

Theories, Techniques, and the Impacts of Computer-Mediated Conferencing  
in a University Writing Center:  
Toward a Model for Training Programs

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(ABSTRACT)

In 1984, Stephen North said of writing center research: “There is not a single published study of what happens in writing center tutorials” (p. 28). In the eighteen years since then, writing center practitioners and scholars have produced impressive research and development work, but few empirical studies have added to the sub-field of computer-mediated writing conferencing, though there are more than 300 online writing labs, OWLs, listed on the National Writing Centers Association website.

This study started with the understanding that there are significant behavior, communication, and tutoring technique differences between online tutoring and f2f tutoring that can affect tutor training, which the research from the fields of computers and composition, computer-mediated communication, and writing centers shows. The purpose of this research was to describe the nature of the online writing lab tutorial.

Qualitative analysis was used to prepare a full picture of the online tutoring sessions of three tutors over a six-week period in the Radford University Writing Center. The researcher took the role of participant/observer/interviewer for the sessions. Interviews and talk during conferences with the tutors, were transcribed, coded and contextualized, adding to the understanding of the tutor’s online work.

Using a functional analysis model created by Gere and Abbott (1985) and applied by Hewett (1999), transcripts of the tutorial conferences were divided by linguistic idea units and coded according to function, intent, and consciousness. Additionally, a coding scheme was created out of the interview transcripts and from the tutorial responses of this study that focused on the technical and social aspects of the online conferencing, which helped objectify the nature of computer-mediated conference.

## Dedication

To my father who said, “Don’t fly too close to the ground.”

To my mother who said, “Never quit.”

To my son who said, “Just write.”

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Work like this doesn't get done without a big team on your side. There are those who support you, those who teach you, and those who guide you. The line of support extends far back and in many directions. I will confine the acknowledgements here to the most immediate line, those who guided me through the process of this dissertation. Dr. John Burton stood vigil for the six years of my journey, answering my questions, stepping in when needed, trusting me to move at my own pace. Dr. Sheila Carter-Tod, whose life has crossed over mine in many ways, has been a constant friend as we have exchanged roles as easily as tossing hats. Dr. Michael Moore has helped me to see things in a different way, challenged me to read the whole screen, see the whole picture, in something besides text. Dr. Glen Holmes asked questions in each of our meetings that I am still trying to answer. Dr. Barbara Lockee taught me the techniques and philosophy of distance education and instructional design, through her nearly perfect modeling. Dr. Jan Nesor instilled in me an interest in qualitative research that I put into practice almost daily. Each of these people stayed with me through this project, never tiring of the topic, making valuable and challenging suggestions, reading and rereading, listening and questioning. They taught me a great deal about committee work.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The writing center field is one of the most exciting in higher education, in composition studies, and now, in computer-mediated communication. Always at the margins of English Departments, the writing center is a place of continuing, dynamic, and open-minded study. Writing center professionals, in part because they are in an area that is academically distinct and removed from the central university core, have a collegially close membership, sharing ideas and experiences at every level. Writing centers have historically and continue to be rich research sites for studies of composition and pedagogy, and in English studies they are taken seriously. More recently, writing centers have become areas of teacher training because of the unique opportunities presented by tutorial practices that may include, in typical university centers, undergraduate and graduate students, undergraduate and graduate tutors, instructors as tutors, graduate teaching fellows as tutors, and writing center directors. A writing center is an opportunity for lab experience because it is a place of symbiosis and synergy, where there are constant possibilities for personal, one-to-one teaching and learning from others at each level, where the development of writing skills can be better understood.

The skill of writing, perhaps more than any other academic undertaking, is tied to the developmental level and idiosyncratic learning needs of the student, and, while there are ages and grade levels predicted by research studies when certain critical thinking abilities necessary for mature writing skills become possible, there are as many outliers as there are norms in this learning curve. Often the outliers are those whose learning styles are also in the minority. Writing centers have the opportunity to watch, listen to, and work with these writers in ways that provide constant feedback to the teaching and learning processes of composition.

Most university writing center directors report that their first surprise in the field is in discovering the misperception of the mission, philosophy, and goals of writing center work, even after more than 90 years of research, achievement, successes, and scholarship in university writing centers nationwide. It would be unthinkable to offer any thesis or dissertation or scholarly article to the writing center field that did not include some mention of Stephen North's seminal article, "The Idea of a Writing Center"

(1984a), in which he uttered the battle cry and the now-well-worn slogan: “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (p. 438). Still, though, writing center personnel continue to fight the image that centers exist for basic writers, for students with immature writing habits, for students who make grammar errors. Perhaps the reason for this, in part at least, is that the reported research from the writing center field is in large part anecdotal.

Writing products are judged for quality. Therefore, the study of writers’ processes and their products is often anecdotal and qualitative. It follows that the same is true of tutors’ work in writing centers. While writing and tutoring studies are respected in the fields of composition, pedagogy, and writing centers, there is also a need for empirical studies that can begin to isolate for study and confirmation some of the elements of teaching and learning that define writing center work. This study attempted that.

Starting with the understanding that writing center work is both technical and social in the face-to-face tutorial, it seemed crucial to determine if those same aspects are employed and employable in the computer-mediated conference. The writing center field is replete with research studies that have shown the importance of pedagogical approaches, tutoring techniques, and tutorial focuses for the face-to-face (f2f) environment, and the research continues there. Beginning in the 1990s, however, computers were rolled into writing centers, as they were into every other academic area. Studies had confirmed that word processing coincided with process writing pedagogy and had positive effects on both the construction of writing and on the conversation about writing between instructor/tutor and writer. With the networking capabilities that followed, however, writing center professionals discovered some philosophical dilemmas: tutoring writing is technical and social. How can the tutor-student dyad transfer those aspects to a text-only space?

If the social aspects, that is, the conversation, the body language, the comfort of the place, the rituals, and the like, of the tutorial are as important to the instruction as the technical aspects, that is, the pedagogical approaches and the tutoring techniques, then is the same writing center philosophy possible in the computer-mediated environment? Writing centers have always been philosophically opposed to any kind of “drop-off” concept, insisting that learning to write is a personal and immediate proposition, and

professionals argued that a paper sent by electronic messenger, synchronous or asynchronous, amounts to no more than “dropping off” a paper at a writing center. How, then, could we manage the argument that the face-to-face writing conference could be reconfigured for the computer-mediated writing conference?

The challenge for this study was to isolate and understand the technical and social aspects that define a writing conference, whether face-to-face or computer-mediated and then, by observation and participation, to detect the functions of those features of the writing conference in the computer-mediated conference. Engaging experienced and interested tutors as participants of the study added the training issues to the research questions. Each of the three participants in this study came to it with different backgrounds in tutor training; therefore, their perspectives on computer-mediated conferencing included training needs as well as their individual definitions of the aspects of task. As a point of validity, the participants’ discussions of the aspects of computer-mediated conferencing coincided with those valued in face-to-face conferencing and with those of writing center research findings.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

Training tutors in the electronic environment of writing centers is a topic of much conversation, speculation, debate, and trial. Anecdotal and descriptive studies have begun to appear in the literature; however, few empirical research studies have been added to the writing center field to date (Beebe & Boneville, 2000; Coogan, 1999; Hobson, 2001). It will be valuable to understanding the study, then, if the history of writing centers as it fits with the changes that computers have brought to composition is provided as background information. This literature review will also address research that has been done in computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is vital to the work in electronic writing center work. The history, techniques, and theories from these three areas provide a backdrop for issues of tutor training that are now forming in the electronic environment. Not many empirical studies have yet been published on the nature of writing tutors working in an online writing lab (OWL) or on the additions to tutor training programs that include OWLs in college and universities. Therefore, the literature reviewed will come from the three fields whose research and knowledge are informing and framing the issues as studies and practices proceed: 1) writing center history and research, which helps to situate the study; 2) computers and composition, which has been a leading field in the research of computer-mediated writing issues and in related pedagogical concerns; and 3) computer-mediated communication, which adds knowledge of the sociolinguistic impacts on communication. Study of the perspectives from these interrelated fields is necessary in order to understand how written communication is mediated and, therefore, impacted by computers.

### Writing Centers

#### *History of Writing Centers*

The history of writing centers in American colleges and universities is not well known, perhaps because the function of writing centers and labs has always been as part of the university support system. It appears that the admission by administrators and faculty that students who have been legitimately accepted into a university need further writing instruction and support is as difficult today as it was in 1895 when Amherst College and the University of Michigan began discussing a lab concept for writing

students: “for deliberate consultation and personal criticism” (Lerner, 1998, p. 120). By 1912, the *English Journal* extended the writing lab idea, for better or worse, to offer aid in grammar and usage. Writing labs became a part of several universities in the 1930s: In the late 1920s and 1930s, immigration tripled college enrollment, and lab programs were instituted to help immigrant students with foundation skills in writing. These labs were, by necessity, remedial in nature, using individualized drills to teach the basics of written expression, taking the burden off of English instructors, who viewed college writing courses as a bit above grammar instruction. The labs were more or less study halls, though, with instructors available to answer questions as students wrote (N. Lerner, personal communication, February 4, 2002). Some of the more progressive programs, though, had begun instituting writing labs: the University of Minnesota and the University of Iowa were two. The Minnesota lab was a provision for whole classes, while the Iowa lab was a one-on-one model (Carino, 1995).

After WWII GIs, with generous education grants from the government, accounted for yet another surge in enrollment in post-secondary schools (Lerner, 1998). The focus in higher education was still strictly on standardized language, and many of the new students were unprepared for college work. The writing labs were instrumental in bringing these students’ skills up to college expectations, especially in grammar and usage. Tutors were, by and large, faculty, though the literature does mention graduate students as assistants. It appears that undergraduate students working as writing center or writing lab tutors was in place by 1942; the first article that has been traced is that of Elizabeth Campbell, found in *College English* (Lerner, personal message, 2/4/02). In the late 1950s and 1960s, the behaviorist movement had the effect of further entrenching the idea of writing labs for remediation, where students could learn grammar and usage outside of the writing classroom. Tutor-training was receiving attention by CCCC in 1951, and indicates that instructors were assumed to be tutors in the university setting: “No instructor should be assigned to the lab who is not trained and willing to do the work it requires” (as cited in Carino, 1995). By the 1970s student tutors were being introduced, chosen from composition classes, with excellent writing skills and grammar rules committed to memory. The first tutor-training manual was published in 1977: Carol Feiser Laque and Phyllis Sherwood’s *A Laboratory Approach to Writing* (Lerner,

personal message, 2/4/02; Murphy, Law, & Sherwood, 1996).

The result of this history is that writing centers at every college and university still battle the image of a remediation lab, or what David Coogan (1999) conceptualizes as part of the Theory of Containment perpetuated by universities.

#### Writing Center Research

In the 1980s, some of the first research studies on writing labs came out. Up to this point, writing labs were studied mainly by surveys (Murphy, Law, & Sherwood, 1996). One lab that presented a large portion of studies on writing labs was COMP-LAB at CUNY. This lab used individualized instruction modules, first audio- and videotapes and workbooks, then, later, computer-assisted instruction (CAI). The overall findings at CUNY did report improved writing skills for students designated as remedial. But critics pointed out that the lab students were required to write extensively, an activity which, in itself, has been shown to improve writing skills: content as well as mechanics (Coogan, 1999, p. 133). Besides, with the shift in composition theory and in pedagogy at that time, from current-traditional to process, the idea of a writing environment that was isolated, decontextualized, product-oriented, and only suitable for grammar practice was distasteful to most compositionists interested in the more collaborative ways (Carino, 2000). Coogan (1999) adds that the “research” on the CAI programs was mostly anecdotal and focused on attitudes and test score comparisons. The formula that resulted in CAI, for remediation and for instruction, came from the need to change writing behavior plus the need for objective feedback at a time when the Rhetoric of Technocentrism was dominant (p. 13), and specialists such as Coogan feel that this was not the best foundation for writing center work.

Pedagogies were still teetering between current-traditional and process when articles from writing center scholars, beginning in 1983, indicate that word processing programs were being utilized as tools to support process theories (Carino, 2001; Clark, 2001; Coogan, 1999). Students reported that they enjoyed writing with the new technologies: revision was easier, writing could more easily be shared with others, and it was more fun (Coogan, 1995). At the same time, CAI skills programs had improved to the point that some researchers could see students taking more responsibility for improving their grammar (Southwell, 1983, as cited in Carino, 2000). Grammar checkers

were on review as well (Dauite, 1983; Dobrin, 1990; Hawisher, 1984) and were mostly positive: checkers help writers by providing objective feedback on mechanics as well as helping the writer to see a reader's perspective of the text. This was reminiscent of the behaviorist thought behind CAI (Coogan, 1999, p. 11) and checkers were seen as helpful for teaching surface features of writing such as stronger sentence structures, paragraphing, and thesis construction. As well, some said the dignity of the student was preserved as s/he practiced grammar and punctuation with impunity. Writing centers were beginning to combine current-traditional and process with intervention strategies: the writing center tutor trained as a reader/responder and using the student's text at any stage of the writing process.

During the mid-1980s, the second most popular topic in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* was the use of technology in writing centers (Carino, 2001). Software reviews remained essentially negative toward CAI programs. Based on the accepted trends in composition theories, that relied, in part, on reader response, many scholars concluded that the available software wouldn't work in the writing center, especially the reader responding/coaching facsimiles, because it is not possible to program computers to react to the nuances, variation, and style of language or the "social subtleties encoded in 'consensus knowledge' humans employ in making decisions in complex acts such as writing" (p. 505). Compositionists and writing center specialists, like Farrell (1987), were more interested in the process and collaborative possibilities they detected as promising in computer writing (as cited in Carino, 1999; Holmes, 1985). By the late 1980s, many specialists in composition had layered in the concepts of discourse, based on the work of Berlin (1987) and the more refined thoughts about intervention offered by Vygotsky (1978), which positioned the tutor to "fit into – observe and participate in – this ordinarily solo ritual of writing" (North, 1984a, p. 439).

The first article written for the *Writing Lab Newsletter* about on-screen tutoring was submitted by Joyce Kinkead of Utah State University. As a way of offering services to some of the more remote situations of their students, Kinkead's center tried working with them by email. The trial was successful but Kinkead, in her 1988 article, was careful to say that asynchronous tutoring could not compare to and would not replace face-to-face tutoring, and would only be used when time and distance were unalterable obstacles.

Though electronic services were developed in nearly every writing center during the 1990s, this has remained the central issue: Can electronic tutoring, synchronous or asynchronous, replace, complement, and/or provide a reasonable alternative for writing center services?

## Online Writing Labs

### *Overview*

The first Online Writing Lab, along with its acronym, OWL, which also has endured, was set up in 1990 at Purdue University by Dr. Muriel Harris, who was and continues to be one of the leaders in the writing center field. Shortly after the Purdue OWL made its debut, Fred Kemp at Texas Tech opened an OWL on that campus. Lady Falls Brown, who worked with Kemp at Texas Tech on their OWL, created WCenter in 1991, the Writing Center Directors List, as a way for directors of writing centers in colleges, universities, and high schools to share information and strategies for all things related to writing centers. These events were followed by construction of OWLs at SUNY-Albany in 1993, a premiere writing center, one which has produced some of the writing center field's most respected work; Dakota State in 1993, a writing center that still operates exclusively online; and the University of Texas-Austin in 1994, one of the first writing centers to experiment with a MUD. Today, in August 2001, there are 335 OWLs listed on the National Writing Center Association website ([www.ncwa.edu](http://www.ncwa.edu)).

### *Surveys*

As discussions continued on the busy WCenter list, articles appeared in various journals, and reviews, surveys and studies began in earnest. One of the first surveys inquiring about college and university writing center directors' knowledge and attitudes concerning OWLs was done in 1997 by Joel English (2001). The survey brought varied responses. Most directors defined an Online Writing Lab to be a site that dispensed information, handouts, and/or online tutoring services. Directors felt that OWLs were valid writing center extensions for these reasons: resources made handy, FAQs, computer literacy, collaborative efforts, distance students, flexible scheduling, and students'/tutors' preference for computer-mediated communication over face-to-face. Directors who did not favor OWLs cited philosophical differences, cost, lack of equipment, staff shortage, and resistance from tutors, faculty, and staff (Shadle, 2000, p. 7).

### *Pedagogies*

The computer had entered the writing center at the same time as process writing pedagogy, which is based on cognitive learning theories, and computers found use there in the existing tutor model that was student-centered, dialogic, and context-based, becoming “an instigator of collaboration” (Coogan, 1995, p. 18). Collaboration was already a writing center work design, and the emerging social constructionist theories in composition just reaffirmed writing center work. Tutors, who were work study students, graduate assistants, and English faculty, mostly from English departments, were taught that the teaching of writing should be decentered, have discourse as its focus, that knowledge is constructed by the writer and the reader, and that tutor/student conferences are social in nature, with conversation providing the channel for idea articulation, reader reaction, and a place to exchange writing/reading advice. Writing centers are able to work within current-traditional, process, intervention, discourse, and collaborative practices, respecting the requests of individual students as they present different papers, writing needs, and learning styles. As training programs were built, tutors engaged in practices and theories that included these commitments. They were trained as reader/responders, to use question/answer and conversation techniques, and to focus on higher orders of concern (thesis, purpose, organization, etc.). The purpose of the writing conference is to engage writer and reader – collaborators – in dialogue that may include interdependence, dissensus, idea play, answerability, and interactivity: the techniques that are the writing center field’s “most under-represented and significant contribution to the teaching of writing” (Coogan, 1999, p. 90).

### *Chaos Theory and OWLs*

With the introduction of networking and its many possibilities, writing centers moved cautiously forward, encouraged by the obvious social aspects and intersections. But, like many other beginnings that involve intersections, which here can be defined as intersections among various cultures: student – tutor – the disciplines – the university, Chaos Theory can be applied to the debut of the OWL. Chaos Theory can help explain the self-organization that takes place at the borders of new intersections (Beebe & Boneville, 2000; Taylor, 1992). Writing centers exist at the borders, the borders between different university cultures, and, as Chaos Theory supports, it is often at the borders

where activity takes place, where self-organization, based on the activity between those borders, begins. This is where new ideas can emerge, and in the case of writing centers, these are ideas that inform composition, communication, psychology, and education theories and practices. Chaos Theory also reminds us that practice, what takes place at the local level, where the work is done, is complex and messy and, often, disorderly, but the theory, which is viewed globally, remains relatively simple and orderly (Beebe & Boneville, 2000, p. 42). Networking generated new pedagogies and new theories and a new literacy that are only now stabilizing and becoming distinct enough for study. Writing centers can begin examining the effects of their electronic work in light of the emerging pedagogies and with students', other fields', and university expectations in mind.

*Expectations: Tutors and Clients*

Writing centers have not always understood students', that is, tutors' and clients', expectations of teaching styles; the styles they have experienced and, therefore, understand, is often hierarchical, static, rigid, top-down, and authoritative. Further, the work of writing has been given the image of solitary work, individual genius, inspired from within, and the process pedagogy supported that image in many ways. Both of these patterns have resulted in schooling that has not included collaboration skills (Blau, et al., 1998; Coogan, 1995; Mabrito, 2000). Classes in public schools, grades 1-12, are still largely teacher-led, lecture format. Tutors were trained in collaborative techniques for f2f work, but they had to learn and work at the roles. There were issues of expert-novice roles, image maintenance, and self-confidence in their own writing and reading abilities. Students, tutors and clients, who were comfortable with the teacher-led format had to learn how to work together on a paper through conversation. As will be discussed later, in the review of the computer-mediated communication literature, some students find the search for roles difficult in the f2f environment. School for most students in this country generally means top-down, linear, hierarchical learning, and they can't be expected to quickly understand the process and mechanics of collaboration. Writing center tutors often have to learn how to collaborate in the tutoring session; it is not a natural inclination. Students have become comfortable with the expert-novice dichotomy, and because most tutors have been successful in the traditional classroom structure, they may

take the only role they understand that an expert may take: instructor. The one-to-one, face-to-face situation does, however, seem to eventually lead most tutors into a coaching role as individual students explain their distinct needs for writing and as tutors become more confident in their own knowledge and skills.

### *Asynchronous Online Tutoring*

#### *Advantages*

An interesting phenomenon occurred, however, when writing centers began experimenting with asynchronous online tutoring, though not surprising when viewed against the backdrop of CMC findings: the connections between tutors and students became more collaborative and productive in many, though not all, cases. As in most writing center issues, there were and still are strong opinions on either side of the ongoing philosophical, theoretical, and practical debates on OWL use. Some of the more positive points will be presented here, but the reservations will also be included.

Coogan (2001), in a self-study of the writing center he directs, wrote of the collaborative effect of email conferencing: “The catch-all theory is that the paper-bound environment creates vertical relationships while the paperless environment creates horizontal relationships, precisely because the students’ property in the paperless environment is disembodied” (p. 557). The intervention techniques are much like face-to-face (Monroe, 1998), but observations have shown that there is more participation from both tutor and student (Beebe & Boneville, 2000). Barker and Kemp (1990) point out that the computer exchange is “purified” (p. 21), collaborators tend to stay focused and they more quickly get to the point, with “informal dialogue at the level of ideas instead of personality” (Coogan, 2001. p. 557), which the research in CMC also has shown.

In the asynchronous writing center conference, the paper is the presence, with no voice to explain it, set it up, or defend it. The writer is part of the text, “a rhetorical construct, not a social given” (Coogan, 1995, p. 171). Coogan (1999), drawing on the work of Goffman (1959), argues that face-to-face tutoring is difficult and limiting, with two people negotiating places: feeding and responding to lines; emitting, receiving, and deciphering verbal signals; constructing a version of self and presenting the face appropriate to the situation. He believes that this showing and managing of face is a lot to handle for a student tutor. Tutors, whose roles in the writing center are defined by their

changing situations, are usually not yet confident enough to let a situation develop before taking a role, and some uncomfortable moments can result. As Goffman (1959) showed, when one commits to a “face,” he must remain consistent with it; reversals constitute loss of face.

Online, however, the tutor has time to take control of his image (Maid & Jordan-Henley, 1995). Online correspondence provides anonymity, which can be an advantage in writing center work. Linguist Naomi Baron (1998a) points out the paradox: people tend to be more personal when they can’t see or hear each other. David Coogan (1995), writing about his online tutoring experience, said that the anonymity provided by the situation kept him focused on the text, and he discovered that his responses to the student were more direct and more honest and dealt more fully with the students’ requests. Coogan felt that “e-tutoring channel[s] the social energy of reading a person into the reading of a text” (p. 179). Others report that tutors are more productive in the electronic session for a variety of reasons that are considered in discussions of anonymity (Beebe & Boneville, 2000; Carlson & Apperson-Williams, 1999): it feels more private, prejudices don’t surface as a result of instant physical judgments, students must be more responsible for the conference and for asking questions to get the help they need.

Other advantages of electronic environments that writing centers enjoy have been observed and discussed at length in writing center journals, newsletters, and lists. The flexibility of meeting times as well as individual control of time spent reading, responding, and revising, lets the tutors and students better manage the tutorial. Young tutors often feel constrained by the physical presence of the writer and by the pressure of working within an allotted time frame (Mabrito, 2000) and can feel that they must fill in every minute of the conference with reading, responses, prompts, or instruction, leaving little time for rereading and reflection.

The electronic space provides “psychological filtering” for the time constraints as well as the non-verbal cues and paralinguage that can also disrupt full and focused concentration on the text (Coogan, 1999, p. 21). Electronic conditions actually have the effect of motivating conversation, and both student and tutor appear less worried about being right, with respect to the content, and correct, with respect to the surface mechanics of the paper (Barker & Kemp, 1990; Cooper & Selfe, 1990). The conference becomes

more decentered, both parties write with more voice, the conference is likely to be described as social and collaborative, turn-taking is more equal, and the pacing evens out (Coogan, 1999).

Students consulting with e-tutors appear to enjoy the advantages. Face-to-face writing center work is good for apprehensive writers because tutorials are one-on-one, with the tutor taking a coaching role. But the conference is still, admittedly, public, and it can feel evaluative to a student (Mabrito, 2000). In the electronic space, studies have shown that students and tutors react favorably to electronic conferencing because the psychological distance (Wolcott, 1996) remodels the hierarchy of the participants, making participation more equal (Hartman, et al., 1991), that is, the tutor may be expert in some areas, but the client clearly takes that role in other areas: content, assignment, and plans for the paper; the fact that the student and tutor are not facing each other can give the student more confidence to take the expert role when it is appropriate. Two additional related factors that add to the discussion of psychological filtering and participation issues concern non-verbal language: in computer-mediated conferencing, the need to interpret paralanguage is reduced, and the strain of self-monitoring is limited to written language. The absence of those factors allows more cognitive space for tutor and student to focus on the text and issues involved with the text. Mabrito (2000) found that writers identified as “high anxiety” engage in more revision of their texts during and after computer conferencing than they do with face-to-face conferencing, possibly because of the psychological filtering. It has also been shown that students do more writing in the electronic conference, and, certainly, because the conference takes place in writing, both students and tutors practice the language of composition and the concept of writing for a real audience: both tutor and student must be more “exact” and “uncluttered” (Inman & Sewell, 1999, p. 168) as well as more focused in their expression. This is the concept of *facilitas* discussed in the CMC literature, and it fits with the philosophy of Bakhtin: each collaborator is answerable to the other, the writer to the reader, which adds authenticity to the task. Mabrito (2000) also found that students remembered more from the computer conference than they did from the face-to-face conference, probably the result of a combination of factors: the face-to-face meeting is often all verbal, typically students do not take notes in a writing center conference, the

“noise” of non-verbal cues present in the face-to-face meeting (Blythe, 1997b), and that the primary point of focus in the computer conference is the text, with the secondary focus the messages about the text.

The argument has been made that there is an obvious accordance (correspondence, appropriateness, compatibility) in an electronic writing conference. Before networking capabilities, conferences were primarily oral. In fact, many writing center theorists and practitioners disallow writing by tutors in the conference, which does not motivate the student to write during the conference either. In an electronic conference, it has been found that tutors write lengthy, well-developed responses because they have the time to read, reflect, and revise their responses before sending them; they can carefully focus their written comments to the writer of the text, not the person, with all of his/her sociocultural traits that we react to and are pressured by in the face-to-face conference (Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000). This provides a strong and lasting model for the student. Coogan (1999) adds that in his electronic tutoring experience, he and the client were “transforming the same terminal that the student wrote monologic papers with into an instrument of dialogic exchange” (p. 32).

#### *Disadvantages*

The disadvantage to electronic conferencing that gets mentioned most often is the same feature that is mentioned as its greatest advantage: the conference is not personal, immediate, and face-to-face, with all of the associated paralinguistic, social, and non-verbal cues that aid conversations (Beebe & Boneville, 2000; Carlson & Apperson-Williams, 1999; Inman & Sewell, 1999; Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000; Spooner, 1994). Writing center specialists have worked hard to justify and construct face-to-face tutorials and have based their research work on the personal relationship that develops during a one-to-one tutorial. Tutors are trained to interpret non-verbal cues, to understand and use silences, to provide comfortable contexts, down to and including the seating arrangements in the writing center. They learn to use conversation to make students comfortable and to share information that will focus the conference. They learn dialogue techniques that will situate the conference: methods for questioning that draw out content or attend to structure; read aloud methods that dramatize writing strengths and weaknesses or illustrate syntax problems; partial-text readings for error analysis

(Gillespie & Lerner, 2000; Harris, 1982; Meyer & Smith, 1987; Ryan, 2002).

Tutors also learn, usually by the Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator (MBTI) testing course or some comparable instrument that draws attention to the variations individuals show for processing information, working with others, and viewing the world, to identify and work with students who have different learning styles (Johnson, 1994). For a visual learner who is particularly analytical, for example, the tutor might use a chart to design a paper; auditory learners might talk through a paper. Tutors read and discuss articles, do role-playing, practice in the center with more experienced tutors as they learn these skills. There is, however, no empirical evidence that tutors, who generally are students themselves, can make distinctions about clients' learning styles during a face-to-face meeting. There are observations and stories. Developmental theories, Perry's (1970), for example, would call this feat into question. Nevertheless, writing centers have staked their reputations on a model that blends personal attention with instruction in context. In those tutorial situations, there are multiple transactions and interpretations going on at once.

Some writing center theorists, such as Blythe (1996), feel that the conference participants' traits -- gender, race, ethnicity, age -- are contributive factors in a tutorial, and are part of how tutors understand the student and the text; other writing center participants report that they feel strengthened by the knowledge that they are not being prejudged on those traits, that the text should always stand alone. Some researchers in computers and composition, such as Stewart, Shields, Monolescu, and Taylor (1999), Tannen (1996), Herring (1996), and Markel (2000) say that, based on their studies, these personal identity traits are not entirely absent in writing, that they do "get inscribed online" (Blythe, 1996, p.6), and, put more definitely by Feenberg (1989): "It turns out that many ordinary individuals possess a compensatory 'literary' ability to project their personality into writing destined for the computer screen" (p. 23). This leaves the question of whether or not inexperienced readers -- writing center tutors -- can discern the marks of individuality from written representations.

### *Synchronous Online Tutoring*

In order to experiment with some virtual replacements for the physical traits, places, and non-verbal information, and to encourage more conversation in the electronic

writing center space, several university writing centers set up chat rooms and MOOs. These experiments brought out interesting reactions and responses from tutors and clients. Shewmake and Lambert (1999) used NetMeeting, CU-SeeMe, and Ceildh. The writing center directors were pleased that, given their reservations about the environment, tutors and students decided that the conference was fun for them, that they were less intimidated and distracted by the presence of the other person; the directors reported that the tutors spent more time on task, focused more closely and seriously on the text, and presented fuller records of the session. Joel English (2000) studied the MOO he employed as director of his writing center to see if freshmen clients engaged in MOO activities, that is, if they engaged in the conference conversation and if they participated in manipulating the MOO environment. Writing center specialists have long fought for environments deemed peculiar in an academic setting, that is, lounge-like, with sofas and carpets, coffee-makers and dishes of candy, aquariums, even cats, paintings, and music, all designed to lower the stress of cognitive activities in an academic situation where students may feel inadequate. English recorded that, in his MOO, which was to emulate the comfortable and friendly setting of a real center, 80% of the student participants interacted at a low level with the environment, according to English's and his tutors' expectations, and for the interaction that did take place, the tutors nearly always had to take the lead. In their evaluations of the experience, some students even expressed some disdain for the extra time and effort spent on playful, but not exactly necessary, activity.

#### *Other Concerns in Online Work*

Other concerns about online writing center work have surfaced as the technology has become more of a fixture in tutorials, concerns that are speculative but, because they represent important topics for composition instructors, bear mention. Since social constructionism has been one approach favored by writing center experts and by many composition/rhetoric scholars, the issue of plagiarism/cheating has been discussed throughout all academic areas that trust writing instruction to writing centers. Writing centers have had to defend the collaborative arrangement, promising to keep it instructive, and to train the tutors thusly, in the face of suspicion that tutors would proofread and edit papers, write papers, or offer students ideas they might not have generated otherwise (Carino, 2001). Articles such as Hayes-Burton's (1995) "Intellectual

(Proper)ty in Writing Centers: Retro Texts and Positive Plagiarism,” in which she suggests new ways of conceiving of academic writing using hypertext (as cited in Carino, 2001), seem to fan the flames for academics already skeptical of the free-for-all mentality they see associated with the internet: cheat sites, papers for sale, text easily copied and pasted from literally millions of hardly traceable sites. Add to this a virtual tutor and it can look like students are learning the skills of seek, find, and shuffle rather than research and writing. To deflect some of these fears, Peter Carino (2001) reminds academics of the true nature of collaboration, a definition tutors honor: “As for authors of scholarly works, though their names may be on a title page, their ‘collaborators’ are recognized in the text and bibliography” (p. 515). He also offers a compelling argument about well-known and acceptable instances of writing groups and collaboration among authors throughout history. The writing center, as a system based on collaboration, tries to teach tutors the value and skills of collaborative work at each stage of the writing process, and they do this by modeling collaborative techniques.

### *Collaboration*

Blau, Hall, and Strauss (1998) used linguistic analysis to examine collaboration in tutor-student face-to-face writing center sessions. They looked specifically for collaborative indicators, those that represent techniques used in training programs, which they identified as 1) questions showing guidance and intent, 2) verbal echoes that give assurance, and 3) use of qualifiers, which may mask directive actions. Blau, et al. (1998) concluded that the outcome of collaborative efforts depended on both student and tutor. In their study, graduate tutors working with graduate students were more comfortable and more successful at collaborative work. Developmental levels are almost certainly a factor in this phenomenon, but equally provocative is the argument that collaboration skills must be learned. Most entering college students have not had experience or training in collaboration. The electronic conference, though, is a different context.

### Tutor Training

Training for writing center tutors who work in the electronic environment should include practice with and discussions about how communication and collaboration are different in that space. The pedagogy for online teaching is the same as that for face-to-face: process, discourse focus, student-centered; but the instruction and techniques, and,

therefore, the training, are different (English, 2000; Hobson, 1998; Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000; Monroe, 1989; Rickly, 1998). Kastman-Breuch and Racine (2000) write about how we should first help tutors find value in the text-space; that online tutoring should be taught and practiced, perhaps by using a comment model; and that acknowledge must be made that roles in the online environment are different. Monroe (1989) writes about the use of templates in her online writing center experience; Rickly (1998) writes about how different the training experience is. Her program trained tutors online, as an online class, which helped the tutors become “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983, as cited in Rickly, 1998, p. 44).

### *Templates*

Some trainers have implemented templates, as mentioned above, that help tutors learn to communicate in a text-only space, using, for example, front notes to set the meeting tone, goals, and strategies; in-text notes to create a dialogue and to comment on the text; and end notes to add global responses to and suggestions about the text, a design discussed fully by Monroe (1998) and Hewett (2000). In this way, as Monroe discovered in her tutor-training experience, the e-tutor role becomes more peer reviewer than coach. Monroe observed and analyzed electronic sessions based on this front, in-text, and end notes template. She noticed that the front and end comments were generally friendly and gentle and were much like teacher comments on papers. Tutors also used that space to discuss how they would respond to the paper, the logistics of the commenting. Monroe and Coogan (1995) also saw that the intertextual comments by tutors tended to be more blunt, honest, and focused in the e-conference, and that they were more like actual dialogue, not like margin comments that readers often make on papers.

### *Tutoring Differences*

Tutors in this environment can be more invasive with the paper than face-to-face tutors have been (Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000), possibly a result of the influence of social constructionist focuses on meaning-making in the writing center conference: the response is part of the dialogue and can include idea play, Q/A, disagreement, and the like. Before social constructionist influences, writing center tutors were trained to stick strictly to Q/A-motivated dialogue, trying not to divulge personal information, ideas, opinions, or attitudes. Coogan (1995) quotes Freed (1989) to support the acceptance of

the more recent open dialogue among professors and students: “We [are] doing students a disservice by not voicing our opinions” (p. 178). Not much research has been reported yet, though, to see how these social constructionist methods are working in writing conferences. Only a few informal studies have so far been done, but they are laying groundwork for others.

### A Comparative Study

#### *Description of the Study*

One interesting study was carried out by Hewett (1998). Her focus was different from the writing center focus – she studied peer response groups, that is, groups of four college freshmen in a writing class meeting to read and respond to their essays-in-progress. Hewett compared a writing group that met face-to-face with a writing group that met electronically. The study had two prongs: to examine the function of the group’s talk and the quality of their interaction and to examine the application of responses on subsequent revision of papers. The study has something to offer writing center work because these are students responding to students and because the instrument Hewett used to analyze the group’s talk, a linguistic analysis tool created by Gere and Abbott (1985), can be adapted to a tutor/client study.

#### *Outcomes of the Study*

Hewett concluded from her study that for peer response groups, f2f is a more effective medium. She could detect the sociability and the clear construction of knowledge as she analyzed the transcripts of the f2f group. That was, in large part, due to the heteroglossia in the f2f conference: several people responding to a text brought about overlap, suggestions, a tag-team of ideas, and talk, which Hewett determined, using the linguistic analysis instrument, was more abstract, more contextual, and more imitative than the talk in the CMC environment. She found that the group’s focus in the CMC group was on the more concrete matters of the papers, more about specific content and process. Hewett detected no imitation of ideas carried over into revisions; she also did not see ideas inspired by the group indirectly carried over into papers, which she did see in the f2f group. Hewett noted that the depth of interaction was missing in the CMC as compared to the f2f group. The students used Norton’s Connect, which gave them a real-time chat space, but the overlap was not as productive as f2f, and the group members

ended up with most of their responses directed to the writer. Hewett believes the CMC group's conversation was shaped by the medium in three ways: 1) it was less context-based because they did not have a physical context or, as yet, a "history" together; 2) there was more group procedure talk because of the lack of visual and oral cues that direct the group (like eye-contact, shifting, moving papers, nodding, making sounds, etc.); 3) there was less real interactivity in the CMC group. Hewett measured interactivity by the phatic talk, which was remarkably different between the f2f group and the CMC group. Orally, phatic talk shows that people are listening and following along, and it cues others that you want to speak, want someone else to speak, want the speaker to explain or continue, etc. Phatic talk consists of words and sounds that a culture understands in context, like "OK," "well," "um," "hmm," and the like. In the CMC space, emoticons and punctuation marks have evolved to take that linguistic role. Also used to measure the interactivity in this study was the referential talk, that is, verbal or written reference back to a comment or to a part of the text under discussion. Hewett found that there were fewer referential comments among the members of the CMC group.

#### *Implications of the Study*

Parallels can be drawn and lessons learned using Hewett's study for writing center work: these are students working with students, learning to be critical and responsive readers, learning revision skills. The implication is that online reading/responding is different from f2f, that studies need to be done to look at the techniques that can work online, and that training and practice are needed, as noted by other researchers in the field (Coogan, 1995; Hobson, 2001; Monroe, 1998; Rickly, 1998)

Hewett said that there is evidence that online tutoring is pedagogically well founded. She went on to become the writing center director of SmartThinking.com, a Washington, D.C.-based, for-profit, online tutoring service. Hewett trains e-tutors entirely online using instructional design models: she sets goals for each tutor, based on their needs which she assesses through observations of tutoring sessions and through role-play; she isolates problem areas, and, online, teaches the concept. She gives e-tutors templates to follow as they are learning best practice methods; and she evaluates their progress by observation of their sessions and transcripts, by discussions with the tutor, and from evaluations from the clients. Using the same basic design, tutors work with

online clients (Hewett, 2000).

## OWL Research

### *Beginnings*

Research is only beginning in the field of online writing centers. It is, as yet, anecdotal for several reasons: 1) Computers, in a politicized move, appeared in writing centers before the need was fully established, so writing center personnel have been working out practical uses while standing by writing center theories, questioning purposes of OWLs, and constructing “theoretical praxis and practical theory” (Beebe & Boneville, 2000, p. 47); 2) Descriptions and assessments need to be compiled to give a clearer picture of the functions of OWLs, students’ and tutors’ expectations, and results of tutoring techniques (Beebe & Boneville, 2000); 3) Compositionists have viewed the discussion, work, and trials in automated feedback to texts as a task analysis fallacy, and some have viewed the use of CMC with skepticism because of this conjecture (Coogan, 1999); and 4) The pressure from administrations to set up electronic writing centers has resulted in centers using computers instrumentally, not taking the time to research or review the research from other fields that can help practitioners understand the impacts of electronic communication that can add to critical thought about the theories and practices computers can be used for (Blythe, 1998).

### *Literacy*

The research will be important because the terms of literacy are changing, and the writing center field will be affected by the direction these new literacies open. Literacy as a cultural issue is complicated, the educational system often receives blame, and, as a culture, we have frequently reacted by turning to technology for solutions (Hobson, 2001), and if we subscribe to Postman (1985), Feenberg (1989), and Ong’s (1982) views, technology does not simply add to a culture, it changes a culture. Havelock (as cited in Baron, 1998, p. 135), as well as Ong (1982), Baron, (1998) and others, believe that the type of literacy practiced in a culture impacts the way the people think. Writing always uses some type of technology, and that technology has effects even on the content of thought and communication (Baron, 1998). The implication of that statement causes anxiety for some, excitement in others, and Coogan (1999) warns that we should be careful how we view technology in writing center work. Haas and Neuwirth (1994), after

Feenberg's (1989) substantive, instrumental, and critical theories of technology, pointed out the corresponding dichotomous views they have determined in literacy issues: 1) technology viewed as all powerful, 2) technology viewed as another tool only, and 3) technology viewed as the work of other fields.

Writing center specialists need to be fully aware of and involved in the definition of literacy to help students who are engaged in the "epic struggle between the forces of access and the forces of exclusion" (Coogan, 1999, p. 62). In the writing center, students learn dialogic skills, now considered a literacy, through collaboration. They begin to find ways into the discourse of their fields, and they learn academic conventions, without which, Bartholomae (as cited in Coogan, 1999, p. 84) has said they will not be allowed entrance into their fields. Academic discourses are "continuous and conflicting" (Harris, as cited in Coogan, 1999, p. 117); therefore, it should be part of the mission of the writing center to assist students in defining, interpreting, and applying the heteroglossia of academia (Coogan, 1999).

Most writing centers recognize that, even while expected to guide students through traditional academic writing, that objective may not be what will ultimately serve the students best (Johnson, 1997). Students will be expected to demonstrate computer literacy in their research and in their writing skills, and that will likely include visual literacy and the ability to use hypertext and hypermedia. That will mean writing in ways that make use of layers of information and depth of knowledge. For this reason, writing centers are currently adjusting, experimenting, observing in their centers, and looking to the theories that have informed the fields of computers and composition and computer-mediated communication.

### Computer-Mediated Communication

#### *Overview*

When college and university writing centers entered the electronic environment, practitioners and scholars looked to the research in computer-mediated communication, and this literature review will cover briefly some of the more compelling and useful findings. The research in CMC has helped to shape the electronic writing center and will, therefore, be important in the research in tutor training. A short history, then, will be needed to foreground the current effects of computer-mediated communication on online

writing labs. A basic knowledge of CMC will be a component of any solid tutor-training program. As well, the study of this dissertation will rely on the work done in CMC, the findings of which have provided direction for electronic tutor training. As the computer communication field has learned from and developed products based on this research, so has the writing center field, which now uses the technology extensively. This review will acknowledge the contributing disciplines and their different perspectives, that is, computer science, composition, social psychology, linguistics, distance education, communication, and English as a second language.

### *History of Computer-mediated Communication Research*

As noted elsewhere, the research and practice of CMC in academia has involved several fields, all of which have shared their knowledge and research. It is not well known, however, the extent of the innovations from the composition and rhetoric field, and that will be highlighted here. In the 1980s, electronic conferencing was tried at universities, the first recorded at, notably and fittingly, Gallaudet University, where Trent Batson developed the Electronic Networks for Interaction (ENFI) as a communication forum for deaf students in a writing class (Taylor, 1992). In 1987, Fred Kemp, an English graduate fellow at the University of Texas, developed InterChange, a networking software package that promoted and guided electronic peer responses and discussions for composition students (Taylor, 1992). In 1988, as discussed above, Joyce Kinkead used her university system for the first writing center email tutoring service.

### *Pedagogical Shift*

As networking capabilities became more prevalent in academia, through those and other instructional uses for computers, a pedagogical paradigm shift was beginning. Activity Theory says that context and the mediating tools are catalytic components of an instructional setting, capable of changing the pedagogy as well as the sociocultural setting (Sherry, 2000, p. 22). As the emerging paradigm for communication and teaching formed from traditional, cognitive, and social constructionist theories, CMC, as a socio-technical system, fit in as a communication system, a conferencing tool, and a collaboration facilitator. The “focus of pedagogical thinking [is being shifted, with impetus from postmodernism and electronic capabilities] from learning as acquisition of

knowledge and skills to learning as entry, enculturation, and legitimate, valued activities situated within a community of practice” (Sherry, 2000, p. 23).

The idea of a community in the social construction of knowledge, as a theory, embraces inclusion of other voices, or heteroglossia, a term chosen by Mikhail Bakhtin with which he talked about the multiplicity of voices that are inherent in any text (Taylor, 1992, p. 411), in both the creation and the reading of text: meaning is the goal, to create it and to extract it. Researchers and theorists agree that the inclusion of many voices is a significant feature of CMC, for, in effect, it provides exposure to others’ perspectives (Selfe, 1990), allows more interaction among participants in a group (Barker & Kemp, 1990), and builds respect for others (Langston & Batson, 1990). Even though the concepts of heteroglossia, interaction, and collaboration were accepted into the pedagogy, the medium has still not found wide acceptance as a reliable and trusted pedagogical tool.

#### *Computer-mediated Communication Problems*

By 1991, study results in CMC were showing that interpersonal communication was not possible electronically (Dubnovsky, Keisler, & Sethna as cited in Walther, 1996, p. 4). The common problem was that electronic talk was viewed as impersonal. Walther (1996) explains that this evaluation came about, in part, because of the history of CMC, the rather utilitarian, distanced, task-oriented uses that were originally imagined for it (p. 5). Research conducted 1984-1995 found that CMC groups became more task-oriented and less social, that behavior was sometimes more uninhibited, that perceptions were not as accurate, and that groups were less cohesive (Walther, 1996, pp. 5-6). Other reviews of early studies add that, in addition to those characteristics, CMC participants appeared cold, detached, business-like, and depersonalized (Liu & Ginther, 2000), all of which added to the impression that CMC is an “impersonal” medium. It is no wonder, then, that writing centers, where tutors are trained to work with students in a private, personal, one-on-one conference, showed little interest in CMC during the early 1990s.

#### *Computer-mediated Communication Possibilities*

But when other theories and factors became a lens with which to compare f2f and CMC, other discoveries were made. In an article titled “Internet and F2F: Not Functional Alternatives,” Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) describe their application of the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory to investigate why people communicate interpersonally

compared to why they communicate electronically. The U&G Theory describes six primary reasons for interpersonal communication: inclusion, affection, control, escape, pleasure, and relaxation (pp. 4-5). As well, Flaherty, et al. (1998) cite media researchers who have studied reasons why people communicate electronically: social, information, habit, time-shifting, and entertainment were some of the reasons listed (p. 5). The study further combined computer communication anxiety factors with locus of control factors. The results showed that predictions can be made about media choices by taking into account communication preferences/comfort level/skills and personality traits and task needs. As might be guessed, people will choose a medium based on these factors (pp. 21-22), leading these researchers to say that f2f and CMC are not simply interchangeable media (p. 22). It can be deduced, now, that tutors and students might make choices for writing conferences based on these traits and their knowledge of them.

#### *Social Context Cues*

Early studies on CMC, combined with theories from communication and psychology, such as the Information Richness Theory and the Social Presence Theory, indicate that social context cues are absent from CMC and that certain interpersonal connections cannot be engaged. These studies (Liu & Ginther, 1999; Walther, 1996) clearly show that it is difficult to establish personal connections, to show one's personality, to affect the voice of the message, to appreciate the individuality of others. However, there are situations in which an impersonal atmosphere is desirable: some people are more comfortable and others are more efficient in less personal formats; some activities may need to be less encumbered with the personal communication that must be dealt with in f2f meetings (Walther, 1996). There are negative aspects to group work that may arise due directly to interpersonal noise, and those aspects may be reduced by sociotechnical mediation: individual domination, pressure to conform to group opinion or to the dominant members, and natural hierarchy issues that can interfere with and complicate group work. The value of this finding was made more credible by the work of psychologists such as Smolensky, Carmody, and Halcome (cited in Walther, 1996, p. 7), who reported simply that the number of personal remarks made during group work is inversely proportionate to the amount of work that gets accomplished.

A body of research conducted in the late 1980s and into the 1990s began to show that CMC can be an interpersonal communication mode, yet the original judgment still perpetuates in some studies. Walther (1996) questions both outcomes and suggests that the conflicting results may be explained by the fact that CMC users learn effective communication skills over time – a prediction made by researchers Hiltz, Johnson, and Agle in 1978 and Rice and Love in 1987 (as cited in Walther, 1996). Using a Social Information Processing Framework, several studies have shown that one important variable that is likely to explain the development of interpersonal differences in CMC and f2f is the factor of time. CMC simply requires more time for skill development, for comfort with the medium, and for relationships to develop through electronic channels. Kelly and McGrath (1985, as cited in Walther, 1996) proved such to be the case also in f2f meetings. It follows that CMC requires even more time. Sherry (2000) adds that perceived value of CMC by peers and parents also encourages CMC use and skills, which builds self-efficacy, each of which take time to develop. Walther (1994, as cited in Walther, 1996) found that efforts to use interpersonal skills was also a function of the participants' expectations of future relationships to those they were communicating with, not the communication medium alone. Walther concludes from overwhelming evidence that CMC does not eliminate the need for interpersonal relationships, but, rather, that the evidence shows “a very resilient view of humans communicating . . . us[ing] cues available to them to manage relational development in normal (or perhaps supernormal) fashion” (p. 13).

Positive aspects of impersonal communication, however, are useful and worth considering, according to Walther (1996). Anonymity, which can be both positive and negative, has been shown to add to the comfort level of many CMC users, especially those who are not in the majority; those of lower status can contribute without fear of reprisal; turn-taking strategies do not have to be negotiated; conflict becomes more useful and productive. Batson and Langston (1996) found that their composition students generally gave more reading/response time to peer projects, and they tended to be more critical and more honest in their responses. Batson and Langston speculated that the students felt safer in the screen environment and more removed from the emotion stirred up by critically analyzing the paper of a peer whose reactions were so immediately

visible. One study of decision-making via f2f, CMC, and CMC-enhanced (by a software program designed for group meetings), showed that the CMC-enhanced group produced more and varied ideas than the two other groups. We can speculate that the group did well, in part, because they did not have to cope with interpersonal noise or with designing the group discussion, leaving their time and energy for reader response.

### *Other Problem Differences*

#### *Border Elements*

CMC is still predominantly a text-based system; by virtue of that, interpersonal communication is limited. The border elements (Brown & Duiguid, 1993, as cited in Hsu & Sammons, 1998, p. 183), non-verbal cues that fill out communication, such as eye-contact, facial expressions, tones of voice, gestures, nodding, shifting about, and the like, are not available in CMC, at least not in the normal form (Hsu & Sammons, 1998; Liu & Ginther, 1999; Sherry, 2000). Hsu & Sammons (1998) explain that when border elements are missing, and a system for understanding and replacing the missing elements has not been learned, people get confused. A simple group Q/A or a joke may be misinterpreted without the supporting body language and intonation, the paralinguistic cues.

In terms of distance classes, there is often a different classroom format to learn as well as the adjustment to the missing border elements, for the instructor and the students. Classes today still tend to follow a traditional format, one that does not translate easily to the sound-only or text-only formats generally available for distance instruction (Hsu & Sammons, 1998). Teachers in f2f environments intuitively look for puzzled expressions, raised hands, and confirming sounds. When these are missing, content as well as attitudes about the class can be affected (Hsu & Sammons, 1998). In an ethnographic study of three distance classes conducted by audioconference, Hsu & Sammons found that students and instructors did not notice the missing border elements, and they tried to interpret the communication with others with the cues available to them. The deficiency, along with the fact that it was not acknowledged or understood, caused still further confusion among the students and the instructors. In all cases, the context of a situation, which includes border elements, should be examined, in terms of space, time, and channel; missing cues should be discussed, and alternative ways of understanding nuances through writing must be learned (Hsu & Sammons, 1998; Murray, 1991).

Another problem caused by the anonymity factor of CMC is that CMC participants tend to form hasty first impressions of others because of “overreliance on minimal cues” (Walther, 1998, p. 18). Lea and Spears (1992) found that online correspondents made a great deal out of whatever social cues they could ferret out of the text. Impressions might be based on level of writing skill, grammar or punctuation errors, perceived tone, vocabulary, as well as the content of the message (p. 18). Further, it was found that participants who sensed some commonality were more likely to find positive social cues in the text (Collot & Belmore, 1996; Lea & Spears, 1992). Impressions build in CMC through language. “[O]ne’s social currency is based not on riches but on the information he or she manages and the wit with which it is given” (MacKinnon, 1995, as cited in Walther, 1996, p. 20). Gender, race, and appearance are revealed through disclosure, not as a package (Rice, 1987; Walther, 1996). Participants in any group, f2f or CMC, normally disclose some traits carefully, but CMC grants the writer more time for reflection and revision of those revelations, or as Walther (1998) called it, “selected self-presentation” (p. 19). Impressions build over time through any communication medium or channel, teaching communicators to withhold judgments and allow in multiple layers of impressions (Sherry, 2000). Verbal information, though, is easier to control than non-verbal information, which takes disciplined self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is harder to control as more variables are added (Walther, 1998). In one surprising study that compared groups in f2f, audioconference, and videoconference situations, the more favorable impressions were reported in the audioconference group; the videoconference group placed second and f2f, third (Chilcoat & Delvine as cited in Walther, 1996).

When some of the border elements are eliminated, more cognitive space is accessible for deliberation of ideas, selection of language, and development of communication. Also, Matheson and Zanna (cited in Walther, 1996) saw that CMC groups exhibited more “private self-awareness,” that is, that they were more in touch with their values, beliefs, thoughts, reactions, attitudes, and feelings while communicating through CMC. During f2f encounters, it is difficult to attend to this level of awareness and, at the same time, fully hear other participants, which requires “heightened levels of psychic, sensory, and emotional involvement, and arousal, increased cognitive load, competing conversational and relational demands, [and] differential salience of context

cues” (Burgoon & Walther, 1990, p. 258). Because CMC exposes writers to others’ writing, they can begin to scrutinize the attitudes and personal values of others, with the effect of further development of their own self-understanding (Barker & Kemp, 1990).

Other studies have shown the benefits of anonymity. Cynthia Selfe (1990), using feminist theory, showed that CMC can reduce the marginalization of participants who are treated differently because of gender, race, age, social status, appearance, and the like. Studies comparing f2f and CMC meetings argue that women become more active, collaborative, and equal in CMC media (Markel, 2000; Selfe, 1990). Social psychologists such as Spitzer (1986) and Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire (1984) have shown that CMC groups can decrease or eliminate group domination by the perceived-powerful members. Other research, however, has found that gender is still very much a factor in CMC situations, saying that even in electronic situations where participants can hide their gender, they most often still remain in the roles they have been socialized to (Markel, 2000; Stewart, et al., 1999).

### *Hybrid Language*

CMC has been described as writing-talk, as a blend of writing and speech, as a hybrid language, as more like oral language, as more like prose. Michael Heim (1987) said, in, maybe a bit of a glorification, “visual electronics reawakens impulses of the oral culture. The appearance of more direct contact alludes to the potential oneness and harmony of the orally-bound tribe” (p. 67). Most researchers are beginning to see that CMC has multiple descriptions, and it resembles speech at times, writing at others, and both at the same time in certain formats and uses. Like speech, CMC is interactive; like writing, it allows time for invention, drafting, and revision. CMC takes some of the energy of speech into writing, with the effect of creating a text that is more conversational, less formal, and with more voice. Electronic communications are generally thought of as producing less stress than writing and as being less intimate than talking (Batson & Langston, 1990). CMC naturally elevates writing from the private to the more social realm, which ideally fits with current pedagogies based on social constructionism; both the physical writing environment and the “real and present audience” (p. 148) add to the open and social nature of writing in this medium.

### *Collaboration and CMC*

A study by Murray (1991) observed how a group of college students collaborating through CMC on group papers strategized their communication. Murray found that students used cognitive and social constructionist strategies during real-time CMC for each of the process stages of brainstorming and drafting. They deliberately chose other channels, however, when the synchronous mode complicated the process, leading Murray to dichotomize synchronous and asynchronous choices for collaborative writing projects: students preferred the synchronous channel mostly for question/answer activities. As a word of precaution, however, as Hsu and Sammons (1998) discovered, even Question/Answer (Q/A) is difficult until the discourse community is formed. Without border elements, the community has to develop its cues, interaction pattern, and expectations, which, given time, they usually do. Larger, more complex writing projects are better served by asynchronous means because planning stages require “organizing subprocesses” or the strategies for arranging ideas; when that activity opens up new ideas or changes to original thoughts, there need to be ways to arrange and rearrange ideas. Synchronous writing complicates this process rather than facilitating it.

### *Community*

Moller (1998) claims that asynchronous distance learning provides the kind of instruction that is not possible in the traditional classroom: it is active, interactive, decentered, individualized, and it offers varying degrees of self-pacing and sequencing. Moller qualifies this, perhaps, hyperbolic assessment with the community argument: that community should be deliberately established, with attention to the kinds of support it is expected to offer, which, she suggests, should be at least for information and for social support.

### *Time Factor*

The time factor that helps define asynchronous CMC cannot be overstated. For meetings, discussions, class work, collaborative work, and messaging, asynchronous modes give the participants nearly complete control over when they will attend to communication demands and how much time they will put into them. Time control also gives the writer a chance to attend to the social aspects of communication without that aspect interfering with the task (recall, as Smolensky, Carmody, & Halcomb (1990)

showed, that given the same time frame, the more personal interaction in any group task, the less work gets done). Asynchronous CMC disentangles the responder from other communication feeds/cues/distractions that are present in f2f. It allows the participant to fully concentrate on his ideas and the language to convey them in (Sherry, 2000). Following one's intuitive guess at the quality of response possible given more time, fewer distractions, and the leisure to deal with inner formulations of ideas and responses, it stands to reason that the discourse will reflect these advantages. A frequently cited study by Och (1979) showed that "planned discourse . . . is more intersubjective and less egocentric" (as cited in Walther, 1996, p. 26).

#### *Social Cue Replacement*

Walther & Burgoon (1992) found that CMC can, at times, actually be more personal than f2f communication. The asynchronous system, especially, allows participants to create meaning using social cue replacements – emoticons and punctuation have become stand-ins for those cues, to the point that some of the recent word processing programs automatically convert the well-known :) to a ☺. There are online guides now for the hundreds of emoticons that have been created by the CMC culture. It appears, too, that online participants have learned the skills of excavating the sub-text, asking for clarification, and reading carefully to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Walther (1996) also points out that readers have become more aware of relational keys in CMC. When the argument is made that the asynchronous mode causes, by its nature, delays in communication, Walther answers that subject/topic markers and time-sent markers are cues. Walther further declines to compare synchronous and asynchronous CMC, saying that asynchronous is not meant to be a sequential communication channel in the same way as f2f.

#### *Email*

Of all the modes of CMC, email, as a representative of the asynchronous faction, is probably the most prevalent. Most OWLs, as of this writing, offer their online services through email. Much has been made of the kind of communication email provides, especially the writing style that seems to be emerging. Each discipline struggles to describe and define this electronic discourse. Email writing has characteristics of oral and written discourse. It is conversation, and is much like oral discourse. A linguistic

examination of email discourse reveals how that mode is adapted to conversation-like writing. Word usage was identified by Hatch (1992, as cited in Gains, 1999, p. 94) as one signal of conversational discourse: slang, sloppy words, or designer spelling (“see ya,” “hi,” “sez,” for example); also choppy clauses that resemble fragmented speech (clauses put together with conjunctions); and lexical choices of words or phrases that are not used in formal English, such as “a lot,” “just,” or “really” are all commonly used to capture a style and voice appropriate to the audience and context. Baron (1998a) notes that a casual style is acceptable in email: users are more likely to use first names, to leave out formal openings and closings, and to use humor. With academia and the general population modeling this informal writing/speaking style in CMC, the question has surfaced as to the impact of CMC writing on composition. Already we are experiencing shifts in writing environments to collaborative, process, reader response – all supported by social constructionist philosophy and by postmodern thought. The shifts in composition pedagogy and the emerging computer technologies and software are nearly impossible to unravel, though competent arguments have been made representing both viewpoints (Baron, 1998b; Taylor, 1992).

Naomi Baron (1998b) argues in “Writing in the Age of Email: The Impact of Ideology vs. Technology,” that the trend toward more informal, speech-like writing had started sometime before the email influence, that the shift could be seen taking shape in several other harbingers: a broader range of topics acceptable in composition classes and the more relaxed view of grammar instruction and use. Her prediction is that the influence will go the other way: composition → email, as the technology becomes ever more a part of our lives, our schooling, and our business. On the other hand, many other researchers and practitioners celebrate the technology as a communication medium that ensures more writing (Carlson & Apperson-Williams, 2000; Coogan, 1999; Mabrito, 2000).

The concept of *facilitas* is more likely to be at work here than with other teaching strategies. The “real” writing that is practiced to a real audience, for real purposes, gives writers more facility with language in the written modes. In theory, that facility should be well under way before disciplinary formats and grammatical perfection are imposed (Barker & Kemp, 1990; Selfe, 1990; Sherry, 2000; Taylor, 1992).

### *Theories in CMC*

It is important that researchers, practitioners, and writers in a field display the theories that ground their disciplines, their pedagogy, and their findings to show their knowledge of prior developments, the only way to maintain integrity in research. CMC is very much tied to theories, and the research generated is used to refine and even develop new theories for electronic communication. One of the earliest theories, one that still holds under ever-newer technologies, is the Transformation Theory.

#### *Transformation Theory*

CMC emerged with the cognitive theory of process writing and social constructionism, which includes collaborative theory, and the technologies and software have helped make pedagogies that have developed out of these theories possible. Researchers have set up empirical studies that show how learning to write can be facilitated by understanding and practicing the process and how dialogue with others can show how we learn together as well as how no text is an isolated piece. Collaborative theory helps us further understand the roles of writers and readers and, more important, how the roles change based on personality traits, abilities, maturity levels, and needs. Herein, we have examined arguments that provide, for example, evidence that communication differences based on gender get equalized in online conversations (Walther, 1998), and there are respected arguments that show this is not really the case (Selfe, 1990). It is important to be reminded that there is not a single answer for complicated issues.

Transformation Theory, which has been talked about extensively by Walter Ong (1982) posits that new technology changes our communication and, therefore, psychodynamically, our ways of thinking, and that people conform to the systems imposed and begin to think in the ways that are made available by the systems. Sherry (2000) uses this theory to look at the concept of communication and educational tools. In an activity system, which is based on social constructionist principles of teaching and learning and on activity theory, the tools we can use change our perspective on the subject, and as those tools are developed and revised, again, the way we view the subject and then talk about it, problematize it, and imagine it will be affected by the perspective the tools provide. Sherry, drawing on the work of Engestrom (1996), describes an activity

system as an interdependent system of people and tools, with the tools fully capable, as part of the activity system, of transforming the activity and the roles of the participants, as well as adding perspective. Heim (1987) says that computer writing was originally conceived to change thought processes, from static to dynamic, that it is a medium that could show that by interaction, images, and animation, that communication can be “a whole new element for the movement of thought” (p. 104). The medium makes writing more public, not just supporting cooperation and communication, but setting in motion a new ontological configuration. This is the process of transformation: that the tool can ultimately revise our reality.

### *Chaos Theory*

Taylor (1992; also Beebe & Boneville, 2000) uses Chaos Theory, a theory discussed elsewhere to describe writing center activities, to help explain the developments of CMC and, consequently, caused by CMC. Taylor explains Chaos Theory from the scientific perspective from which it came, and then claims it can be applied to textual interactions. Chaos Theory first helps us to understand that we need to change our questions as we acquire more knowledge and new tools. In an explanation of this theory, Taylor says that the borders of any entity are the important places of interaction. If we consider CMC, then, and we speak about the characteristics of speaking and writing, which seems to be where the scrutiny of CMC always begins, we generally discuss (Taylor says “define”) the border elements of those discourses – where we leave the inner dimensions of getting the discourse from private idea to public display. It is at borders where dynamic interaction takes place and then “self-organization” happens.

### *A New Context*

Using CMC in academia, in writing centers, in business, and for pleasure, we are organizing a new context for conversation/writing and with that new context, we need new theories to understand it and new strategies that fit its use. Computer writing, in all its manifestations, is affecting how we communicate, and especially how we write. A recent survey, reported on National Public Radio (2/4/02), found that one-half of the U.S. population uses the Internet, and the users surveyed said that of business, communication, and information opportunities on the Internet, communication is their primary Internet

use. This survey is supported by research by Baron (1998b) and Chesbro and Bonsall (1989, as cited in Beebe & Boneville, 2000).

### *Literacy*

We adapt our vision of reality according to how our vision (way of seeing and interpreting) is trained. It is trained, in part, by the technological means assisting it and the vocabulary we have to speak about it. We use new technology to “see” in new ways. Now in this brave new world forced open by an unidentified and leaderless groundswell, there have come new modes for expression: faster transmissions, larger audiences, modes for transmitting ideas that have no effective verbal counterparts, and efficient, exciting possibilities for intertextuality and heteroglossia. Research efforts are only in the first stages, laying the groundwork in these areas, but the boundaries of composition are being pushed on. Some researchers/ practitioners in the composition field suggest that there are two good reasons to adopt computer writing as a new literacy: 1) that the evolving techniques, theories, and pedagogies offer excellent learning opportunities; and 2) that professionals in every field will be held accountable for computer communication skills (LeBlanc, 1992). The university writing center, as a lab for teaching and learning, is taking steps into the electronic world. Tutoring is being done online, with techniques developing as observations and studies are made. To this point, there are few published studies in online tutoring and fewer still on the training process. With the research and knowledge from the literature in writing center work, composition and rhetoric, and computer-mediated communication, dependable groundwork is in place to begin those studies.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### *Investigative Methods*

Because this study took place in a laboratory setting where students are teaching and learning, where many variables and unknowns are at work, the research methodology followed a qualitative design. The research began with one comprehensive question: “What is the nature of a computer-mediated tutoring conference?” and, out of that question others were allowed to emerge. Although the researcher entered the study with other questions of interest, questions which will be revealed below, the guidance of Miles and Huberman (1994) was followed: start with a general question and let hypotheses and theories develop from the findings, along with other questions and deliberations.

This study started with questions that were defined, in part, by the context, and generated data that had to be interpreted in that context, and the data analysis made use of both qualitative methods and a quasi-quantitative (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) linguistic analysis. Qualitative measures were used to present the setting, participants, and events by descriptions, contextual analyses of interviews, and close readings of the transcriptions of the interviews and correspondence between tutor and client. A functional analysis was applied to the tutor-student exchanges, which yielded a more quantitative and objective picture of the kind of computer-mediated talk that takes place.

The setting of this study, as well as the participants involved in it, is a dynamic entity, which yielded results that are particular to this study situation. As researcher, I am identifying the whole project as qualitative because of its primary uses and purposes: this is a practical study that relied on three case studies; the participants were involved in every level, from data collection to interpretation, and the context was a vital factor. Data was collected by the researcher as observer/participant; the researcher conducted interviews with the participants; and tutorial reports, a routine writing center item, were collected and contextually analyzed. The researcher was most interested in the participants’ perspectives on the process of online tutoring: what they do and how they describe, interpret, and explain it, which further identifies this study as a qualitative one (Wolcott, 1994). The researcher tried to find the keys to this OWL’s tutoring process, the primary influences on the tutors’ techniques. The study is not a treatment → effect one,

but, rather, an examination of the process as a whole. Qualitative methods are the proper choices for the purposes as outlined here.

Having said that, however, the researcher also used a linguistic analysis method, one that has found credibility in other composition studies (Gere & Abbott, 1985; Hewett, 1998; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) and in a writing center study conducted by this researcher. Though qualitative methods are preferred in the composition and writing center fields – with their nearly zealous devotion to description, collaborative experience, and process pedagogy and theories – there are certainly instances when more defensible objective analytical measures are appealing. Here, a quantifiable linguistic analysis method, which is also used for descriptive purposes, will serve to objectively explicate tutor talk.

As the researcher is seeking to understand and further develop the writing center in question, the results of this study will guide that ongoing work. It is possible, however, that the findings of this study can offer suggestions to other university writing centers, which are generally more similar than different, regardless of size and population. The writing center field, as the history and research briefs show in Chapter Two, appropriates and contributes to the pedagogy and theories in composition, education, psychology, linguistics, English as a second language, and communication.

The researcher, as director of the writing center and an interested, and not impartial participant in this study, did, necessarily, filter the data; the data collection and data analysis was “a continuous, iterative enterprise” as described by Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 12), which, along with the inductive approach of qualitative methodology, accounts for questions that emerged out of the data, and out of the ongoing analyses and the reduction of data coding, that were not immediately apparent at the start of the study.

Research and practical questions, however, guided the design of this study and, while other mysteries developed and other problems steered the study toward other questions, the researcher began with these:

### *Research Questions*

1. What is the nature of computer-mediated tutoring in a university writing center?
  - 1a. What are tutors’ perceptions, actions, and theories? (that is, descriptions,

- techniques, explanations)?
- 1b. What actually happens in computer-mediated tutoring sessions?
  - 1c. What techniques are practiced? (writing center, composition, pedagogy)
    - 1c. 1. What roles get established?
    - 1c. 2. What communication styles are in use?
  - 2. How does the actual session compare to the participants' accounts?
  - 3. How does the session line up with writing center and composition philosophy and theories?
  - 4. What computer-mediated tutoring theory is emerging?
  - 5. What computer-mediated tutor training design can be formulated as an ID model?

### *Research Design*

The design of this research follows the context of the situation under study: the computer-mediated component of a university writing laboratory. The participants in the study further affected the questions that were taken up, and the researcher kept in mind and factored into the interpretation of tutor process that study participants are affected by other systems that shape them (Gee, 1992). The questions asserted above guided the methods chosen herein. The surest way to understand what happens in a writing tutorial is to view it from several perspectives and analyze it based on those observations. Therefore, qualitative methods will be used to describe the nature of the sessions.

The questions that started this study were suited for qualitative methods. The writing center setting inscribes the tutorial, and the medium under study will have further effects. Therefore, a full description from the observer and from the participating tutors was necessary to represent and understand the techniques, roles, communication styles, and individuals' reactions to the online tutoring experience. Other qualitative methods filled out and added to the interpretive certitude of the sessions. Transcripts were used for both the linguistic analysis and for a close contextualization of the student-tutor conference; interviews and tutorial reports added others' perspectives to the data by filling in information about the session, adding background knowledge, and revealing attitudes. These combinations of methods, then, were used to collect data as it was guided by the above research questions concerning computer-mediated tutoring sessions.

A linguistic analysis model was chosen as a more structured and objective means of interpreting the tutor-student talk, which provided information for questions 1c., 1c.1, 1c.2, 2, and 3. Writing center theories inform tutoring techniques, as explained in Chapter Two, so it was important to see how these techniques, developed in the f2f environment, were practiced in a computer-mediated environment. The selection of a linguistic analysis model was made based on evidence of its usefulness, adaptability, and replication information. Gere and Abbott (1985) adapted, employed, and replicated a scheme created by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) to study peer response groups in a middle-school writing class. Hewett (1998) adapted that model for her use with a study that compared two peer response groups in a college composition class: one f2f group and one computer-mediated group (see Chapter Two for a more detailed description of the study and outcomes). The model in both studies, Gere and Abbott's and Hewett's, accounted for 100% of the talk, and Gere and Abbott, in their field test, realized 85% inter-rater reliability. It should be noted here that quantitative studies are generally defined as valid when inter-rater reliability reaches 90%. Given that these studies aimed to measure qualities of student talk as they learned response techniques for composition classes, that 100% of the talk could be categorized with this scheme, and that it has been replicated, this researcher finds the 85% rate acceptable.

#### *Planning and Preparation*

The plan for this study was originally conceived from two directions: 1) A project completed in the course of my doctoral studies, "An Ethnography of a University Writing Center," produced valuable insight into both the process of tutor development and the methods of qualitative research. The study took place in the Radford University Writing Center in Spring 2000; and 2) The opportunity to use networking to offer writing support services to students, a goal shared by hundreds of higher education writing centers nationwide, has subsequently created a need for empirical research, as addressed in Chapter Two, that will describe and interpret the nature of computer-mediated tutoring.

The university writing center is a support service offering reader response and other writing instruction to all university students, freshmen to graduate students. The center is staffed by four undergraduate work study students who compete for the positions by application, interview, and financial aid eligibility. Tutors come from a

variety of majors and backgrounds, but they are required to have taken English 314: Writing Center Seminar & Practicum, a course the director teaches every spring. The work study tutors work 10 hours/week. Two Graduate Teaching Fellows (GTFs) from the English Department's Graduate Teaching Fellow/Mentor Program are assigned to the writing center for a two-year commitment. For the first year, the GTF is a full-time tutor (18 hours) in the center; for the second year, the GTF is assigned half-time in the center and half time as an instructor in freshman English composition (ENGL 101/102), with the writing center director as mentor. A third graduate student, a Graduate Assistant (GA) is assigned to the writing center full-time (20 hours/week) for two years. The graduate students learn the philosophy, theories, and techniques of writing center work in a variety of ways: meetings with the director, selected readings and discussions of the material, workshops, and on-the-job training. The writing center staffing is funded entirely by the English Department.

The writing center space, a large, light room with clusters of tables and upholstered couches and chairs, five computer work areas, and a small library of composition, literature, ESL, and grammar books was supplied by the Office of Academic Enrichment, a Division of Academic Affairs, which also helps with incidental expenses, since the writing center has no budget. The director, this researcher, has been in the position for twelve years, with an MA in English, certification to teach ESL and additional training to work with learning disabled writers.

The writing center, because of its close connection to the GTF/Mentor Program, has worked out an agreement by which the sixteen GTFs work one hour/week in the Center. Each of these teaching fellows brings a different perspective to the tutoring dyad, shaped as they are by other systems, personal capabilities, and distinct interests, adding another level of learning opportunity to the ongoing writing center conversation, as well as adding to their growing personal knowledge and philosophy of teaching. This opportunity pairs GTFs with students who are not their students, who are not working on their assignments, and are not under their influence and/or power, a perspective that gives GTFs a glimpse at a student's views and reactions to assignments, classes, topics, and the art and skill of writing. The writing center and the GTF/Mentor Program operate in full support of the objectives of the Radford University English Department. Composition

classes at Radford University follow current-traditional, process, post-process, and social constructionist theories, as described in Chapter Two. GTFs and writing center tutors see students from composition instruction that represents a range of theoretical opinion.

Students at Radford University come to the center for writing support as they decide it is necessary or helpful. Some professors offer extra credit and some may encourage specific students to use the center because they have detected writing/grammar/punctuation problems that warrant special, individual attention; for the most part, however, the writing center advertises its services so that students will know that help is available for all writers, and that it is free, personal, one-to-one. Tutors make brief presentations in classes at the beginning of each semester, flyers are sent to professors in every department of every college, Residential Life announces writing center services as a public service to all students living in dorms, and posters are hung in classroom buildings. Each of these advertising strategies informs students of the writing center hours that cover approximately 70 hours/week; location; scheduling details (phone, email, on location); and they explain that tutors work with students at all stages of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading. Because the writing center was instituted at Radford University during the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement of the mid-1980s, most disciplines value writing skills as well as the writers' processes, and they encourage students to use the center as a part of their writing process as well as for reader response.

The Radford University writing center has enjoyed full support from the campus community, as this recent demographic information will attest to. A survey conducted in the writing center during the academic year 2000-2001 showed that business was represented by the following: 1293 appointments met, from 26 academic departments; 40% were from the freshman class, 10% were sophomores, 20% juniors, 20% seniors, 10% graduate; 33% were return visits.

With approximately 8000 undergraduates and 1000 graduate students at Radford University, as well as two satellite campuses: Abingdon, 1 ¾ hours-drive south of Radford, and Roanoke, one hour north, the writing center has begun offering electronic services. Tutors have not, however, been trained in computer-mediated tutoring techniques to date. There are anecdotal exchanges among writing centers that are

descriptive and informative, but there are not yet theories or techniques firmly committed to this medium. Centers are relying on writing center theories and practice, but there are signs that the different medium will spin off, resulting in revisions of these theories and practices. In order to prepare for this study, I had to make decisions on how the writing center would respond to OWL submissions and then try out the techniques. The Radford University OWL was developed and put in place on the university server in fall 1999. Students on the Radford University campus have nearly unlimited access to computer labs, all with Ethernet connections, open 10 a.m. until midnight, and monitors are available to assist. However, the Radford University OWL has not been a popular medium for either tutors or students, probably because it is relatively new; students are not yet comfortable with the technology; undergraduate tutors have been trained solely in f2f techniques; GTFs tutor with their developing teaching skills; and, perhaps, other reasons yet to be expressed. Since its inception, only about 48 e-appointments have been registered; 40 of those appointments were with graduate students; 29 of those were from the Roanoke campus.

Through informal observations, I have noted that most all Radford University students have access to computers, if not personal, then certainly the labs, and are comfortable with computer-mediated communication. They are not as familiar with mail attachment functions or with the Microsoft Word Review feature, which several of us use to respond to texts. This feature, on the Word toolbar, allows the reviewer/tutor/responder to click anywhere in the text and embed a comment. The cursor is placed at the point of comment, and in the bottom fifth of the split screen, the tutor types comments. When the text is viewed on screen, the text commented on appears highlighted; when the mouse is rolled over the highlighted area, the comment “pops out” in an electronic post-it note facsimile. The printout of the reviewed text results in embedded bracketed keys in the text with the reviewer’s initials and the comment number, like this – [am1] – at the point in the text that is commented on. The comments follow the text in order at the end of the document.

My practice and self-study of computer-mediated tutoring has refined this procedure for our center and resulted in a template that tutors might follow. The template, also described by Monroe (1998) and Coogan (1999), is an obvious invention in its

parallel to writing center procedure: front comments usually restate the tutor's acknowledgement and understanding of the assignment, topic, and student's requests, and is used to explain the tutor's commenting procedure, intentions, and methods. The in-text comments are direct responses to the text; the end comments provide the tutor's overview of the text: restatement of the purpose, summary of the paper, and/or reader's reaction. The tutor will usually comment on a particular weakness and a particular strength of the paper that extends and emphasizes in-text notes. The tutor may, in the end note, stress writing skills that the student might continue to focus on; these comments will include one or two higher orders of concern (HOCs) (thesis, organization, supporting points, for example) and one or two lower orders of concern (LOCs) (grammar and punctuation). The tutor might sign off by inviting the student to submit other revisions and/or come into the writing center. This is standard writing center procedure and seems to translate naturally to the OWL.

Students using the Radford University OWL are required to introduce their work to the tutor in the same way they do in the f2f center. Before working with a student in the f2f center, the tutor asks the student to sign our log. In this way, we have records of students and the demographic information that helps describe the extent of our outreach. On-line, we collect that same information. In the f2f meeting, the tutor asks the student about the assignment that motivated the paper, how he/she chose the topic, how he/she generated ideas for the paper, what stage of the writing process the paper is in, and what the student's specific concerns/questions/needs are for the paper. The OWL session requests that same information.

The work of the f2f center and the subsequent emergence of an electronic service prepared the framework for this study. The OWL should be staffed with tutors who have been trained to work in that environment, the nature of which may or may not parallel that of the f2f environment. The starting question: "What is the nature of the computer-mediated tutoring conference?" came out of that planning.

#### *Choices for Collection of Data*

Qualitative research design includes attention to triangulation. For the sake of validity, the researcher builds into the process multiple ways of collecting data from several participants and in several settings. Because this study was small – three case

studies – took place in an insular context, with the researcher as the participant/observer, and because the researcher was intimately involved in the project, multiple perspectives and data sources were requisite. As well, a detailed description and justification for the sampling and the collection methods is presented here. An overview of the data collection choices is described first.

#### *Selection of Participants for Case Studies*

I chose purposeful sampling, that is, a sample out of the context under study, one that can help to uncover information for very particular research questions. The four possible goals of purposeful sampling in qualitative research, according to Maxwell (1996), are 1) to obtain a sample that is representative of the context, 2) to obtain a sample that reflects the heterogeneity in that context, 3) to select participants that will permit critical examination of theories important to the area of study, and 4) to select participants that might yield additional useful information in “controlled comparisons” (p. 72) between and among participants. The following brief descriptions of the participants will reveal how the sampling decision for this study met the criteria for purposeful sampling. The justifications for choosing this sampling idea and these participants follow.

#### *Melissa*

Melissa was a second-year Graduate Teaching Fellow at Radford University. As described above, GTFs are required to work one hour/week in the writing center, but Melissa had volunteered hours beyond that requirement during her two-year tenure at the university. Melissa had tutored online at another university and received on-the-job training there. She had logged probably 30-40 hours of online tutoring, but none at this center. She knows our writing center philosophy and techniques only informally, through interested conversations and through two workshops that I presented for the RU English Department GTFs.

#### *Shaun*

Shaun was a first-year Graduate Teaching Fellow assigned full-time to the writing center. His only tutoring experience was on-the-job during this academic year. We had three formal meetings and several informal discussions that focused on writing center philosophy and techniques. We had talked only briefly about online tutoring. Before this

study, Shaun had tutored through the Radford University OWL two times, during which he devised his own methods. I had observed Shaun tutoring f2f, which he expresses a preference for over computer-mediated tutoring. He shows some intuition for well-grounded tutoring strategies, probably the result of his personal experience in writing groups. His expertise interferes at times, though, when he gets involved in too many areas of a student's paper, from content to grammar to style. He has some tutor-role identification problems, and sometimes covers his lack of confidence and experience as a novice tutor with his ideas of the tutor as expert.

*Stephanie*

Stephanie was a junior English major, full-time writing center tutor/work study. She took the Writing Center Seminar & Practicum in spring 2001 where she studied composition theories, learning styles, writing center techniques, grammar review, LD writers, and ESL writers. The class did not study or practice online tutoring. At the start of this study, Stephanie had worked in the writing center for one semester and had logged five online sessions. She was left to her own devices for these OWL conferences, and we had not discussed her experiences.

The sample participants, then, represent three points in the full range of writing center workers:

Participant	Developmental Level	Training	Experience
1	Graduate	On-the-job, off-site	3 years
2	Graduate	On-the-job, local	6 months
3	Undergraduate	Classroom, on-the-job	6 months

This selection of participants allowed me to fulfill Maxwell's (1996) criteria for purposeful sampling:

- 1) Representativeness: Each of the three participants represented the prototypical range for funded writing center tutor positions available at this writing center each year. These were the representatives important to include for this center.
- 2) Heterogeneity: The range of funded writing center tutors is heterogeneous in terms of class level and the extent and variety of their tutor training and experiences. The participants in this study represented the full range of typical writing center applicants and hires for this center.

- 3) To aid in the examination of theories under consideration in the study: The participants can be helpful to a study that draws from theories in composition and rhetoric and from the writing center field, especially current-traditional, process, and collaborative. Each participant was knowledgeable about, and made use of these theories, to varying degrees. The theories of interest in computer-mediated communication, such as social presence, influences on writing styles, and communication styles, were equally unfamiliar to each of these participants; they have, however, informal knowledge of, opinions about, and had discussed the effects of computer-mediated communication in writing center work. Participants were asked to explain and interpret their tutoring sessions, which did cast some light on their use of theoretical or intuitive approaches.
- 4) Controlled comparisons between participants: This study was a multicase one. The researcher was looking at what takes place in asynchronous online tutoring sessions in order to add detailed description and understanding of that tutoring medium to the field. The outcomes of the study have resulted in recommendations for tutor training. It will be of interest, then, to note how the participants compare in terms of their class level, specific training, and tutoring experiences. The primary goal of the study was not to compare tutors but rather to look for evidence that prior training, experience, and developmental levels may suggest differences that should be under consideration in a training program.

#### *Procedure for Case Studies*

The case studies involved three writing center tutors. During the initial invitation to the participants to take part in the research study, I described the procedures and requirements, and explained the purpose and the guiding questions of the study. A short, taped interview served as an introduction of each participant, giving the study a starting point. The interview started with prescribed questions to learn about each tutor's OWL experiences, attitudes concerning computer-mediated tutoring/communication, and knowledge about computer-mediated communication (See Appendix A). From there, the interview followed natural inclinations.

### *Methods of Data Collection*

A naturalistic study maintains integrity and proves its validity, in part, by triangulation, which requires the researcher to carefully choose multiple methods of data collection. The five methods chosen for this study are discussed below:

1. Participant/observation. Following the initial interview, each tutor scheduled three evenly-spaced dates and times within the six-week period of this data collection during which he/she worked on the OWL with the researcher observing/ participating and audiotaping the conferences. The researcher and tutor talked naturally during the course of the tutor's OWL work. As described in the "Relationship" section, collegial talk takes place during many f2f writing center sessions, a practice that tutors, directors, and students find edifying and comfortable. While observing the session, the researcher prepared "thick description" (Geertz, 1983) of the event in an effort to verify the content, situate the context, and fairly represent the participants' complete language.
2. Interviews. The researcher interviewed the tutor before the project, after each of the three OWL tutorials, and at the end of the project. After each OWL tutorial, copies of the tutor-student exchange and the student's text with tutor's comments were printed out for the project. Immediately after the session, or as soon after as possible, the researcher interviewed the tutor for elucidations. Prearranged questions (formed during the observation) framed the interview, questions that focused on the work of the session, that asked the tutor to construct a description of the tutorial and that encouraged the tutor to interpret and explain the techniques, theories, and procedures enlisted during the conferences; however, the tutor and researcher also followed natural and interesting extensions to the topics. The interview also attempted to disclose the tutor's attitudes about OWL work and the roles assumed in that environment.
3. Tutor Reports. The tutor provided a tutorial report for each session in the case study, a requirement for record keeping for all sessions, f2f and OWL. The tutor report, a short summary of the tutor's work with a student client, is kept on file in the writing center. The reports were used as support for tutors' explanations and interpretations of sessions.

4. Final papers. Tutors submitted a final paper for the study, one in which they were asked to reflect on each OWL experience and on the comprehensive experience. Participants were prompted to describe, interpret, and explain their OWL work, in terms of techniques employed and theories drawn on.
5. Transcripts. Transcripts were generated in three ways: a) from tutor-student OWL conferences, b) from each of the five tutor-researcher interviews, and c) from the observation tapes. The researcher transcribed the tapes as part of the analysis procedure.

### *Data Analysis*

This study employed qualitative analysis for describing and interpreting the OWL conferences, the conversations between researcher and tutor, the interviews, the tutorial reports, and the participants' final papers, which were described in the section "Qualitative analysis of the data"; the study used a quasi-quantitative method (Coffey & Adkinson, 1996) for the linguistic analysis of the tutor-student talk, and that model and analytical method are described below.

### *Linguistic Analysis*

Gere and Abbott (1985) modified a classification tool from a systematic coding scheme developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), with which to study middle-school peer group f2f talk in a writing class. The classification scheme was used to determine three things: 1) how the peer group members were directing their talk: to the text or for the purpose of group management, and in what proportions; 2) the functions or intent of the group talk: to offer information, to give directions, or to elicit information or responses; and 3) the specific part of the text or writing process their attention was focused on. The scheme accounted for 100% of the group talk and field tested at 85% inter-rater reliability. The Gere and Abbott model was replicated, with some minor adjustments, by Hewett (1998) for use in a study of college level peer groups in a composition class. Hewett's study compared a f2f peer group and a computer-mediated peer group working in a synchronous environment. Gere and Abbott's scheme is elaborated below, and Hewett's adjustments follow.

Using a transcript of the f2f group talk, Gere and Abbott transcribed and broke the peer groups' discussions by natural pauses, sentence breaks, and intonation, which they

called “linguistic idea units” (Gere & Abbott, 1985, p. 367). The linguistic idea units, for talk about text during peer response session, 100% of the time, fit three categories. The codes Gere and Abbott used are indicated below within the definitions of those categories. Linguistic function. Gere and Abbott found that each utterance in their peer group talk had one of three linguistic functions: 1) to inform (coded I), that is, the speaker is giving information, opinions, ideas, and the like; 2) to direct (D), that is, the speaker is suggesting that the listener or listeners act in some way. That intended direction is meant to engage the listener in action, not in linguistic response (e.g. “Look at paragraph two.”); and 3) to elicit (E), which is a request for a response. This may be in the form of a question or a statement, like, e.g. “I would like to know more about that.” Focus of attention. Gere and Abbott determined that linguistic idea units in peer response groups took on a linguistic function that was directed to either the written text or to the group. The groups have two tasks: to share responses to each member’s text and to manage the group’s procedures. Gere and Abbott created a second category that specifies the focus of attention: written text (W) and group (G). Focus of consciousness. Each linguistic idea unit in Gere and Abbott’s writing responses group could be categorized according to a group member’s focus on a specific area of the text or to the group. In order to talk in an organized way about a text, a responder naturally isolates his/her reactions into one of six foci of consciousness, according to Gere and Abbott. That scheme is as follows: Content (C) – comments directed toward ideas, purpose, points, information, and the like; Context (X) – comments that focus on the contextual elements of the paper (the assignment, for example) or the group (materials, perhaps); Format (F) – focus on the organization or conventions for the paper or the activities of the group; Process (P) – comments that focus on the writer’s processes (editing or invention, for example) or on group procedure (for example, the group’s decision to read, make written comments, and then discuss their responses); Reference (R) – a remark that makes reference to a portion of the text or to another group member’s comment; and Phatic (Phatic) – Phatics are words or non-verbal expressions that have no content but function to move conversation along: signal that a listener hears and understands (“uh-huh” or nods), needs explanation (“umm” or puzzled expression), wants to speak (“OK,” or audible breath), and phatics and other subtleties of

conversational etiquette and nuance. Phatics are not coded in the Gere and Abbott scheme, but they are provided for in the analysis.

Gere and Abbott's categorization scheme was adapted and replicated by Hewett (1998) for her comparison study, which was described at length in Chapter Two. Hewett's adjustments to the design were relatively minor. The model actually translated well to Hewett's transcripts of her group's synchronous peer response meetings, a fact that inspired this researcher to try the scheme as well. Gere and Abbott's peer groups followed a talk format adapted from Elbow (1973), which was designed to teach students how to be effective responders to others' texts. Elbow's format is somewhat strict in its design, and students follow their parts in a rather regulated manner. Hewett modified this design for her groups, who presumably have more writing and critical response experience, and she encouraged the groups to organize and manage their reading/response in the way that worked best for them, both the f2f and synchronous computer-mediated group.

#### *Modifications to the Model*

This study combines Gere and Abbott's model with Hewett's adaptations and makes further modifications appropriate for the medium – an asynchronous computer-mediated environment – and the forum – a university writing center. The following section describes and justifies the modifications.

#### *Template*

Gere and Abbott applied their scheme to groups using prescribed response formats. This study of a writing center conference also provided, but did not impose, a template for student requests/data/information and for tutor responses. The template is one that has evolved naturally for our OWL uses and has been described elsewhere (Coogan 1999; Monroe, 1998). Therefore, the Gere and Abbott classification was extended to include the template location of the tutor's comments in the Word document, that is, front (f), in-text (i), and end (e).

#### *Address*

Whereas the Gere and Abbott and Hewett studies focused on peer groups, this study looked at pairs, that is, one tutor and one student. The category Gere and Abbott used to identify where comments were directed (to the text or to the group) was slightly adjusted

for the dyad arrangement of this context, that is, comments were coded to reflect that they are directed to the written text (W) or to the student (S).

### *Mechanics*

Writing centers are obvious places to request and receive help for mechanical or surface features of written text. Consider the history of writing centers (Chapter Two) as well as the philosophy: to help students become better writers. That, of course, includes the mechanics of writing: grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word choice. Many writers have unresolved errors that outside assistance can uncover, repair, and, more importantly, teach the concepts of. At the college level, it takes commitment on the part of the student and the tutor to evaluate the severity of an error in the context of a student's work, and then focus on that error pattern. Inexperienced tutors in the f2f center find this one of the most difficult challenges of tutoring. When they see errors in written text, they are tempted to point out the errors, all of them. This is not, however, best practice. We know that student clients do not learn grammar and punctuation unless the error is isolated within the writer's context, and the concept taught and practiced. Therefore, I added a category, Mechanics (M), to Focus of Consciousness.

During the analysis of data, it became necessary to rethink the function of phatics in the writing center conference. When a tutor responds to a client, phatics clearly have a linguistic function. Part of the writing center purpose is to make students more comfortable with the stages of their writing and with revealing that to the responder. Tutors engage clients in conversation in order to learn more about how the student feels about his/her writing and about the paper-in-progress; therefore, that conversation is often strategic, and phatics, then, become even more functional. Because of this, I chose to move phatics from Gere and Abbott's Focus of Consciousness category to the Linguistic Function category.

### *A Pilot Study*

After selecting the Gere and Abbott model and studying it in their context as well as in Hewett's, I ran a small pilot study to see if the scheme could work for my study purposes: a tutor-student dyad meeting asynchronously to share an electronic paper. I chose a research paper that I had taken through our OWL in January 2002, before I had committed to the Gere and Abbott model; therefore, it fairly reflects responses that were

not influenced by the knowledge that every comment would be cut into linguistic idea units and then categorized according to function, attention, and area of consciousness. That knowledge would surely have resulted in undue attention to the length and focus of each response. The student, a graduate student in the Radford University Nursing Department, submitted the paper with this request: “It needs reviewed [sic] for grammar, organization, a lot of APA that I still need to read up on (I do have the new book), and any other suggestions you may have. . . .”

The study gave me a chance to gauge the workability of the model and begin thinking about how to key and chart the findings. I found, for example, that I had to make decisions about how I would categorize comments that refer to style; I chose to put those under Format. Another difficulty was for grammar issues. If I found an error and simply corrected it, I recorded that as Directing, because Gere and Abbott defined that category for directions that do not expect a linguistic response. If, however, I explained the mechanical error, I recorded that as Inform. Usage problems posed another question, I resolved those in a similar way: I viewed a usage error as Mechanics (their/there, for example), but a usage problem, such as repetition, as style, therefore, Format. Overall, I saw clearly, though, that each electronic submission will have its own framework. This student’s paper is a graduate paper, nearly her final work in the program. For a paper like that, I am more likely to proofread. Her request, which gave me information on her status as well as her view of my role, helped me make decisions about how to respond. The full study, with further discussion on the decisions made for analysis, is available upon request. I found the model to be entirely workable for this format, yielding some interesting results.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

### *Overview*

In order to understand the interview material, the tutorial reports, and the final papers, I applied an inductive coding and contextualizing scheme to the transcripts and texts. The scheme was drawn from the text and linked to the research questions. Writing centers operate under a common philosophy, a range of pedagogical theories, and tutoring techniques that have developed from the theories. Coding by an expert in the field can help determine which techniques and theories the tutor is applying.

At the same time that the conversations and interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded, the researcher wrote descriptions of the tutoring sessions. There is a real threat to validity recognized in this coding methodology: the researcher is not neutral, disinterested, or impartial. The researcher is coming into the project with certain biases and with hopes of finding answers to questions that are of interest to the context. As the participant/observer, however, the researcher can be more reductive in constructing a coding scheme, because she is there to illustrate the contextual elements as well. The tones, expressions, and non-verbal language will help situate the coding.

### *Coding*

Observations and interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed and coded, the goal of which was to “fracture the data and rearrange it into categories” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78) in order to compare data within and between categories. The study I conducted in the writing center with one tutor learning f2f techniques confirmed, to me, the value of this technique. After transcribing the tutor-student conferences and the researcher-tutor interviews, I began to see categories emerge (for example, if the focus of a comment was on content or on surface features of the text), and I could more clearly track the tutor’s progress from session one to session three: whether the categories appeared with the same frequency and whether the data within a category changed. The coding categories in this study came from composition and writing center theory; they were developed inductively by the researcher during the course of the study; and they came from the conceptual structure, that is the conceptualization of tutor as described by the writing center field, a tactic suggested by Maxwell (1996). In addition, I applied the coding scheme from the Gere and Abbott model where appropriate.

Coding does, by definition, reduce the text and, if the context is invisible, the subtleties of the text or speech may not be detectable. The researcher, however, as stated above, provided the context in detail during the observation and interview stages of the study. It is, however, accepted, that coding of any sort does result in the forfeiture of signature pieces of the text or conversation, but it is done to “translate the data into more abstract forms, forms that can reveal patterns that would otherwise be lost in the mass of complexity of uncoded data” (Grant-Davite, 1992, p. 284). Coffey and Adkinson (1996) explain that the loss of data is minimized if the analyst views the coding process as

decontextualizing and recontextualizing, and if this process is recursive. Coding, categorizing, questioning the data sorting, and theorizing should not be discrete steps, but rather present ways of seeing the data, the coding, the categorizing, and the emerging theories in new ways, with constant revision possible. And, on a larger level, the work of analysis and interpretation may lead to revision of or additions to the research questions. Because the topic of this study is relatively narrow and the selected participants have a shared language, this “open” scheme of coding along, with that of the Gere and Abbott model, which is less flexible, gave the researcher the opportunity to cross-reference the codes and categories, which gave support to the themes that emerged (Coffey & Adkinson, 1996). Both coding and categorizing efforts followed Marton’s (1986) idea that “each quotation has two contexts – the one from which it was taken and the ‘pool of meaning’ to which it belongs” (as cited in Coffey & Adkinson, 1996, p. 31).

### *Contextualizing*

I also used contextualizing strategies as described by Maxwell (1996) and Coffey and Atkinson (1996) to understand the data in its context, trying to find the relationship between data, categories, and context in order to form a clearer picture of a student-tutor conference. Case studies lend themselves to this kind of analysis. Narratives that make use of the interviews and observations – the data as well as the contextual elements – helped form a more complete picture of the tutorial. Coding and contextualizing provided an analysis of online tutoring that added to the understanding of computer-mediated tutoring for the writing center field but, certainly, directly informed and influenced the Radford University writing center tutoring program.

Interviews started with a statement of the purposes of the study. This helped to create a collegial relationship, one that admits the roles of all participants and the sense of our search for strategies and techniques that work in online tutoring, a place where few research studies have yet been done. Interviews continued with a pre-established set of questions (Appendix A) and then were followed by individual circumstances (tutors’ sessions, experiences, etc.) and provocative lines of thought that occurred during the interview.

Contextual/narrative analysis provided an analytical method for examining the function of the narrative and its contents as well as the context that motivated and

backgrounded it. Because the acceptance of roles by tutors in the writing center, for example, is of particular interest in this study, the concept of performance with respect to various conferences was revealed by determining the function of narrative pieces. In the context of writing center conferences, narratives often provide examples for tutors' exploits, problems, successes, and questions; they have purpose and they "relay their context in morally contextual and socially acceptable ways" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 67). Looking at the overall narrative content with respect to the context did lead, as it was hoped for in the original plan, to understandings of the participants' views of their work: how they do it, how they explain what they do, and how they interpret it. The writing center is a sub-culture of the university with its own social and power structure, and, therefore, "relies for its success on culturally shared conventions about language and the hearing of stories" (p. 77). The analyst needed to listen and read for what was said and how it was articulated in order to find out how tutors learn the language, how they view their roles, and how they express dominant messages (Goodson, 1995, as cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) about the writing center's work.

The observation/interview sequence was done for the purpose of learning how participants "make sense of what happened and how this perspective informs their actions" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 59).

#### *Assumptions and Limitations*

No methodology is neutral (Kirsch, 1992). To protect the integrity of any study, the researcher must reveal her assumptions: what ideology, knowledge, and interest is she entering the study with and with what familiarity about the subject and its language.

This study is grounded in the ideology that I hold at this time, with the education and experience that I now have: 16 years in the composition classroom, 11 in the writing center, with certification in Teaching English as a Second Language, with five years of graduate courses in Instructional Technology, with courses and interest in linguistics, learning preference theories, and development theories. To articulate an ideology will bring those pieces together so that some correspondence might be found.

I assume that, to be understood, language must have context that can be understood as well, because the meaning of most any utterance can change with the context (Beach, 1992; Mortensen, 1992); in fact, "meaning is not openly negotiated; it

inheres in words and is merely elaborated in context” (Mortensen, 1992, p. 115). Where we find meaning in an utterance, then, whether written or spoken, f2f or computer-mediated, comes in part from the context which must be “read” as well. We have rules for communication. Sociolinguists have located those rules and how we learn them for different contexts: conversations, classrooms, formal writing, informal writing, and telephone, to name a few. Our classroom communication, for example, has a relatively rigid protocol compared with the writing conference, which is a hybrid of classroom etiquette, becoming more like conversation (Black, 1998; Freedman & Katz as cited in Mortensen, 1992). Mortensen (1992) found that teachers are less willing to negotiate conversation when they know a lot about the content, and vice versa; I suspect the same might true for writing center tutors. Writing center practitioners often point out that dialogue between writer and tutor strengthens the writer’s resolve and familiarity with his content, that the writer becomes the “expert” in his content during a writing center conference, which helps him rehearse the paper, build confidence in his knowledge, become more fluent with the material – all of which expand writing skills. But that discourse must be learned, and finding meaning in that discourse includes the language and the context.

I also believe that computer-mediated communication brings to participants a context that must be learned. The contexts vary from one mode to another – in language, format, nuance, style, and other language-specific ways. Learning can take place through this medium, but only after each participant has resolved his/her relationship with the technology and the distance issues. Chapter Two gives a lengthy discussion of the research on computer-mediated communication, and it appears to be a common belief in the field of distance education that communication techniques and contexts and differences must be understood and acknowledged before participants are fully comfortable in the CMC environments. The research continues in that field and will be added to, in some small part, here, with the findings of this OWL discourse community.

Linguistic analysis allows context factors and the rhetorical nature of learning into the analytical scheme. It recognizes that each of us belongs to and is influenced by a variety of discourse communities, which are “defined primarily by texts” (Huckin, 1992, p. 84). Language defines, creates, and maintains communities and by doing so influences

their language. Writing center tutors bring students into that community and, by doing so, influence their knowledge, language, and writing behavior. The study I proposed was context-sensitive. It was to find out what happens in a very narrow context, the OWL, where two unique constituents meet to work together on a unique, random paper. This is a new medium, though, where the communication rules and contextual elements are still being worked out.

Especially for results that include a coding and classification scheme, something must be made of how the coding is determined because these “represent ways of reading” (Grant-Davite, 1992, p. 284) and, therefore, are interpretive. The meaning of a text doesn’t reside entirely within the words and sentences; the context, the participant/observer, the paralinguistic, the shared knowledge, and the shared experiences are a few of the contributing factors to the meaning of the event. The researcher working in a natural and descriptive research environment is willing to change the research questions as data evolves because we “learn most through addition and revision – when the knowledge we bring to the data proves inadequate to explain what we find, causing us to accommodate or reconstruct our knowledge” (Grant-Davite, 1992, p. 273). As writing center director and instructor of the tutor training program, my choices for the functional analysis categories, for example, revealed the areas I regard as important for tutors to direct their comments to; in fact, even the units that comments were divided into was a choice that affected how meaning was expected to be derived from each utterance: the researcher could select clauses, sentences, behavior, or episodes, and each choice can restrict or broaden, oversimplify or unnecessarily complicate. My decision to use the Gere and Abbott scheme was made in part because it has been tested, replicated, adapted for a study that includes computer-mediated peer talk (Hewett, 1998), and published, and it is adaptable to the needs of this study.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

Validity was approached as the researcher revealed the above assumptions and described the context as fully as possible. The researcher’s knowledge about the topic, biases brought in by the researcher, information about the participants, and the relationships among participants were unveiled and discussed. In this work, those matters are found in the literature review, in the “Assumptions” section above, and in the section

“Sampling,” respectively. Crucial to the faith in this design, too, were the definition and defense of the coding and contextualizing strategies. The researcher must exhibit how the coding strategies fit the research questions, and show representative examples for each category and code. Grant-Davite (1992) warns that “the greater the range of data” (p. 280) to classify, the greater the threat to validity. The range of the data presented here was confined to tutor talk in response to student writing submissions/requests through an asynchronous medium. The validity should be somewhat protected by the relatively narrow limits that context allows.

To further ratify the interpretations of the coding, a researcher should employ the help of disinterested members of a discourse community to read the data, affirm the codes, and extend interpretations. This project followed that recommendation by use of member checks. The researcher enlisted participants in the project to reread and offer opinions on the researcher’s interpretations of the tutoring sessions, the interviews, and the tutors’ perspectives. Even so, “we can only measure validity of interpretations relatively, comparing them with the assumptions and practices that define a particular discourse community” (Grant-Davite, 1992, p. 281). This project accomplished that, too, by using a model that has been published, replicated, and adapted to purposes similar to those of this study.

Reliability is generally reported in terms of inter-rater reliability tests, which offers some assurance of objectivity for coding written or spoken data. This assurance that the researcher is describing the data and not interpreting it “endows the system with the appearance of impartiality” (Grant-Davite, 1992, p. 283). One criticism of inter-rater reliability tests that support coding schemes of written text has been that the readers have simply been trained to use the same codes, and, therefore, to interpret the data in the same way. For the Gere and Abbott model, however, which showed 85% reliability, that criticism is probably not applicable. Inspecting the examples from their text, and from Hewett’s, the coding seems clear and unambiguous, for the most part. Even so, I decided to run a preliminary study using the scheme for a conference for our university OWL, and, as reported above, found that the model worked well, especially as it is only one part of a larger design.

In defense of the somewhat structured nature of parts of this qualitative design, I should add that it appears to be allowable for studies that have limited time for collection and analysis, for those researchers who are not yet professionals at qualitative design, and for those contexts that the researcher is inextricably a part of (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994), all of which this study fits. Where possible, though, the design remained open to emerging ideas and inductive interpretations.

## Chapter Four

### Results

#### *Research Study Questions: How and Where They Will Be Answered*

The research questions that started this study were meant to break down into manageable and clearly defined parts the major research question: what is the nature of computer-mediated conferencing. The sub-questions guided the course of the study and the data analysis and gave way to the implications and recommendations. Question 1a. What are the tutors' perceptions, techniques, and theories (that is, descriptions, actions, and explanations)? managed, focused, and organized the interviews, both the design and the somewhat looser conversation that followed the initial questions. Question 1b. How does the actual session compare to the participants' accounts? was answered through the observations of the tutors' work with online clients and during the subsequent analyses of the tutors' responses to their clients. Question 1c. What techniques are practiced (writing center, composition, pedagogy)?, Question 1c. 1. What roles get established?, Question 1c. 2. What communication styles are in use?, and Question 2. How does the session line up with writing center and composition philosophy and theories? were answered through observations of the participants and through the coding procedure. The knowledge gained from the answers to these design questions will be found within the summary of and discussions about each participant's work in the study. (Acronyms were used for ease of discussion and references; the key can be found in Appendix C. Dates of interviews and student-tutor computer-mediated conferences that correspond with interview and conference numbers in the in-text reference notes can be found in Appendix D).

#### *Definitions, Derivations, and Discussion of the Coding*

The nature of tutoring writing is both technical and social, which is within the philosophy and the definition of writing center work. The writing center has evolved with composition studies, with the field of computers and composition, and with the possibilities afforded it by computer-mediated communication. The computer-mediated writing center/lab can naturally adhere to the fundamentals of writing center work, as this study shows. After extensive interviews and observations of three tutors working with papers submitted to an OWL were transcribed and coded, the categories that emerged were clearly in two main areas: the technical aspects and the social aspects.

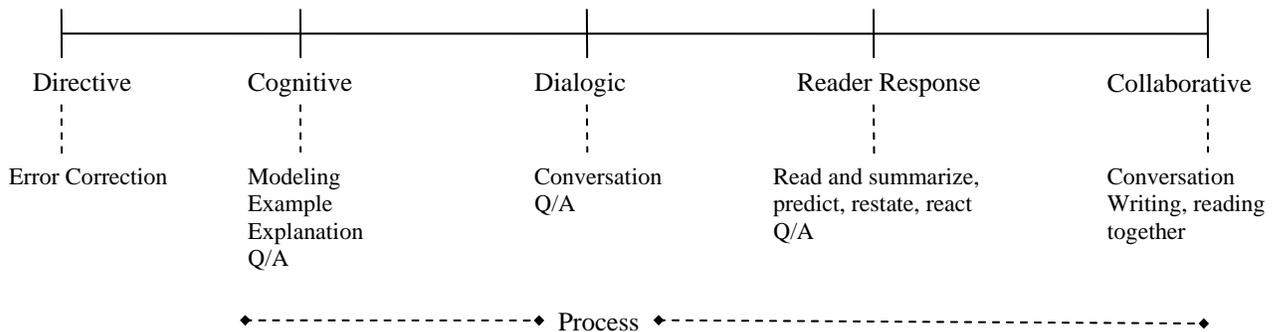
### *Technical Aspects*

The technical part of writing center work is represented by a range of strategies for reading and responding to a client's text. The coding scheme for this study emerged from the data collected: the interviews of three tutors as they described and explained their work, and the observations of their actual practice. What emerged from these interviews and observations showed a full range of writing center techniques, which are grounded in composition theories, taking place in the computer-mediated conferences.

Most of the tutoring methods that writing center tutors are trained to use are social: dialogic, collaborative, reader response, and process. The cognitive approach, too, has aspects of the social with its Q/A and modeling techniques meant to teach writing, critical thinking, and grammar concepts.

An obvious but still interesting observation of the technical-social management that the tutoring role requires concerns the tutor's choice of tutoring techniques, all of which come from composition and writing center theories. There exists a continuum of approaches for the writing team from directive to collaborative, representing conservative to liberal views of the role, the techniques of which are best applied based on the need of the situation (See Figure 1). As must be expected, the more conservative comments are delivered at a more impersonal level, and this study bears that out. The directive approach

Figure 1 *Writing Center Techniques Based on Composition Theories*



is used too, though, when fitting. Writing center methods that represent these approaches are discussed in each case and are noted on the table that was produced from the interviews, observations, and student-tutor communications.

The techniques that a tutor uses for any conference, f2f or computer-mediated, is determined by the tutor's experience, the request of the client, and the needs of the text. The techniques that have been taught and that have appeared in the literature as successful strategies for "producing better writers, not necessarily better pieces of writing" (North, 1984a), every writing center's slogan, are those that have been derived from the approaches discussed above. The following practices were predominant in the discussions, observations, and tutor-to-client communications in this study.

### *Reading Techniques*

Tutors learn various reading practices that are suitable for the social/personal status of the f2f conference: reading the paper aloud, which immediately involves both tutor and student, opens the way for dialogue about the topic and the paper, lets both hear the flow, style, organization, and helps show mechanical errors; rereading; and reading/responding aloud in an alternating manner. Tutors are encouraged to read enough of the paper to get an idea of the topic, content, organization, and style so that rereading can confirm their decisions of how to respond. Reading is a separate training skill from response, because it sets up the response technique choices. Reading style is tied to identification of role, and these techniques are not natural inclinations for many new reader/responders. It is at this first stage that tutors experience the social aspects labeled here as pressure/influence of other, expectation, and face issues.

### *Higher Orders of Concerns and Lower Orders of Concern*

Tutors must learn the value of making choices about orders of concern as reader/responders in a writing center. The ideal response is focused on higher orders of concern (HOC)s, that is, thesis, support, content, organization, and the like. Issues of grammar, punctuation, and style are generally referred to as lower orders of concern (LOC)s, though this terminology is currently under discussion, not the least reason because these are not always lesser orders of concern for students. The theory behind this accepted hierarchy is understandable and reasonable, but it also causes much consternation among writing center personnel and their clients – and many of their clients' instructors. The thinking, idealistic in a number of ways, says that issues of grammar and style are not important compared to issues of critical thinking and written expression. That is quite true if the writer is not being penalized for grammar and style

errors. However, as we have all experienced in our academic lives, there are often instances whereby red marks appear to be, if not the only factor in a grade, certainly one of them. The second part of this idealistic thought, and studies do support this notion, is that grammar and style problems tend to disappear during subsequent revisions of papers. While true, this does assume that students will have the time, energy, and knowledge of content and process to perform those revisions. Sometimes they are simply defeated by these LOCs. When they come to the writing center, f2f or electronically, they will often request assistance with LOCs, and tutors try to both honor their requests and focus on both HOCs and LOCs.

### *Response Techniques*

There are many ways to respond effectively to a piece of writing. As with reading strategies, some of the more effective tutor response techniques are not natural tendencies. The most time-honored techniques, seen imposed on Figure 1, follow: read and generate interest; read and restate whole/parts; read and predict; read and give an overall reaction; read and summarize whole/parts; read and restate purpose; match introduction, idea, thesis, support, conclusion; and gloss. These techniques require the reader to go through a sizeable part of the paper before making comments. That way, the higher orders of concern (HOCs), such as purpose, thesis, support, organization, audience, voice, idea, and the like, are considered before the lower orders of concern (LOCs), such as error, format, and style. Cognitive approaches are represented by Q/A, modeling, examples, and explanations, as well as pointing out specific weaknesses and strengths in the paper; dialogic approaches (such as Socratic) use conversation or Q/A to develop and organize ideas; directive approaches are generally error correction with, perhaps, some explanation. Process techniques can be used with any approach from directive to collaborative as tutors focus on brainstorming exercises to proofreading models. For this study, the approaches, writing center techniques, and foci are captured under the Technical Aspects explanations and presented in the Technical Aspects Tables for each tutor's work. A description of the coding and tabulation procedures can be found in the Technical Aspects section below.

### *Gere and Abbott Model*

The Gere and Abbott model (1985), described in some detail in Chapter Three, was developed to track the responsive comments among students in writing groups. Later, Hewett (1999) used the model to track talk among students in two freshman composition class peer groups, one f2f and the other CM. The model gives the researcher a way to discern if and how the group members are engaging in reader response techniques. The model is divided into focus areas: 1) Linguistic function, 2) Focus of attention, and 3) Focus of Consciousness. Each statement made by participants is evaluated according to its intent (to inform, to direct, or to elicit), where the statement is directed (to the student or to the text) and what the statement is aimed for (content, context, format, process, reference, phatic, or mechanics) As the data analysis began, it was determined that phatic language, as defined and applied in this electronic writing center study, is a linguistic function. That delineation was then useful for determining the technical and social intentions of the tutors, because the comments could be seen with respect to the tutor's idea of role. Together, the Linguistic Function and Focus of Attention categories show how the tutor is relating to the client.

For this study, the tutor's work was further divided into front, end, and in-text comments, if the tutors used that format or some variation of it, to more clearly see what was being accomplished in each. This breakdown of the text comments was done to help clarify the nature of CM conferencing. After having determined that it is technical and social, the Gere and Abbott model helped to show where those aspects were taking place, but it was soon apparent that, if the technical and social aspects were to be uncovered in any detail, a wider range of categories would be needed. The social aspects, for example, may only be inferred by the number of idea units that fall into the elicit/student/content or the phatic category. There is no way, using this model, to develop a deeper understanding of the technical and social exchanges between a tutoring dyad. The results will be presented here for each participant, because the findings do make an interesting comparison to the model that developed using the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations with the participants.

### *Social Aspects*

Based on the definition of personal for this study, a written comment that is directed to the person, which is judged by its interaction intent and /or immediacy factors to be sociable, friendly, conversational, and has the client's interest at the center (Mehrabian, 1969), it was found that, and therefore the conclusions allow for, there are degrees of personal communication, which will be illustrated later. To define more clearly "personal" using the terms chosen to drive this study, though, is important. Personal – a comment is personal if it shows immediacy and/or is interactive with the person and/or text. It takes both factors to be highly personal, and the tutor can change the degree of personal level by adjusting either. If, for example the tutor shows interaction with the text and uses no immediacy language, the comment is impersonal (e.g. "omit 'would'" in SC, Conference 1, C6). No comment that included immediacy was impersonal. Several comments that showed intention for interaction with the person, though, were labeled impersonal, e.g., "see general comments," (MS, Conference 1, C5) because of lack of immediacy. At the same time, several comments were personal that did not have immediacy features. These, however, were addressed to the person and used self-monitoring words, such as "I might" or "I think."

The techniques by which the participants managed the social level of a conference emerged as common topics among the tutors during the interviews and observations. Those topics, which the literature supports as constructs of social presence, are interaction, immediacy, and intimacy.

### *Interaction*

The nature of this work, computer-mediated tutoring, dictates that the interaction may be with the text or with the person or with both, a choice that the tutor and/or student makes that adjusts the social level of the conference. Another subset of interaction is the tutor's decision about and the function of possible roles. The decision about role is based on experience and the tutor's comfort level with the topic, client and genre. The criteria for role identification that emerged in this study from interviews with the participants and observations of their communication with their clients, and, therefore, were discussed and measured were the following: pressure of other, self-monitoring, and impression

formation. Because these criteria, and their several sub-categories, are original to this study, definitions and examples will follow:

- 1) Pressure of other, including expectations of self and other: In the f2f center, tutors are often under pressure, largely unconscious, from the client. Students have expectations of the writing center as a fix-it center, a place where good writers will clean up their mechanical errors. Other students may have more experience with writing groups and will expect the tutor to read the paper and give them advice on the effectiveness of it. In either case, though, the tutor may feel pressure to immediately begin talking. They often feel that they don't have enough time to form a clear impression of the whole paper, or, as Stephanie said, "That's one thing about doing it online that I like, because I think you can sort of catch more sometimes because you can go back and read through it as many times as you need to and you're not, you don't have somebody sitting there waiting for you to say something and you can just get through it and then go back as much as you want" (SS, Interview 2, p. 19). (Explanations for the citation devices are found on page 69).
- 2) Self monitoring, including ownership, face, and anonymity. Tutors use self monitoring language to help establish their roles. Use of phrases like "I think" and "I would" help them to impress upon the client, as well as remind themselves, of their collaborative/responsive roles. As well, tutors will sometimes make it clear that the paper ultimately belongs to the client (ownership), with phrases like "this is only a suggestion" or "maybe something like this" as they offer an example. Young tutors have to work with their various concepts of role in this position. Generally speaking, they are 20-23 years old, have not had many opportunities to be called "expert" in the academic world, which this job does not demand, but does imply, despite all we do to the contrary. Therefore, "face" is involved, as each participant in this study explained with their ideas of role: "If I have somebody sitting in front of me, I, I feel like I just have to say something at a certain point. And,

um, I don't want to look like I'm floundering for something to say" (SS, Interview 2, p. 19);

- 3) Impression formation. Because of the nature of the computer-mediated conference, physical characteristics are missing. Impressions of the person the tutor is working with are formed in other ways in this medium, through text. Impressions develop from writing style, tone, level of formality, writing skills, content of requests, topic and content choices, and the like, and the participants here were able to describe how those impressions were formed. Because the literature of computer-mediated communication and distance education have also determined impression formation to be an important concept to understand, it was chosen for this study.

These criteria will be examined further in the discussion of each tutor's experience in this study.

#### *Immediacy*

The necessity for "psychological closeness" and the ability to control the degree of that closeness also became a theme during these discussions. The techniques used for adjusting the immediacy of a conference were the following:

- 1) the writer's choices of pronouns, which sets the exchange at inclusive, "we," more distant, "I," very distant, no pronouns, or intimate, when names are used along with other intimacy markers;
- 2) writing style, which communicators used to change the formality of their exchanges. Vocabulary, use of slang, contractions, looser sentence structures, and the like help to convey less formal communication;
- 3) tone: tutors and students used words and expressions to bring warmth, humor, friendliness, professionalism, and the like, to effect closeness and distance. Tone and style in this study carry meaning only for comments intended to set up a personal interaction. Otherwise they are empty sets which, by default, and as other evidence bears out, by design, intend for the communication to be less personal, perhaps to

reflect the role being assumed at the time. Absence of tone does not convey hostility in this study, though it may in other settings.

- 4) emoticons, which have become a nearly universal way of adding facial expressions such as smiles, frowns, surprise, winks, and the like, to electronic text;
- 5) non-verbal conveyances are uses of text and punctuation that add paralanguage (stress, intonation, emphasis, rhythm) and emotions, with such contrivances as capital letters, ellipses, exclamation marks, “ha ha”s, “smile”s, and the like;
- 6) personality disclosure also appeared, though sparingly, in the transcripts. While personal disclosures in a tutor/client conference are generally defined as intimacy, the use of personality here will be defined as a factor in immediacy. The degree of personal knowledge revealed in all cases of this study was too stingy to be called intimacy. The tutors who used this method were clearly intending it to convey friendliness and warmth, not to create a relationship or to even continue a conversation on a particular subject of common interest, and they said as much.

Immediacy has been described as “psychological closeness,” and the manifestation of that in the computer-mediated, text-only medium is found in the use of inclusive pronouns, personal names, symbols that represent facial expressions and gestures, the use of tone, and the style of writing that can capture paralanguage (formality, intonation, rhythm, stress). Each of these characteristics has been defined and detailed through each tutor’s communication with their clients. Another vital element in immediacy, though, is feedback. That element is assumed here: giving one-to-one feedback is the tutor’s primary role in this position and, as such, must be accounted for in each written comment. Because of that, though, the degree of immediacy in each statement could not be accounted for. Therefore, in order to actually see how immediacy functions to control the social level in this situation, feedback will not be “counted,” it will be assumed. Only the other characteristics will be counted. In this way, we can better

detect and detail, on still a very broad scale, how a tutor uses immediacy to control the social level of the encounter.

In order to better gauge the levels of immediacy without turning this study into one that focuses too closely on that – though that does merit study because the application of immediacy statements in this environment and for this work, as shown here, can be controlled by the tutor and the student and are the primary techniques for setting the social level of the session – the characteristics discussed above will be divided into their building blocks, which are defined and discussed below and roughly compared with respect to the overall social level of the conferences.

#### Explanation of the Interviews and Conferences

It was here, then, that this study began, with three participants selected for their training in writing center methods. Even though the observations and interviews took place concurrently, each case will be discussed individually, though in no special order. Along those lines, too, even though the technical and social aspects of tutoring are used together, they will be discussed separately since the point here is to explore the nature of computer-mediated conferencing. Because this study looked at three tutors working with three random papers each, the techniques and principles seen practiced were of primary importance for making a statement about and a model for the possibilities for writing center computer-mediated conferencing and the training for that work. In order to best display those findings, the sections will be divided by participants, that is, the data analysis from each tutor. This study was qualitative in its design, though it does include some quasi-quantitative aspects with the coding of the transcriptions and analysis of texts, which were then tabulated for a more objective view of the tutor's work and a more visual presentation. An explanation of the coding and quantifying of this project follows below. A word is needed here, though, about the citation of the interviews with the tutors. Because the formal "personal communication" of APA documentation would not clearly show the difference between the "interview" – the observation and discussions between researcher and participating tutor – and "conference" – the text generated by the electronic work on a client's paper – it was decided that a citation form should be constructed that would give that information in the parenthetical note. The pattern for those notes is this: the tutor's initials (key in Appendix C), Interview number or

Conference number, and page number, when needed. Dates were also not included in the in-text citations because all of the work was done over the same six week period (individual dates of interviews and conferences are listed in Appendix D).

The Discussion and Recommendations section (Chapter Five) will take a broader view of the findings across the participants. Preceding the discussion of the each of the results (technical aspects, Gere and Abbott, and social aspects) for Participant One, is an explanation and description of the coding and tabulation procedures for the Technical Aspects Tables, the Gere and Abbott Tables, and the Social Aspects Tables. The explanations are based on the text analysis of the conferences of Participant One, but the same procedure was followed for each of the other two participants.

#### Explanation of the Coding and Quantifying for the Technical Aspects Tables

In order to make the results of this study more complete and more visual, a tabulation was done. The conference transcripts, that is, the student's paper with the tutor's in-text comments were coded using the schemes described above. Because the in-text comments represent the real work in an OWL conference, each comment was examined for approaches, techniques, and focuses as defined in the Response Techniques section above. First, each individual in-text comment was coded according to the teaching approach taken by the tutor; second, the researcher determined if the tutor was using a writing center technique for each response, and, if so, which technique was used. The third category in the Technical Aspects Model indicates the tutor's focus, and each comment was coded for that as well. (See Table 1 for the individual categories and codes.) Following is an illustration of the researcher's means of coding using a comment from Stephanie's first conference. For example, one of Stephanie's comments was, "You might want to make it clear that the 'why they write' connects to the 'ideal audience' by uniting them under one term – maybe 'purpose' because when I first read it, it wasn't clear to me – I thought you were shifting ideas" (C 3); this comment was coded as Reader Response Approach, Thesis Matching Technique, HOC focus. Each individual comment, separated by sentence breaks, was coded for the technical aspects and a simple count was done. The percentage was then calculated for each conference and for the total technical aspects for all conferences combined.

The top line of the Technical Aspects Table gives the total number of comments the tutor made for each conference. The tabulation was done in order to get a more objective picture of the tutor's work: to see if the approach was obvious, to see if the tutor uses writing center responses, and to see where the tutor's focus is. The percentages are not meant to evaluate the tutor's work, but rather to clarify the techniques. Stephanie, for example, clearly uses a Reader Response Approach most of the time, 43%, and that is consistent across the papers she did for this study: Conference 1: 45%, Conference 2: 44%, Conference 3: 38%. On the other hand, the average she acquired under the Collaborative Approach was 10%. Since she only used that approach in Conferences 2 and 3, and that varied from 2% to 23%, it is not valid to say that 10% of the time she uses a Collaborative Approach. It is fair to say, though, that she prefers Reader Response but that she does go to Collaborative when it is fitting.

*Participant 1: Stephanie*

*Technical Aspects*

Stephanie's reading techniques for the three sessions looked and sounded like classic writing center sessions: she chose to print out the paper and read it, aloud at times, quietly or to herself at others. She made abstract editing and proofing marks (stars, words, question marks, checks, and the like) on the paper that reminded her of comments she might make when she reread the paper for responsive work. The comments she made aloud during her reading were all for the purpose of generating her personal interest in the topic, a way of connecting with the topic, which is a first order of business for Stephanie as she pointed out eight times in the interviews with comments such as this: "I go in it saying, 'OK, what can I get out of this,' and I think that's a better way to do it because, if you can learn something from something that somebody else has written, then . . . as long as you can relate it to yourself somehow or find some way to get involved with it and interested in it, and you can relay that, I think that adds a lot" (Exit Interview, pp. 25-26). Stephanie consistently practiced this writing center technique in her three computer-mediated conferences, and she directly communicated this personal interest to her clients six times, with comments like this: "Thank you for sending your paper! It was very interesting to read, I know I have taken the Myers-Briggs and my personality type is

ENFP, so it was a lot of fun to read your paper and see what the research says about my own type and others. Great topic!” (Conference 1, C3).

The writing center approach she was engaging with this reading technique is reader response, which is a technique that represents one of the missions of all writing centers. This is the approach she discussed more than any other as she described her work: the “tutor [gives] a response, a human response, even if it’s online. Because how can it be, it be wrong to respond to something, and however it makes you respond. Like, if something makes me angry, I will say ‘This makes me angry,’ because, and sometimes people want to make you angry” (Exit Interview, p. 32), and reader response was the approach she used most often during this study: 43% of her comments were categorized as reader response approaches. The approach Stephanie applied second most often during this electronic work, however, was directive (42 times or 21%); though that does not appear to support the idea of a university writing center, directive (or intrusive or authoritative) methods are used in f2f conferences as well. These methods, used primarily in error correction, are certainly only considered useful for that work and are based in large part on expectations: the student’s, but also, at times, the student’s instructor (see “Role” for more discussion on the definition and function of the criteria for this study). Stephanie also relied on other composition theory-based approaches as she conferenced in the computer-mediated space, though: collaborative (10%), which, like reader response, is based in social constructionist thought and, therefore, highly social as well as respectful of the perspectives of all individuals involved. She also used a cognitive approach (7%); that is, her intention was to teach a writing concept by example, model, explanation, or reference. An example of her use of the cognitive approach is this comment taken from the front note of Conference 3: “Your paper seems to back up your intro just fine, except I would break up your thesis statement into several sentences because it reads like a list. Sometimes people think you are supposed to have one main thesis statement, but as long as you leave the ideas close together, I think it would sound better if it was two sentences” (C13). In this acceptable technique, explanation, Stephanie uses the student’s work to explain a concept.

Throughout this study, Stephanie did use the techniques that are taught in tutor training. Of the eight distinct reader response/collaborative techniques stressed in writing

center work, the techniques that serve the tutor as well as the client and that help focus the session on HOCs, Stephanie used five in her three sessions. By far, though, her preferred methods are example/model/idea sharing, which she used in 22% of her comments; questioning, which she used in 16%, and matching, that is, finding the thesis and making sure the paper's elements – introduction, support, ideas, examples, and conclusion – work together, a method she used in 12% of her comments. Stephanie's reading technique guides her approaches to tutoring and the techniques that she then uses, as she describes here: "Honestly, before I did this, I didn't realize how much real time it does take to respond to somebody and to fully read something that somebody else has written, especially if it's a 5-10 page paper, and understand what they're saying, and make sure it all fits together. I think that's a lot harder, I think, than most people realize" (Exit Interview, p. 19).

In the three observations of Stephanie's work, HOCs were the focal point in 68 instances, or 34% of the time, that is, she addressed HOCs directly to the student in either her front note or in the in-text comments. LOCs – word level and sentence level errors or style problems – she addressed 94 times (47%). Actual error correction, without explanation or modeling, she performed 14 times (7%); the other LOCs she concerned herself with were style (32%) and format (9%) issues. (See Table 1 for a breakdown of approaches, techniques, and focuses by individual conference.) All writing centers carefully describe their services with familiar language: no proofreading, not a fix-it shop, and the like. Good tutors, though, do not wear this as a badge, feeling that clients trust them to point out small errors that are clearly not part of a larger error pattern. They do this frequently and the activity appears to transfer to the computer-mediated space in a similar small percentage of the greater work.

#### Explanation of the Gere and Abbott Tables

In order to code the conference transcript for the Gere and Abbott model, each comment – front and/or end and in-text – were first divided into idea units. According to Gere and Abbott, idea units are divided by pauses, syntax breaks, or change of focus. This method differs from the Technical Aspects model, which divides each comment at the sentence level only. That accounts for the difference in numbers of comments between each method.

Table 1 *Technical Aspects for Participant One*

Total Comments	Paper 1 (68)	Paper 2 (50)	Paper 3 (81)	Total (199)
Approaches				
<b>Directive</b>	25% (17)	22% (11)	17% (14)	21% (42)
<b>Cognitive</b>	9% (6)	4% (2)	7% (6)	7% (14)
<b>Process</b>				
<b>Dialogic</b>	4% (3)	12% (6)	7% (6)	4% (8)
<b>Reader Response</b>	45% (31)	44% (22)	38% (32)	43% (85)
<b>Collaborative</b>		2% (1)	23% (19)	10% (20)
<b>Protocol</b>	17% (12)	16% (8)	11% (9)	15% (29)
Writing Center Techniques				
<b>Personal Interest/ Read &amp; react</b>	12% (8)	14% (7)	7% (6)	11% (21)
<b>Restate/summarize/predict</b>	1% (1)	4% (2)	6% (5)	4% (8)
<b>Question</b>	6% (4)	10% (5)	27% (23)	16% (32)
<b>Example/models/ideas</b>	22% (15)	8% (4)	30% (25)	22% (44)
<b>Match thesis, support, intro, ideas</b>	9% (6)	18% (9)	10% (8)	12% (23)
Focus of Comment				
<b>HOCs</b>	22% (15)	34% (17)	43% (36)	34% (68)
<b>Specific strengths/weaknesses</b>	12% (8)	14% (7)	1% (1)	8% (16)
<b>LOCs [Error Correction]</b>	13% (9)	4% (2)	4% (3)	7% (14)
<b>[Style]</b>	35% (24)	28% (14)	30% (25)	32% (63)
<b>[Format]</b>	3% (2)	12% (6)	11% (9)	9% (17)

This table is a display of numbers of times teaching approaches and writing center techniques were used in a conference. Some comments employ more than one approach; some do not employ any writing center techniques, depending on the tutor's choice of action.

For example, Stephanie had a total of 199 in-text comments in the Technical Aspects table and 204 in the Gere and Abbott count. Each idea unit was then coded according to the definitions provided by Gere and Abbott, as detailed and discussed in that section above and in the Methodology chapter. An illustration of this researcher's use of the coding scheme follows, again using Stephanie's conference text.

In Conference 3, Stephanie wrote in in-text comments 33-35, “Later in this paragraph, you discuss the fact that Christians merged their ideas with certain pagan practices, like Christmas. Is this consistent with intolerance? Also, I think that this is a good place to insert which one of these theories, if any, you agree with.” These comments were coded in the following way: Sentence 1, “Later in this paragraph...” as Inform/Writing/Reference, because it refers the reader and writer back to prior sections of the text. Sentence 2 was coded as Elicit/Student/Content because the tutor is questioning the student about the content, and Sentence 3 was coded as Inform/Writing/Content.

Recall that the Gere and Abbott model was modified for this study. One change was that the Phatic category was added to Linguistic Function because the social exchanges and explanations of writing center work are a part of writing center protocol. Therefore, the tutors’ comments which were counted as phatic will not be counted in the Focus of Consciousness section. This accounts for why that section does not always add up to 100%. Adding the Phatic category to the Focus of Consciousness percentages will complete the total. For example, in the last column of Table 2 (in-text total), Stephanie’s Focus of Consciousness column adds up to 92%; adding the Phatic total in Linguistic Function, 8%, completes the total of idea units and how they were categorized.

#### *Gere and Abbott Model*

The Gere and Abbott model, which was described and explained in detail in the Methodology chapter, is used here as a linguistic analysis of the tutor’s portion of the conference. Unlike the Technical Aspects model above, based on the coding from the interviews and observations, this scheme shows the difference in the speech function, attention, and focus between the notes (end and/or front and in-text comments). The Gere and Abbott, because it breaks out phatic and context comments, is useful in the examination of the individual notes; therefore, part of the analysis for this scheme includes separating the front/end and in-text comments. The Gere and Abbott focuses the observer on the participant’s role: the linguistic function and focus of attention show how the tutor is relating, while the above model, Technical Aspects, shows the methods the tutor is using for the conference.

Stephanie’s communication with her three electronic clients consisted of a front note and embedded in-text comments. Her three front notes together totaled 98 idea units

and her in-text comments, 204 idea units. Coding the tutor's comments according to the Gere and Abbott categories yielded an analysis of the linguistic function and focus of the work done (see Table 2). In the front note, Stephanie's linguistic function was to inform 70% of the time, and most her other comments were categorized as phatic (21%). Stephanie's focus was mainly on format issues (32%) and context (30%), which gives the impression that the front note was used to relate the tutor's overall reactions to the paper. The in-text notes, on the other hand, gave way to nearly equal direct and elicit comments, but still the tutor made twice as many informing comments. The in-text comments focused attention mostly on the writing (69%) with 24% focus on the content. Unlike the social aspects analysis (see Table 3), which looks for how the tutor is interacting with the client or with the text, the focus of attention according to Gere and Abbott is what the tutor's talk is about: the writer or the writing. Stephanie's focus of consciousness, the category that divides the area of the writing the tutor is commenting on, was directed 49% of the time on format issues. In the Gere and Abbott model, format is the category where style is counted here, as well as documentation and organization matters, which is to say that this model only distinguishes between talk about the content and how the content is presented (format). The above scheme, Technical Aspects, adds a sharper view of the tutor's focus on the content and the presentation.

The Gere and Abbott model, then, does help to categorize the communication, providing insight to the social focus (phatics), but it doesn't give depth to the specific nature of the technical and social potential of CM conferencing. The Gere and Abbott model makes clear, for example, that Stephanie is more social in the front note (21% phatics; 55% directed to the student, and 30% of the exchange concerned with context) compared with the in-text comments (8% phatics, 31% about the writer, 3% on context) but the next model adds the depth. This model gives a reasonable classification for the focus of consciousness, but not in enough detail to determine, for example, whether the tutor is referring to word choice or organizational issues within the format category. In other words, the Gere and Abbott model helps to track the areas within which the work gets done, but not how it is done. Because the medium and the tutors' methods, perceptions, intentions affect the work, we need to understand how they can manage this

Table 2 *Gere and Abbott Model for Participant One*

Participant: Stephanie	Front note				In-text			
Idea Unit Totals	Paper 1 (30)	Paper 2 (32)	Paper 3 (36)	Total (98)	Paper 1 (60)	Paper 2 (48)	Paper 3 (96)	Total (204)
Linguistic Function								
<b>Inform</b>	77% (23)	63% (20)	72% (26)	70% (69)	52% (31)	48% (23)	47% (45)	49% (99)
<b>Direct</b>		13% (4)	3% (1)	5% (5)	30% (18)	23% (11)	18% (17)	23% (46)
<b>Elicit</b>			8% (3)	3% (3)	13% (8)	17% (8)	28% (27)	21% (43)
<b>Phatic</b>	23% (7)	25% (8)	17% (6)	21% (21)	5% (3)	13% (6)	7% (7)	8% (16)
Focus of Attention								
<b>Writing</b>	43% (13)	41% (13)	50% (18)	45% (44)	88% (53)	56% (27)	64% (61)	69% (141)
<b>Student</b>	57% (17)	59% (19)	50% (18)	55% (54)	12% (7)	44% (21)	36% (35)	31% (63)
Focus of Consciousness								
<b>Content</b>	10% (3)	9% (3)	22% (8)	14% (14)	18% (11)	25% (12)	27% (26)	24% (49)
<b>Context</b>	33% (10)	28% (9)	28% (10)	30% (29)		6% (3)	4% (4)	3% (7)
<b>Format</b>	30% (9)	31% (10)	33% (12)	32% (31)	53% (32)	46% (22)	47% (45)	49% (99)
<b>Process</b>	3% (1)			1% (1)				
<b>Reference</b>		6% (2)		2% (2)	13% (8)	6% (3)	8% (8)	9% (19)
<b>Mechanics</b>					10% (6)	4% (2)	6% (6)	7% (14)

Where percentages do not add up to 100, rounding is accountable.

medium. This model, as it was intended, helps to highlight the foci of the session. The tutoring of writing is a social process, in part, and that can be taken to the CM format, as shown in the model created through the observations and interviews of the participants in this study.

#### Explanation of Coding and Quantifying of the Social Aspects Tables

The social aspects categories were derived from the computer-mediated communication literature, from the interviews, and from the conference texts. The tutors' comments (front/end and in-text) in the conference texts were then coded according to the definitions of those terms (see p. 86). Each comment was first evaluated on the basis of interaction, that is, if the tutor's interaction was with the student or the text; if the tutor brought his idea of role into the comment; if the tutor used self-monitoring language in

the comment; and/or if ownership of the text was mentioned or alluded to. Second, the tutor's comment was evaluated for immediacy. In order to call a comment immediate, the tutor had to employ one or more of these factors that clearly intended to close the psychological distance between tutor and student: pronoun use, writing style or tone, emoticons or other non-verbal conveyances, and personality.

Drawing from Stephanie's Conference 2, in-text comment 7 helps to illustrate the coding procedure for the Social Aspects table: "I am pointing this out because it is a bad word ~gasp!~ haha! But I do think it fits here. Some teachers may not agree – it's your call. ☺" This comment was coding in the following way: "*I am pointing this out because it is a bad word*" = first person pronoun used in friendly way, role identification/ "*pointing this out*" = self-monitoring, role identification, and use of writing style (Stephanie is indicating that her role is to respond in her personal way; she is not looking for errors.). *Bad word* = tone, she is using vernacular here to maintain a friendly peer tone. *~gasp!~ haha!* = use of non-verbals keeps the tone light and conversational. *I do think* = self-monitoring language, again helps the reader to understand Stephanie's role as responder. *Some teachers* = this qualifying word is another use of self-monitoring language. Stephanie shows herself as an experienced student with some insight into how teachers read. *It's your call* = Stephanie makes it clear that the writer is the owner of this text and can take or leave the tutor's suggestions. And, of course, the ☺ is a useful emoticon for indicating the writer's understanding of immediacy.

The tutor may use more than one interaction factor and more than one immediacy factor in each comment, as seen in the above comment, and this accounts for the totals in each category that go over the total number of comments (which were counted by sentence).

Each comment was evaluated as personal or impersonal based on the levels of interaction and immediacy, the presence of which one or the other is required for the comment to be labeled personal. Each factor was evaluated according to the definitions set but the researcher, in a somewhat subjective way, evaluated the comment with respect to the context.

### *Social Aspects*

One way to view the social aspects of the tutor's communication is to divide the front and/or end note and in-text comments. Stephanie introduced each of her conferences with a note to the student, which included her overall reaction to the topic and paper and general comments that referred to specific areas of the paper. This note (referred to here as the front note), written in letter style, she placed at the beginning of the paper. Stephanie's front notes were all personal by virtue of the immediacy aspects found there. Each comment of the note was an obvious attempt at written interaction with the student, again using some of the same reasoning: the comments were directed to the reader in a friendly, conversational way that kept the student's work at the center: each front note began with a salutation, using the student's name and ended with a signed closing, and included personal remarks.

Stephanie also used notes embedded in the text in parentheses (until she discovered quite by accident, miss-hitting keys, that a bold font shows up nicely) to comment on specific areas (referred to here as in-text notes). It is clear that she has closely matched her note to the in-text comments. In Conference 3, one comment in the body of the paper "See my above comments about splitting up this thesis statement into two sentences" (C 9) referred to the note cited above in paragraph two of "Technical Aspects." Stephanie used this method in each conference. The in-text comments in each case focused on a specific text interest, carrying out writing center techniques that fit accepted writing center approaches (as shown in the "Technical" section) though not always to the desired degree, perhaps. But experience and anecdotal exchanges among writing center professionals tell us that this is also true of most f2f sessions as well. The in-text notes were, in all cases, more intrusive, more direct, and less personal than the front note, as described below.

The in-text notes are specific comments on a variety of aspects of the writer's work; the technical focuses were discussed above, and the social aspects are shown and discussed here. Table 3 shows the social composition of Stephanie's three conferences, individually and overall, with discussion following that will point out some of the relevant features.

Table 3 *Social Aspects for Participant One*

Participant: Stephanie	Paper 1		Paper 2		Paper 3		Total	
	Front	In-text	Front	In-text	Front	In-text	Front	In-text
<b>Total comments</b>	(26)	(42)	(24)	(26)	(28)	(53)	(78)	(121)
Social Level								
<b>Personal</b>	100% (26)	50% (21)	92% (22)	80% (20)	100% (28)	72% (38)	97% (76)	66% (79)
<b>Impersonal</b>		50% (21)	8% (2)	20% (5)		28% (15)	3% (2)	34% (41)
Social Presence								
<b>Interaction: Person</b>	100% (26)	57% (24)	92% (22)	80% (20)	89% (25)	60% (32)	94% (73)	63% (76)
<b>Text</b>		42% (18)	8% (2)		11% (3)	25% (13)	6% (5)	11% (13)
<b>Role</b>	19% (5)		17% (4)		14% (4)	6% (3)	17% (13)	3% (3)
<b>Self-monitoring</b>	12% (3)	13% (14)	17% (4)	16% (4)	32% (9)	38% (20)	21% (16)	32% (38)
<b>Ownership</b>	4% (1)			24% (6)			1% (1)	5% (6)
Immediacy								
<b>Immediacy</b>	100% (26)	38% (16)	100% (24)	72% (18)	100% (28)	45% (24)	100% (78)	48% (58)*
<b>Pronoun use</b>	88% (23)	41% (17)	71% (17)	67% (12)	89% (25)	45% (24)	83% (65)	91% (53)
<b>Writing Style/Tone</b>	23% (6)	7% (3)	29% (7)	61% (11)	25% (7)	38% (9)	22% (17)	40% (23)
<b>Emoticons/ Non-verbals</b>	23% (6)	5% (2)	25% (6)	56% (10)	29% (8)	17% (4)	19% (15)	28% (16)
<b>Personality</b>	4% (1)				4% (1)		3% (2)	1% (1)

\* The percentages under Immediacy are based on the portion of immediacy they represent, not of the entire in-text number. That is, for example, Pronoun use is calculated at 53 comments out of 58 comments that contain immediacy factors.

As can be seen in Table 3, Stephanie’s front note comments are more personal (97%); each of her notes begins with a salutation that uses the student’s name and ends with a signature using hers, confirming the overall personal intent of the note. In fact, Stephanie made the following comment during the exit interview: “Sometimes they say, here’s my paper, and then attachment. And sometimes they don’t even write their name on it, but when they don’t write their name on it, I will look up their email in the directory and find out what their first name is and I’ll say, ‘Laura, I looked at your paper’” (p. 33). Stephanie made no impersonal comments in the front note, but 34% of

her in-text comments were impersonal. This was based in large part on the immediacy factors: in the front comments, 94% made use of immediacy language, mostly pronoun use, but followed by writing style and tone.

The in-text notes, though less personal, did show some immediacy (48%), which was accomplished mostly by pronoun use (91%). Contrast this with 100% immediacy in the front note: a high percentage was accomplished by pronoun use, too, but a fair share was also in use of the other immediacy factors. Nearly one-quarter of the statements in the front note were written in a style and tone that were intended to close the psychological distance. In the front note to the student in Conference 2, for example, Stephanie said “Thank you for trusting me with your personal thoughts” (C4) and, combining cognitive and directive approaches, neither of which are particular sociable, she was able to make this comment personal: “Do not bold or quote your own title. It just stands by itself, center at the top ☺ (you aren’t a famous writer yet!) haha” (C14, C15), by using immediacy factors: writing style (contraction, directed to writer), tone (humor), and non-verbal conveyances (emoticon, “haha,” and !).

The difference between immediacy use in the front note and the in-text comments reflects the tutor’s management of social level. Though the intention is to remain personal in the in-text comments, the degree of social level is turned down. The same thing can be seen with the interaction with person factor: the front comment shows 94% personal/person; the in-text comments, 63%. Examining the comments, it might be inferred that pronoun use just keeps the interaction alive, which, again, keeps the statements somewhat personal. Stephanie’s goal is to balance the technical and social aspects of the writing conference

#### *Participant 2: Shaun*

##### *Technical Aspects*

Shaun’s reading technique remained consistent throughout the study. He printed out the paper, read it out loud all the way through. He checked and underlined at various points in the paper, but he did not interrupt his reading. This is a technique that he embraced while learning to tutor on-the-job: “I read the paper out loud – obviously the student wasn’t there, but it felt good to me to catch, like the typos and awkward sentences and stuff like that....So, of all the techniques that I use right now, I, the only one I was

really able to utilize with this paper was reading it out loud” (Introductory Interview, p. 4). However, during the study, it became apparent that Shaun’s work falls well within pedagogical approaches that ground writing center techniques. The tracking model, Technical Aspects, Table 4, that evolved from the interviews and observations of the participants shows this in depth: the in-text comments over Conferences 1, 2, and 3, in terms of teaching approaches, showed that Shaun made thirteen directive comments in Conference 1 (for example, “Expand on what you mean by ‘normalcy,’” C5), five directive comments in Conference 2, and four in the last conference. He also used a reader response approach (for example, “If you are discussing Nixon and the Watergate scandal, this needs to be established in the first paragraph” (Conference 1, C2)), ten times in Conference 1, nine times in Conference 2, and seven times in Conference 3. (He also used a dialogic approach eight times and a cognitive approach once.) The complete analysis of the interviews, observations, and Shaun’s written responses and communication with his clients, yielded the data in Table 4.

Eighty-eight percent of Shaun’s responses to his clients come from solid teaching approaches (directive, cognitive, reader response, and dialogic), but only 35% of his work can be traced to standard writing center techniques. He uses mostly reader response and directive approaches, but he defaults to a technique that might be called “pointing out problems.” Comments like “Watch out for awkward sentences” (Conference 3, E3), for example, do not comply with writing center techniques any more than “Drive carefully on icy roads” would for driving instruction, and for the same reason: it does not give the learner the knowledge or tools to use at a specific instant, at the point of need, and Shaun did this frequently through each paper. An example that illustrates his technique is this comment: “Start a new paragraph here” from Conference 1 (C7). Because students often struggle with lengths and content of paragraphs, Shaun has an opportunity here to show the writer how he is thinking about the organization of this writer’s work: why the paragraph might be divided differently. His comment will help the student fix the problem this time, but he/she is not learning the concept.

Part of Shaun’s frustration with CM-conferencing is that he doesn’t yet see how to apply writing center techniques that are taught for the f2f environment in the computer-mediated space, and the data collected from his conferences during this study

Table 4 *Technical Aspects for Participant Two*

Total Comments	Paper 1 (24)	Paper 2 (22)	Paper 3 (17)	Total (63)
<b>Approaches</b>				
<b>Directive</b>	<b>56%</b> <b>(13)</b>	<b>23%</b> <b>(5)</b>	<b>20%</b> <b>(4)</b>	34% (22)
<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>4%</b> <b>(1)</b>			2% (1)
<b>Process</b>				
<b>Dialogic</b>		<b>23%</b> <b>(5)</b>	<b>15%</b> <b>(3)</b>	12% (8)
<b>Reader Response</b>	<b>43%</b> <b>(10)</b>	<b>41%</b> <b>(9)</b>	<b>35%</b> <b>(7)</b>	40% (26)
<b>Collaborative</b>				
<b>Protocol</b>		<b>9%</b> <b>(2)</b>	<b>30%</b> <b>(6)</b>	12% (8)
<b>Writing Center Techniques</b>				
<b>Personal Interest/ Read &amp; react</b>	<b>13%</b> <b>(3)</b>		<b>15%</b> <b>(3)</b>	9% (6)
<b>Restate/summarize/predict</b>	<b>13%</b> <b>(3)</b>	<b>18%</b> <b>(4)</b>	<b>5%</b> <b>(1)</b>	12% (8)
<b>Question</b>		<b>9%</b> <b>(2)</b>	<b>10%</b> <b>(2)</b>	6% (4)
<b>Example/models/ideas</b>	<b>4%</b> <b>(1)</b>			2% (1)
<b>Match thesis, support, intro, ideas</b>	<b>4%</b> <b>(1)</b>	<b>14%</b> <b>(3)</b>		6% (4)
<b>Focus of Comment</b>				
<b>HOCs</b>	<b>48%</b> <b>(11)</b>	<b>50%</b> <b>(11)</b>	<b>25%</b> <b>(5)</b>	42% (27)
<b>Specific strengths/weaknesses</b>	<b>9%</b> <b>(2)</b>	<b>9%</b> <b>(2)</b>	<b>5%</b> <b>(1)</b>	8% (5)
<b>LOCs [Error Correction]</b>			<b>10%</b> <b>(2)</b>	3% (2)
<b>[Style]</b>	<b>9%</b> <b>(2)</b>	<b>27%</b> <b>(6)</b>	<b>20%</b> <b>(4)</b>	18% (12)
<b>[Format]</b>	<b>35%</b> <b>(8)</b>			12% (8)

confirms that. He verified his position on computer-mediated tutoring, recognizing both his disdain for it as well as some inherent obstacles in the medium when it is being used for a technical and social exercise such as tutoring: “I prefer to have the student be in

front of me. That way, I can talk about the problems with the paper with them directly. I can get feedback from them. I can get ideas from them, and basically have a dialogue with that student. And with the email papers, with doing these things online, I don't get that" (Exit Interview, p. 1).

His focuses during the conferences, however, are in the right areas. He makes a point of looking for higher orders of concerns in his tutoring ("I'm looking over a paper, I'm looking at it for content issues, looking for the organization, development, flow, and stuff like that. So, when it comes down to it, yeah, the focus is the same [as f2f tutoring]" (Introductory Interview, p. 7)) and, during this study, his focus was 42% on HOCs, which is effective reader response work. Shaun does have a, perhaps, unduly large percentage (33%) of comments on style and format and error correction in his in-text comments. By his own admission, Shaun battles the editor in himself: "See, when I started here, that was probably my biggest concern was how am I-, because prior to then I had probably been more of an editor type. I would catch the mechanical stuff. I would catch, like stuff that didn't sound right, like awkward sentences. And those things – awkward sentences still drive me nuts, even to this day. But, yeah, see, but now, I've moved away from the mechanical stuff, unless it's just something, unless either a) they request help for it specifically, or it's just so glaring that it really detracts from the paper" (Interview 2, pp. 19-20). He believes that CM tutoring does keep his attention on larger concerns: "I think I'm more tempted to point it out if the person is f2f, like mechanical stuff" (Interview 2, p. 13), one of the few concessions he made to CM conferencing in the writing center.

#### *Gere and Abbott Model*

Looking at Shaun's work through the Gere and Abbott model (Table 5) and comparing it to the expanded model above, an interesting picture is completed. Over the course of the study, it appears that he becomes more confident and relaxed with the CM work. Tracking his language with respect to linguistic function, it can be seen that his in-text notes became more informing and less directive. He started with no eliciting or questioning comments, but by Conference 3, he was using nearly 25% eliciting comments. He also looks more closely at content over the course of the study, both in end notes and in-text notes; this model confirms that format issues take an inordinate amount of attention. The phatic content of his communication is a relatively flat line, as is his

Table 5 Gere and Abbott Model for Participant Two

Participant: Shaun	End note				In-text			
Idea Unit Totals	Paper 1 (13)	Paper 2 (7)	Paper 3 (4)	Total (24)	Paper 1 (11)	Paper 2 (17)	Paper 3 (14)	Total (42)
Linguistic Function								
<b>Inform</b>	77% (10)	71% (5)	75% (3)	75% (18)	17% (2)	47% (8)	57% (8)	43% (18)
<b>Direct</b>	23% (3)	14% (1)	25% (1)	21% (5)	83% (10)	35% (6)	21% (3)	45% (19)
<b>Elicit</b>						18% (3)	21% (3)	14% (6)
<b>Phatic</b>		14% (1)		4% (1)				
Focus of Attention								
<b>Writing</b>	85% (11)	57% (4)	100% (4)	79% (19)	100% (11)	94% (16)	93% (13)	95% (40)
<b>Student</b>	15% (2)	43% (3)		21% (5)		6% (1)	7% (1)	5% (2)
Focus of Consciousness								
<b>Content</b>	62% (8)	29% (2)	75% (3)	54% (13)	17% (2)	53% (9)	21% (3)	33% (14)
<b>Context</b>		14% (1)		4% (1)				
<b>Format</b>	38% (5)	43% (3)	25% (1)	38% (9)	83% (10)	41% (7)	64% (9)	62% (26)
<b>Process</b>								
<b>Reference</b>						6% (1)	7% (1)	5% (2)
<b>Mechanics</b>		14% (1)		4% (1)			7% (1)	2% (1)

For Conference 3, Shaun included a front note. The breakdown for the seven line front note is 86% Inform, 14% Phatic; 100% Student; 100% Context.

attention to student and focus on context, all an indication of social level, which the discussion of the social aspects of Shaun’s conferences will continue below.

### *Social Aspects*

Shaun maintained throughout all five interviews that CM-conferencing is impersonal, with comments like this: I think if you have that open atmosphere, then the tutoring session will run better because the student feels more comfortable with you and you feel more comfortable with them. With an online writing center, tutoring, you don’t get that. I think it’s very, it’s impersonal for-, yeah, that may be the word I want to use for it” (Introductory Interview, p. 6). He has said that the absence of dialogue stunts his tutoring style: “I prefer to have the student be in front of me. That way, I can talk about

the problems with the paper with them directly; I can get feedback from them; I can get ideas from them, and basically have a dialogue with that student. And with the email papers, with doing these things online, I don't get that" (Exit Interview, p. 1). The social aspect of Shaun's work, however, did become noticeably more personal over the three study conferences (see Table 6 for each of the factors described here), from 0% personal comments in the in-text notes in Conference 1 to 31% in Conference 2 to 50% in Conference 3. In fact, for Conference 3, he added a front note that was 100% personal;

Table 6 *Social Aspects for Participant Two*

Participant : Shaun	Conference 1		Conference 2		Conference 3*		Total	
	End	In-text	End	In-text	End	In-text	End	In-text
<b>Total comments</b>	13	11	6	16	3	10	22	37
Social Level								
<b>Personal</b>	39% (5)		67% (4)	31% (5)	67% (2)	50% (5)	50% (21)	27% (10)
<b>Impersonal</b>	62% (8)	100% (11)	33% (2)	69% (11)	33% (1)	50% (5)	50% (11)	73% (27)
Social Presence								
<b>Interaction: Person</b>	100% (13)	100% (11)	100% (6)	94% (15)	100% (3)	70% (7)	100% (22)	89% (33)
<b>Text</b>				6% (1)		30% (3)		11% (4)
<b>Role</b>			17% (1)					
<b>Self-monitoring</b>	23% (3)		17% (1)	25% (4)	33% (1)	30% (3)	18% (4)	19% (7)
<b>Ownership</b>								
Immediacy								
<b>Immediacy</b>	69% (9)	27% (3)	100% (6)	38% (6)	67% (2)	70% (7)	77% (17)	43% (16)
<b>Pronoun use</b>	100% (11)	100% (3)	83% (5)	100% (9)	100% (2)	100% (7)	100% (18)	100% (19)
<b>Style</b>				17% (1)		14% (1)		13% (2)
<b>Tone</b>	22% (2)		17% (1)	17% (1)			17% (3)	6% (1)
<b>Emoticons</b>								
<b>Non-verbal conveyances</b>								
<b>Personality</b>								

\*Paper 3 included a front note as well as an end note and in-text comments. The front note consisted of the following Social Aspects: Social Level, 100% personal; Interaction/Person, 100%; Role was brought up in 14% of the comments; Ownership in 14%; Pronouns were used in 100% of the comments; Writing Style was a factor in 29%; and Tone in 29%.

neither of the other two papers had front notes. The language of this front note for Conference 3 was made more personal by its immediacy factors: pronoun use, including the student's name and the tutor's signature; reference to ownership ("Thank you for telling us what exactly it was you wanted us to look for while reading your paper"). In the in-text notes for Conference 3, Shaun also used self-monitoring language ("*I see* the point you are trying to make here, but *I think* you can phrase it better," (C5)) and the tutor's signature; reference to ownership ("Thank you for telling us what exactly it was you wanted us to look for while reading your paper").

In the in-text notes for Conference 3, Shaun also used self-monitoring language ("*I see* the point you are trying to make here, but *I think* you can phrase it better," (C5)) and writing style ("*I'm really intrigued* by this idea," (C9)) to ensure the personal level of this conference. This is in stark contrast to the end note to the student in Conference 1: "One of the main things I noticed about this paper was that all of the direct quotes were stand-alone, with no introduction" (E1). Here, referencing "this paper," the rigid use of the "that" clause, and the choice of "noticed" as the verb are formal and distant and the entire note sounds as if it is written to a mediator. In Conference 2, Shaun had increased the personal level of his comments, but only through pronoun use and a more obvious interaction with the writer. He was still using very formal language in some of the notes, though, which kept the personal level low, as in this in-text comment, worthy of a legal deposition: "You stated in the previous paragraph that this poem was 'universal'" (Conference 2, C15). During the exit interview, Shaun acknowledged his dilemma with crafting more personal communication in the computer-mediated environment: "I like having a face to put with the name and put with the paper. I don't have it here. I think that my own comments are probably impersonal, simply because, again, I don't have that student in front of me. The tone, the voice that I take when I'm tutoring somebody, I can't really convey that through email" (Exit interview, p. 3)

The data analyzed for social aspects, as shown in Table 6, helps to mark Shaun's change in comfort level over the course of the three conferences, and this was noticed in the Gere and Abbott model as well. This model also helps to monitor how the interaction and immediacy factors combine to manage the personal level. In Conference 1, Shaun shows only the merest hint of personal communication with the client. The language of

both the in-text comments and the end note is stilted and formal. Shaun doesn't even use contractions, and his pronoun use is limited to "I" and "you," and, even then, only when absolutely necessary. In the in-text notes, he manages to make comments without using pronouns nine of eleven times, defaulting to rather neutral-sounding statements, like these: "There needs to be a better transition between the ideas in these sentences" (C1) and "Introduce quote" (C7). This is a striking example of how interaction can be taking place, but, without immediacy factors, the social level is in the very low range of personal. This study does not provide a division between personal and impersonal, but recognizes, through the data analysis, that a number of degrees exist there. By Conference 3, Shaun displayed a considerable increase in personal communication; he adds a front note that is entirely personal, made so, in large part, by the immediacy factors tone and style (though the self-monitoring feature is under interaction, it, too, often helps with the tone of a statement, especially in any kind of hierarchical relationship). The front note, with its 29% portions of tone and style gave the tutor more latitude to depersonalize the in-text notes, yet still sound friendly and conversational overall. Shaun also extends the immediacy of the communication by increasing his use of pronouns in the in-text notes from Conference 1 to Conference 3: 27% to 56% to 70% (as calculated by number of pronouns in the entire note, not just comments considered to have immediacy value), and the overall personal feel of the communication expands as well.

### *Participant 3: Melissa*

#### *Technical Aspects*

Melissa has considerable experience with electronic tutoring, more than with f2f tutoring. For two years, she has been working as a long-distance tutor for Bluefield College while she is a graduate student in the English Department at Radford University. Her training was minimal: she listened to the advice of the writing center director at Bluefield, watched some of the computer-mediated conferencing sessions that other tutors conducted; otherwise, she had no training for either f2f or computer-mediated conferencing. Bluefield College has an impressive online writing lab, worthy of emulation. Melissa was a welcome participant for this study because of her experience

and training, all occurring outside of the location of this study, and because of the reputation of the center she came from.

From the first observation, it was obvious that Melissa's tutoring habits, in terms of reading and responding differed from that of the tutors trained here (Stephanie was trained in the seminar and on-the-job; Shaun, on-the-job). Melissa starts her responses with a front note, which is a template that she routinely fills in for each individual she tutors. The template explains that the tutor will be looking for HOCs first and includes a statement that all writers should invite readers into their process. In this front note, she lists the areas of concern that she will be commenting on in the body of the paper. Melissa reads silently and she starts commenting on a client's work before she has finished reading the first paragraph, a practice she defends: "I've kind of refined my process now. Instead of reading through the all-, whole essay, or printing out the essay, reading through it and marking it up on a pen, and then trying to go back and put the comments in. I just cut and paste, put everything into Word, and put in my comments as I go, so I just read the essay once, maybe a paragraph twice. So that's helped me refine and utilize my time a little bit better" (Introductory Interview, p. 14). She reads quickly and responds as she reacts, and she seldom rereads. Writing center directors and those who teach training courses, have learned from research and from experience that reading at least the introductory portion of a piece of writing guides the tutor's focus. Readers who begin commenting too quickly can get involved with parts of the writing that, while they may warrant responses, may not be the most important issues in the work. In f2f tutoring, this sets off a confounding of "face," as discussed in Chapter Two. In Melissa's third conference of this study, evidence for the rationale for such reading protocols in electronic work emerged; therefore, part of that session will be described.

Conference 3 for Melissa was a relatively long paper, eight single-spaced pages. Melissa, as is her method, began reading and commenting immediately. She did stay with her usual techniques and her usual focus on HOCs. However, the experience was visibly frustrating for her; she sighed with irritation, made faces at the screen, talked to the screen ("What are you trying to say!"), complained about the topic ("Lovely. I wanted to read about Jack the Ripper" (Interview 3, p. 2)), and, at times, pounded the keys as she typed. The session took more than twice the estimated time, and Melissa did not finish

reading and commenting on this paper. To her credit, though, there is only a trace of her annoyance in her comments to the student (for example, when the student wrote that there were three suspects in identifying Jack the Ripper, Melissa wrote, “HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS? WERE YOU THERE? IT SEEMS THIS CAME FROM A SOURCE. YOU NEED TO CITE IT” (Conference 3, C28), the tone here was helped along by the all-caps format she chooses to use). She did, however, unlock the source of this problem herself. During the interview following the conference, Melissa tried to sort out her role in this conference. She said: “I know that I told him organization, organization, so now, it’s hard for me to look at the other things because it’s so random” (Interview 3, p. 7). As she continued to struggle with what was obviously an unsatisfactory conference for her, she became more cognizant about her technique. She talked about how she might have handled this conference f2f, and then how she could improve her communication about the student’s problem in text: “Well, I guess the goal is that he should, basically there shouldn’t be any, any difference. I mean, whatever we talk about in a f2f tutoring session, we should be able to hit online. Maybe, well, I, hopefully, this will, this will help. Just from my saying, right from the beginning, and I think I’ll write down at the bottom. I’m not, I kind of lose what you’re trying to tell-. Tell me what the purpose of all of this is, and that means to be clear from the beginning – and throughout – because if you lose that focus, then you lose your reader’s interest, and we just get bogged down” (Interview 3, pp. 9-10). Because Melissa started out by commenting on the first flaws she detected in the paper – rambling sentences, information not cited, incomplete ideas – rather than reading enough of the paper to determine the most troublesome problem – lack of a driving thesis – she had invested a great deal of work, over 100 comments and more than an hour, before she finally found the key that will help the student begin to revise the paper. Melissa had forecast this problem when she discussed her reading practice during the first interview: “I used to read all the way through and then go back, and it just wasn’t time savvy. I mean, I’d read it through and I’d have a grasp on it as a whole, but, for the most part, that’s not real, that really doesn’t matter. So I just kind of read as I go through. Sometimes that gets me into trouble, but most of the time it doesn’t” (Interview 1, p. 6). Experienced reader/responders know that pointing out problem after problem in a student’s work is like trying to repair a cracked and leaking dam by adding more water. If

a writer needs to revise a paper for thesis, then working on citation information or developing a supporting point will have to come later.

Another interesting outcome of this conference is that Melissa's rehearsal of her comments, for the first time, became more personal. Her use of pronouns, as shown by the quote in the above paragraph, indicated a higher level of immediacy than she had used in other comments to the students she worked with. Even though Melissa's goal is to maintain a relatively impersonal electronic conference, this session does illustrate that her interest in this work has increased now that she has solved the mystery of its initial failure. Another important point came out of this conference: Melissa has a rather rigid formula for reading and commenting on papers. She uses a template as a front note, she uses the same reading method, and she has a basic rubric for responding. She talked several times, for example, about her "bag of tricks" and her "solution bank" for explaining errors to electronic clients. In the following statement, her comfort in this patterned tutoring is apparent: "As a tutor, you need to have that hierarchy of things that you look for. It's like you have to have a formula before you go in. . . . and I think it, once I got comfortable with that, piece of cake. It's easy. It's easier. I don't have to think about what I have to look for. I can look at every paper, theoretically, the same" (Exit Interview, p. 9).

As Table 7 shows, Melissa's practice is led by a dialogic approach, which she used in 31% of her work during these three conferences, and she used that approach at a fairly equal rate across all three conferences – 42%, 31%, and 26%. Her second approach was directive (25%), followed closely by reader response (22%). Close examination of Melissa's comments reveal that her dialogic method is highly directive, and hardly ever collaborative. The following comment is illustrative of many of her questions to her clients: "WHAT KINDS OF RESPONSIBILITIES DID YOU UNDERTAKE? WHY WAS THIS A 'BIG STEP'? WHAT PROCESS DID YOU GO THROUGH TO PURCHASE THE HOUSE? WHERE? WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?" (Conference 1, C20). Melissa used accepted writing center techniques in 53% of her tutoring work, one-half devoted to the questioning technique (27%), which matches her dialogic approach. She did, however, adopt the thesis-matching technique for Conferences 2 and 3, which confirms her ability to respond in creative ways when necessary. These percentages also

Table 7 *Technical Aspects for Participant Three*

Total Comments	Paper 1 (64)	Paper 2 (51)	Paper 3 (148)	Total (263)
<b>Approaches</b>				
<b>Directive</b>	14% (9)	23% (12)	30% (45)	25% (66)
<b>Cognitive</b>	2% (1)	2% (1)	9% (14)	6% (16)
<b>Process</b>	6% (4)	4% (2)	3% (4)	4% (10)
<b>Dialogic</b>	42% (27)	31% (16)	26% (39)	31% (82)
<b>Reader Response</b>	17% (11)	19% (10)	25% (37)	22% (58)
<b>Collaborative</b>			<1% (1)	<1% (1)
<b>Protocol</b>	19% (12)	20% (10)	6% (10)	12% (32)
<b>Writing Center Techniques</b>				
<b>Personal Interest/ Read &amp; react</b>	2% (1)	6% (3)	4% (6)	4% (10)
<b>Restate/summarize/predict</b>	5% (3)	2% (1)	3% (4)	3% (8)
<b>Question</b>	41% (26)	21% (11)	22% (33)	27% (70)
<b>Example/models/ideas</b>		2% (1)	3% (5)	2% (6)
<b>Match thesis, support, intro, ideas</b>	5% (3)	19% (10)	21% (33)	17% (46)
<b>Focus of Comment</b>				
<b>HOCs</b>	52% (33)	56% (29)	51% (76)	52% (138)
<b>Specific strengths/weaknesses</b>				
<b>LOCs [Error Correction]</b>		8% (4)	8% (12)	6% (16)
<b>[Style]</b>	6% (4)	10% (5)	15% (22)	12% (31)
<b>[Format]</b>	2% (1)	2% (1)	16% (24)	10% (26)

emphasize the strength of her tutoring skills as she spent 52% of her work on HOCs, and this was consistent across all of her conferences – 52%, 56%, and 51%, an excellent record.

*Gere and Abbott Model*

The Gere and Abbott model (Table 8) shows further how Melissa combined the linguistic functions of Inform and Elicit to help the student think more about the content

Table 8 *Gere and Abbott Model for Participant Three*

Participant: Melissa	End note				In-text			
Idea Unit Totals	Paper 1 (22)	Paper 2 (18)	Paper 3 (34)	Total (74)	Paper 1 (33)	Paper 2 (26)	Paper 3 (109)	Total (168)
Linguistic Function								
<b>Inform</b>	59% (13)	33% (6)	76% (26)	61% (45)	12% (4)	46% (12)	43% (47)	38% (63)
<b>Direct</b>	9% (2)	22% (4)		8% (6)	15% (5)	15% (4)	22% (24)	20% (33)
<b>Elicit</b>	23% (5)	33% (6)	18% (6)	23% (17)	73% (24)	39% (10)	32% (35)	41% (69)
<b>Phatic</b>	9% (2)	11% (2)	6% (2)	8% (6)			3% (3)	2% (3)
Focus of Attention								
<b>Writing</b>	82% (18)	61% (11)	53% (18)	64% (47)	100% (33)	100% (26)	97% (106)	98% (165)
<b>Student</b>	18% (4)	39% (7)	47% (16)	36% (27)			3% (3)	2% (3)
Focus of Consciousness								
<b>Content</b>	55% (12)	61% (11)	24% (8)	42% (31)	70% (23)	46% (12)	36% (39)	44% (74)
<b>Context</b>	14% (3)	17% (3)	9% (3)	12% (9)			1% (1)	1% (1)
<b>Format</b>	18% (4)	6% (1)	59% (20)	34% (25)	15% (5)	31% (8)	31% (34)	28% (47)
<b>Process</b>	5% (1)		3% (1)	3% (2)				
<b>Reference</b>		6% (1)		1% (1)	12% (4)	12% (3)	17% (19)	15% (26)
<b>Mechanics</b>					3% (1)	12% (3)	38% (13)	10% (17)

and purpose of the paper. As was captured by the model in Table 7: Technical Aspects for Participant 3, the Gere and Abbott model also shows Melissa's relentless use of the questioning technique of writing center work, which is here labeled Elicit. Her in-text comments for Conferences 2 and 3 were one-third questions, and for Conference 1, three-quarters question format. Melissa's in-text work over the three conferences shows a remarkable focus on writing issues: of the 168 idea units she contributed, 98% were directed to the composition needs, as defined by Gere and Abbott in the Focus of Attention section. She puts heavy emphasis on content in her in-text notes for each of the three conferences (70%, 46%, and 36%) and in her front note (55%, 61%, and 24%). Melissa continues her focus on content even into the end notes for Conferences 1 and 2,

a good reading/responding model for the student. In Conference 2, for example, she left the student with these thoughts: “What is it you want to communicate through this essay? What is the problem? US troops were sent needlessly into Korea? Establish that issue as a problem first. Then, what kinds of solutions could have been possible?” (Conference 2, E4-7). Her front note had indicated to the student that revision was needed in “content, development, punctuation, word choice” (Conference 2, F9), and she matched these suggestions with in-text and end comments, all of which will help the student focus on those needs in the paper. It is also interesting to note that in her in-text comments, where most of the tutoring work gets done, Melissa focuses on mechanics 3% in Conference 1, 12% in Conference 2, and 38% in Conference 3. This is a good indication that she does not default to mechanics as a role designation or because she lacks the confidence, skills, or approaches to deal with bigger issues. It appears that she will work with mechanics when it is necessary and warranted (although the 38% is rather too much focus on mechanics when there were so many larger issues to focus on for Conference 3).

Melissa’s phatic content is quite low, especially in the comment sections that are intended to establish contact, confirm roles, and build trust, that is, the front and/or end notes. She does use 18%, 10%, and 22% phatics in the front notes (see the addition to Table 8 below) across her three conferences, a nearly negligible amount in the in-text notes, and low in the end comments (8%). She does, however, balance this lack of phatics in the end note with more concentration on context; 14%, 17%, and 9% of her comments in the end notes focused on the context of the paper and/or conference. Combined with her 36% focus of attention on the student in the end notes, this, in effect, raises her social level to one that fits the idea of the role of electronic tutor that she has defined for herself. Melissa’s comment format for all three conferences consisted of a front note, in-text comments embedded in the text in all capital letters, and end notes. The addition to Table 8 below continues by showing the contents of her front notes across the three conferences. Each of Melissa’s front notes is essentially the same since she uses a template that she cuts and pastes into the document; that accounts for the consistency seen across the table. Melissa only changes the salutations, the specific recommendations that she will be pointing out in the paper, and, perhaps a line or two of protocol.

	Front note			
Idea Unit Totals	Paper 1 (11)	Paper 2 (10)	Paper 3 (9)	Total (30)
Linguistic Function				
<b>Inform</b>	82% (9)	90% (9)	78% (7)	83% (25)
<b>Direct</b>				
<b>Elicit</b>				
<b>Phatic</b>	18% (2)	10% (1)	22% (2)	17% (5)
Focus of Attention				
<b>Writing</b>	9% (1)	10% (1)	11% (1)	10% (3)
<b>Student</b>	91% (10)	90% (9)	89% (8)	90% (27)
Focus of Consciousness				
<b>Content</b>				
<b>Context</b>	55% (6)	60% (6)	56% (5)	57% (17)
<b>Format</b>				
<b>Process</b>	27% (3)	30% (3)	22% (2)	27% (8)
<b>Reference</b>				
<b>Mechanics</b>				

### *Social Aspects*

Table 9: Social Aspects for Participant 3 reinforces the assertion that Melissa kept the social level of her conferences low, especially in the in-text notes of Conferences 2 and 3 (46%, 8%, and 4%). She accomplished that by keeping the majority of the interaction to the text (33%, 87%, and 96%), and by using minimal immediacy tools.

Use of pronouns was Melissa's primary means of establishing any personal level with her clients; her front and end notes contained a high number of pronouns, but her in-text notes stayed lower. Her use of pronouns illustrates that judging the social level of an exchange by the immediacy factors contained in it is a difficult and subjective call; this study looked at immediacy language not only by counting each time an immediacy factor was used but also by looking at that use in context. For example, pronoun use has been defined in the literature as a way of establishing immediacy and, therefore, a personal interaction; the literature further adds that the use of "we" is more intimate than

Table 9 *Social Aspects for Participant Three*

Participant : Melissa	Conference 1			Conference 2			Conference 3			Totals		
<b>Total comments</b>	front (10)	in- (33)	end (21)	front (9)	in- (25)	end (18)	front (8)	in- (106)	end (34)	front (27)	in- (164)	end (73)
<b>Personal</b>	30% (3)	46% (15)	67% (14)	22% (2)	8% (2)	11% (2)	25% (2)	4% (4)	29% (10)	26% (7)	13% (21)	36% (26)
<b>Impersonal</b>	70% (7)	54% (18)	33% (7)	78% (7)	92% (23)	89% (16)	75% (6)	96% (102)	71% (24)	74% (20)	87% (143)	64% (47)
<b>Social Presence</b>												
Interaction: <b>Person</b>	100% (10)	67% (22)	76% (16)	100% (9)	13% (3)	39% (7)	100% (8)	4% (4)	29% (10)	100% (27)	18% (29)	45% (33)
<b>Text</b>		33% (11)	24% (5)		87% (22)	61% (11)		96% (102)	71% (24)		82% (135)	55% (40)
<b>Role</b>			5% (1)					1% (1)			1% (1)	1% (1)
<b>Self-monitoring</b>			10% (2)					2% (2)			1% (1)	1% (1)
<b>Ownership</b>												
<b>Immediacy</b>												
<b>Immediacy</b>	20% (2)	46% (15)	52% (11)	22% (2)	4% (1)	33% (6)	25% (2)	5% (5)	21% (7)	22% (6)	13% (21)	33% (24)
<b>Pronoun use</b>	100% (10)	100% (19)	100% (16)	100% (8)	100% (3)	100% (9)	100% (8)	100% (32)	100% (16)	100% (25)	100% (54)	100% (41)
<b>Writing Style/Tone</b>		7% (1)	18% (2)					20% (1)			5% (1)	8% (2)
<b>Emoticons/ Non-verbals</b>	50% (1)		18% (2)	50% (1)			50% (1)	60% (3)		50% (3)	14% (3)	8% (2)
<b>Personality</b>												

“you”/“I.” In a tutoring situation, however, that distinction can be subjective, as the following two examples might help to show. In her front note template, Melissa uses this line: “Therefore, we strongly recommend that you work with a tutor and/or your professor more than once on each assignment” (Conference 1, F5). The use of “we” in this statement in no way invites a collaborative relationship between the tutor and student. The formality of the writing style and the absence of tone call attention to the distancing use of “we” in this context. For this reason, the breakdown of the immediacy factors, that is, pronoun use, tone, writing style, non-verbal conveyances, and personality for each comment was helpful in defining how immediacy works in electronic communication. This is illustrated through Melissa’s first conference in the end note, the note that displayed a higher personal level than any of her other connections with the clients. In this note, she had interaction with person 76% of the time, which was only the

fourth highest rate in her missives, and her pronoun use (76%) was also only fourth highest. The difference, then, lies in the tone of the note: in 18% of her comments in Conference 1, she used tone to raise the personal level. In the case of this tutor, though, it should be said that she purposely drained out tone and style to keep the social level more impersonal, which is how she views her role. She also used few comments about role or ownership, and she used minimal self-monitoring language to adjust the interaction to a more personal level.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations provides a closer look at how each tutor managed the technical and social aspects of computer-mediated conferencing by highlighting how each of them view electronic work with respect to the criteria detailed here. These criteria, which emerged from the transcripts of the observations and interviews with the participants, create a more complete picture of the differences and similarities among the participants here, thereby making it possible to see a little clearer how tutors can make decisions about the technical and social aspects that fit their ideas of role as well as the philosophy of the writing center.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of computer-mediated conferencing in a university writing center. This study was not a comparative one; however, several discoveries were made based on the similarities and differences that emerged during the observations and interviews of this study. Those will be discussed here because details converged across the participants that help clarify the conclusions drawn overall. This final chapter summarizes the data for the entire study, that is, across all participants, and, based on that, some recommendations can be offered for tutor training for computer-mediated conferencing.

#### *Participants*

The participants for this study were selected based on their prior training, but, as it turned out, by virtue of personal traits, they were also representative of three remarkably different perspectives on computer-mediated work. Severino (1992) also found tutor training and age to be significant factors in her study to identify and define collaboration in f2f writing center techniques. Participant 1, Stephanie, completed a semester-long tutor training seminar and practicum; Participant 2, Shaun, learned to tutor on-the-job in the university writing center this study took place in; and Participant 3, Melissa, received some preliminary, mainly logistical, training for online conferencing and then learned on-the-job in another college writing center. It was, then, significant that each of the tutors for this study presented an interesting diversity in terms of background experience, knowledge, personality traits, and communication/conferencing preferences. Whether on-the-job or in tutor training classes and workshops, tutors are taught the standard approaches and techniques for tutoring writing; they also learn the social aspects that are considered part of the writing center experience. Because electronic writing centers are relatively new, there have not yet been empirical studies that show how the technical and social aspects can transfer from the f2f environment to the computer-mediated one (Baron, 1998; Hara & Kling, 1999; Murray, 2000; Selfe & Meyer, 1991). In fact, in the recently published *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation* (2002), there was some discussion on CM conferencing, but not one research study was presented.

### *The Nature of Computer-mediated Conferencing*

Through the observations and interviews of this study, it became clear that computer-mediated conferencing is both technical and social. In fact, others have called CM communication a socio-technical system, and argue that “the technical and social forces cannot be clearly separated” (Sherry, 2000, p. 22; see also Falk, 1996, as cited in Sherry, 2000) and the same is true for f2f conferencing. The strategies for the technical work and the social environment are, however, applied differently in the CM space, sometimes in subtle ways that can have various effects on the conference, and it is those differences that should be brought out in tutor training for distance work (Blythe, 1997; Eldred & Fortune, 1992; Harris & Pemberton, 1995; Kaplan, 1991). The categories and themes that emerged from these tutors’ descriptions, actions, and explanations of their work helped to define the components for the technical and social aspects of electronic writing center tutoring that formed the coding system for this study. Following is a brief look at the differences that were noted between the tutors’ strategies, which will be used to support the conclusions that developed over the course of this study.

### *Technical Aspects in Computer-mediated Conferencing*

#### *Pedagogical Approaches and Writing Center Techniques*

The participants each chose valid pedagogical approaches for their conferences, engaging in different approaches for their purposes but clearly favoring one over the others: Stephanie, reader response; Shaun, reader response and directive; Melissa, dialogic. The Gere and Abbott scheme (1985) confirmed these approaches with its analysis of the linguistic function of the in-text portion of the conferences: Stephanie, inform; Shaun, direct; Melissa, elicit. The double analysis of this study, that is, parsing the tutors’ comments using writing center, composition, and pedagogy categories as well as the linguistic model presented by Gere and Abbott was also supported by Thomsen, Straublaah and Bolyard (1998) as a way of applying functional analysis to messages. They suggested that individual computer-mediated messages be coded for form, function, and content. In addition, Spradley’s (1980, as cited in Sherry, 2000) outline for discourse analysis as a way of finding the relationship of linguistic functions in a discourse was consulted. The areas of composition that the tutors chose to focus on were also valid writing center concerns. Each of them put the majority of their focus on HOCs: Stephanie

34%, Shaun, 42%; Melissa, 52%. (The calculation was made by first determining what the tutors' comments in the student's text focused on – if the comment mentioned thesis, for example, the comment was counted as a HOC; if the comment was about grammar, it was counted as a LOC. Then a simple count was done and a percentage calculated from the number of overall comments.) Here, the category HOCs contains purpose, audience, thesis, support, organization, content issues, use of sources, and other crucial composition matters. Reader response, process, dialogic, and collaborative approaches, as well as their associated reading techniques and tutoring strategies, channel the tutor's attention to higher orders of concern, which is the argument for training in reading techniques, approaches, and tutoring techniques.

There is still some slippage in the tutors' intentions for focusing on HOCs, though, as the sub-category in the Technical Aspects Tables for HOCs illustrates. This category, "pointing out specific strengths" in a paper, was developed because the tutors each discussed it specifically, but it was interesting to see what transpired in their work. Sometimes it is hard to remember to concentrate on the positive parts of a paper when tutors view their job as helping to improve that text. However, it is good writing center practice to call the writer's attention to parts of the paper that the reader finds especially strong – and to be specific about those strengths, as Stephanie did in this example from Conference 2: "NICE sentence. Love the parallelism here, and the concept" (C3). Writers learn from praise, especially when it is affirming their work. Most tutors talk about the value of such responses, and these participants did as well. Stephanie proclaimed during the exit interview that her goal was to "make sure, even if they have a lot of work to do, I make sure, like a third of my comments are good. And I don't, like weigh them out, OK, I've said three negative ones, it's time for a positive one. I just try to sprinkle it in" (p. 13). She did not achieve this goal during the three conferences of this study, however; only 8%, overall, were her comments made to specifically point out the writer's strengths. Shaun and Melissa, too, talked about positive responses, but also fell short of practicing it during these conferences: Shaun made comments 8% of the time in this category; Melissa, not at all. On the other hand, most of their comments could not be considered negative, but, rather, responsive, telling the reader what they were getting from the text.

The LOCs, too, especially error correction and style, were the focus in about the same proportions: Stephanie, 39%; Shaun, 21%; Melissa, 18%. These foci are well within acceptable limits for the work of tutors, and demonstrate how the tutors' experience, knowledge, and commitment have extended into the computer-mediated tutoring space.

It is through the writing center techniques, however, that student clients learn to become reader responders themselves, one of the missions of writing centers. There have been studies showing that peer response/tutoring/instruction is "essential" to learning (Moller, 1998), and this is what the university writing center provides. It was in the writing center techniques that these tutors showed critical differences in tutoring styles. The writing center techniques that are most valued, that is, those that have developed from composition and pedagogical theories and through writing center work, are referenced on the continuum (Figure 1), explained in Chapter Two, and indicated on the Technical Aspects Tables for each tutor. Of the work that was done through the conferences, Stephanie used writing center techniques 65% of the time, Shaun 35%, and Melissa 53% (each tutor spent about 12% of their comments on protocol; it can be assumed, then, and the observations back this up, that the remainder of the comments were delivered in something outside of standard writing center fare. It may be deduced that this was error correcting without explanation or directing the student in writing content or format without models or examples. All other linguistic responses here have a category to be put in.)

The techniques that have been developed from composition theories as constructive for writing center tutor-student work take an amount of learning, practice, and reflection on the part of young tutors as they work in the writing center. As Stephanie pointed out in the interview following Conference 1:

I just took what I would normally do and tried to fit it in with what I have and what I was given because I think you learn a few basic things that you can always fall back on, and as long as you have those that you can use, then I usually change the rest for some situations. . . . You know, there's a sort of set thing you can do with that, and that's adaptable . . . because those are just certain safe strategies that help you make tutoring any way go smoother. And then, I think the rest over email is just style, which is the same thing with f2f. Everybody has their own sort

of style of talking to people and tutoring. Some people prefer to read out loud and some people don't, and some people will talk more and some people will ask more questions. And so I just try with email papers-; at first when I looked at it I was, like, hmm, now what would be the best way for me to respond to it. . . . You know, make it as, as much less different as I could than f2f. (pp. 38-39)

Stephanie has made a concerted effort to transfer the techniques she learned in the seminar and on-the-job to CM, and did so 65% of the time. She also has an underlying philosophy for her CM conferencing, which she expressed: "The things that I basically try to stick to online is, remember that I'm responding to a person and a paper, even though I can't see the person. You know, this is really stupid, but you know that, there's a thing that's like 'Do no harm.' I, whatever I do, I try not to do any harm" (Exit Interview, p. 36). A tutor's philosophy is a developing concept, too, but it can help him/her to choose approaches and techniques with substantial information and help him/her view the process in ways that are grounded in experience, research, anecdotal evidence, and theories that fit the field.

Shaun, on the other hand, used writing center techniques fewer times (35%) than the other two participants in his online work in this study, defaulting to directing the student more than guiding; this is typical of untrained tutors operating from a position of uncertainty. His approaches were valid, his reading technique was good, his foci were top-down; all of these components were undeniably excellent tutor practices, learned on-the-job and through his writing experiences since Shaun was not formally trained for this work. His philosophy reflects his, as yet, meager experience and training: "I think the, I really can't describe why it is I do that. It's just, I think it's just the way I work overall. I mean, I'm too, I'm somebody, I just take things as they come. There's, I'm not even exactly sure. I think it's more intuitive than anything. . . . It's the philosophy that's been in the-, it's been put into me, that you need to focus on content issues" (Interview 2, p. 13). His instinct is good; he has not yet, though, committed to the techniques that model for students how critical reader response is done. As he worked on Conference 1, for example, he read aloud and talked about what he would say to the student, as this excerpt depicts:

I think the writer gives good statistics to back the point up, about the Americans' declining trust in government, where she cites how people trusted the government during the Eisenhower administration, well, no, in '66 and '68 and '70 and then the poll given in 1974, after Nixon resigned. I think those statistics really, probably almost more than anything else in this paper, back up what she's trying to say. I mean it's good. Maybe she could trim back so much summary of what happened at Watergate and maybe work with this a little bit more. Because . . . these statistics are what made the point for her. Other than that, this was in her first paragraph: it reads, 'Once upon a time Americans had faith in their politicians and believed that their government was a working political machine. Cynicism that the American people have toward politicians and their government is a concept that seems fairly normal to most Americans beyond the baby-boomer era.' It's, it lacks something. It lacks some sort of transition there between those two ideas that she has. That, one hand, she said, 'once upon a time Americans had faith in their government,' and then the next sentence says, well, the cynicism and mistrust is something common to those born beyond the baby-boom era. It, I don't know, it's just maybe, it seems like maybe she could go with that a little bit more, and maybe develop something to link those two ideas together. And, not only that, but if she's going to talk about Watergate and Richard Nixon, then she needs to establish that in her first paragraph also. (Interview 1, p. 5)

These are solid, thoughtful comments representing the reader response approach. What follows, though, are all of Shaun's actual comments to the student regarding these responses (caps are Shaun's):

THERE NEEDS TO BE A BETTER TRANSITION BETWEEN THE IDEAS IN THESE SENTENCES. FIND SOME WAY TO LINK THEM TOGETHER. ALSO, IF YOU ARE DISCUSSING NIXON AND THE WATERGATE SCANDAL, THIS NEEDS TO BE ESTABLISHED IN THE FIRST PARAGRAPH (C1). [And, in the end note]: I THINK YOU HAVE A CLEAR THESIS IN THIS PAPER – THAT THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION'S ACTIONS LED TO AMERICAN'S LACK OF FAITH IN THEIR GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, I FEEL THAT YOU DO A BIT TOO MUCH

SUMMARIZING BY GIVING THE DETAILS OF THE WATERGATE SCANDAL (E 6-7). TRIM OUT ANY UNNECESSARY FACTS. ALSO, IN YOUR SECOND TO LAST PARAGRAPH YOU GIVE A STATISTIC THAT SHOWS THE AMERICAN'S GROWING MISTRUST IN THEIR GOVERNMENT. THIS IS VERY GOOD AND YOU DO A GOOD ANALYSIS WITH IT. BE SURE TO DO MORE ANALYZING THROUGHOUT YOUR PAPER, RATHER THAN JUST SUMMARIZING. (Conference 1, E 9-12)

Shaun has used several writing center techniques in his thinking and talking about the paper's content and purpose – responding to specific parts, restating the thesis, thesis matching. The inconsistency is in his communicating it to the student through text: he is being highly directive as well as non-specific about how the writer might revise the content.

From the beginning, Shaun did not feel comfortable with this medium as a tutor, complaining that both he and the student were missing teaching and learning opportunities because f2f dialogue is missing:

I've learned to have a dialogue with the student. Mainly ask them, first ask them, "Tell me in your own words what you're writing about," because that forces them to articulate it in their heads, what they're trying to do, the point that they're trying to make. And, sometimes, what they tell you may not be what they're writing about. And then I ask them, "Are there any weak areas in the paper that you feel need to be looked at?" And that gives me like a guide to go through when I'm reading the paper through. . . . One of the challenges for me, in doing online tutoring, and this is probably one of the reasons I don't do it as much as others do, is I, I like having that student in front of me so I can go through and point out the mistakes they-, "OK, right here, is there any way you think you can reword this? Um, can you expand on this a little bit more?" I like having them in front of me to do that. When I'm doing this paper online, I can't. (Introductory Interview, p. 2)

For the text-only conference, Shaun cannot yet break out of the formula he has become comfortable with in his f2f work. He is in that zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), though, where he can see the next step, is frustrated by it, but, with training and practice in the CM space, he will learn how to transfer this technique to the electronic

medium. As Rickly (1998) wrote, tutors are made uncomfortable when introduced to the text-only space of CM conferencing, but it forces them to reexamine their ideas of role, techniques, and construction of impressions of others as text. This frustration may be one reason why Shaun's online work was sparse; the total number of comments Shaun registered across all three conferences was 63. Numbers are not, of course, a primary consideration in terms of judging the quality of a writing conference, and no real comparison can be made with that, but the difference between his total number of comments and those of the other participants is remarkable (Stephanie, 199; Melissa 263) for papers that were selected randomly.

Melissa has a committed conferencing style; she uses a dialogic approach and a questioning technique for most of her work, which she has found workable in the f2f and CM environments, one that is described in the literature as "online Socratic dialogue" (Watson, 1996, as cited in Sherry, 2000, p. 42). Her work in this study exemplifies that approach and technique. In Conference 1, for example, the student was writing an autobiography. Melissa had determined that the essay needed further development, and guided the student with comments like this: "Wait! How did we get here? Tell the reader why this was such a major purchase. What did you have to go through? How did you decide on a car? Why is that important? How does it shape who you are?"(Conference 1, C16-18). The lengthy illustration of her work in Chapter Four can also be referenced to fit the discussion here. Melissa is aware of her techniques and can articulate how and why she uses them. When asked about her philosophy of CM tutoring, she said, "I think some of it has to do with writing as a process. . . . I'm not sure that I can say one specific thing. It's kind of emerged on its own because I didn't have clear guidelines and clear instructions from the beginning for the online. So I've just kind of fold-, and used whatever's worked" (Exit Interview, p. 19) and, further,

They've come to us for solutions and if we just say, 'Oh, fix this, fix this,' we haven't really provided them with the tools. We've just handed them the fish, you know. If you give me a fish, I'll be fed for a day, but if you teach me to fish, I'll be fed for a lifetime. Well, that's what we're doing. . . . That's kind of, goes back to what do I see my role. So, in a way, I put on a consultant hat, but I also put on a

teacher hat, because, theoretically, I should get that student to be able to find those things on his or her own. (p. 21)

Melissa does model the dialogic approach and questioning technique to the writer, which is one of her goals as well as a goal of writing center work.

The important finding here is that these tutors chose valid pedagogical approaches that work in writing center conferencing. They also replicated standard writing center foci. Their abilities varied, however, in adapting to CM the techniques that are specific to conference style teaching/responding. These techniques are sanctioned by writing center professionals because they put into practice the pedagogical approaches and foci, and make explicit to the student-writer, through modeling, examples, explanation, and dialogue, how critical responding is done. Using these techniques is the most difficult task for tutors in the f2f environment, and is often the last skill to be developed. Applying the techniques takes confidence and experience; it also takes an understanding of role and other social aspects. Taking the conference online removes the physical presence of the other person so that the tutor is responsible for his/her entire side of the conference at once, and this adds yet another dimension to the training design needs for computer-mediated conferencing.

#### *Social Aspects in Computer-mediated Conferencing*

As a tutor is making decisions about the technical aspects of the conference, that is, the approaches, techniques, and foci, he/she must also decide on the social aspects. Since the beginning of writing center history, the personal conference has been a central feature of its pedagogy (Carino, 1995). Of the debates that arise regularly on WCenter, the writing center directors' list, the possibilities for OWLs to be personal is one of the most frequent. This study, then, endeavored, in part, to find out how these conferences are personal or impersonal, what identified them as such, and how the tutors chose and managed the social level, for, as Sherry (2000) argued, "Research that fails to take into account the social aspects of a learning task can be criticized as not being ecologically valid" (p. 21). As was described in Chapter Four, the social aspects that the literature identifies are interaction, immediacy, and intimacy (Saenz, 2002); the factors that were important here were interaction and immediacy.

### *Interaction Factors*

The components of interaction that emerged through the interviews with the tutors and the observations of their work were interaction with person or text and issues having to do with role, which were expectations, pressure of other, self-monitoring, and ownership. (The Social Aspects Tables include only those factors that showed up in the tutors' comments on clients' papers, but the factors of expectations and pressure were themes that came up in the interviews and have an impact on role choices). Interaction with person or text was the most difficult component to work with in this study. It was seldom completely clear which interaction was intended, and, more ambiguous still, whether that choice had any real effect on the social level of the conference, or it may be, as Kimball (1997) argued, that there is no interaction with text, only with the writer. This is in part due to the purposes and roles of writing center conferences and in part due to the nature of computer-mediated communication, which is "redefining social interaction" (Thomsen, Straublaah, & Bolyard, 1998, p. 4) in ways that allow intimacy and a personal level of communication without co-presence.

### *Role Identification Factors*

The in-text notes that comprise most of the tutor's response work for a client help to illustrate the complex nature of the tutor's role and, as it turns out, how the tutor manages this complexity in a text-only environment. Several elements, which were named by the participants during the interviews and observed in their work, contribute to social presence in this work situation. The tutor's concept of role is in delicate balance in f2f and in computer-mediated environments, but role is constructed and managed differently in each place (Monroe, 1998; Rickly, 1998). Each of the participants' definitions of role were individual and distinct, and the expression of that as compared with their ideas about CM conferencing was useful in describing the nature of this work. Stephanie characterized her role as CM tutor in these ways: "I don't want to make it seem like I'm right, completely, and I'm all knowing, all powerful" (Exit Interview, p. 3), but, rather, as training classes try to instill, that we are there "to give a response, a human response, even if it's online" (Exit Interview, p. 32).

Shaun said it this way: "I don't try to be Grr, like a writing center Nazi or something, or I don't mean to, and I'm trying to be that here [CM], too, try not to be

mean about everything” (Exit Interview, p. 3) and, in another place he said, “I think maybe my position maybe gives me a little bit more room to speak on such matters. I try to see myself as an objective, a third party almost, between them and the professor, that I can look it over and I can make suggestions to them about ways I feel that they can improve this paper” (Interview 3, p. 16).

The social aspects concerning role of Melissa’s work imply a quite different definition. During the interviews and observations, Melissa had said several times that her role in the online writing lab is as a professional consultant: “I guess I have in my head that I need to be professional. They’re coming to me as a consultant almost, so I need to be as professional as possible” (Interview 3, p. 26) and she tries to establish a tone in her conferences that is “business-like and consistent” (Exit Interview, p. 9).

For all of the participants in this study, the in-text notes are where the work gets done and they are less personal for all the participants. However, front and/or end notes that express a personal level more easily allow the in-text comment section to be a premeditated work space, an inclination that has been noted in other OWL work (Monroe, 1998). Looking at the social aspects table totals of the in-text comments concerning role helps to see one way that tutors can negotiate the social level of the conference with the client. Across the participants, Stephanie used 40% of her comment space in referring to role. She used self-monitoring language in 32% of her comments and made reference to the ownership of the paper six times, or 5%. Shaun used self-monitoring language in 7 of 37 in-text comments (19%); he made no references to his role or to the ownership of the paper. Melissa referred to role once in Conference 1 and once in Conference 3. Self-monitoring language was only noted in 1% of her in-text comments. These numbers represent a vast difference in the tutors’ intentions, as they described their roles above, and will be applied to their choices of social level later in the discussion.

#### *Pressure/Expectation of Other Factors*

The identification and adoption of a role should be experimental for young tutors (Selfe, 1992), but often they are reluctant to switch roles, feeling that that can result in a loss of face (Gains, 1999). Another element that affects role choices came out in the interviews, and is supported by other studies in computer-mediated communication

(Barker & Kemp, 1990; Coogan, 1995; Langston & Batston, 1990) – that of pressure from others/expectations of others in a f2f environment, which the CM space eliminates, for all practical purposes. In a f2f tutoring situation, the tutor may feel a need to speak when there is silence, to respond to writing quickly, to be right, to sound smart, and other actions that they imagine experts are able to do, including sounding like the “humble expert” (Gains, 1999, p. 95).

Stephanie, who enjoys f2f tutoring, says that CM tutoring appeals to her as well because

I think to a certain degree, this [f2f tutoring] is like a performance job. You’re expected to greet everyone with a smile and sit them down and read through with them and ask the right questions and point out the right things and focus their attention on the right things, and you have a limited amount of time to do that and you have, you also have somebody who’s sitting there, waiting on you to respond, to say something (Interview 2, p. 20). [And later she continued the thought]: I’m probably not quite as thorough [in f2f], just because it’s that time constraint. And because this [CM tutoring] gives me more freedom to sit down and read a paragraph three or four times if I need to read it, and sometimes people will just look at you weird if you try to do that when you’re sitting at them, with them. You know, they’re like, “Hey, why do,” you know, they sort of expect you to get it on the first time, even though they might not have gotten it on the first time. (Interview 3, p. 25)

If there is such a thing as too much social presence, Stephanie summed it up with this comment:

People are constantly redirecting your focus in here, but when you’re tutoring online it’s like you, you read it, you take it in, and then whatever response you have to it, you can just say it. You’re not encumbered by, “Hey, stop. Let me show you. Go back here.” And, then it’s more your own pace, I think, then adjusting to somebody else’s, which I, I mean, I guess if you’re somebody who, who can do that f2f and you’re not adjusting to people as much, then you can do it, but that’s not my personality, like I constantly make adjustments for the feedback that I get from f2f. (Exit interview, p. 15)

During the interview, Stephanie said that CM conferencing enabled her to be more direct, more honest, that she felt freer in offering her true reactions, a phenomenon known as individuation that has also been found by Smelowitz, et al. (1988, as cited in Liu & Ginther, 1999; see also Coleman, Paternite, & Sherman, 1999; Coogan, 1995; Harasim, 1987, as cited in Sherry 2000; Selfe, 1992).

It appears that removing some of the f2f personal factors eased some of the pressure on tutors. Stephanie mentioned eighteen times in the interviews how she was affected by pressure/influence of other, saying, for example,

I read more closely online just because I feel like I have the time allotted me to do so, and there's not that expectation to read it once and have a comment for everything, or automatically be able to say, you know, what's strong...just the fact that there's somebody sitting there wait-, it's like a conversation, like they might ask a question and that conversational pattern that we set up in, you know, the world, everyday life, you know, three seconds and you expect somebody to respond to you...I don't know, I feel that conversational expectation. (Exit Interview, p. 17)

Other studies, too, have found the time factor afforded by CM conferencing in collaborative activities to benefit tutor-student communication, giving participants a chance to think about, review, and revise their comments (Moller, 1998; Walther, 1992).

Shaun's description of pressure was from the other direction and, again, reflects his general dislike for CM conferencing. He expressed the stress he experiences in the CM conference:

Well, there was a, on me, there was a lot of pressure, I think, when I was constructing my response, to be as clear and as thorough as I could when giving the feedback. That way, there wouldn't be any questions on the student's part. That way they wouldn't have to email me back and be, like, "What did you mean by this," or, such and such, which you have here in the writing center sometimes. When you make a suggestion, the student will have a question about it. They're like, "Why?" Or, "What do you mean?" And when you're doing this online, you, there's really no room for that. (Introductory Interview, pp. 4-5)

In describing his reading technique later, Shaun alluded to a rather systematic approach that he has developed that reduces the pressure on the tutor and client in the f2f conference: “[Reading the paper aloud] creates an atmosphere of comfort for the student. You know, you’re not sitting there and there’s this uneasy silence between you and the student that you’re tutoring” (Introductory Interview, p. 13), which indicates that he is aware of the potential for pressure to come between the writer and the tutor who is responding to his ideas and his presentation.

Melissa, who is older than the other two participants by five or six years, has taught freshman composition for one year as a graduate teaching fellow, and has three years’ experience tutoring, mostly online. She talked more about how the student clients may experience pressure, showing the value of anonymity from their perspectives: “I think maybe on the other side, on the student’s side, it is more comforting for them. You know, they don’t know who this person is that’s reading their paper, but they know that the person is going to look at it for what my teacher might, without looking at my stringy hair or look, listening to my comments in class or whatever, and so I think it’s more comfortable for them” (Introductory Interview, p. 8).

Part of finding one’s role in a writing conference is built on the tutor’s reactions to the client, and that reaction is based largely on the f2f dialogue, which includes conversation give and take, non-verbal language, and a quick assessment of the “other.” Characteristics such as gender, age, speech pattern, vocabulary, presence, eye contact, tone, and the like, help the tutor and the client situate themselves and figure out how to communicate, that is, negotiate the register of the conference (Ferrara, Brunner, & Whittemore, 1991; Gains, 1999; Murray, 2000). In several studies cited by Murray (2000), linguistic features of CMC were analyzed. The conclusion reached was that writers/speakers conform to the expected social situation. It should be added, though, that they conform as best they can and as they understand the situation. It takes practice and experience to learn the register and conventions of any new discourse community, all of which are socially constructed. This may explain why student requests for OWL assistance are often reserved and incomplete; it also may explain how Shaun’s experience places him well within the learning curve for this medium. Even though students are comfortable with email, linguists have found that communicators have to adjust the

formality of their email writing when the context prompts it. When the physical characteristics are missing, as they are in CMC, impressions are left to text features, where there is language and paralanguage, but it has to be interpreted differently. Reading non-verbal cues and paralanguage is usually second nature, all a part of the language, but when communication becomes all textual, it takes a redefinition and a new awareness to interpret it (Flaherty, et al., 1998; Walther 1993; 1996).

### *Impression Formation Factors*

Role and pressure/expectations of others is closely tied to the desire and/or ability to form impressions of a client who only appears in text (Ferrara, 1999; Walther, 1996). Modernists will say that there is no reason to construct a writer out of the text, that the two are independent, not affected by each other, and have no meaning to each other. Postmodernists will say that the two are inextricably and forever linked, indivisible, providing all the meaning to each other. Whichever philosophy tutors identify themselves with is acceptable in writing center work, but it is necessary to read electronic text with some sense of how you might be reacting to the writer. Kimball (1997) said that the personal features come through in text: “We all enact our various identities in the language we produce” (p. 41). In addition, to know that is to be able to control your own electronic messages and responses in ways that communicate what you mean (Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000). In keeping with these tutors’ distinctive personalities and goals, each of them had different ways of interpreting text for impression formation, as is described next.

When asked about his impressions of the students he worked with for this study, Shaun was nearly stumped. All of his impressions were somewhat the same: that the students were polite in their requests, that they sent papers to the writing center indicated that they cared about their work. For example, in Interview 3, Shaun answered these questions, Did you get an impression of her? And, if so, how and when? in this way:

Well, no, I really can't. I could tell that she read the, the text that she was required to because she gave enough details. I think that made the point. So apparently she read the text. Which could probably say something for her right there. That she does her assignments. The fact that she sent it to us probably signifies that maybe, that she, well, definitely wants somebody to look over it. As to why she wants

somebody to look over it, maybe she acknowledges that she has problems with her writing that need to be looked at and addressed. . . . But I really can't get a clear idea just reading this. (Interview 3, p. 6)

His struggle with figuring out his impressions and where they come from, though, is a start at understanding the writer from the text.

Stephanie's discussion of her impressions from texts, which she has made nearly into a science, is a startling contrast to Shaun's. About the writer in Conference 1, she said: "I thought that she had picked a really cool topic, so that makes me think that she's not just trying to do what everybody else is doing. . . . I thought that because she did switch tenses a lot, it seemed like, lively" (Interview 1, p. 30). Referring to the student's use of pronouns, Stephanie said,

She was trying to make it universal, you know, she was trying to relate herself to the paper, relate the reader to the paper, trying to relate anybody else in general, you know. She wanted everybody, you know, to get something out of it. . . . She didn't want to leave anybody out, you know; she didn't want to use "he" all the way through and leave out "she". . . . And she, the-, feeling she wanted to have a lot of details. . . . she wanted people to be able to under-, she didn't want to be over anybody's head, it looks like, and I guess that's how she's being inclusive. (Interview 1, pp. 31-32)

This is a sophisticated attempt to construct the writer out of the writing, showing a close reading of the text and an awareness of the sub-text.

Melissa had yet a third way of thinking about impressions from text, one that fits her philosophy and her idea of role. Her dissection of the student's textual request and the paper itself gave her plenty of material for constructing impressions. Following are several examples from her discussion of how she does that:

Where they say the help requested I can tell how, how much time they're invested in the paper, or, maybe, what kind of student they are by the grammar, by their spelling, by their capitalization, and "I" even, and just little things like that. And the comments that they say, you know, "I really appreciate you taking the time," and, you know, that makes a difference. As silly as it seems, it, it really makes a difference. And even if there's no title on the paper, if they don't bother to fill in

who the professor is or what class it's for. I've had students who didn't even complete an email address. . . . You know, so things like that really, really make a difference. (Introductory Interview, p. 6)

On the textual features of one student's email message/request, Melissa said, "It shows me that that person has no self-esteem when they don't use capital I's. It shows me that that person doesn't want to take the time to use correct punctuation, that, maybe I'm, maybe I'm not important or that message is not important enough to take the time to do that. I just, I think if you know how to use it, then you ought to use it. If you know how to use proper grammar then you should use proper grammar all the time" (Interview 3, pp. 3-4).

Those were general concepts that Melissa has extracted from her experience. Her interpretation of one of her study clients was quite specific and shows how she uses her analytical assumptions for electronic text:

He focuses on grammar and style [in his request]; those are two things that I usually think about last. I, as a tutor, look at thesis and organization and content, and he didn't say anything about that, so he assumes his thesis is clear and his organization is fine and his content is fine. And so, this, "any obvious grammar mistakes"- . So he doesn't want the ones that might be more subtle. So I, I'm sure this is: "I just need somebody to look over to make sure the big stuff is taken care of." But it's not. It wasn't. And so, I think there's probably more work to do with this paper than he, maybe he wanted. But, there's not really much for me to go on. He doesn't capitalize the "I's, so that tells me either he's in a hurry or he's lazy or he doesn't think of himself as being knowledgeable or important. And no punctuation. And he does say "thanks," but never says "Jack," or, you know, doesn't ever tell us anything more than his email address. (Interview 3, pp. 23-24)

Her interpretation of the textual persona is well-reasoned, showing her experience with the medium and with students, and, perhaps, a hint of her personality and her individual perceptions. The point, though, is not to analyze her analysis of the text but, rather, to listen to how a reader sees the writer in the text and how he/she might be reacting to those impressions as well as to the text itself. These tutors use the information gained from their impressions to varying degrees to make some of their decisions about the technical

aspects they will use for the conference. Along with immediacy language, which the following discussion takes up, these impressions also set the social aspects of the conference.

### *Immediacy Factors*

Much of the discussion on immediacy and its component parts was discussed extensively in Chapter Four; therefore, this section will look exclusively at the combined immediacy features across the study. Trying to numerically rank immediacy is a subjective exercise, rather like trying to academically analyze and judge love letters. To treat that component more objectively, this study broke it down into the six factors that the tutors had to work with in the all-text communication: pronoun use, writing style and tone, emoticons and non-verbals, and personality. Once again, the percentages followed the participants' social intentions: Stephanie and Shaun used more pronouns in-text, 43% and 51%, respectively, as opposed to Melissa's 33%. The pronoun factor is not entirely reliable in and of itself, though. The CMC literature (Murray, 1991) does support the analysis of text for pronoun use to judge social intention, but the nature of the tutor's job complicates this factor. The tutor is, after all, interacting with a client one-to-one, so pronouns are somewhat unavoidable (although Shaun managed to construct quite a few comments without them in his first conference. As he became more comfortable and more cognizant of his intention to be personal in this medium during this study, his language became a little more relaxed; his pronoun use increased from 27% to 56% to 70% through his three conferences.)

Otherwise, there was a large gap in immediacy performance among the three participants. Stephanie used writing style and tone to close the psychological distance in 19% of her in-text comments, and emoticons and non-verbals in 13%; Shaun used style and tone in 8%, and no emoticons or non-verbals; Melissa used only four comments in two conferences that could be considered a use of writing style and tone in an attempt to be personal, and she used emoticons and non-verbals in only 2% of her 263 comments across the three student conferences. Recall that writing style and tone have been shown to adjust the social level of CMC by use of lexical choices that keep the tone conversational or formal (Gains, 1999).

### *Social Level Goals in Computer-mediated Conferencing*

Each of these factors can be traced to the tutor's goals for social level. Therefore, it might be useful to reconsider the social level goals that each of these participants intended to attain for their conferences. Stephanie: "I still put my personality into it [CM], like I don't feel like free from the sense of I have to be nice or personable, because I still do that, so it's, it's not like I'd rather interact with a computer than a person because that would be a sad state of affairs. . . . I would rather relate to a person, but I like about email that it's not that immediate response" (Exit Interview, p. 6) and "The only role model that I've had are, you know, personal and not through a computer. So I, maybe that's why I transfer, try to transfer, like, the personal to the computer" (p. 22) because "I have to make everything personal that I do" (p. 30). She is very aware of what she is doing: "I try to make my personality, I guess, come across. I think that's an important thing in f2f, and I don't want it to be lost over email" (Conference 1, p. 13).

Shaun's goal is to be personal but he has decided that it is not possible in the CM conference: "I would say a dialogue is necessary to teach writing. . . . Perhaps watching them as they, their facial expressions. . . body language. . . . I would say it's [CM] impersonal, merely because that dialogue's not there" (Exit Interview, p. 2), and the CMC field also supports his reasoning: social presence theory was used in early studies showing that reduced social cues means reducing personal levels of communication (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Walther, 1996). (Later studies have shown that when CM communicators meet over an extended time and when they anticipate meeting over time, the social presence factors equal, and can exceed, those of f2f meetings (Walther, 1996)). Shaun, still searching for a plausible method for getting the personal into this medium, added, "I could see maybe, like, doing a tutoring session over, like, an instant messenger type service, because then you at least have that student there talking to you and they can ask you questions, you can ask them questions, and, you can have that dialogue going there. But as far as, like, email goes, no" (Exit Interview, p. 1).

Melissa represents the opposite perspective and procedure from Stephanie: "Well, I'd rather not have, I'd rather have it not be personal. Well, it's easier to be honest with someone you don't know. On both a tutor and a student" (Exit Interview, p. 17) and "I just think, well, it's OK that we don't meet because it's a, it's a professional level. It's a

professional relationship, and even though writing is very personal, when you tutor you have to keep that. It's like a patient, doctor-patient relationship. You have to keep that level of privacy" (Introductory Interview, p. 7).

Sub-categories that made up the social aspects were clear, well defined, and shared among the three participants, as they all agreed that the social level of computer-mediated tutoring can be impersonal, personal, or hyperpersonal, definitions which the CMC literature offers (Baron, 1998; Walther, 1996), and the participants of this study further agreed that the tutor and student make that decision and negotiate it as they work together. As it turned out in this study, much by accident since there was no indication based on training, experience, personality, or any other obvious characteristic that the participants would differ so completely in this category, each participant expressed a different preference for and/or perception of social level for their work in this environment, and two of the participants were well able to manage that social level using the techniques discussed here.

Stephanie and Melissa achieved the social levels they had set for themselves, personal and impersonal, respectively. They did it by managing the factors that the literature of CMC describes as components of social presence (Flaherty, et al., 1998; Schweizen, Paechter, & Weidenmann, 2001; Walther, 1996) and by the components that developed out of the observations and interviews here. Their awareness of their individual goals for social presence in their CM conferences made the reality of it possible. Social level choices – personal or impersonal, and there is a wide range of choices between – are not imposed on tutors in f2f or CM conferences. The personalities and learning preferences of both student and tutor (Sherry, 2000), their relationship, goals, needs, work ethic, and the like, determine the choice of social level for any conference. But it is a choice that tutors should make on a conscious level. Stephanie and Melissa managed their conferences with an impressive level of awareness of what they were doing.

Stephanie wanted to keep the social level as personal as possible and her choice of interaction and immediacy factors show that: she used the highest level of each component. She also used the technical aspects to control the social. Stephanie's personal interest in the client's content was set in motion during her reading, which was highly

interactive. Stephanie's reading technique matches her goals for a personal interaction. She reads the text in a way that will help her to generate personal interest in the text and the person, as Simich-Dudgeon (1999) showed is possible in CMC speech communities, and as Stephanie explains here: "I will definitely put in my own opinions. . . . She might have all the research in the world, but if I say, 'Oh, I know what you're talking about, then, you know, that means her research has meant something. . . . If somebody had sent a paper like that [on gay and lesbian issues], I would have said: 'Hey, I'm in gay and lesbian studies class. I think this is a really fascinating paper'" (Interview 1, p. 19). She went on: "For some reason, most everything I read I can relate to myself. . . . I can always pretty much relate anything. Or I'll remember something I read or saw on the news . . . . Like if somebody talked about something in their paper that I've been through or I've had to deal with, I'm like, 'Oh, I know what you're saying right here because I've had to do that.' And I think that makes it more personal, too" (Introductory Interview, p. 18), and, "I have to find some way to care about it or else, it does-, I don't get anything out of it" (Interview 3, p. 20).

Melissa had predetermined that her CM conferences would be impersonal to a large extent, and she took control of that throughout each conference, using the least number of interaction and immediacy tactics for closing psychological distance in every category. Melissa exemplifies how the impersonal social level can work, and her reasoning is supported in the CMC literature. Walther (1996), for example, writes extensively about the social level choices available in CMC and, specifically, how the impersonal level is useful and desirable in certain situations (see also Coogan, 1995; Selfe, 1992). Task-oriented conferences, he argues, benefit from removing the "social hindrances" (p. 6) to "achieve strategic impersonality" (p. 13). Melissa has made a conscious decision and defends it:

I like the online stuff . . . because of the, the distance that there is. There's not that person; you don't have to worry about personal connections. You know, you don't have to know the student to find out about their writing. I mean, I think that, I can't think about it, I can't even articulate it, that feeling that the students have that this is not my instructor; it's somebody I don't even know, and per, me, as a tutor, this isn't someone that I know, so I don't have to take into consideration all

of that baggage that the student has. I think that's very helpful. Sometimes it's easier for them to take the criticism from someone they don't know. . . . And don't get me wrong, but I prefer online, because of the personal, the intimacy – I like that and I enjoy that with my students, but sometimes I think that gets in the way of our doing revision – and so the online stuff puts that distance back in there and we both can, we don't take it personally. If there's something wrong, it's not a personal affront. It's "Oh, this person is looking at my stuff as a writer, not as John Smith." And so, or the stringy hair, the things that we can't help.

(Introductory Interview, pp. 16-17)

The Social Aspects Table shows that some of the features Melissa chooses to eliminate from her interaction with students are the social presence factors that have been shown to make CM conferencing personal (Walther, 1996): pronouns – Melissa specifically mentions that names are too personal; psychological distance – rather than seeking to close it, she uses it to her and the student's advantage; personality – the term "baggage" above possibly indicates her feelings about that factor in CM conferencing; anonymity – Melissa assumes that anonymity can be comforting to the student and deals with it as a positive feature; impression formation (a term also used by Walther) – her comments here, along with some of her other reactions to this concept, make it clear that Melissa prefers not to examine the sub-text too closely for that, or to get personally involved with either the person or the text:

I try to distance myself from the content, you know. I don't care what you write about as long as it's, as it's, coherent and well-organized and that. I don't care what you write about. You could write about bestiality for all I care. I don't-, and the, and I pride myself on being able to do that, and being able to separate my opinions about what you're writing about, evaluating the paper as a writing. . . . And there are some very strong viewpoints that kids have and, you know, I can follow, follow what they're saying and I can see their logic and see their progression, but I will, I don't agree with what they have to say sometimes. So I look at their logic progression. I look at how they present their information and that kind of stuff, and I pride myself on being able to do that whether I agree with the, what the paper has to say or not. (Interview 3, p. 14)

Shaun, on the other hand, is not yet fully controlling his intended social level as he has described it. This study was set up, in part, to find discrepancies between a participant's perceptions of the technical and social aspects of the CM conference and their actual work in that environment as they describe it, act in it, and explain it, in ways that, though quite subjective, could account for and endorse the term "actual work." Shaun's difficulty with CM conferencing illustrates how that plan worked. Shaun's goal was to have a personal and technically defensible CM conference. Because he could not resolve the technical and social aspects, though, the conferences were not entirely successful or satisfactory to him. The social composition of Shaun's conferences were conflicted, as the totals in the tables tell: high interaction with person, role revealed entirely by self-monitoring language, high use of pronouns in end notes, moderate use of pronouns in in-text comments, very low use of style and tone, no use of emoticons or other non-verbal expression. Because this social presence is not yet realized, Shaun is unable to practice the writing center techniques he uses f2f. It is clear from the analysis of his work that Shaun's reading technique, that is, that he reads all or a large portion of a text out loud before beginning his responses, leads to his use of reader response approaches which leads to his focus on HOCs, and he is aware of that: "The bigger issues like content, like development of ideas, organization, I have to read it all the way through first and get an impression of what this paper is trying to say before I can address the really big concerns" (Interview 3, p. 19). The place to work on the CM conference with Shaun, then, is in the technique he chooses, purposefully, to communicate his responses to the client. For the conferences observed in this study, Shaun's comments were too often abject corrections (without explanation or example) or rather broad, vague criticisms ("Be attentive to redundancy and word choice as you revise" (Conference 2, E 4)). Shaun also needs instruction and practice in controlling the social level of the CM conference. He still views the technology of the OWL as a tool, one through which he should be able to transfer wholesale his tutoring techniques, a perspective discussed in Feenberg (1991) as instrumentalist and by Haas and Neuwirth (1994) as transparent, a theory of technology that discounts the effects of technology on writing and thinking.

### *Toward a Model for Tutor Training in Computer-mediated Conferencing*

The language tools found through this study can be used to make a CM writing conference technically and socially viable. More importantly, these skills can be taught and practiced by tutors-in-training, using an ID model based on their individual needs. Writing center conferences should not be set to one template or script, nor should the training. As seen in Melissa's Conference 3, following a pattern too closely can blind the reader to the myriad of possibilities for reader response. Tutors in a university writing center, as learners themselves, should experiment with both the technical and social aspects that are possible in the f2f and CM media. Only then will they become comfortable with adjusting their approaches, techniques, and social levels to fit their changing situations. Participants in CM conferencing need to be acutely aware of the different social situation that the medium places them in. Only when they understand how the absence of paralanguage (intonation, stress, silences, rhythm), context cues (paper, assignment), dialogue (immediate, co-present, simultaneous, synergistic), body language (facial expressions, gestures, body movements and reactions, such as smiles, nods, shifting), phatics (non-verbal sounds that round out the conversation), and the like, affect the context, can they begin working effectively in it (Flaherty, et al., 1998; Hsu & Sammons, 1998; Kimball, 1997; Moller, 1998). Practice, as well as knowledge of the CM environment, will assure participants that relationships through this medium are possible when they have experience with and knowledge of the sociolinguistic aspects (Thomsen, Straublaah, & Bolyard, 1998). Sensitivity to the linguistic features of the text and sub-text will also help the tutor begin to understand the client's attitude and intention about the CM conference and about his/her work (Coogan, 1995; Kimball, 1997), another vital key to the success of the conference. This is difficult online, but not impossible, as tutors learn strategies for uncovering the clues and as they begin to feel comfortable adjusting their strategies to fit the situation.

Each of these tutors expressed surprise at what they had learned about themselves, about how they tutor, what their personal needs and preferences are, how they appear in text to others, how they form and convey impressions in text, and how they learn. Stephanie and Shaun remarked on the benefits of this study model, specifically the

observations and feedback, to their understanding of their tutoring processes. Stephanie put it this way:

I guess now, I just, I sort of am more conscious of it. Before [this study], I mean, I, of course I was conscious of it while I was doing it but I didn't really pay attention to whether I did certain things with certain papers and not with other papers. And before I just, like, "OK, I have this work to do, I'll do it, and I didn't really, and I, I didn't change, really, what I did. When I was doing the process, but it just made me think about the way that I did it. (Exit Interview, p. 1)

Shaun said, "Mainly it was through your observations that I've become more aware of how I actually do things. I mean, it was something that I did, but I just didn't think about it" (Exit Interview, p. 8).

It is of interest, though, to examine each participant's discussion of the origins of their tutoring processes, f2f and CM. Not one of them could cite a grounding philosophy or major theory that explained their concept of tutoring or the techniques they chose. When asked to explain their work, they drew mainly on individual shaping experiences. Shaun and Stephanie both talked about classes and teachers whose response techniques had been a model for their work, while Melissa drew on conferencing techniques she was learning through the graduate teaching fellow program she was enrolled in at the time of the study. In tutor training, discussion of the origins of response techniques are helpful for building a philosophy and for understanding theories that explain writing center work, the technical and social aspects.

Looking back over each of the participants' conferences and the discussions with them, it seems clear how a model for CM conference training might be developed based on the activities that supported Stephanie's and Melissa's work, the participants who were successful and satisfied with this enterprise. It is coincidental, but also instructional and evidentiary, that these two tutors have quite different expectations, needs, and ideas about CM conferencing, providing a more complete picture of how the CM space does not require that all tutors work under the same theories. This study illustrates that the tutor can manage the conference based on his/her goals and needs and those of the client. To manage that, though, the tutor needs to be trained in writing center theory and

practice, f2f and CM. The following is a brief recap of Stephanie's training and the footprint of that training found in her CM work.

Stephanie decided she wanted a conference not so much unlike f2f and on a personal level. She found the means to do that. Trained in a for-credit, 300-level seminar, she learned the pedagogical approaches that work in conference teaching as well as the techniques that are used in writing centers, the processes and the underlying theories. In the accompanying practicum, she observed and was observed by experienced tutors as she practiced the approaches and techniques. She engaged in metacognitive activities during the course, writing journal entries that described and analyzed each conference she was involved in, doing role play, making lists of techniques she observed and practiced in conferences, responded to readings on writing center theory and practice, reacted to a variety of models of conference teaching. Her idea of CM conferencing conforms to what she works for in the actual conference: interactive techniques (tutor → student → text) on a personal level. She manages the technical aspects by adapting writing center reading techniques, pedagogical approaches, responding strategies, and focuses to the CM medium. She manages the social aspects by carefully considering the social level that is appropriate, learning how to read others' subtexts, and remaining aware of the features of written language that can convey her meaning best in a task that puts her in a paraprofessional role in which she might be teaching, learning, collaborating, empathizing, and/or correcting, all in text, all without the assistance of that elusive and not quite understood f2f paralanguage. She chooses different approaches for different tasks; her focus is guided by the needs of the student and the paper. She makes a valiant effort to set the social level at personal, and she can identify and defend each of these choices and methods.

Melissa, who represents different technical and social choices, is nonetheless successful at CM conferencing as well. The intersection between Stephanie's and Melissa's experiences is in background work and practice. Melissa, as a graduate teaching fellow in the English Department, has read extensively in the areas of composition and pedagogy and has practiced conference teaching. As part of the training in that program, she has participated in seminars that examine student profiles: academic preparations, developmental levels, learning characteristics, and the like. Her choices for

CM conferencing were made in intellectually well-informed and thoughtful ways. Therefore, she was able to manage her conferences technically and socially.

Whether the CM conference is personal or impersonal is not a writing center philosophy. Tutors should find their level of comfort for conferences, f2f or CM, but they should be specifically trained to manage the technical and social aspects, to know the factors that can help them adjust the levels, because the electronic space is different and it affects the nature of the conference, as this study shows and as is supported by the work of Hobson (1998), Kastman-Breuch and Racine (2000), Monroe (1998), Rickly (1998), and others. OWL work represents a different working space from others studied in the CMC literature. Liu and Ginther (1999) and Walther (1996) studied task-oriented and social-oriented CM spaces and found distinct features of each; the OWL can and does represent both. Walther (1993) and others (Schweizen, Paechter, & Weidenmann, 2001) have found that impressions of self and others in the CM environment require text clues that take practice and time to form and to interpret. They concluded that time is the determining factor for impression formation or “relational development” (Walther, 1996, p. 11). Ferrara, et al. (1991), on the other hand, suggest that “facts of identity are nonessential matters” (p. 14). Tutors need ways to understand how this environment can work for them and for their clients and how to adapt strategies that fit their intentions for the CM conference. OWLs do not offer the advantage of tutor-client time together, in cyberspace or otherwise. Walther’s 1996 study offers compelling evidence, though, that participants in CMC begin to work out a relationship based merely on the possibility that they may meet again online. He says that time is most certainly a factor in the development of a relationship online, but that there is evidence that shows “a very resilient view of humans communicating. . . [using] cues available to them” and he “[rejects] the notion that CMC is inherently impersonal” (p. 13).

#### *Toward an Instructional Design Model for Tutor Training in Computer-mediated Conferencing*

The end of this study is the beginning of the construction of a training model for online writing lab tutors. An instructional design model is one way to conceptualize a training program that is both individual and inclusive. The model itself can be constantly redesigned, based on formative and summative evaluations, to fit the mission and

philosophy of the center, as well as the individual characteristics of the tutors-in-training (Yancey, 2002). Using the ID model – analyzing needs, setting goals, forming objectives, choosing instructional activities, giving feedback to practice, and designing appropriate assessments that will lead the trainee to set further goals – can allow the trainer and the student to personalize the training and to build a training program. Following explanations of each step in the model is an illustration based on Shaun’s case.

Needs analyses can be done that will give the trainer an idea of the starting point of new tutors, that is, what they know about writing and reading in the CM environment and their own strengths and preferences in writing conferences. Along with the trainer, tutors should name their personal goals and objectives for learning the CM conferencing techniques. Training plans should begin with goal setting, which should be based on a needs assessment. Through discussion with tutors-in-training, the trainer can determine the background knowledge and experience, the theories and practice, that the tutor is bringing into the program. The initial plans should also be predicated on discussion about and assessment of the trainee’s learning styles and preferences. This initial needs assessment begins the training plan by giving the instructor a view of the trainee’s beginning point. The introductory interview with Shaun revealed that he was starting this work with no theoretical background in CMC, composition, or writing center work. His experience was limited to personal online writing response and to f2f writing center tutoring. He also had no background knowledge about teaching/learning styles.

The second step in the needs analysis procedure might be to observe the trainee’s tutoring style. It is at this step that the Technical and Social Aspects Models would be useful. The trainer can observe the tutor at work and then, using the conference transcript, study the approaches, techniques, and foci to better understand the trainee’s technical work and, using the Social Aspects Model, examine the interaction factors and the immediacy factors, all of which add up to determine the degree of social presence (personal to impersonal) of the tutor’s work. The trainer might use the Technical and Social Aspects Models as they were used herein or the models might be used as rubrics, a checklist that will, along with the observer’s descriptions and assessments, offer a simple visual of the tutor’s actual processes.

In Shaun's case, the Technical Aspects Model shows that his work follows sound pedagogical approaches and the focus of his tutorial is on HOCs more than half of the time. Under the category of Writing Center Techniques, though, Shaun needs work. Since he has not had training as a writing center tutor, Shaun has not been exposed to the theory and practice of tutoring, so it is not surprising that his online work is not well grounded in the techniques that are valued in the field. The evaluation of the social aspects of Shaun's online work also reveals areas that need more work. In the introductory interview, Shaun expressed a desire to make his conferences personal, but he went on to say that it was not possible to make an asynchronous conference personal. A look at the individual components of Shaun's interaction category shows that he brings up his role in communication with the client and that he does use some self-monitoring language; these are indications that Shaun is comfortable with his role as tutor. A look at the individual components of his immediacy category, though, shows where work can be done that may make the CM conference more understandable for Shaun. In fact, over the course of the study, Shaun did become more comfortable with the setting; each paper revealed that Shaun used more pronouns in his communication with the students, which made the notes less formal and more friendly. The immediacy factors that Shaun may need to learn about are Writing Style and Tone, Emoticons and Non-verbal Conveyances, and Personality in text.

Goal Setting. The work of this dissertation brings the model to this point, to the place where the instructor and the trainee begin setting goals for online writing lab work. Based on the needs analysis, the trainer and trainee can discuss which technical and social aspects the tutor-in-training will study and practice. Making such a decision together can make the training more collaborative between the trainer and student-tutor. Shaun indicated in his introductory interview and in each subsequent interview that he prefers a more personal connection with his clients; indeed, the lack of that connection is his sole reason for disliking the CM conference. Shaun also realized, and the interviews and observations confirmed, that his technical work in CM tutoring needs some attention.

Practice instructional activities. The trainer can then formulate a plan of instruction that includes multiple activities that will be useful for individual tutors based on their needs and that will be adaptable to their levels of knowledge and experience:

metacognitive work; practice; role-playing; observation with feedback; self-description; definition activities, that is, learner characteristics and preferences (Sherry, 2000; Stone, 1996, as cited in Sherry, 2000); and personal observations and descriptions of a variety of models of online work, all can work at each level of the student's development as a writing center tutor. Shaun's work should include the above activities and should focus on a variety of writing center techniques, perhaps trying out several technical strategies that will give him practice.

Kastman-Breuch and Racine (2000) suggest an extensive analysis of text as a training exercise to build an appreciation for and to learn more about the textual presentation of self, as Feenberg (1989) for one, described. Tutors should analyze text for impressions of other and then do close analyses of their own texts as objective readers. A linguistic analysis, such as the Gere and Abbott Scheme (1985), Spradley's (1980, as cited in Sherry, 2000) outline, or the technical and social aspects model produced here would be useful for this task, as well as exercises that have tutors examining their personal technical and social choices. Severino's (1992) Features for Rhetorically Analyzing Collaboration(s) is another useful tool for scrutinizing some of the ways tutors perceive the client and his/her intentions, the status and possibilities of the client's text, and the outcome of the session, for what Severino calls "situational and interpersonal dynamics" (p. 54) of a writing center conference. Tutors-in-training should begin connecting their reflections to writing center, composition, and computer-mediated communication theories in an effort to ground their work in the fields that have contributed to the techniques and understandings of their work, because, as Cooper (1987, as cited in Selfe, 1990) said, "Theory is prior to, and essential to, good practice" (p. 1).

Using the Social Aspects table to draw some conclusions about Shaun's social presence in text and going back to the interview notes, it is clear that he is not achieving the social level that he prefers. Shaun's communication showed very low use of writing style and tone, no use of emoticons and non-verbal conveyances, and no indication of his personality in the text. In his case, the trainer might have Shaun practice close readings of text, his and others'. In this way, he can begin practicing with the concepts of impression formation. By examining other tutors' conference work and listening to them describe

their clients, he might develop a better eye for the sociolinguistics of computer-mediated communication.

Students should be encouraged to begin creating metaphors of online tutoring, connecting those to their developing ideas about pedagogy, and they should work on constructing their philosophies for CM conferencing, an activity that is important for f2f tutor training and tutor work, as well (Lunsford, 1991; Severino, 1992). Readings on pedagogical philosophies that are appropriate for tutor training in a writing center might include Coogan (1999), Harris (1995), Lave and Wenger (1991, as cited in Sherry, 2000), Bereiter (1994), Welch (2002), and Benjamin (1995), to name a few.

Consulting the introductory and exit interviews with Shaun, it is obvious that he credits his response techniques to several influential teachers and to his experience with serious writing groups. Reading in the area of composition and writing center theory will help him to better see how those teachers and groups were functioning within well-grounded philosophies. Though writing center tutors do not often discuss their tutoring philosophies, a good foundation will include knowledge of the origins of their preferred methods, and they should be able to defend them.

Journal writing should be included in the instruction, which will give tutors opportunities to deliberate on their work, helping them to become “reflective practitioners” (Rickly, 1998, p. 44), and that might include efforts to connect their practice with theory. Gillespie, et al. (2002) suggest that the act of constructing theory, “theorizing,” offers new ways of understanding the work. They quote Gary Olson (1995) to explain that “the act of engaging in critical, philosophical, hermeneutic speculation about a subject . . . can lead us into lines of inquiry that challenge received notions or entrenched understandings that may no longer be productive; it can create new vocabularies for talking about a subject and thus new ways of perceiving it” (p. xxiv).

Again Shaun provides an interesting illustration of how this part of the model might work. During the exit interview, Shaun expressed his appreciation for the experience this study had offered him. He was surprised that the observations, descriptions, conversations about the conferences, and the examination of the conference text had helped him to more clearly see and understand his own work. A reflective journal would mean one way of self-study.

Assessment. Tutoring is an ongoing developmental process that takes time, practice, construction of a knowledge base, and critical examination of one's own practices, which includes the models the tutor has of school, teaching, and learning. King and Kitchener (1994) offer a "reflective judgment model" that is a way of describing an adult's cognitive development level that could assist trainers and students in understanding their ways of knowing and those of their clients, in terms of developmental level (see also Yancey, 2002, for other reflection techniques). This model, much like Perry's (1979), is one tool that is at least useful for talking about dual, relative, and reflective thinking (Duffelmeyer, 2000), as is Jenlink and Carr's (1996, as cited in Sherry, 2000) taxonomy of online conversations that also roughly parallels Perry's scheme. Periodic assessment should be a routine part of writing center work, during and after training. Observations should be designed to offer a description of the conference that will be helpful in the discussion about the experience from the tutor's and the observer's perspectives. Writing center techniques should be practiced in the CM environment, and discussions should be on-going concerning how the f2f techniques transfer to the CM space and how CM communication affects tutors' choices and their relationships with clients. The discussions might be based on the assessments and on continuous questioning, practice, and reading in the CM area. Discussions should include how the medium affects writing, reading, thinking, and interpersonal dynamics. Readings might include McLuhan and Fiore (1967), Sherry (2000), Ong (1982), Baron (1998), and Bolter (1991). New ways of thinking about roles and ownership issues, as affected by electronic interaction (Selfe, 1990), should be explored. Reading in the field of CMC on text cues that reveal the writer (Davis & Brewer, 1997; Ferrara, et al., 1991; Flaherty, et al., 1998; Hawisher & Selfe, 1998; Herring, 2000; Murray, 2000; Walther, 1993) will help tutors begin to find the writer in the text.

The original intent of this study was to create a tutor training model for the CM conference in a university writing center. The questions that emerged, however, were directed more toward the nature of the CM conference, and it became obvious that an analysis of the CM conference should precede the instructional treatments. Like theories of pedagogy and composition, like CM communication, like instructional design, all areas that are part of writing center research and knowledge, we are always approaching

answers and then finding new questions, adjusting the functions with respect to the variables. This study only adds to the calculus of tutoring writing. The successes of the tutors in this study appear to be an indication of what is critical in the developmental process of learning to be an effective writing center tutor in the computer-mediated environment; therefore, models for training in individual writing centers with varying needs might be based on the components that emerged here, models that can be constantly revised as the writing center field expands academically and technologically.

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Appendix A  
Interview Guide  
for Tutor Participants

## Interview Guides for Participants

### Introductory Interview:

1. When you first tutored, how did you learn?
2. Can you reconstruct your first tutoring attempts?
  - a. What did you do for the student?
  - b. What did you do for the paper?
3. Can you reconstruct how you felt during your first tutoring work?
4. Was computer-mediated conferencing a different experience? How?
5. What was your first computer-mediated conference like?
6. Did you do things differently? What? Why?
7. Do you prefer face-to-face conferencing or computer-mediated conferencing? Why?
8. Which mode works better? Why?
9. Is the focus the same for you whether you conference f2f or CM?
10. What is your role as a tutor in the CM conference?
11. What is your communication style in the CM conference?
12. Describe a typical CM conference.

### Exit Interview:

1. Do you feel freer reading, marking, talking in the f2f or CM conference environment?
2. Are your ideas stronger, different in one mode or the other? Is the tutoring process different?
3. Is the CM environment a good place to learn to respond as a writing tutor?
4. How would you have liked to learn CM conferencing?
5. Does CM conferencing help your writing skills/reading/thinking/tutoring? How?
6. What kinds of papers do you prefer online and why?
7. Do the students' requests help in CM conferences? Why are they so abbreviated?
8. Are you as personal f2f as CM?
9. Do you give compliments f2f and online?

10. Is CM conferencing impersonal, personal, or hyperpersonal?
11. Do you need for it to be personal?
12. What is your philosophy for CM conferencing? What theories do you use, pedagogy, composition, writing center?
13. Do you form impressions of the writer of electronic papers? Where do you get those impressions?
14. What is your communication style in the CM conference?
15. Describe your thinking process as you conference in the CM environment.

Appendix B  
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Information

Included in this appendix:

Expedited Approval Letter, dated September 29, 2000

Form – Informed Consent for Tutors who took part in the study

Form – Informed Consent for Students who submitted electronic paper

**Institutional Review Board**

Dr. David M. Moore  
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair  
Assistant Vice Provost for Research Compliance  
CVM Phase II - Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442  
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033  
e-mail: moored@vt.edu

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Ann Moser EDCI 0317  
John Burton Teaching and Learning 0313

FROM: David M. Moore 

DATE: April 2, 2002

SUBJECT: **Expedited Approval** – “Theories, Techniques, and the Impacts of  
Computer-mediated Conferencing in a University Writing Center” – IRB  
#02-199

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective April 2, 2002.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. It is your responsibility to report to the IRB any adverse reactions that can be attributed to this study.

To continue the project past the 12 month approval period, a continuing review application must be submitted (30) days prior to the anniversary of the original approval date and a summary of the project to date must be provided. My office will send you a reminder of this (60) days prior to the anniversary date.

cc:File

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: Theories, Techniques, and the Impacts of Computer-Mediated Conferencing in a University Writing Center

Investigator(s) Ann Moser

**I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

This research study will generate a description of how tutors work in a computer-mediated writing conference. Because this is a relatively new writing center space, there have been few empirical studies added to the field of writing center research. Writing tutors generally apply writing center techniques, formed from composition pedagogies, as they work with students on-line but this way of tutoring is intuitive, not developed out of theory and practice. There is a need for research that will lead to a better understanding of how tutors learn to work in an electronic environment, research that will produce knowledge that can be applied to tutor training programs.

Research in computer-mediated writing center conferencing will build stronger tutor training programs as well as contribute to other fields. The research will start with the understanding that there are significant behavior, communication, working, and tutoring differences between online tutoring and face-to-face tutoring (Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000; Monroe, 1998; Rickley, 1998) that will affect tutor training. The research for this study will include this question: How do these differences manifest themselves in tutoring strategies, techniques, and expectations, and in composition and pedagogical philosophies and theories?

The subject pool will be selected from those students at Radford University who have either 1) elected to take the training class that the researcher teaches: Writing Center Seminar & Practicum, 2) chosen to take positions as tutors in the Radford University Writing Center, or 3) chosen to volunteer as tutors in the Radford University Writing Center. The students in this pool have, then, self-selected as possible participants because of their interest in writing center work. The researcher will select four participants from this pool on the basis of experience, level of study at the university, and training.

**II. Procedures**

The research project will take place during a 6-week period of the academic year and will require approximately 8-10 hours of your time. The research procedures are as follows:

- a. Participant/Observer. The description of electronic writing conferences will be done as I, the researcher in this study, sit in on three Online Writing Lab conferences that you, as tutor, have with student clients. I will write descriptions during the conference and carry on normal writing center conversation during the tutorial. I will audiotape

the conversation for later transcription, analysis, and discussion. The Online Writing Lab conferences that you will participate in for the study will be of the usual length for Writing Center sessions, 45 minutes to one hour.

- b. Transcripts of Online Writing Lab sessions. I will make copies of each Online Writing Lab tutorial, which will include electronic requests from clients and electronically submitted papers with your responses. If there is other correspondence concerning the tutorial under consideration, that, too will become part of the study.
- c. Interviews. I will interview you after each of the three Online Writing Lab sessions. The focus of the interview will begin with the transcript of the tutorial. I will ask about your reactions to the tutorial: how effective it was; what the client's response was; what parts of the writing you focused on and why; your description of the differences between online and face-to-face writing center work; advantages and disadvantages of online work. Questions from there will focus on your descriptions, interpretations, and explanations of the tutorial. I will also ask questions concerning your preferred medium for tutoring, and why; reactions to the online tutoring experience; what kinds of communication styles you use during your tutoring sessions; and your suggestions for effective and efficient methods and ideas for training programs.

Preliminary interviews will introduce the project and exit interviews will provide an opportunity for you and me to reflect on the research opportunity. In all, there will be five interviews audiotaped: one introductory, one after each of the three sessions, and one exit interview, each 30 minutes to one hour in length, depending on how the conversation proceeds.

- d. Tutorial Reports. As participating tutor in the study, you will complete tutorial reports for the Online Writing Lab conferences. These reports will be used in the research study and then kept on file in the Writing Center, as is usual for all writing center tutorials.
- e. Final Paper. You will be asked to write a final reflective paper that will give an overview of the project from your perspective. Prompts will guide the paper so that I can collect information and reactions from all participating tutors on a number of common areas: descriptions, interpretations, and explanations of Online Writing Lab tutorials; experience gained; understanding of the medium, for example.

To summarize: As a participating tutor in this study, you will be observed during three Online Writing Lab conferences, at times convenient to and scheduled by you, in the Radford University Writing Center. After each of the three conferences, I will interview you about that particular conference. Participation in this study is not part of your work as a Radford University Writing Center tutor. Evaluation of your work is not a part of this study; you may withdraw at any time during the study for any reason and with no consequences to your status as a writing center tutor.

**III. Risks**

There are no more than minimal risks in this research project.

**IV. Benefits**

There are no benefits to you as participant in this study.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your anonymity, as a participant in the study, will be preserved by the use of pseudonyms. The data from the study will become a part of the research material and will be preserved intact as well as extrapolated for evidence, ideas, and examples in the paper that I will produce.

Audiotaping will be a primary source of data collection. Taping will give me the opportunity to observe, describe, and talk to you during the Online Writing Lab sessions. Additionally, the transcribing of the tapes will ensure that I will scrutinize the conversation and interviews closely and from several perspectives. I plan to use the transcripts for analysis of discourse. The act of transcribing the tapes is a part of the analysis procedure, one through which I can begin to hear and see categories of functions and foci. The audiotapes will be kept by me, but will only be used to transcribe from and to recheck transcriptions. You will have access to the transcripts, which will be used during the interview as one focus for discussion of sessions. You may contact me at a later date for a summary of the research results.

**VI. Compensation**

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any compensation.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from a study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, you will not be penalized in any way. You are free not to answer any questions in the interviews that you may choose without penalty.

There may be circumstances under which I may determine that you should not continue as a subject. In that event, I will talk this over with you and explain the circumstances.

**VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Instructional Technology

April 10, 2002  
IRB Approval Date

November 30, 2002  
Approval Expiration Date

## IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- Take part in introductory and exit interview
- Maintain regular Writing Center schedule
- Take Online Writing Center submissions during research time slots (3)
- Submit client electronic requests and papers with comments
- Submit tutorial reports for the three OWL conferences of the project
- Write a final reflection paper on the research experience, following prompts

## Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

---

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Subject signature \_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

<u>Ann Moser</u> Investigator(s)	<u>831-6128/amoser@radford.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>Dr. John Burton</u> Faculty Advisor	<u>231-7020/jburton@vt.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>Dr. Jan Nespor</u> Departmental Reviewer/Department Head	<u>231-8327/nespor@vt.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>David M. Moore</u> Chair, IRB Office of Research Compliance Research & Graduate Studies	540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu Telephone/e-mail

This Informed Consent is valid from 2/27/02 to 11/30/02.

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: Theories, Techniques, and the Impacts of Computer-Mediated Conferencing in a University Writing Center

Investigator(s) Ann Moser

**I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

This research study will generate a description of how tutors work in a computer-mediated writing conference. Because this is a relatively new writing center space, there have been few empirical studies added to the field of writing center research. Writing tutors generally apply writing center techniques, formed from composition pedagogies, as they work with students on-line but this way of tutoring is intuitive, not developed out of theory and practice. There is a need for research that will lead to a better understanding of how tutors learn to work in an electronic environment, research that will produce knowledge that can be applied to tutor training programs.

Research in computer-mediated writing center conferencing will build stronger tutor training programs as well as contribute to other fields. The research will start with the understanding that there are significant behavior, communication, working, and tutoring differences between online tutoring and face-to-face tutoring (Kastman-Breuch & Racine, 2000; Monroe, 1998; Rickley, 1998) that will affect tutor training. The research for this study will include this question: How do these differences manifest themselves in tutoring strategies, techniques, and expectations, and in composition and pedagogical philosophies and theories?

The subject pool will be selected from those students at Radford University who have either 1) elected to take the training class that the researcher teaches: Writing Center Seminar & Practicum, 2) chosen to take positions as tutors in the Radford University Writing Center, or 3) chosen to volunteer as tutors in the Radford University Writing Center. The students in this pool have, then, self-selected as possible participants because of their interest in writing center work. The researcher will select four participants from this pool on the basis of experience, level of study at the university, and training.

The study will also include student-client participants. Each of the nine clients for the study will be chosen as they submit papers to the Radford University Online Writing Lab.

**II. Procedures**

The research project is taking place during a 6-week period of the academic year. This study will require no additional time for you, but it will require your permission to use the paper you submit electronically for writing center responses. The research procedures are as follows:

- a. Participant/Observer. The description of electronic writing conferences will be done as I, the researcher, sit in on the Online Writing Lab conference that you, as client, have with a Radford University Writing Center tutor. I will write descriptions during the conference and carry on normal writing center conversation with the tutor during the tutorial. I will audiotape the conversation for later transcription, analysis, and discussion. This observation will be done during the tutorial and will not interfere with your personal work. It will, however, have as a focus your electronic submission.
- b. Transcripts of Online Writing Lab sessions. I will make copies of each Online Writing Lab tutorial, which will include the introductory electronic request from you and your electronically submitted papers with your tutor's responses. If there is other correspondence concerning the tutorial under consideration, that, too will become part of the study.
- c. Interviews. I will interview the tutor after he/she has completed the online session concerning your paper. The focus of the interview will begin with the transcript of the tutorial. I will ask about the tutor's reactions to the tutorial as these examples show: how effective it was; what your responses were; the tutor's description of the differences between online and face-to-face writing center work; advantages and disadvantages of online work. Questions from there will focus on the tutor's descriptions, interpretations, and explanations of the tutorial. I will also ask questions concerning the tutor's preferred medium for tutoring, and why; reactions to the online tutoring experience; what kinds of communication styles both you and the tutor use during your tutoring sessions; and the tutor's suggestions for effective and efficient methods and ideas for training programs.
- d. Tutorial Reports. The participating tutor will complete tutorial reports for the Online Writing Lab conferences, as is usual for every tutorial that takes place in the Writing Center. These reports, of which yours will be one, will be used in the research study and then kept on file in the Writing Center, as is usual for all writing center tutorials.
- e. Final Paper. The tutor will be asked to write a final reflective paper that will give an overview of the project from his/her perspective. Prompts will guide the paper so that I can collect information and reactions from all participating tutors on a number of common areas: descriptions, interpretations, and explanations of Online Writing Lab tutorials; experience gained; understanding of the medium, for example. The tutor may refer to your paper and/or your responses and requests in the paper. Your name will be changed, however, to protect your privacy.

### **III. Risks**

There are no more than minimal risks in this research project.

#### **IV. Benefits**

There are no benefits to you as participant in this study.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your anonymity, as a participant in the study, will be preserved by the use of pseudonyms. The data from the study will become a part of the research material and will be preserved intact as well as extrapolated for evidence, ideas, and examples in the paper that I will produce.

Audiotaping, transcripts of the online writing center sessions, and writing center clients' submissions, of which your paper will be one, will be the important sources of data collection. Taping will give me the opportunity to observe, describe, and talk to the tutor during the Online Writing Lab sessions, and that may include conversation about your submission and requests/responses. The transcribing of the tapes and the computer-generated transcripts of writing center sessions will ensure that I will scrutinize the tutorials closely and from several perspectives.

The audiotapes and will be kept by me, but will only be used to transcribe from and to recheck transcriptions. The transcripts of the online writing center session may become part of the text of this study, and that will include the text of your request and your paper, as well as any other correspondence you have with the tutor concerning the paper under consideration. You may have access to the transcripts and to a summary of the study. You may contact me at a later date for a summary of the research results.

#### **VI. Compensation**

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any compensation.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions during the tutorial without penalty. There may be circumstances under which I may determine that you should not continue as a subject. In that event, I will talk this over with you and explain the circumstances.

#### **VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of \_\_\_Instructional Technology\_\_\_\_\_

April 10, 2002  
IRB Approval Date

11/30/02  
Approval Expiration Date

**IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

Submit client electronic requests and an electronic paper for tutor response.

**Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

<u>Ann Moser</u> Investigator(s)	<u>831-6128/amoser@radford.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>Dr. John Burton</u> Faculty Advisor	<u>231-7020/jburton@vt.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>Dr. Jan Nespor</u> Departmental Reviewer/Department Head	<u>231-8327/nespor@vt.edu</u> Telephone/e-mail
<u>David M. Moore</u> Chair, IRB Office of Research Compliance Research & Graduate Studies	540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu Telephone/e-mail

This Informed Consent is valid from 2/27/02 to 11/30/02.

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

Appendix C  
Acronym Key

## Acronym Key

### Participants:

SS – Stephanie Saunders, tutor, undergraduate work study student

SC – Shaun Corley, tutor, graduate teaching fellow assigned to the writing center

MS – Melissa Sheppard, tutor, graduate teaching fellow in the English Department

### Transcriptions and Conference Papers:

Conference – Refers to the electronic conference paper from the student including tutor's comments.

Interview – Interview based on conference paper. "Interview 1," for example, refers to the interview transcription based on computer-mediated conference #1. Page numbers refer to interview transcriptions (available upon request).

C – In-text comment from the tutor's responses to the client. Comments are numbered by sentence.

F – Front note comment from the tutor's responses to the client. Also numbered by sentence.

E – End note from the tutor's responses to the client. Numbered by sentence.

### Other Acronyms:

F2f – face-to-face

CM – computer-mediated

CMC – computer-mediated communication

HOCs – Higher orders of concern

LOCs – Lower orders of concern

Appendix D  
Dates of Conferences by Participant

## Dates of Conferences by Participant

### Stephanie (SS):

Introductory Interview – March 29, 2002

Conference #1 – April 4, 2002

Conference #2 – April 11, 2002

Conference #3 – April 22, 2002

Exit Interview – April 30, 2002

### Shaun (SC):

Introductory Interview – March 9, 2002

Conference #1 – March 22, 2002

Conference #2 – March 28, 2002

Conference #3 – March 29, 2002

Exit Interview – April 12, 2002

### Melissa (MS):

Introductory Interview – February 27, 2002

Conference #1 – March 20, 2002

Conference #2 – March 27, 2002

Conference #3 – April 18, 2002

Exit Interview – April 24, 2002

Appendix E  
Vita

**Ann Hager Moser  
Curriculum Vita**

**Address:** 1278 Mountain Pass Road  
Blue Ridge, VA 24064  
703-977-1579  
amoser@radford.edu

**Education:**

Virginia Polytechnic and State University Blacksburg, VA	8/96-12/02	Ph.D. Instructional Technology
Saint Michael's College Colchester, Vermont	6/94-8/94	Advanced Certification for TESL
Saint Michael's College	6/91-8/91	Certification for TESL
Radford University Radford, VA	9/85-6/88	M.A. English
Barton College Wilson, NC	9/68-8/72	B.S. Biology

**Experience:**

Radford University                      English Instructor: 101, 101 ESL, 102, 102 ESL, 314 (Writing Center Seminar & Practicum); Writing Center Director; Supervisor of Graduate Teaching Fellows in English Department GTF/Mentor Program; Coordinator, Appalachian Arts & Studies in the Schools.

Dr. Parks Lanier, Chair 8/94-12/97  
Dr. Rosemary Guruswamy 1/98-8/02

Instructor of English 101 and 102 and sections of composition and research writing for ESL students; Director of the Radford University Writing Center: supervise four undergraduate workstudy tutors and three graduate students in the center, which serves approximately 1200 students per year. Instructor of English 314: Writing Center Seminar & Practicum, which trains tutors and offers an elective to students interested in conference style teaching. Class includes composition theory, learning theory, learning styles, grammar review, tutoring techniques, and working with LD and ESL writers. Coordinator of Appalachian Arts & Studies in the Schools, an outreach program from the Appalachian Regional Studies Center of Radford University. As such, coordinate

meetings and workshops, group activities, correspondence among 50 university student-mentors, 100 high school students, and 10 high school teachers. Instructor for PRAXIS review of grammar and writing.

Radford University                      English Instructor: 101, 102, 202; Writing Center Director;  
Radford, VA                              ESL Writing Instructor

Dr. Grace Edwards, Chair  
8/93-6/94

Instructor in ENG 101: Introduction to Expository Writing; ENG 102: Reading, Writing, and Research Skills; and ENG 202: Masterpieces of British Literature. Developed and instructed pilot class of ENG 101 and 102 for second language speakers. Managed University Writing Center with four undergraduate and two graduate tutors. Serviced all university students and faculty. Developed volunteer staff in Writing Center.

Radford University                      English Instructor: 101, 102, 202; Writing Center Co-  
director

Dr. Grace Edwards, Chair  
8/91-5/93

Instructor in ENG 101, 102, and 202. Co-director of University Writing Center. Duties included interviewing, hiring, and training undergraduate workstudy tutors. Planned and led special topic training sessions, including techniques for tutoring second language speakers.

Radford University                      English Instructor/Mentor; Writing tutor for International  
Students

Dr. Warren Self, Chair  
8/89-5/91

Mentor to three Graduate Teaching Assistants in English. Provided guidance in syllabus design, assignment production, lesson planning, classroom management, conferencing, and grading. Supervised and evaluated classes. Served on Policy Committee of Graduate Program. Co-edited *Radford University Graduate Assistant Handbook*. Participated in bi-weekly workshops focusing on philosophies and techniques for teaching writing. Teacher of record for classes taught by graduate students. Instructor for three (Fall) freshman writing classes and two (Spring) classes.

Worked with international students during Spring semester. Co-writer, with Ms. Jan Aycock, Director of International Student Services, of grant proposal for University of the Twenty-first Century.

Radford University

Graduate Assistant

Dr. Richard Murphy, Supervisor  
8/85-6/88

Instructor for two sections introductory English per semester. Participated in weekly meetings focusing on composition theory in which members read and discussed works by Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, Linda Flowers, Mina Shaughnessy, Marion Mohr, and the like.

N.C. State University  
Raleigh, NC

Research Assistant

Dr. Hershell Ball, Supervisor  
1/78-2/79

Experience included research replications for product development in poultry, use of testing apparatus, computer analysis of statistical data, literature searches, and assistant to undergraduate students, M.S. and Ph.D candidates using lab facilities.

University of North  
Carolina at Greensboro  
Greensboro, NC

Supervising Instructor

Ms. Deronda Johnston, Coordinator  
Summer, 1976

Participated in UNC-G three-month environmental day camp at their Piney Lake Ecological Center. Children 7-14 enrolled in science classes. Camp also served as an internship for the university's recreation and education majors. Responsibilities included supervising six interns through the three sessions.

Linkhorne Middle School  
Lynchburg, VA

Science Teacher

Mr. Robert Bailey, Principal  
9/74-12/77

Teacher of Life Science 7 and Physical Science 8. Worked with Science Club and Science Fair. Served on Middle School Visiting Committee

### **Related Honors, Activities, Services:**

Member of Virginia Association of Teachers of English  
Presentation of academic papers at VATE Fall Conferences:

“Teaching Revision as a Workshop Activity” (October 1987, Virginia Beach, VA)

“The Story of Teaching is Learning” (October 1989, Richmond, VA)

Member of Radford University Appalachian Events Committee, 1990.

Presentation of academic papers at Appalachian Studies Conferences:

“Appalachian Oral Stories from Childhood” (March 1987, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee)

“Tiger Lilies, Daisies, Cabbages, and Goose Eggs: A Collection of Appalachian Oral Stories”

(March 1989, University of West Virginia, Morgantown, West Virginia)

Chair, Exhibits Committee. VATE Fall Conference. October 1993. Roanoke, VA

Chair, Registration Committee. VATE Fall Conference. October 1995. Roanoke, VA

Member of National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling

Guest Storyteller at Bethel School, Radford, VA, 1987 Appalachian Awareness Week

Participation in workshops sponsored by Radford University’s Writing Across the Curriculum. Experience included work with leaders such as Mary Kay Healy, Peter Stillman, Toby Fulweiler, and Nancy Martin, as well as Radford faculty.

Member of Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society

Volunteer at Community School, Roanoke, VA

Coach for Odyssey of the Mind competition, 1992, 1993, 1994

Judge, Odyssey of the Mind competition, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001

Coordinator, State Odyssey of the Mind competition, 1996

Board Member, Regional Odyssey of the Mind, 1998, 1999, 2000

Board Member, Community School, 1993-1994

Board Member, Blue Ridge Writers Conference, 1993-1994

### **Recent University Work:**

**University of the Twenty-first Century Grant**, co-written with Ms. Jan Aycock, Director of International Student Services, was accepted (March 1991) and funded the following activities which were carried out through the Radford University Writing Center:

Visits to other university Writing Centers to explore ways of strengthening our Center to prepare for international students: Virginia Tech; Old Dominion University; Northern Virginia Community College, Arlington; George Mason University; Saint Michael’s College.

On-campus faculty development workshop with speaker, Robert Bray, Director of the English Language Center at Old Dominion University. Invited guests numbered nineteen and represented eleven academic departments. Presentation of information concerning the growth of the non-native speaker population in the U.S. Discussion of writing problems and methodologies. April 27, 1991.

Writing Center Library Addition: 59 ESL texts, grammars, readers, and research studies were examined and purchased. Membership in the TESOL Organization and subscription to the *TESOL Quarterly* were also procured.

ESL Certification for Writing Center Director. Saint Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont. Summer 1991. Participated in three graduate classes and three workshops at the six-week TESL Summer Institute.

Advanced Certification for Teaching English as a Second Language. Saint Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont. Summer 1994. Participated in two graduate classes and a practicum at the six-week TESL Summer Institute.

Summer Workshop. "Innovative Techniques for Teaching Writing to LD Writers." Landmark College. Putney, VT. 1997.

**Faculty Development Grant:** Summer 1994 resulted in ESL Advanced Certification. Saint Michael's College. Participated in two graduate classes and one advanced Practicum.

**New Course Proposal:** ENGL 101 and 102 for ESL students. Accepted by English Department, February, 1993. Expository and research writing classes, optional for non-native speakers, this process writing class with an American culture theme included grammar for ESL. The class encouraged speaking and listening, in groups and through formal presentations, reading and writing,. Offered, Fall and Spring 1993-94; Fall and Spring 1994-95; Fall and Spring 1998-99.

ENGL 314: Writing Center Seminar and Practicum. Course offered to sophomore, junior, senior level students interested in becoming Writing Center tutors or in adding an elective that adds to their knowledge of composition theory, learning styles, teaching writing to ESL students, strategies to aid Learning Disabled students in writing, tutoring techniques, grammar review.

**Writing Across the Curriculum:** Coordinator of on-campus events, 1993-1994. Participated in WAC Spring Retreat, May, 1992, at Mountain Lake Resort. As director of the Writing Center and WAC coordinator, I am working to make each project more visible and useful to students and faculty. At the six events sponsored during 1993-94 at Radford, inroads were made to that end.

September 1993, the Writing Center staff, sponsored by WAC, gave a presentation for faculty. Tutors modeled a writing/response session, handouts were distributed containing information about the philosophy and techniques of the Writing Center, audience was encouraged to participate by writing and questioning.

As coordinator for Writing Across the Curriculum, I was asked to revitalize the newsletter. In September 1993, associate editors Janette Newhouse and Sam Zeakes and I, as editor, formed an advisory board for *Radford Writes*. The board, made up of faculty

committed to writing, represents 14 different departments. Together, we produced three issues of *Radford Writes* during 1993-94.

**Faculty Development Center.** Served as editor for *InterActions*, the newsletter for the Faculty Development Center at Radford. Attend workshops, readings, and other programs hosted by the FDC to encourage attendees to submit their reactions and responses, ideas and assignments to the newsletter. 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000.

**International Student Activities:** Presentation for new international students, August 1994, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000. “What to Expect from Academic Life at Radford.” Discussion included services available; how to read a course outline; what to expect in introductory classes; how to budget time for homework, reading, play; classroom etiquette; and the like.

Served on English Language Institute Review Committee. March-April 1994. Committee charged with reviewing all aspects of the Radford University ELI.

Taught in English Language Institute. Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking skills for beginner to advanced international students. Summer 1999.

Teaching a composition class for ESL students, 1994-2002 that puts the focus on western conventions, format, grammar issues, and culture.

**Appalachian Arts & Studies in the Schools.** Coordinator of AASIS, and outreach program of the Appalachian Regional Studies Center. The purpose of AASIS is early intervention for area high school students who are “college-able but not necessarily college-bound.” University students are grouped with high school students to provide college information, mentoring, and to raise awareness of our Appalachian culture and heritage. Coordinate efforts of the AASIS staff in reviewing applications for mentors; selecting high school teachers; corresponding with mentors, teachers, and administrators; planning meetings and workshops; planning for high school students’ visits to Radford University; program planning; program evaluation. 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002.

**Appalachian Regional Studies Center:** Member of the Highland Summer Conference Committee, 1998-2002.

**AASIS Leadership Class (through a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission):** Through a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Radford University and thirteen other colleges and universities received support to teach and/or give support to research projects for students who would endeavor to answer the commission’s question: *How can we sustain Appalachian communities?* Co-taught the class with Dr. Grace Toney Edwards in fall 2001 and independently taught the class in fall 2002. Students met to generate project ideas, researched in the schools to determine the efficacy of AASIS according to the participating teachers, scholars, mentors, administrators, and AASIS staff, and presented their findings to the Appalachian

Regional Commission staff and to the other participating schools in Washington, D.C. in November 2001 and 2002.

**Writing Center:** With the support of the English Department, Writing Across the Curriculum, Office of Academic Enrichment, and Residential Life, the Writing Center has recently maneuvered a long-awaited move, from a space in the computer lab in Moffett Hall to a large, private space in Muse Hall. With the Center in a more strategic place, we hope to increase the number of students we see throughout the year.

Starting in Summer II, 1994, one graduate assistant will be stationed in McConnell Library at the reference desk. This GA will function as a Writing Center tutor with special research skills who will also work as a reference consultant along with the other reference librarians who will train him.

During the academic years 1992-93 and 1993-94, the Writing Center has built a rather large volunteer staff. GAs and instructors from the English Department have added substantially to our Center, making it easier for us to see more students but also in offering their observations and expertise in our meetings and conversations. The Writing Center staff presented a program for the GA/Mentor Workshop in August 1993, and at that time we appealed to first and second year GAs for their services. Volunteers agree that the experience added to their understanding of the teaching of writing. Working with students from many disciplines helped the GAs learn more about writing in other academic areas.

Consulted with GTF Coordinator to establish a link between the GTF program and the Writing Center, 1997. This link has been refined each year, 1997-2002, to bring the GTFs into the Writing Center as tutors. As of fall 2001, GTFs are required to tutor in the center one hour/week. The benefits to the GTFs and to the center (tutors and students) are countless, each learning from the other.

In April 1994, I was invited to speak at the Hollins College Writing Center on working with students, native and non-native, in a university Writing Center. The director and tutors at Hollins are interested in forming a network among our tutors.

Summer Session I: Writing Center open in Young 409. Director served as tutor. Writing Center continues to function during summer sessions and continues to grow. 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002.

Summer Session II: Writing Center open Monday and Wednesday in Muse, Tuesday and Thursday in McConnell Library. Scott Ellis will serve as tutor. This year marks the first that our Writing Center has opened for Summer II. 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002.

Conducted ethnographic study of tutor training and tutor growth. Radford University Writing Center, Spring 2000.

Initiated asynchronous computer-mediated component in the Writing Center. Fall 2000. Trial synchronous component, Spring 2001.

Conducted PRAXIS workshops for instruction in essay writing. 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001.

Taught six PRAXIS classes through Radford University College of Education: Review of Grammar and Writing. Spring 2001. Trained Writing Center Graduate Teaching Fellow to instruct PRAXIS class. Spring 2002.

Outreach to the university community has resulted in several trips to the satellite campuses. September 2002, workshop in research skills and APA guide to graduate Nursing class. Workshop in research skills and documentation to graduate Counselor Education classes: November 4, 2002 at the Roanoke Higher Education Center and November 28 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon, VA.