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A Design Thinking Mixed Methods Study on Empathy
in a Midwest University Writing Center

by

Susan Sinclair Edele

April 30, 2024

Problem of Practice

Research submitted to the Education Faculty

Lindenwood University, College of Education and Human Services

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education, Leadership EdD

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Susan Sinclair Edele

Signature: Susan E. Edele Date: May 15, 2024

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Executive Summary

The scholar practitioner explored the problem of practice in the role of empathy in writing center services, focusing on tutoring training. The research aimed to determine if empathy training and mindfulness could enhance the empathetic practices of writing center staff, and if such enhancements would make students using writing center services feel more included, seen, and heard during tutoring sessions. The problem of practice was examined through three lenses: tutor training, understanding empathy in the context of a writing center environment, and the perceptions of empathy from the students using writing center services. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. Data collection methods included open-ended surveys, a stakeholder focus group, pre- and post-surveys using a 5-point Likert scale, document analysis of writing center websites, and reflection responses from writing center staff and tutors' post-empathy training. Findings indicated experienced staff were aware of empathetic practices, with less experienced tutors showing higher empathy scores. The study's alignment with the EdD Leadership framework highlighted the importance of a human-centric approach, suggesting empathy training could lead to organizational change within writing center pedagogy, technology, ethics, equity, and social justice within writing centers. The implementation of empathy training modules into tutor programs emerged as a key strategy for meeting students' needs who use the writing center services, promoting equity, and enhancing empathy in the writing center environment. The research underscored the critical role of empathy in educational settings, offering insights for further integration of empathetic practices in tutor training programs and consistent writing center professional development.

Keywords: empathy, education, writing center, tutors, tutor training, empathy training,
equity

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Chapter One: Introduction

Position of the Problem within Practice

The landscape of writing center services has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from a traditional focus on crafting the perfect product or piece of writing to a more student-centered approach. The paradigm shift within writing centers emphasized the unique writing strategies and voices of individuals, placing a spotlight on the processes involved in a student's writing rather than fixating on predetermined outcomes (Bassett, 2021). In the wake of the transformation, in the experiences of the scholar practitioner, a crucial theme emerged – the need for inclusivity within writing center environments. Research conducted about inclusivity not only documented the shift in focus, but also highlighted the pressing importance of serving marginalized students within writing centers. Directors and administrators responded by integrating strategies aimed at addressing the specific needs of the students leading to an evolution of tutor training programs and courses reflecting a growing commitment to inclusivity (Condon, 2007; Denny, 2010; Geller et al., 2007).

Researchers highlighted the role of empathy in creating a conducive and inclusive writing center environment. The comfort and success of students in writing sessions were connected to a sense of being seen and belonging (Driscoll & Wells, 2020). Consequently, writing center staff education and tutoring practices evolved to prioritize empathy, ensuring a more supportive and less anxiety-inducing experience for students using writing center services (Blazer, 2015). Furthermore, the current researchers noted the limitations of traditional tutoring models and pedagogies in meeting the diverse goals, abilities, cultures, and learning styles of individual students (Condon, 2007). The call to

construct writing centers as inclusive spaces demanded a shift toward more personalized and empathetic approaches to best support the writing center staff as well as students using writing center services (Blazer, 2015; Condon, 2007; Denny, 2010; Geller et al., 2007).

Building on the work of Jackson et al. (2016), Shea (2017) made the connection between empathy and equity in the classroom, arguing understanding students as human beings with issues outside the classroom provided equity. Taylor (2018) examined how empathy in the classroom demonstrated to students how everyone mattered; the classroom became other-centered. Additionally, McBride et al., (2018) examined how empathetic listening in the writing center by the tutors created a holistic approach to writing by truly honoring the students' request for writing assistance, while Their et al. (2021) researched how productive disruptions with empathy moved pedagogic strategies toward a more inclusive learning environment in writing center and in the writing classrooms, especially through the practice of transformative listening.

Although the specific term "empathy" may not have been widely used throughout the history of education and tutoring, an understanding of the underlying concept as integral to teaching and tutoring practices had long been assumed. Thanks to Salem's (2016) research, Kim (2018) examined how tutors and writing centers handled proofreading and grammar requests from non-native English speakers. Kim's (2018) work addressed equity for multiple languages learners' needs and the growing movement to honor students' requests, disrupting the traditional writing center pedagogy of only addressing higher order writing concerns.

The changes in writing center pedagogy significantly moved best practice emphases from the tutor to the student using the writing center services. Empathy had

been researched for both writing center staff members and for the students using writing center services, as well as for the directors of writing centers (Bell et al., 2010; Denton, 2015). Extensive studies connected empathy in tutor training to improved equity and inclusivity in writing center practices and in the services students using the writing center received (Bell et al., 2010; Denton, 2015).

Salem's (2016) ground-breaking study challenged traditional writing center pedagogy to shift the focus from the "rules" of no proofreading and editing to examining who the users of the writing center were and why students came to the writing center. Students using the writing center needed help with skill development, and by tutors withholding writing information, equity and inclusion were not achieved; the proverbial pendulum moved back from the tutors to the students using the writing center. Salem's (2016) research was not well received by many writing center theorists who questioned the results (as cited in Jacobs, 2018). However, many researchers followed Salem's (2016) lead in examining why practices were either approved or denied and how the strategies were inclusive or exclusive (Atwood, 2021; Carter, 2016; Griffin & Glushko, 2016; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014; Sturman, 2018).

While researchers like Salem (2016), Atwood (2021), Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014), and Sturman (2018) examined how students' needs were or were not being met in writing centers, other researchers examined how the tutors in the writing centers were being trained to provide feedback to the student writers, once again moving the focus to the tutors. Empathy was found to be a common thread in tutoring writing (Borba, 2018; De La Fuente-Anuncibay et al., 2019; Englander, 2019; Harrison, 2012; Jordan & Schwartz, 2018; Leake, 2016; McBride et al., 2018; Shea, 2017; Teding van Berkhout &

Malouff, 2016). Geary and McFerrin (2021) researched the relationship between faculty and tutors and how empathy in tutors bridged the gaps in relationships between faculty and student writers. Empathetic tutors met students' writing needs or writing requests in the sessions, then worked to help improve students' writing skills to accomplish the writing requirements for students' coursework (Geary & McFerrin, 2021).

Framework Surrounding the Problem

In 2008, the scholar practitioner became the director of the university writing center and brought a background in teaching composition and current writing center pedagogy and best practices. Realizing changes needed to be made, the scholar practitioner began by assessing who could work in the writing center; students interested in the working in the writing center needed to submit a second application tailored specifically for that purpose. The scholar practitioner established a tutor training program to ensure the tutors were using best practices to serve the students using writing center services.

At the time of the study, the researched writing center served the entire university community, from non-English speakers to graduate students in doctoral programs to faculty and staff working on publication of articles and research; approximately 1,000 students were served each semester (Researched University, n.d.). Students used the writing center for emailed feedback, in-person consultations, and video consultations. The scholar practitioner collected data using the academic calendar, from the fall semester, spring semester, summer semester to fall semester, rather than a calendar year.

Students using the writing center services often requested assistance with grammar, a forbidden service according to writing center pedagogy. Traditionally,

writing center pedagogy focused on the product, creating the best written document the student could produce (Abascal-Hildebrand, 1994; Adams et al., 1987; Stay et al., 1995). Most writing consultants used the Socratic method of asking questions to elicit responses from the student, so the student made improvements while the consultant was the coach or facilitator (“Socratic Questions”, n.d.). The writing process and the student writer were not essential to the process of getting the written document in the best possible shape to submit for a grade.

However, the shift started around the late 1990s to include a focus on the process as well as the writer. In the edited book by Mullin and Wallace (1994), they asked contributors to examine the alignment of writing center theory with the tangible practices of tutoring. The responses provided by contributors lent support to the hypothesis posited by Mullin and Wallace (1994), revealing a discrepancy between the theory, the implemented practices, and the writers' requests. Researchers Hoskins (2007) and Babcock (2008) expressed concerns the very rules prohibiting grammar assistance was excluding the students needing the services the writing center provided. Additionally, Hoskins (2007) and Babcock (2008) advocated for the marginalized users of the writing center, students who did not have solid grammar skills, the skills assessed in the courses necessary for graduation. The practice of refusing to honor the students requests for grammar assistance and only focusing higher order concerns was exclusionary.

While researchers continued to focus on the needs of the marginalized students using the writing center services, Jackson et al. (2016) along with Perry (2016) examined the training the writing consultants were required to complete. The focus on delivering the product or the “A” paper was again shifting back to the needs of the users of the

writing centers. Jackson et al. (2016) examined the emotional energies required by writing center directors in delivering the services to support the whole student, not just the piece of writing. Conflict management, advising, mentoring of the writing consultants, and creating the training guides were all examined to determine how much mental energy was needed in addition to supporting the students using writing center services. Perry (2016) examined how the writing consultants also expended significant amounts of mental energy when supporting the whole student. Perry (2016) proposed practices of self-care for the student consultants to enable continuation in the support roles.

Driscoll and Wells (2020) built on the research of Jackson et al. (2016) and Perry (2016) to connect the emotional energy of both the student user and the student consultant. More importantly Driscoll and Wells (2020) sealed the writer-reviewer relationship by providing suggestions for improved training for focus on both the product and the process, keeping the student user in the center of the tutoring sessions. While Bleak (2021) investigated the role of empathy in online consultations and found the same empathy for in-person consultations was necessary for successful online consultations.

By honoring the requests of the students who accessed the writing center with empathetic writing consultants, users of the writing center services should feel included, seen, and have the consultation discussions help to improve writing skills. In the experience of the writing practitioner to achieve a balance of introducing a successful product (the written piece reviewed in the tutoring session) and having a successful writer, empathy training should be the focus in the training of writing tutors.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

The scholar practitioner, in collaboration with the Scholar Cohort Lead/Advisor, created research questions and hypothesis statements for a design research, mixed-methods study:

Research Question 1: How will writing center staff implement empathetic strategies into writing center consultations with students?

Research Question 2: How do writing center staff perceive the empathy training module?

Null Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference in the writing consultants' level of understanding of empathy pre/post empathy training.

Null Hypothesis 2: There will be no reported perception of empathy by students who receive writing consultants.

As part of defining the problem of practice in the design thinking method, the scholar practitioner interviewed five writing center tutors and asked the tutors the following question: What barriers or obstacles do you see inhibiting the tutors' abilities to honor the student requests in writing sessions? Barriers were described to the tutors as challenges or misconceptions or absences of necessities. The two issues the tutors agreed upon as the main struggle in helping students with the writing pieces brought to the writing center for assistance were as follows: 1. Writing center pedagogy still focused on product rather than process and discouraged consultants from assisting with grammar and proofreading. 2. Professors graded for grammar and mechanics, not only for organization and structure. The writing center tutors also determined the following secondary barriers:

1. Consultants [tutors] may not know how to connect with struggling student writers. 2. Consultants [tutors] may think they know what is best for the paper, but not necessarily what is best for the writer.

Definitions

Belonging: “feeling accepted, and being included, is important to university engagement because students who feel that they are part of the university are more likely to be engaged in their university and campus community” (Masika & Jones, 2016, para. 2 as cited in Dost & Smith, 2023).

Empathy – “understanding a person from his or her frame of reference rather than one’s own, or vicariously experiencing that person’s feelings, perceptions, and thoughts” (American Psychological Association, 2023).

Mindfulness: “awareness of one’s internal states and surroundings” (“Mindfulness”, n.d., para 1).

Writing consultant -

Writing consultants assist writers with analysis, research, organization, and development. They model writing and revising strategies and encourage writers to experiment with these strategies. Writing consultants act as sounding boards for writing ideas and help writers overcome anxieties and build confidence in their writing” (“Experienced Writing Consultants”, n.d., para. 3).

Limitations and or Improvement Science Researcher Bias

The scholar practitioner acknowledged the position as both the writing center director and researcher while the study was framed and interpreted. The researcher’s investment in the writing center potentially introduced bias. The nine participants were

writing center staff members and writing center tutors, all supervised by the researcher.

To remove bias, the pre and post self-assessments were collected anonymously.

Participants could opt out of the data collection assessments. Interviews and observations were not considered to protect the anonymity of the participants and preserve the supervisor-employee relationships.

Embarking on a scholar practitioner's journey 17 years ago within the writing center, the balance between theory and application became a central theme in navigating the evolving landscape. The commitment to continual professional development, marked by diverse workshops, seminars, and training sessions, cultivated a skill set essential for navigating the complexities of writing center dynamics. Each experience, as a scholar practitioner, not only broadened theoretical understanding but also equipped the practitioner with practical strategies to address the ever-changing needs of writers.

Active participation in conferences dedicated to contemporary writing center issues provided a platform for engaging in meaningful dialogues with fellow scholar practitioners. Presenting insights and research findings contributed to the collective knowledge of the writing center community, fostering camaraderie, and reinforcing the interconnectedness of the shared mission to empower writers and promote communication skills.

Hurst (2023) described reflexivity as a means for scholar practitioners, especially using qualitative research, to reflect on the expertise brought to the scholar practitioner's research. Hurst (2023) noted "being reflexive is being aware that you yourself are part of the research when you are conducting qualitative research. This is particularly true when conducting interviews, observing interactions, or participating in activities" (para. 4). As

previously noted, the scholar practitioner had over 17 years of writing center experiences, and while the experience provided insight into writing center practices studied for the research, the experiences also included limitations. When a claim was not cited, the scholar practitioner drew on the past experiences, observations, pedagogy, and collegial connections.

Since empathy in writing centers was an emerging topic, the researcher found a limited amount of prior scholarship to draw from and during the search connected bodies of literature not typically connected. Additionally, the lack of existing tools tailored to assessing empathy in the context of writing center usage, environment, and culture required modifying existing instruments, which may not have captured writing center-specific nuances. The scholar practitioner believed developing purpose-built measurement tools designed specifically for writing centers could improve precision.

The researcher identified the study's situational specificity as a major limitation, as data came from one writing center at a single Midwest university. While potentially offering valuable insights, the results could only be transferable to other like contexts with no generalization of the research results occurred. Furthermore, the scholar-practitioner taking on the researcher role also directed the writing center under investigation, creating potential for bias. Although voluntary and confidential, writing center staff participants may have felt pressure to participate given the power differential. Having external researchers could have reduced potential biases and elicit an increase of participation in the surveys, the tutor training modules, and the reflections. The limited sample size and self-selection of participants also may have skewed the research results; a broader random sampling may have produced more representative results.

Summary

Various studies have explored the connection between empathy and equity in writing center practices, focusing on understanding students as individuals with unique backgrounds and challenges (Blazer, 2015; Condon, 2007; Denny, 2010; Geller et al., 2007). Additionally, there has been a shift toward honoring students' requests for assistance with grammar and proofreading, challenging traditional pedagogies that prioritize higher-order concerns within the Researched University. The scholar practitioner had 17 years of observations, scholarly pursuits, and experiences to use as filler for gaps in the research literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The information gathered by the researcher for the literature review underscores empathy's pivotal role in human connection and understanding (Davis, 1983). Empathy's definitions vary across disciplines. Within writing center pedagogy, empathy emerged as a vital principle, inviting inclusive learning environments and student-centered approaches. Historical shifts in writing center paradigms, from product-focused to student-centered, and from “fix-it” shops to spaces of higher learning, highlight empathy's evolving significance in tutoring practices and the need for empathetic training to meet diverse students' needs.

Empathy

Davis (1983), a leading researcher in the field of empathy, described empathy as a powerful force, the heart of human connection and understanding. It is a complex cognitive and emotional process that enables individuals to perceive, understand, and resonate with the experiences, emotions, and others' perspectives. Additionally, Davis (1983) perceived empathy as a complex process which involved both cognitive abilities and emotional responses. The concept of empathy crossed many disciplines, including psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and literature.

Defining Empathy. Empathy had many definitions, depending on the discipline in which empathy was studied. For the purpose of the study, the scholar practitioner defined empathy as “understanding a person from his or her frame of reference rather than one's own, or vicariously experiencing that person's feelings, perceptions, and thoughts” (American Psychological Association, 2023, para. 1). Empathy encompassed a

broad spectrum of abilities, ranging from simple emotional contagion to more complex forms of perspective-taking and compassionate concern. Psychologists defined empathy as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, often distinguished between affective empathy, which involved sharing the emotional experiences of others, and cognitive empathy, which involved understanding the thoughts and perspectives of others (Davis, 1983). Affective empathy involved sharing and experiencing the emotions of others and cognitive empathy involved understanding the thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives of others (Decety & Jackson, 2006). However, recent research suggested empathy was a multifaceted construct including both emotional and cognitive processes, as well as motivational components (Decety & Jackson, 2006).

Empathy in Action. Neuroscientific studies revealed the neural underpinnings of empathy, highlighting the involvement of brain regions such as the anterior insula, anterior cingulate cortex, and mirror neuron system (Decety & Lamm, 2006). The mirror neuron system, in particular, had been implicated in the automatic simulation of others' actions and emotions, providing a neural basis for understanding and resonating with the experiences of others (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). The neurons triggered a mechanism in the brain which helped individuals understand, anticipate intentions, and imitate the actions of others. The affective and cognitive aspects of how the brain processed empathy were also studied (Shamay-Tsoory, 2009).

In addition to neural mechanisms, social and cultural factors also influenced empathic processes. Sociologists emphasized the role of socialization, cultural norms, and social identity in shaping individuals' empathic responses to others (Hoffman, 2000). Developmental psychologists highlighted the importance of early experiences, parental

attachment, and caregiving practices in the development of empathy in children (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2009). Along with the mirror neurons, people were able to learn what empathy looked like.

Empathy across Disciplines. In psychology, empathy was regarded as a fundamental aspect of prosocial behavior and interpersonal relationships. Researchers in the field demonstrated individuals high in empathy were more likely to engage in helping behaviors, exhibit greater altruism, and form closer social bonds (Batson et al., 1981). People with high levels of empathy often had careers in a helping field such as the medical field and education.

The field of neuroscience offered insights into the neural mechanisms underlying empathy, shedding light on how the brain processed and responded to others' emotions and experiences. Understanding the mechanisms was crucial for developing interventions aimed at enhancing empathic abilities and promoting empathy-related skills. Recent studies revealed when people see someone else experiencing an emotion, the brain activates in a similar way as if the people observing the emotions were experiencing the same emotion. The process helped in creating a shared understanding of emotions, which was a key part of empathy. However, empathy was not just about sharing emotions; empathy also involved being able to distinguish between one's own feelings and the feelings of others, as well as regulating emotions to avoid confusion (Decety & Jackson, 2006; Ruby & Decety, 2004). Sociology researchers explored empathy within the broader context of social interactions, cultural norms, and societal structures. Specifically, researchers examined how empathy influenced social cohesion, conflict resolution, and

collective action, highlighting the significance in fostering understanding and cooperation among diverse individuals and groups (Decety & Jackson, 2006).

Literature studies on empathy provided a rich source of narratives and characters which evoked empathic responses in readers. Through storytelling, authors invited readers to step into the shoes of others, fostering empathy and compassion for characters' struggles, triumphs, and experiences (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). Literary works often served as vehicles for exploring complex social issues and promoting empathy across cultural and historical boundaries (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). As fiction was often a reflection of realities in place, character, or emotion, readers could connect in an empathetic way, mirroring the feelings of the characters or tying the emotions to their own emotions (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004).

Empathy was crucial for understanding and responding to others' emotions, promoting prosocial behavior, and succeeding in emotional communication; despite the importance, no consensus on a clear definition of empathy existed, which led to various measures with differing focuses (Spreng et al., 2009).

Empathy and Writing Centers

The research studies from psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and literature offered a strong foundation for understanding the importance of empathy and how empathy fit into the writing pedagogy. Empathy emerged as a principle connecting pedagogical approaches aimed at nurturing students' writing development and fostering inclusive learning environments. A study by Wambsganss et al. (2021) showed empathy skills of United States college students dropped by 30% since data collected between 1979 and 2009, indicating empathy strategies need to be included in training (p. 55).

Empathy in the writing center and composition classroom encompassed a deeper understanding of the writer's experiences, perspectives, and challenges rather than just the writing process or the writing produced at the end of a writing session. Just as individuals engaged in empathic responses to literary characters or social situations, (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013) writing instructors and tutors were called upon to empathize with the writers in the tutoring sessions, acknowledging the diverse backgrounds, identities, and goals, as well as the writing skills shaping writing center users' writing processes (Richmond, 1999). The mindful practice of employing empathetic strategies can form the basis of a student-centered approach to writing instruction, supporting the issues writers want to review, even if the issue was only grammar support.

Empathy in Writing: The Early Connection

Empathy had been a critical component in teacher education, according to Rector (1953) in one of the first studies about empathy in the classroom; Rector "hypothesized that one of the important factors in the achievement of educational goals is the extent to which students and instructors are able to predict, or to project themselves into, the responses of each other" (p. 175). To understand what a student was feeling and to then acknowledge and act upon the understanding, built relationships in the classroom between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves (Rector, 1953). Writing instructors employed a significant degree of empathy when teaching both creative writing and composition (Richmond, 1999). Individuals who worked with writing center pedagogy drew heavily from composition pedagogy, so the natural transfer of empathy to writing center tutors would seem obvious and necessary (Boquet, 1999;

Carino, 1995). However, not all tutors were aware of the role empathy played in making students who use writing center services feel connected and included.

After an extensive literature search, the scholar practitioner identified the connection among empathy, writing tutors and staff, and the students served in writing center consultations. The researcher compiled a chronological, yet brief history of writing center and writing pedagogy, specifically noting the shift from a product-based approach focused on creating the best piece of writing, to a more student-centered, empathetic approach, focused on encouraging reflective practices by the writers and writing tutors as to how the piece is created. One gap in the literature was a lack of emphasis on empathy in the writing center, so the researcher needed to examine how empathy was used in other disciplines. The chronological literature review supported the scholar researcher's questions about whether empathy training and the mindful improvement and execution of empathy skills in writing center staff members would change writing tutor perceptions of inclusion as well as change the student perceptions of inclusion when using writing center services.

The Early Years of Writing Pedagogy

Beginning with Rector's (1953) study on empathy in the classroom, most educators were empathetic toward students and students reciprocated the empathy felt from the educator. The literature of the last decade read by the researcher showed how empathy and empathy in action was prevalent in and out of the classrooms but was not labeled as empathy until the late 1990s – early 2000s, despite the connection made in Rector's (1953) study.

In a brief review of writing center history, writing center scholar Carino (1995) noted the existence of writing centers or labs or clinics pre-1970, with the emphasis on more of a “fix it” shop to assist remedial writers returning from the war with money to spend on a college education. Early writing center scholarship bounced back and forth between more remedial skills aimed at producing a correct paper to higher order skills of crafting and drafting the correct paper. Even the name of the place for writing assistance – writing center or writing lab – came with preconceived perceptions from users and faculty; “The concern with rejecting the stigma of remediation and with creating an identity separate from the classroom is a recurring motif throughout the CCCC [Conference on College Composition and Communication] workshops of the 1950s” (Carino, 1995, p. 112).

Boquet (1999) continued Carino’s (1995) examination and development of writing centers using a historical approach. Like Carino (1995), Boquet (1999) reflected on early writing centers’ transformation from places focused on remediation to spaces fostering collaboration and learning among peers, noting the introduction of peer tutors instead of faculty members to provide feedback to students using writing center services. The peer tutors, along with the idea of collaboration rather than a one-sided delivery of information, marked a significant shift in writing center pedagogy, emphasizing the writing center as a dynamic space for intellectual engagement and development (Boquet, 1999). The move toward more inclusive and student-centered pedagogies gently signified the importance of the student over the product – the paper – receiving feedback (Boquet, 1999). Also noted was the continued perceptions by faculty, administration, and students was the conflict between institutional expectations and the writing centers' pedagogical

goals, often shifting between remediation and empowerment (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995).

Small Shifts in Writing Center Focus

While writing center scholars such as Carino (1995) and Boquet (1999) gave historical context to writing center development, the struggle for writing center identity was explored by other writing center scholars. The main conflict was the writing center as a place to “fix” grammar and other errors instead of a place for discussion of higher order skills. Many writing centers were training tutors to focus on higher-order concerns and refusing to give feedback on grammar and proofreading (Abascal-Hildebrand, 1994; Adams et al., 1987; Stay et al., 1995). Leahy (1990) lamented writing centers were used as and perceived as “fix-it shops”, where tutors focused on the end product - the paper being reviewed - rather than the writing process of the student. Abascal-Hildebrand (1994) further examined writing center power dynamics, noting the tendency of tutor training to position tutors as gatekeepers of grammar and structure, thus determining what constituted “good” writing. The judgmental, rules-based approach centered final drafts over students’ requests for specific assistance with writing. Adams et al. (1987) echoed similar concerns in the study of writing center tutor education, finding rigid responses like “We don’t proofread” were more common than adapting to students’ perceived needs and building trusting tutor-writer relationships. Mullin and Wallace (1994) collected chapters for a book, *Intersections: Theory-practice in the Writing Center*, which asked the contributors to examine how writing center theory worked in the practice of tutoring; the contributors argued the theory did not match the practices. Most contributors found rigid rules against editing or teaching grammar prevented tutors from

honoring the students' requests, even if the requests were "just" grammar or "just" helping with citations. The observations from contributors to the book edited by Mullin and Wallace (1994) revealed empathy's absence in early writing center pedagogy and tutor training.

By the early 2000s, writing center pedagogy began to shift again from the product-centered approach Leahy (1990) experienced to the student-centered approach Carino (1995) and Boquet (1999) advocated. Hoskins (2007) critically reflected on having empathy for the students who used the writing center and knew grammar concepts and self-proofreading strategies were necessary for writing center users to be academically successful in the classroom yet working grammar lessons into tutoring sessions was often a struggle. Babcock (2008) continued emphasizing the importance of empathy and equality for writing center users in the article "Outlaw tutoring: Editing and proofreading revisited" in which the author argued when tutors followed rules prohibiting proofreading and editing during writing sessions, exclusion of the very students the writing center staff served could happen: basic writers, writers with physical or learning disabilities, and other students in marginalized groups. Including the needs of the students who used the writing center, Babcock (2008) said, were more important than upholding outdated rules or keeping to traditional processes.

Emphasis on the Student User

As best practices and writing center pedagogies shifted from focusing on producing the perfect product or piece of writing to the student using writing center services and the processes involved in the individuals' writing strategies and voices, writing center directors' and administrators' awareness of inclusivity surfaced in the

research; writing center directors and administrators started to integrate strategies on how to serve marginalized students. Tutor training programs and courses began to change (Blazer, 2015; Ivy et al., 1995; LaClare & Franz, 2013; Mitchell, 1994; Roy, 1995). Further studies revealed strengthened attention to the writing requests of individual students and diverse populations. Blazer (2015) supported a growing commitment to inclusive writing center staff education and everyday tutoring practices. National and international writing center organizations issued statements on inclusivity to promote the need to support all writers, no matter what level of writing was brought to the tutor or who produced the writing (“Disabilities Statement” International Writing Center Association, 2006; “Diversity Initiative” International Writing Center Association, 2006); however, in 2019 members of the International Writing Center Association addressed the use of “they” as a singular pronoun for gender equity. With empathy from the writing center staff, students’ writing needs were more likely to be met, and students were more comfortable in during writing sessions. Other research explored writing centers as sites for critical tutoring and resistant pedagogies honoring marginalized identities, like queer theorists (Denny, 2010), working-class perspectives (Geller et al., 2007), or antiracist praxis (Condon, 2007). If students using writing center services felt seen and heard, anxiety toward writing center sessions could be lessened.

Studies and observations from writing center directors and administrators reflected a widening recognition about how standard tutoring models often failed to meet individual students’ goals, abilities, cultures, or learning styles (Salem, 2016).

Constructing writing centers as inclusive spaces demanded adopting more personalized,

empathetic approaches focused on writers themselves, not predetermined outcomes from outdated tutoring practices.

Empathy Examined in Tutor Training

With the paradigm shift toward the student user of writing center services, studies of tutor education increasingly emphasized interpersonal skills like empathy. Mindful practices and training in empathetic practices seemed to be present in the restructured tutor training programs. Bell et al. (2010) examined what tutors reflected on during training, finding many tutors tended to gravitate toward the emotional aspects and the identity of the student and learning over procedural concerns. Denton's (2015) quantitative study of writing center efficacy concluded cultivating "warm, friendly, and understanding" tutors boosts usage and satisfaction (p. 28).

Jordan's (2006) qualitative study explored elements of tutor education, fostering collaborative, emotionally supportive cohorts for tutor development. Nelson-Burns and Wilson (2007) echoed a collaborative approach through a model of "relational tutoring" grounded in mutual vulnerability and care between the tutor and the student seeking writing center services, returning to the same results from Rector's (1953) study. Building empathetic practices for tutors required ongoing self-reflection, modeling, and dialogue, enabling moving beyond a remedial "fix-it" model (Leahy, 1990) to holistic mentoring focused on the writer, not just the writing (Babcock, 2008).

Other authors offered frameworks for preparing tutors in more than writing pedagogy and continued empathetic practices. Lape (2015) applied mindfulness techniques to heighten tutors' presence and compassion during tutoring sessions while Perry (2016) presented modules on self-care and emotional intelligence to help tutors

process intensified feelings of responsibility potentially arising during tutoring sessions. Shea (2017) advocated teaching tutors to recognize writers' emotions and adjust responses, accordingly, putting the student at ease. Though differing in methods, the studies shared a commitment to a holistic tutor education, surpassing training only in technical skills like grammar or citations. The researchers reported tutors as emotional beings, not simply neutral sharers of writing knowledge and perceived protocols (Shea, 2017). Cultivating empathetic awareness and communication through tutor training promoted more meaningful tutoring sessions focused on the needs of the students.

But training in empathetic practices showed potential stress on writing center administrators, tutors, and users. Jackson et al. (2016) created a year-long quantitative study of nine writing center directors to examine the emotional labor involved to complete writing center related duties. The researchers determined emotional labor as tasks such as mentoring, advising, conflict resolution, training, advocating for writing center usage, and many other tasks involving an emotional output. Emotional labor was viewed positively by the participants who willingly engaged in the tasks studied, yet consciously engaging in emotional labor benefits students, unmanaged emotional fatigue hurts staff. Writing center administrators and directors viewed emotional labor as worth the drain on energies. Perry (2016) examined how training tutors in self-care as well as reflection empowered tutors to get support for themselves when the writing consultations became overwhelming.

Empathetic practices by tutors and writing center administrators carried risks. Kukk (2022) contrasted empathy and compassion, and which should be employed in difficult situations; while Wender (2014) noted empathy appeared innate but required

ongoing training. Practitioners began to review the training methods for the tutors rather than solely focusing on the practices and strategies for serving the students who used writing center services. Scaffolding activities like role-playing built “empathetic dexterity” to navigate diverse social contexts. Improving empathy literacy enabled students to judiciously apply empathetic awareness (Driscoll & Wells, 2020). Topics such as reflection, mindfulness, and empathy were studied and shared with the writing center community to implement within writing centers or spur further research (Bell et al., 2010; Denton, 2015; Jordan, 2006; Lape, 2015; Nelson-Burns & Wilson, 2007; Threadgill, 2010). Petersen (2021) discussed how empathy in the workplace was not only emotionally draining, leading to burnout, but also faked, used by tutors only to fit into the writing center culture. While acknowledging empathy’s hazards, most studies highlighted empathetic practices made education more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to multifaceted student identities. Sustaining the practices required balancing student engagement with self-care of the tutors. By continuing to refine tutor preparation and knowledge, writing studies maximized empathy’s potential while mitigating limitations (Bassett, 2021; Driscoll & Wells, 2020).

Significant Shift in Writing Center Thinking

Salem’s (2016) ground-breaking study challenged traditional writing center pedagogy to shift the focus from the “rules” of no proofreading and editing to examining who the users of the writing center were and why students came to the writing center. Salem (2016) in an article “Decisions. . . Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center?” analyzed data from 4,204 students entering Temple University in 2009, tracking who used the writing center over four years (Salem, 2016). Students using the writing

center needed help with specific skills, and by tutors withholding information, equity and inclusion were not achieved. Salem (2016) also argued withholding such help from students requesting help with grammar or citations often excluded marginalized groups, conflicting with stated missions of access held by most writing center missions. Key findings from Salem's (2016) study showed the following: 1. Approximately 22% of the students used the writing center at least once (p. 154); 2. Factors such as gender, parental education, and SAT scores were significantly correlated with writing center use (p. 154); 3. Students who planned to use tutoring services before starting university were more likely to use the writing center (p. 155); and 4. The decision to use the writing center is influenced by students' academic standing and identity, with students from historically underrepresented groups in higher education being more likely to use the center (p. 155).

The results and complications from the study revisited the struggle between viewing writing centers as a remedial space or a space for exploration of higher order writing skills. By placing the emphasis on the students using writing center services (or NOT using writing center services, Salem (2016) recommended rethinking the protocols and policies to honor what students want, since the writing center was created to serve students. Additionally, Salem (2016) advocated to remove the stigma or the fear of writing centers being identified as "fix it" shops, and to stop applying a single set of rules to every writer.

The traditional "policies" in place since the 1980s pushed the image and hopefully the perceptions of writing centers away from a remedial space. Salem (2016) now asked writing center directors to rethink those policies, bringing back the tensions encountered

early in writing center development (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995). To further the tensions, Salem (2016) discounted current practices with other educational theories. In fact, research in education, TESOL, and cognitive science has repeatedly shown the practices have only limited value as pedagogies. The practices might be beneficial in some situations for some students; however, as "policies" applied to all students, although a poor choice. Indeed, almost any pedagogy treated as an across-the-board policy would be a poor choice.

The implications of Salem's (2016) study also provided insight into inclusion in the writing center services, supporting previous research by Denny (2010), Geller et al. (2007), and Condon (2007). Salem (2016) noted the writing center pedagogies apply to students of privilege, meaning students who attend the "good" schools had a better opportunity to learn writing skills like grammar. To deny assistance for grammar kept the marginalized writers from potentially earning an acceptable grade.

Writing center director Denton (2017) continued researching the "lore" of writing center pedagogy – traditional, established "policies" - using a similar approach to Carino (1995) and Boquet (1999); however, Denton (2017), like Salem (2016), questioned the why behind the pedagogy, "beyond the lore", and focused on "conversations and research surrounding this format to establish how potential writing center innovations represent missed opportunities when we adhere to lore and dismiss ideas rather than explore them through research-based inquiry" (pp. 176-77).

In an interview with Salem (2016), *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reporter Jacobs (2018) asked about the backlash received from the 2016 article "Decisions. . . Decisions: Who Chooses to Use the Writing Center?" Salem's (2016) research was not

well received by writing center theorists, and the results were questioned (as cited in Jacobs, 2018) because Salem (2016) used quantitative methods such “sophisticated data-mining techniques like chi-square analysis, cross tabulation, and t-tests to measure statistical significance” (para 18). Previous writing center research was mostly based on observations or qualitative research methods by writing center directors holding PhDs in composition, rhetoric, or writing studies (Denton, 2017). By only relying on qualitative assessments and “lore, or a reliance on experience-based conceptions of writing center work”, writing center pedagogy remained stale (Denton, 2017). Salem's (2016) findings challenged the historical, traditional aspects of writing center pedagogy and suggested a need for a complete reevaluation of practices to better serve a diverse student body and highlighted the perception of writing centers as non-remedial spaces and the disconnect between practices and the needs of students using writing center services (Jacobs, 2018).

Despite the public push-back to Salem's (2016) research findings and implications, many researchers followed Salem's (2016) lead in examining why tutoring practices were either approved or denied and how the strategies were inclusive or exclusive (Atwood, 2021; Carter, 2016; Griffin & Glushko, 2016; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2014; Sturman, 2018). Atwood (2021) examined the struggle to honor students' requests and assist with grammar issues by teaching mini lessons to help students recognize grammar issues and learn to make corrections.

Thanks to Salem's (2016) research, studies on inclusion emerged. Kim (2018) examined how tutors and writing centers handled proofreading and grammar requests from non-native English speakers. Kim's (2018) work addressed equity for multilingual learners' needs and the growing movement to honor students' requests disrupted the

traditional writing center pedagogy of only addressing higher order writing concerns. Tutors practicing empathetic strategies with multilingual students could provide sessions with a deeper awareness of the struggles encountered in learning and writing in a different language. “When students feel valued and respected in the educational context, they are motivated to learn because warm, respectful, cooperative interactions foster a sense of belonging, student engagement, and develop a positive learning environment” (Worsley et al., 2021, as cited in Dost & Smith, 2023, p. 846). Using empathy to understand why students use writing center services helped to honor students’ request, even just for grammar (Jacobs, 2018).

Empathy as a Best Practice in Writing Center Training

Recalling Rector’s (1953) study, a significant correlation was found between the empathic abilities of students and instructors, suggesting mutual empathy enhances understanding. While the study was well over 70 years old, the conclusions still apply. Researchers like Salem (2016), Atwood (2021), Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014) and Sturman (2018) examined how students’ needs were or were not being met when utilizing writing center services, other researchers examined how the tutors and staff in the writing centers trained to holistically provide feedback to the student writers. A common thread in tutor reflection pieces was empathy, whether specifically expressed or discussed or implied. In working with tutors to identify how empathy guided tutoring sessions, tutors were able to review the emotional energy used in tutoring sessions (Borba, 2018; De la Fuente-Anuncibay et al., 2019; Englander, 2019; Harrison, 2012; Jordan & Schwartz, 2018; Leake, 2016; McBride et al., 2018; Shea, 2017; Teding van Berkhout & Malouff, 2016).

Driscoll and Wells (2020) examined the emotional energy tutors used when working with students who struggled, not only with writing skills, but with other situations, such as frustration with a teacher, pressure to achieve a high score, or confidence in keeping up with the coursework. In connecting emotional development to writing development, Driscoll and Wells (2020) united the tutor-student relationship; no more was the focus on just one or just the other, but on how emotions guided writing and the tutoring session. Empathy in tutoring was also examined in various modes of tutoring, including online services (Bleak, 2021). Bassett (2021) continued with Driscoll and Wells's (2020) research by examining how an entire writing center can be empathetic or emotionally intelligent through training. Writing center culture played a large role in tutors feeling supported and encouraged to practice empathy in tutoring sessions. Geary and McFerrin (2021) researched the relationship between faculty and tutors and how empathy in tutors bridged the gaps in relationships between faculty and student writers. The relationship needed to be similar, as both the faculty and the tutors wanted the student to be successful writers. Empathetic tutors met students, focused on individual writing strengths, and then helped guide students to meet the course requirements for the writing assignment (Geary & McFerrin, 2021).

Empathy in the classroom, as previously stated, had been employed as an emotional connection to students from the teachers and students. Wender (2014) and Philips (2020) argued the use of empathy must be regularly practiced and improved upon for teachers to become expert educators. The theory was applied to tutors too, as the role of a teacher providing feedback was a role tutors filled. Timms (2021) argued empathy

can be increased through mindful training, which supported Schrachter's (2011) claim at some level, kindness can be taught as well.

Making the connection between empathy and equity in the classroom and arguing the understanding students as human beings with issues outside the classroom provided equity, Shea (2017) built on the work of Jackson et al. (2016). Taylor (2018) examined how empathy in the classroom demonstrated to students everyone mattered; the classroom became other-centered. McBride et al. (2018) examined how empathetic listening in the writing center by the tutors created a holistic approach to writing by truly honoring the students' request for writing assistance. Theirset al. (2021) researched how productive disruptions with empathy can move toward a more inclusive learning environment, especially through the practice of transformative listening. Taking care of the writing center staff was also a topic of examination. Howard (2023) noted how tutors feel a strong sense of community and support among each other, which contributed to a nurturing learning environment.

But along with empathy came potential burnout and a heavy emotional burden for the writing center tutors and staff. In the 2020 article, "The Emotional Sponge: Perceived Reasons for Emotionally Laborious Sessions and Coping Strategies of Peer Writing Tutors", Im et al., noted "a majority of tutors reported engaging in adaptive active and internal coping strategies to manage their work-related stressors" (p. 203). Im et al. (2020) reported how emotional labor was a significant aspect of tutoring, with tutors often having to manage the tutors' own emotions and the emotions of the students using writing center services. Writing described by Parsons (2020) was a deeply personal activity, and tutors often witnessed the emotional struggles of the writers, and tutors often

felt guilty when unable to make writers feel better or unable to meet writers' demands for more directive help. Parsons (2020) noted tutors could empathetically decline a request in order to prevent burnout and maintain tutors' mental health.

The scholar practitioner noticed a gap in the literature specific to writing center tutors and staff and the negative aspects of empathy training; however, the researcher reviewed literature in other related disciplines focused on the ties between empathy and burnout. Lawrence et al. (2020) examined how empathy fit into the writing classroom, coining the term Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy (CEWP), which combined empathy with teaching methods to improve student learning and engagement. The concept of CEWP created a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment by sharing personal stories to build trust, engaging students in the learning process, and adapting classroom policies to be more empathetic towards students' circumstances. Additionally, Hansen et al. (2018) found empathy could lead to compassion fatigue, posing a dilemma for professionals in empathetic roles, such as the medical field or education. The results of Hansen's et al. (2018) study of empathetic professionals indicated one way to resolve empathy fatigue was for the professional, or tutors if the research was applied to writing center professionals, to learn "to feel empathic joy when others feel good might be one way for practitioners to counteract the negative consequences of feeling empathy for those who suffer" (p. 642).

Summary

The evolving landscape of writing center pedagogy, with a primary focus on the role of empathy in shaping tutoring practices, student experiences, and overall inclusivity within the writing center environment moved chronologically highlighting two important

struggles – the identity of the writing center as a remedial fix-it shop or a collaborative space for focusing on higher order critical thinking skills (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995). The initial exploration of empathy in the writing classroom dated back to Rector's seminal study in 1953. The narrative traced the writing center development, confronting challenges such as the stigma of remediation and conflicts between institutional expectations and pedagogical goals.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Results

Problem Statement

The problem of practice chosen by the scholar practitioner was to determine if empathy training for writing consultants changed the mindfulness of how students who used the writing center services felt in the tutoring sessions. Writing center pedagogy had significantly shifted in the past eight years, primarily due to the research of Salem (2016) and Driscoll and Wells (2020). Previously, writing center pedagogy focused on the product, the paper, rather than the writing process, the author. By training writing consultants in mindful empathetic practices, the students who used the services should feel more included and accepted, and therefore, have a better experience.

The results of Salem's (2016) study showed one of the key concerns was honoring the requests the students brought to the writing center, whether the request was for grammar assistance, citations assistance, or reading for clarity. The door was opened for other researchers, like Atwood (2021); Carter (2016); Griffin and Glushko (2016); Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014); and Sturman (2018) to focus more research on the treatment of students requesting tutoring services and the training of the writing consultants. While researchers like Salem (2016), Atwood (2021), Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014), and Sturman (2018) were examining how students' needs were or were not being met in writing centers, other researchers examined how the tutors in the writing centers were being trained to holistically provide feedback to the student writers, once again moving the focus to the tutors. Empathy was found to be a common thread in tutoring writing (De la Fuente-Anuncibay et al., 2019; Englander, 2019; Harrison, 2012;

Jordan & Schwartz, 2018; Leake, 2016; McBride et al., 2018; Shea, 2017; Teding van Berkhout & Malouff, 2016).

Geary and McFerrin (2021) researched the relationship between faculty and tutors and how empathy in tutors bridged the gaps in relationships between faculty and student writers. Empathetic tutors met students where the students were in the writing center and helped to get the student to where the student needed to be for the course requirements (Geary & McFerrin, 2021). The scholar practitioner focused on training writing center tutors in empathetic practices, empathetic language, and empathy mindfulness to help students using the writing center services feel included and seen. By identifying with the writing struggles students brought to the writing center, tutors may be more supportive in how the tutoring sessions occurred. Empathetic language used in writing center communications, such as webpages, may encourage struggling students to use the writing center services.

Design Thinking Process

The design thinking process was an approach taken by the scholar practitioner to address the problem of practice. The human-centric approach seemed to best fit the researcher's journey to understanding how empathy works in the writing center. The design thinking process was iterative, and one the practitioner frequently used within the assessment practices of the practitioner's own writing center. The five steps in the design thinking process were empathy, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Dam, 2022). As a human-centered approach, the design thinking process should be inclusive of the stakeholders connected to the problem of practice and in the solutions for changing, improving, or starting again (Mintrop, 2016).

The scholar practitioner began the empathy stage by first acknowledging any bias, as both the writing center director and supervisor of the writing center staff and tutors participating in the empathy stage. The researcher suspected the writing center staff members knew what empathy was but was curious as to what empathy looked like to current and former writing center staff members. Based on the preliminary findings, the researcher moved to fully defining the problem as best as possible using the information gathered from the empathy stage (see Appendix A) and the literature review. Fine-tuning the problem of practice, the researcher moved to the ideate stage. Tapping a diverse group of scholars and writing center tutors, the researcher facilitated a focus group with stakeholders to develop options for the prototype. Taking the suggestions from the focus group members, the researcher created a prototype which underwent several changes based on input from the stakeholder group (see Appendix B & C). Finally, the researcher was ready to test the prototype to find solutions to the problem of practice.

Empathy Phase

The scholar practitioner used two strategies during the empathy stage: document analysis and open-ended surveys in the fall semester of 2022. The researcher chose document analysis to examine writing center website language of eight universities in the Midwest: two private universities, two community colleges, and four state universities of varying sizes. In examining the writing center websites, the researcher viewed language used to determine if there was an empathetic tone in what students read when looking for writing center services. The website information also indicated if the writing center was process- or product-focused, and if the services provided were student-centered. Of the eight instantiations of higher education studied, seven of the writing center webpages

were written in second person, and six of the writing center webpages listed services to help students learn to find and correct grammar errors.

Document Analysis. In the ideation phase with the stakeholders, a stakeholder suggested the researcher consider the language used on writing center webpages to see if the language used was empathetic. The stakeholder noted students wanting or needing writing center services would be likely to review the webpage for information, and the writing center webpage may be the first place the student encounters what the writing center does and how the writing center could help with writing concerns. The scholar practitioner believed a writing center webpage using empathetic language may be more inviting for struggling students to make the appointment to visit the writing center and use the services.

The researcher examined the webpages for eight universities: two community colleges, two mid-size public universities, two private universities, and two large public universities. The researcher intended to use a document analysis as a preliminary study to determine if further studies would be worth investigating, and the intention was validated by the researcher's stakeholder group meeting which agreed and encouraged a preliminary analysis. The information gained from the document analysis could provide additional insight into how empathetic language was perceived by student users of writing center services. As only the researcher analyzed the writing center websites, further research would be needed to examine student perceptions of the language and whether the students felt the website language conveyed empathy.

Based on the literature review and what the scholar practitioner had seen in the experiences within the researcher institution's writing center, the researcher had three questions about the writing center websites:

1. Does the website provide an empathetic approach to users based on the language used in the website text?
2. Does the writing center use second person, which was directed at the user, or third person, which was a more professional tone?
3. Does the writing center provide basic services like grammar instruction?

The researcher investigated the connection between empathy and inclusion in the writing center environment and the connection between empathy of the writing consultants in making students feel accepted and seen (Denton, 2015; Lape, 2015; Shea, 2017). The language used on the writing center webpage was likely the first interaction students requesting writing assistance experienced. The support of addressing grammar issues was also important in understanding and empathizing with students struggling with grammar (Babcock, 2008; Hoskins, 2007; Salem, 2016). By employing writing center protocols such as denying assistance with grammar issues, students may feel embarrassed and excluded, and may not pursue further assistance (Carino, 1995; Salem, 2016). A preliminary analysis by the scholar researcher also provided potential evidence for further data collection in examining the researcher's own institution's writing center website to determine how the language used supports students needing writing center assistance. Based on the information in the literature review (Driscoll & Wells, 2020; Gill et al., 2018; Salem, 2016), the researcher's analysis focused on the language style, grammar emphasis, and use of empathetic language on the writing center

websites eight Midwest institutions of higher education. The scholar practitioner coded the institutions to protect anonymity.

To determine what constituted empathetic words, phrases, and language, the researcher examined the current literature. Unfortunately, there was no literature specifically related to writing center and empathetic language. However, the researcher found four articles referencing empathetic words, phrases, and language in disciplines other than writing centers: linguistics, medicine, psychology, and business. With over 16 years of writing center experience and pedagogy, the scholar practitioner was comfortable using the information to create the list of empathetic words and phrases. Derringer et al. (2015) studied the use of second person and the connection to empathy.

What characterizes the second person used impersonally, from a pragmatic point of view, is, we claim, “joint empathy”: The speaker and the addressee, on the basis of an attitude of solidarity, jointly empathize with the members of some set of individuals. The speaker intends to evoke empathy in the addressee by using a second person form. (p. 324)

Members of the National Center for Ethics in Health Care (NCECH) provided a chart listing empathetic response care givers could use when working with patients. While writing center students are different than patients in healthcare situations, the phrases were similar to what writing center staff and tutors use during tutoring sessions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Examples of Phrases Used During Tutoring Sessions

1	We will do our very best to make sure you have what you need.
2	This must be... • Frustrating • Overwhelming • Scary • Difficult • Challenging •
3	Our team is here to help you with this.
4	Can you say more about that?
5	I can see how dealing with this might be ... • hard on you • frustrating •

Eldermire (2019) compiled 44 statements from The Gottman Institute to help partners be empathetic listeners (see Table 2).

Table 2

Examples of Phrases Used to Help be Empathetic Listeners

1	I support your position here
2	I totally agree with you.
3	You are making a lot of sense to me.
4	Tell me what you see as your choices here.
5	I see. Let me summarize: What you’re thinking here is...

Gostick (2023) provided an overview of what empathy looks like when working with a team in a business setting, noting “[...]today’s best managers employ specific phrases that convey empathy and foster greater trust, communication, and collaboration

with their team members” (para. 2). Four of the seven questions Gostick (2023) discussed would easily transfer to a writing tutoring session (see Table 3).

Table 3

Questions Easily Transferred to a Writing Tutoring Session

1	How are you doing?
2	I understand.
3	What can I do to support you?
4	Let's find a solution together.

Document analysis results. The analysis of the writing center websites revealed a variety in point of view, grammar focus, and empathetic approaches. While some institutions emphasized responsibility and the development of writerly personas, others prioritized broader discussions over mere proofreading. Despite the variations, the overarching commitment to aiding students in any writing endeavor was evident, reflecting a shared goal of fostering writing excellence across diverse educational institutions.

The researcher looked at two areas in the writing center websites: point of view and grammar assistance. Based on the literature review, Derringer et al. (2015) note the use of second person in text tends to convey empathy. Salem (2016) connected helping students with whatever writing assistance needed builds empathy and inclusion for the users of writing center services.

Institution A used a combination of second- and third person language without explicitly stating whether grammar issues would be addressed in a tutoring session. The institution used the word “help”, noted by...as one of the words listed as empathetic. At Institution B, the second-person language style was prevalent. The grammar focus revolved around addressing concerns hindering reader understanding, with a clear emphasis on the author's responsibility for ensuring a relatively error-free paper. There were no empathetic words used. Institution C’s writing center adopted a second-person language style. Tutors were presented as educators capable of teaching various writing skills, including grammar and proofreading. The empathetic language expressed happiness in assisting students in improving a student’s grammar skills; the writing center utilized the word help in the web page language. Institution D adopted a second-person approach, emphasizing student responsibility and the development of “writerly personas”. The grammar focus centered around not guaranteeing better grades or proofreading essays. The empathetic tone was evident in the commitment to helping students navigate the writing journey. The webpage used empathetic words “happy” and “help”. Institution E employed a second-person approach, offering assistance on grammar, vocabulary, and preferring broader discussions over mere proofreading. The tone and the text reminded students the writing center was not a “fix it” shop for grammar. Institution F’s writing center utilized a second-person language style, though the specific grammar focus was not detailed. The center emphasized aiding students in self-editing for grammar and formatting, providing support for refining the student’s writing skills, and used the word “help”. Institution G adopted a third-person language style. The focus was on providing detailed feedback for writers of all levels, covering

both "higher order concerns" and "later order concerns," showcasing a commitment to comprehensive writing support. Institution H's writing center webpage used second-person language style, focused on teaching students to identify grammatical and usage errors. The empathetic tone encouraged self-correction, with consultants intentionally leaving some errors for students to identify and correct as an individual student.

Table 4

Document Analysis

Institution	Point of View	Grammar Assistance Provided?
Institution A	<p>Second person</p> <p>“You can schedule an appointment...”</p> <p>Third person</p> <p>“Housed in the Division of Student Success and staffed by screened and trained undergraduates, they can help students to become better writers in any subject or major. Writing tutors offer individualized learning sessions for specific projects or help in general, in all aspects of writing: generating ideas and planning a draft, citing sources and avoiding plagiarism, and revising for coherence, concision, and clarity. Students may visit on their own or on the recommendation of an instructor.”</p>	Unknown

Table 4

Document Analysis

Institution	Point of View	Grammar Assistance Provided?
Institution B	Second person “You can schedule an appointment...”	“...we address grammar concerns when poor grammar or syntax interfere with a reader's understanding of the paper. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the author of any paper to ensure it is (relatively) free of grammatical errors.”
Institution C	Second person “You can schedule an appointment... ”	“...we’ll also help you self-edit for grammar and formatting.”
Institution D	Second person “Our tutors will teach you how to brainstorm, draft, revise, edit,”	“We are happy to help you brush up on your grammar skills and proofreading strategies, so come ready to learn.” AND “...Determine grammatical error patterns and learn how to fix these mistakes”

Table 4*Document Analysis*

Institution	Point of View	Grammar Assistance Provided?
Institution E	Second person “Whether you are brainstorming your first assignment at Saint Louis University or putting the final touches on your dissertation...”	“We cannot guarantee better grades, and we do not proofread or copyedit essays. We help, but we also ensure that students take responsibility for their work and develop writerly personas. Our end goal is for students to become self-directed learners.”
Institution F	Second person “You can schedule an appointment...”	“Even if you want to work on the basics—grammar, vocabulary, general—we can do that” AND “... don’t ‘fix.’ A broader discussion of the rules, strategies, and techniques is more useful than mere proofreading.”
Institution G	Third person “Writers of all levels can expect detailed feedback and revision options focused on “Higher Order Concerns” and “later order concerns” for any stage of the writing process, regardless of the modality in which they utilize WC services.”	Unknown

Table 4

Document Analysis

Institution	Point of View	Grammar Assistance Provided?
Institution H	Second person “You can schedule an appointment...”	“...consultants can teach you how to identify grammatical and usage errors, lead you to helpful information and resources, and help you learn how to make corrections. Since part of learning how to proofread well is learning how to spot your own errors, you should expect consultants to leave some for you to identify on your own. They won't necessarily mark every error in your work nor correct them for you”

The results of the document analysis by the scholar practitioner were important and led to the next iteration. Using the writing center tutors as stakeholders, the researcher solicited suggestions for making the webpage more empathetic based on word choice and tone.

Open-ended Surveys. The researcher suspected empathy was necessary for tutors to work well with students needing writing center services; however, the research had no evidence to support the assumption. To confirm or reject the assumption, the researcher decided to survey present and former tutors in the researcher’s instructional writing center. In having the role of writing center director for over 17 years, the researcher supervised more than 100 student worker tutors. The researcher was curious to see if the

tutors were aware of empathy in the tutoring sessions, and if the tutors felt empathy awareness training was necessary for improving writing sessions. Using open-ended surveys to determine if or how writing center staff members perceived empathy in writing center sessions, the researcher sent surveys to over 50 former tutors, using private messages through social media.

The researcher was also curious to know if students using the writing center services felt empathy from the tutor sessions. Participants in the open-ended survey included graduate and undergraduate students who used the writing center services; writing center administrators and staff members; former and current tutors at the researcher's institution. The goal was to have five to 10 participant responses per survey.

A six-question, open-ended survey was created by the researcher and sent to 12 current and former full- or part-time writing center staff members (see Appendix F); six responses were received. A six-question, open-ended survey was created by the researcher and sent to 25 current and former tutors at the researcher's institution; eight responses were received. A seven-question, open-ended survey was created by the researcher and sent to 50 students who used the writing center services at the researcher's institution; seven responses were received.

Current and Former Writing Center Staff Responses. When asked to define empathy, all eight participants provided a definition of empathy which included acknowledging another's feelings. The eight participants collectively had 2-4 years of writing center tutoring experiences. When asked to share an example of what empathy might look like in a tutoring session, all eight participants described being aware of another's skills or emotions. When asked if empathy was a natural mindful practice or if

empathy could be a trainable skill, seven of the eight participants noted people could be trained in empathy.

Current and Former Writing Center Administrators. Six participants responded to the six-question, open-ended survey created by the researcher. The questions were similar to the tutor survey, however, one question for the administrators was different: Other than knowledge about grammar and writing, what qualities do you think tutors need to have? Why? Four of the six participants who previously held supervisory roles noted empathy as a skill tutors needed other than knowledge about writing and grammar. Each participant had 1-8 years of experience.

Users of Writing Center Services Responses. The participants reported using the writing center services at least one time. All seven participants used email feedback on assignments, meaning the seven participants did not physically or virtually meet with the tutor. The researcher was surprised by the responses from the users of writing center services due to the way the services were utilized – emailed feedback. Despite not meeting in-person or virtually through a video call and picking up on verbal or body language cues such as a kind phrase or a smile, the users still perceived a positive interaction with the tutors simply through written feedback. Six of the seven participants using writing center services perceived a positive response in how the tutors treated users of the writing center. The participants responded the tutors provided feedback which resulted in a positive perception. The researcher was excited to read the responses, especially since the users of the writing center services had positive experiences despite not meeting in person or virtually with the tutors. After completing the empathy stage, the

researcher moved to the define stage and used the data to clearly define the problem of practice.

Define Phase

The researcher used the data from the empathy stage to develop an If/Then statement to further define the problem of practice: If writing centers trained tutors in empathy and empathetic practices, incorporated empathetic language into the writing center environment, and incorporated empathetic language into written communications such as emailed feedback, then tutors would be more likely to focus on the writing process rather than solely on the writing product, and students using writing center services may feel more comfortable asking for help with writing assignments. By analyzing the writing center websites of eight institutions of higher education, the researcher noted the words used to convey an empathetic tone on the websites could support students making the choice to use writing center services.

The results of the surveys created for the empathy stage indicated writing center tutors and staff members recognized empathy in tutoring sessions and were able to provide a personal definition of empathy. The researcher was surprised by the responses from the users of writing center services due to the way the services were utilized – emailed feedback. Despite not meeting in-person or virtually through a video call and picking up on verbal or body language cues such as a kind phrase or a smile, the users still perceived a positive interaction with the tutors simply through written feedback. The researcher moved to the ideation stage, where the stakeholders generated solutions to the problem of how empathetic practices in a writing center contradicted current writing center pedagogy.

Ideate Phase

The researcher held a 60-minute meeting via Teams with the stakeholders, and a 30-minute one-on-one meeting with one stakeholder who could not attend the Teams meeting. The stakeholders were a group of women familiar with the researcher's institution's writing center and writing center practices and were chosen with deliberation to provide a variety of ideas and suggestions. Participants in the ideation included a student writing center consultant from the researcher's institution but also with writing center training from another institution; a veteran with experience as a non-traditional student; a retired instructor with over 20 years of experience in teaching composition; a former instructor with experience in teaching composition to multilingual learners; and an instructor with extensive experience in teaching basic and marginalized writers.

One week prior to the meeting, participants were given a brief overview of the data collected and the literature review. The Teams session was recorded. After a brief explanation of the scholar practitioner's research on empathy in the writing center and the need to understand how to improve empathetic practices and introductions of the group members, as well as the researcher's questions and null hypotheses statements, the stakeholders were tasked with brainstorming ways to develop empathy in the writing center culture, within tutoring sessions, and within the language used in writing and in communication with the writing center.

The group discussed several strategies tutors and staff members could employ to build empathy when working with student writers. During the discussion two themes emerged: having access to assignment sheets and class materials assigned by the professors could provide context for the students' goals for the session; and asking

students to share feelings about the writing process could open dialogues about the personal connections to the work created for the assignment, providing insight into the students' mindsets.

The researcher moved the discussion to the next topic of tutor training. The group had many suggestions based on personal experiences in the writing classrooms and in tutoring sessions. The theme emerged from the discussion for tutors to practice reading body language and social cues to identify student discomfort or vulnerability prior to, during, or after the writing session. When tutors were able to visibly detect the discomfort of the student in the writing session, the tutors could adjust their own body language and word choices to put the student at ease. One way to practice reading body language and social cues suggested by the ideation team would be for the tutors to engage in role playing scenarios which could build active empathy skills. The group thought incorporating training in reading body language could be useful and build an empathetic environment in the writing center.

Another suggestion from the stakeholders was to use strategies like checking in frequently with students during tutoring sessions and allowing for pauses for student users to think and to process the session discussions could ensure a better understanding of the suggested revisions. When tutors allowed time for the student to process the strategies discussed or suggested in the tutoring session, the student would have time to ask questions for clarification. Students using writing center services often waited to complete the discussed revisions to the assignment reviewed in the tutoring session. Most tutoring sessions were 30-60 minutes, and the users of the writing center services typically had obligations after the session ends. Student may have questions about the

notes taken, or forget the strategies discussed by the time the actual revisions were made. By allowing time during the tutoring session for the student to think, the stakeholders thought the tutor could answer questions on the spot and allow for a better revision process when the student was ready to make the changes.

The next topic discussed by the stakeholders was how tutors could work with nontraditional students. Tutors could take time at the beginning of the session to verbally validate nontraditional students' academic and life experiences which could lessen anxiety experienced by returning students who may have been out of school for several years. Tutors focused on finding common interests with the students who accessed the writing center services, especially for nontraditional students, could build rapport and potentially encourage future visits.

In the final moments of the session, stakeholders offered one other suggestion to improve an empathetic approach to tutoring. The writing center website copy could use a more conversational approach targeted directly at students reading the writing center webpage to make the writing center seem more relatable and accessible. The researcher was conducting a document analysis of eight other university/college writing center websites, so the suggestion was already under consideration.

The researcher met in-person for 45 minutes with the stakeholder who could not attend the group meeting. In the one-on-one meeting with the single stakeholder, the researcher asked the same questions asked in the group meeting and took notes by hand. The stakeholder noted how empathy made students feel a sense of belonging and how a mindful approach can reduce feelings of being an imposter. After the stakeholder responded to the same questions as the group, the researcher shared the responses and

suggestions from the meeting with the single stakeholder. The stakeholder agreed with the suggestions and thought the document analysis would be beneficial in reviewing empathetic language, especially when the writing center staff offered sessions providing only written feedback.

The researcher anonymized the stakeholders and then coded the responses from the stakeholders into themes and created a chart (Appendix G). Four themes emerged: better understanding of the tasks the students bring to the writing center for assistance; updating the writing center webpage; improving tutor training with exercise in reading body language and structuring the tutoring session to allow for pauses and checking in with the student users; and working toward hiring a diverse tutor population.

Prototype Phase

The researcher used several methods for the prototype of empathy in the writing center, keeping in mind the research questions and null hypotheses statements found in Chapter One of the dissertation in practice.

After careful consideration of the ideas presented during the ideation stage the scholar practitioner decided upon a training opportunity for the writing staff members on empathy. The prototype had three main components: a training module on empathy for the writing center staff members and tutors to complete and a survey of students using writing center services. The training component would provide evidence in response to RQ1, RQ2, and Null Hypothesis statement 1. The survey would provide evidence for Null Hypothesis statement 2.

Creating the Empathy Training Module. The first draft of the prototype consisted of the following items: a pre-survey, three articles on empathy in writing

centers and in the classroom, two articles on incorporating empathetic language into tutoring sessions, and a post-survey. Using email, the researcher shared the draft of the empathy training module with the stakeholders. One stakeholder recommended adding a video; the researcher was able to select a video on empathy which fit the writing center services. A second stakeholder recommended adding a reflection component to understand the perceptions of the writing center staff members after watching the video as well as in the individual tutoring sessions. The researcher modified the training module to include the following: a pre-survey, a video on empathy, questions about the video on how to incorporate empathy into the tutoring sessions, a reflective response to empathy in tutoring sessions, and a post-survey.

Tutors were required to complete the training module but could opt out of allowing data to be collected for the research study. Nine tutors consented to allowing data from the training module to be used anonymously. The researcher coded the data for the pre-and post-surveys and the reflective essays to allow for privacy.

Pre- and Post-Surveys on Empathy. The pre- and post-surveys were based on the Toronto Empathy Survey (TEQ). In 2009, the TEQ (Spreng et al., 2009) was created to evaluate the emotional process of empathy using a self-reporting measure. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions created to record a participant's own process of understanding and feeling emotionally moved by the statements. The TEQ was recognized as a valid instrument to be used in measuring empathy and was also used to measure empathy in educators in Greece (Kourmoussi et al., 2017), in medical students in Turkey (Akgun et al., 2020), and in students in Korea (Yeo & Kim, 2021). The researcher modified three questions and dropped one question, creating a similar survey of 15

questions using a 5-point Likert scale to score participant responses (see Table 7). The TEQ was available in the public domain. While working with the institution's instructor of quantitative research methods, the instructor suggested using a paired *t*-test for analyzing the pre- and post-surveys by adding a question to the survey asking the participant to create an anonymous code name, thus allowing the researcher to connect the pre-and post-surveys with the correct participant. The researcher also planned to use the scoring recommended for the TEQ survey.

The construct validity of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) is evidenced by the ability to measure empathy, as demonstrated through a psychological analysis. Researchers validated the TEQ by ensuring the survey questions relate to different facets of empathy, still aligning with established frameworks. The correlations between TEQ scores and other valid empathy measures, as well as with behaviors associated with empathy, further supported the TEQ's construct validity. The TEQ's ability to assess empathy solidified construct validity reliably and accurately as a robust measurement tool in psychological research (Spreng, et al. 2009).

Tutor reflection. The tutors were asked to write a 300-500 word reflection describing how empathy practices were personally used in tutoring sessions and how empathy was used in observing other tutoring sessions. Tutors were also asked to respond to two questions: Do you feel that the students you worked with felt your empathetic practices? How do you know? Tutors were asked to respond to five questions after watching the 5-minute video (see Table 5).

The questions were as follows:

Table 5*Questions Asked After Watching Video*

-
- 1 What suggestions were provided by the video to show empathy?

 - 2 How can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?

 - 3 How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?

 - 4 Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.

 - 5 Describe a time when you felt empathy in a stressful or happy situation.

Test Phase & Data Analysis

The researcher investigated the connection between empathy and inclusion in the writing center environment and empathy of the writing consultants in making students feel accepted and seen. The participant pool, tutors and writing center staff members at the researcher's institution, originally listed 14 staff members available to complete the empathy surveys and learning module. The completion of the empathy training module was required as part of the staff training, but the writing center staff members and tutor participants could opt out of the data collection consent. The participants had the option to opt out in the survey, and the consent form was posted in the pre-survey page in the Canvas empathy module. Two staff members left the university midway through the fall 2023 semester when the data collection took place. Of the 12 remaining staff members and tutors, nine completed the pre-survey, seven completed the empathy module and final reflections, and eight completed the post-survey. Permission to survey students who used the writing center services was granted through email by the then dean of the College of

Arts and Humanities. The Researched University IRB team approved the research plan for collecting data.

The writing center staff members had six weeks to complete the pre-survey and the empathy training module in the fall 2023 semester. The final reflection and the post-survey were collected the last week of the semester. The total time of data collection was eight weeks, between October and November 2023.

The researcher wanted to know if students who used the writing center services perceived the tutors as empathetic. The researcher sent a six-question survey to 172 students who used the writing center during the time the staff members worked on the empathy module; four students responded. The researcher utilized the researched institution's writing center appointment software program, WCONLINE, to collect the email addresses submitted by students using writing center services. The survey was sent after the tutors completed the empathy training module and was open for approximately four weeks in the fall semester of 2023, from November 12, 2023, and December 10, 2023. The researcher received four responses: one graduate student and three undergraduate students responded.

Pre- and post-surveys. For the pre-and post-survey, the researcher used a modified version of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al., 2009) to assess empathy levels in the writing center staff members before and after the empathy training session. The original TEQ survey consisted of 16 questions (Spreng et al., 2009). The researcher tailored five questions to experiences the writing center staff may have had when working in a writing center or may have experienced in a tutoring session (see Table 6).

Table 6

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and Researcher Modified Questions

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) – 16 questions	Researcher Modified Questions – 15 questions
1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.	1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.
2. Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.	2. Other people’s misfortunes do not usually disturb me.
3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.	3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.
4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.	4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.
5. I enjoy making other people feel better.	5. I enjoy making other people feel better.
6. I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	OMITTED
7. When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else.	6. When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else.
8. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.	7. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.
9. I find that I am “in tune” with other people’s moods.	8. I find that I am “in tune” with other people’s moods.
10. I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses	OMITTED

Table 6

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and Researcher Modified Questions

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) – 16 questions	Researcher Modified Questions – 15 questions
11. I become irritated when someone cries.	9. I become irritated when someone cries.
12. I am not really interested in how other people feel.	10. I am not often interested in how other people feel.
13. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.	11. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.
14. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them.	OMITTED
15. I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness.	12. I find it silly when people cry out of happiness.
16. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him/her.	13. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel protective toward them.
	14. I am pretty good at knowing how someone is feeling by looking at their body language.
	15. The people around me usually have a great influence on my moods.

TEQ questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, and 16 were the positively worded questions, and TEQ questions 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15 were the negatively worded questions;

the scores for the negatively worded questions needed to be reversed for statistical analysis (Spreng et al., 2009). The researcher had questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, and 15 as positively worded and questions 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, and 12 as negatively worded; as the researcher reversed the Likert scale, the researcher reversed the positively worded questions. The TEQ used the following 4-point Likert scale for participants to score the questions: Never = 0; Rarely = 1; Sometimes = 2; Often = 3; Always = 4 (Spreng et al., 2009). The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly agree = 1; Somewhat agree = 2; Neither agree nor disagree = 3; Somewhat disagree = 4; Strongly disagree = 5. The researcher included the option of Neither agree nor disagree to provide the respondents with flexibility in choosing the response. According to Spreng et al. (2009), the participant scores were totaled, with the lowest possible score as 0 and the highest possible score of 64. The higher the score, the higher the level of empathy for the participant (Spreng et al., 2009). The researcher used Qualtrics to deliver the survey to the writing center staff and tutors.

Empathy reflections. Seven of the nine writing center staff members completed both the responses to the survey questions after watching the video and the short reflection. Five of the seven participants answered all five questions; two participants did not comment on question five.

Seven participants completed the short reflection described as “Write a short reflection (300-500 words) describing how you used empathy practices in your tutoring sessions or how you observed empathy in other sessions. Do you feel that the students you worked with felt your empathetic practices? How do you know?” The average reflection was 307 words.

Quantitative Complications. The quantitative research methods professor, as previously noted above, made a recommendation to add one question to each survey: the question asked participants to create a code name so the surveys could be paired during analysis. The researcher agreed created the question in Qualtrics and sent an amendment to the IRB committee noting the additional question.

The writing center staff participants took the pre-survey and created code names so the pre- and post-surveys could be paired for analysis. The researcher reviewed both surveys in Qualtrics. After the survey, the participants completed the Canvas module on empathy, and took the post-survey. However, the researcher, upon review of the Qualtrics data, realized the participants who took the post-survey did not provide the code names created in the pre-survey. Dismayed, the researcher reviewed the Qualtrics post-survey to ensure the code name question was present and active and all was set up according to the revised research plan. The researcher met with the professor of the quantitative analysis course to review the survey. Both researcher and professor were able to see the code name question; however, when the survey was sent to participants, the question for the code name did not show up. The professor recommended the researcher contact the university Qualtrics expert to determine why the question did not appear.

The researcher set up a meeting with the university Qualtrics expert. The expert reviewed the post-survey. When the expert clicked on the link to the survey, the expert did not see the code name question. The researcher, at the request of the expert, deleted the code name from the survey and saved the survey. The researcher sent the revised survey link to the expert to verify the code name question was no longer there; and the question was not visible. At the expert's request, the researcher added the code name

question to the post-survey, clicked save, and then sent the link to the expert. The expert did not see the code name question. The researcher added the expert as a creator to the survey so the expert could access the survey. After repeating the same steps as before, the link was sent to the researcher. The coding question still did not appear, although both the researcher and the expert could see the question in the Qualtrics program.

After multiple attempts to retrieve the code name question and appear to the participants, the university Qualtrics expert determined a glitch occurred and there was nothing the expert or the researcher could do to make the code name visible to potential survey participants. Since the researcher was unable to add the code name question to the post-survey, the researcher could not complete a paired samples *t*-test. As an option, the instructor suggested the researcher conduct a two-independent samples *t*-test. The researcher also summarized descriptive statistics on a question-by-question basis to provide additional insights.

Results

Only basic descriptive statistics were run on the data, using Microsoft Excel programming. The sample size was small, fewer than 10 data points, with only nine responses on the pre-survey and eight responses on the post-survey, so the p-value and normality tests did not provide useful data. In addition, there was an error in the survey data collection, so the identification code names for the post-survey were not collected thus no pre/post-survey analysis for Null Hypotheses 1 and 2 could be completed.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses Analysis. The researcher developed two research questions and two null hypotheses statements:

RQ1: How will writing center staff implement empathetic strategies into writing center consultations with students?

RQ2: How do writing center staff perceive the empathy training module?

Null Hypothesis 1: Writing center staff will perceive no difference in their use of empathy after completion of the empathy module.

Null Hypothesis 2: Students who use the writing center services will perceive no difference in if or how they were treated with empathy when using writing center services.

The researcher was unable to conduct statistical analysis on Null 2 due to a sample size of four students; however, the feedback was presented in the form of descriptive statistics.

Using the collected data, the researcher responded to each research question.

RQ1: How will writing center staff implement empathetic strategies into writing center consultations with students?

The responses to the questions after the video in the Canvas empathy module showed writing center staff members used multiple strategies to incorporate empathy into the writing center sessions (see Tables 6a, 7a). Writing center staff members met with students for consultations in two modalities: in-person or emailed feedback. Three of the questions asked for examples of how to show empathy in a particular modality (see Appendix E).

Table 7

Responses to Question 2 After Empathy Module Video

Participants	Q 2 - How can tutors show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?
1	Being understanding of people's struggles with English and writing
2	You can try to put yourself in their shoes and use that to guide what you say
3	by observing students body language. Additionally, when they express concerns to me I could make an effort to speak to them in a way that shows I am listening
4	we can relate to that stress an empathize with them by making sure to looking at particular areas or issues of concern, providing encouragement and praise when needed
5	while actively paying attention to the person
6	I can show empathy by acknowledging a student's frustration or worry over their assignments I can do this by listening to the student's concerns and giving them the freedom to speak about their problems
7	it's important to both pay attention to body language and what the student is saying. it's important to look at body language. Body language can indicate a lot about what a student is feeling

The participants seemed to understand the language used in tutoring sessions helped to put students in the sessions at ease (Eldermire, 2019; Gostick, 2023).

Table 8

Responses to Question 3 After Empathy Module Video

Participants	Q3 -How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?
1	In the comments made digitally on a person's paper, you can avoid sounding condescending and mean
2	For an email feedback tutoring session, you have to figure out what is going on through what they write. Then you can write a response
3	No response
4	You can show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session by taking extra care to examine your tone and how your words could be interpreted, provide a message of goodwill in your response email, and by reviewing and providing feedback in a timely manner.
5	In an email feedback, one can show empathy by paying attention to the words used and by giving positive feedback, always trying to highlight where the person did a good job.
6	I can show empathy by observing the appointment notes where the student expresses their concerns and acknowledging that in my comments and my emails to them when I reach out post-appointment.
7	In an email feedback session, empathy is something that takes a lot more guesswork. It's important to try and figure out how a student is feeling based on the context they provided. From that point, it is important to figure out what the student might need. This can look like offering advice, or suggesting further avenues of exploration

Participants responses to Q3 showed awareness in the words chosen to respond and give written feedback (Driscoll & Wells, 2020; NCECH, n.d.; Salem, 2016).

Table 9

Responses to Questions 4 After Empathy Module Video

Participants	Q4 - Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.
1	I've seen empathy in the writing center when a consultant is particularly patient or understanding with an especially difficult or confused student. The consultant was kind and did their best to help without being mean or getting upset.
2	I have seen students come in who are stressed about an assignment. Using empathy helped them to not worry about it as much.
3	I saw empathy practices used in the writing center is when a student who had come in the previous day stopped by to tell the tutor they worked with that they received a good score on their paper. The tutor responded with empathy by expressing their excitement for the student.
4	Not too long ago we had a student come in with a young child. The child had lots of energy and didn't want to sit still while his father meet with one of our consultants. At that time, everyone in the Writing Center did their best to try to find ways to keep him entertained. Even though he did get fairly loud at points, no one made a rude comment and instead talked to him, gave him snacks, brought out coloring book and puzzles, and even a small etch a sketch to try to keep him occupied. Near the end, we had to shut the front door to keep him from running out and down the hallway, but we did our best to accommodate the student, show empathy for their situation, and help them through it while they were here.

Table 9

Responses to Questions 4 After Empathy Module Video

Participants	Q4 - Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.
5	I usually see these actions being performed at the writing center. All tutors are very respectful and seem to care about the students. Honestly, I have never seen a situation when a tutor is not approaching a student with empathy.
6	No response
7	The tutors in the writing center always come off as considerate and understanding in many ways. They consider how students might be feeling or thinking when they offer input to students. This also occurs in positive ways; a session I observed involved the student writing a letter to a college they were applying for. The tutor that I observed offered some polite encouragement, encouraging the writer through their exciting journey.

The writing center staff participants agreed to use visual or verbal cues to show empathy for students using writing center services with an in-person consultation. The staff participants also agreed in providing written feedback sometimes presented challenges, and one common theme from the responses was to be aware of the word choice when providing feedback. The writing center staff participants confirmed empathy was visible in the writing center by providing examples from observing other consultations or from personal consultations.

The writing center staff participants completed a short reflection on the experiences when completing the empathy Canvas training module. Four themes emerged from the participants' reflections: empathy was a critical part of tutoring; participants recognized empathetic strategies and how to implement the strategies into the tutoring sessions; students using the writing center services were aware of the empathy from the writing center tutors; and empathy was present in the writing center culture (see Table 10).

Table 10*Experiences of Staff Participants Post Empathy Training Module*

Participant 1	One instance that stands out is when I worked with a student who was struggling with self-confidence in their writing abilities. Recognizing their hesitancy, I started the session by asking open-ended questions about their writing process and the challenges they were facing. During the session, I also made a conscious effort to acknowledge their strengths, highlighting specific areas where their writing demonstrated improvement. I also shared my own experiences with overcoming writing challenges, emphasizing that everyone encounters obstacles on their writing journey. This personal touch helped to build a connection, and the student seemed to visibly relax, becoming more open to feedback and suggestions.
Participant 3	Aside from that, more empathy needs to be applied in brainstorming session with students. Students requesting help with brainstorming or crafting an outline often coming in feeling lost or overwhelm with the assignment. Empathizing with them and letting them know that is a complete normal reaction can often help them to open up about the assignment.
Participant 4	By making connections with the students, it becomes a lot easier for communication to occur between me and the students. Students are more likely to communicate their needs and feelings. Additionally, I try to pay attention to how the students react in terms of body language or other subtle things. This can also communicate a lot about how the students are feeling. Once I know what the students are thinking or feeling, it's up to me to try and figure out what might benefit them best, based on what they have communicated.

The three samples from the writing center participants' reflections showed the staff members incorporated empathetic strategies into the sessions with the students who used writing center services thus honoring the requests of the students in the tutoring sessions (Salem, 2016). The researcher, based on the writing center staff participants' reflections, provided ample information to answer research question one and indicated how writing center staff members incorporated empathetic strategies into writing center sessions.

RQ2: How do writing center staff perceive the empathy training module?

While there was no specific question posed to the writing center staff participants asking for participant perceptions about the empathy training module, the researcher saw evidence from the participants in the reflections to support the theory of a positive perception and perhaps a bit of redundancy in the need for empathy training. The writing center staff participants noted the following in the reflections collected (see Table 11).

Table 11

Excerpts from Staff Participants' Reflections

Participant 1	<p>Additionally, I observed empathy practices in other tutoring sessions, reinforcing the belief that empathy is not only about understanding but also about actively listening and responding to students' needs. In one session, a fellow tutor skillfully employed empathetic listening when a student expressed frustration with a complex assignment. The tutor patiently allowed the student to articulate their concerns without interruption, creating a space for the student to feel heard and validated. This approach laid the foundation for a collaborative discussion on strategies to tackle the assignment, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.</p>
<hr/>	
Participant 3	<p>I have also seen a session where the student came in for help on a discussion board post. They were confused about what to do because they had already done one post and were marked off on it. The tutor was able to understand what they were concerned about and go over the assignment with them so that they could understand it. They were also able to talk to the student about what they missed on the last assignment so that they could understand what they got wrong. After that, they seemed much more confident with the current assignment.</p>

Empathetic strategies and other actions of empathy noted in the writing center staff participants reflections indicated the training may not have been new to the staff members and the staff were already aware of the use of empathy to put students using writing center services at ease.

Null 1: Writing center staff will perceive no difference in the use of empathy after completion of the empathy module.

As stated previously, the researcher used a modified version of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al., 2009) to determine if the training module on empathy made a difference in the writing center staff participants' use of empathy. The TEQ used a 4-point Likert scale: Never = 0; Rarely = 1; Sometimes = 2; Often = 3; Always = 4 (Spreng et al., 2009). The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly agree = 1; Somewhat agree = 2; Neither agree nor disagree = 3; Somewhat disagree = 4; Strongly disagree = 5. The researcher also followed the TEQ in noting a high score indicated a high level of empathy.

Table 6a, displayed in Appendix E, showed the results of the raw data collected. Nine writing center staff participants completed the pre-survey; eight writing center staff participants completed the post-survey. Following the methods used by Spreng et al. (2009) for the TEQ, the researcher reversed the scores for the positively worded questions, which included questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, and 15 also displayed in Appendix G.

The researcher calculated an average of the scores for each question since the number of participants were different in the pre- and post-surveys (see Table 12).

Table 12

Pre-survey Results with Descriptive Statistics

ID	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	SUM	AVG	STD DEV
TIME	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q1	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	42	4.667	0.471
Q2	4	5	5	3	1	5	4	4	4	35	3.889	1.197
Q3	5	5	5	5	5	1	4	5	5	40	4.444	1.257
Q4	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	41	4.556	0.497
Q5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	43	4.778	0.416
Q6	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	39	4.333	0.667
Q7	4	4	4	2	5	4	3	4	3	33	3.667	0.816
Q8	5	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	35	3.889	0.737
Q9	4	5	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	38	4.222	0.786
Q10	5	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	38	4.222	0.629
Q11	4	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	5	38	4.222	0.629
Q12	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	43	4.778	0.416
Q13	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	41	4.556	0.497
Q14	4	4	4	2	5	5	3	4	3	34	3.778	0.916
Q15	4	5	4	4	5	2	4	5	4	37	4.111	0.875
TOTAL										577	64.111	0.838

According to Spreng et al. (2009), the higher the total score of all the questions, the higher the level of empathy. The researcher then calculated the average scores for the post-survey, following the same methods used for averaging the pre-survey (see Table 13).

Table 13

Post-survey Results with Descriptive Statistics

ID	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	SUM	AVG	STD DEV
TIME	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Q1	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	37	4.625	0.484
Q2	4	4	4	4	5	3	4	5	33	4.125	0.599
Q3	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	39	4.875	0.331
Q4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32	4.000	0.000
Q5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	39	4.875	0.331
Q6	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	34	4.250	0.433
Q7	4	4	4	5	4	2	4	4	32	4.000	0.866
Q8	4	4	4	4	5	2	3	4	30	3.750	0.829
Q9	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	35	4.375	0.484
Q10	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	35	4.375	0.484
Q11	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	37	4.625	0.484
Q12	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	38	4.750	0.433
Q13	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	37	4.625	0.484
Q14	5	4	4	5	5	2	3	4	32	4.000	1.000
Q15	2	4	5	5	4	4	3	5	32	4.000	1.000
TOTAL									522	65.125	0.703

The researcher noted the differences between the averages among each question. In the pre-survey, the average score of the 15 questions was 64.11; in the post-survey, after the empathy module was completed, the average score was 65.125. While the higher average score in the post-test would have typically shown the participants increased empathy, the difference in the average score did show an observable difference. The difference in the average score did show an observable difference. The qualitative data collected from the participant reflections seemed to corroborate the increase in empathy.

Table 14

Final Results Summary

TIME	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	(Post - Pre)
	1	2	DIFFERENCE
Q1	4.667	4.625	-0.042
Q2	3.889	4.125	0.236
Q3	4.444	4.875	0.431
Q4	4.556	4.000	-0.556
Q5	4.778	4.875	0.097
Q6	4.333	4.250	-0.083
Q7	3.667	4.000	0.333
Q8	3.889	3.750	-0.139
Q9	4.222	4.375	0.153
Q10	4.222	4.375	0.153
Q11	4.222	4.625	0.403
Q12	4.778	4.750	-0.028
Q13	4.556	4.625	0.069
Q14	3.778	4.000	0.222
Q15	4.111	4.000	-0.111
TOTAL	64.111	65.250	1.139

In reviewing the averages of each question, the researcher noted several questions did not increase from the pre- to post-survey; questions 1, 4, 6, 8, 12, and 15 had slight decreases, which required further investigation.

Due to the Qualtrics glitch and the inability to pair participants’ responses, the researcher triangulated results using a two-sample independent t-test. While not ideal, the statistical test was the only option and considered given the pretest survey responses had 9 participants and the post-test had 8 participants. The underlying assumptions for the test were (1) each sampled population was normally distributed, (2) each sample independently selected, and (3) and population variances are equal (McClave & Sincich, 2017, p. 442). Using SPSS, the researcher verified the normality of each sampled population using the Shapiro-Wilk test and equal population variances using Levene’s

test with a level of significance of alpha equal to 0.05. A limitation was cited for the eight participants being dependent. Furthermore, using an independent samples *t*-test in a paired samples application generally provides a conservative result. In the study, the result was a nonrejection of the null hypothesis, $t(15) = -.438, p = .667, d = .213, 95\% \text{ CI } [-5.9, 3.92]$.

While the paired *t*-tests were not completed due to the unexpected issue with Qualtrics, the scholar practitioner observed a difference in the participants average scores in the first year of being a writing center tutor and participants with one or more years of writing center tutor experience. Participants 2, 5, and 7 in the pre-survey and Participants 10, 11, and 15 in the post-survey were tutors in the first year of tutoring (see Table 15).

Table 15

Pre-survey Results with Years of Experience and Descriptive Statistics

YEARS OF EXP	First Year			1 to 2		3 to 4		5+	
ID	2	5	7	1	8	9	3	4	6
Q1	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4
Q2	5	1	4	4	4	4	5	3	5
Q3	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	1
Q4	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4
Q5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Q6	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	3	4
Q7	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	2	4
Q8	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	2	4
Q9	5	5	4	4	3	5	4	3	5
Q10	5	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	5
Q11	5	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	5
Q12	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5
Q13	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	5
Q14	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	2	5
Q15	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	2
AVG	4.400			4.333		4.400		4.067	
STD DEV	0.827			0.537		0.712		0.998	

Similar to the 1953 study by Rector (1953), writing center tutors with fewer than one year of experience had more empathy than the experienced tutors. Tutors with three to four years of experience scored the same as the first-year tutors, and both participant groups with one to two years and over five years of tutoring experience scored lower than the first-year tutors (see Table 16).

Table 16

First Year Writing Center Consultants Pre-survey vs Post-survey Results with Descriptive Statistics

ID	Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	2	5	7	10	11	15
Q1	5	5	5	4	4	4
Q2	5	1	4	4	4	3
Q3	5	5	4	5	4	5
Q4	5	4	5	4	4	4
Q5	5	4	5	5	4	5
Q6	5	4	5	4	4	4
Q7	4	5	3	4	4	2
Q8	4	4	4	4	4	2
Q9	5	5	4	5	4	4
Q10	5	3	4	4	4	5
Q11	5	3	4	5	4	4
Q12	5	5	5	5	4	5
Q13	5	5	4	5	4	4
Q14	4	5	3	5	4	2
Q15	5	5	4	2	4	4
AVG	4.400			4.044		
STD DEV	0.827			0.788		

In looking only at the first-year tutors, scores from the TEQ were lower in the post-survey than in the pre-survey. While the scholar practitioner hypothesized possible reasons for the lower scores after completing the empathy module, further research would need to be completed.

Null Hypothesis 2: Students who use the writing center services will perceive no difference in if they were treated with empathy when using writing center services.

After the tutors completed the empathy training module, the researcher sent 172 surveys to students who used the writing center services; four surveys were completed. The scholar practitioner reviewed the responses and listed per survey question (see Table 17). The researcher was specifically interested in three descriptive questions relating to status, usage, and modality of services (Q1, Q2, and Q3).

Table 17

Survey Results from Students Who Used the Writing Center

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Q1. Are you a graduate or undergraduate student?			
Graduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate
Q2. How many times have you used the writing center?			
7+	5 to 6	5 to 6	7+
Q3. Please identify how you use the writing center services. Check all that apply.			
Written feedback via email appointment	Written feedback via email appointment	Written feedback via email appointment	Written feedback via email appointment
Q4. How would you rate your experience with the writing center consultant?			
Very good	Very good	Very good	Neutral
Q5. Do you feel the writing consultant treated you and your writing with empathy?			
Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree

Table 17

Survey Results from Students Who Used the Writing Center

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Q6. Please describe how the tutor made you feel during the feedback session.			
All writing specialists have been absolutely amazing. Not exaggerating here. They truly show empathy and a whole lot of support! I am very grateful to them all!	Like a strong writer who has support from the Writing Center.	The tutors are always kind, enthusiastic, and prompt. I always feel welcomed, as they are very polite and offer as much help as I need.	No comment posted

Summary

In reviewing the survey data, the researcher noted the post-survey average was 1.39 points higher than the pre-survey, indicating the empathy training module did increase empathy. However, the sample was small, with the results best described as inconclusive but encouraging, especially when paired with the qualitative data in the writing center staff participants’ reflections.

Chapter Four: Critical Analysis – Integration into Practice

Critical Analysis

The scholar research began the study using the design thinking process to find solutions to the problem of practice in the researcher's own writing center. The overall purpose was to investigate if training writing center staff and tutors in empathetic practices would change how students using writing center services perceived being treated with empathy during tutoring sessions. Through a historical review of writing center literature and the interdisciplinary studies of empathy, the scholar practitioner noted some gaps in studies examining specific empathy in writing center practices. The literature reviewed by the researcher showed the writing centers historically were labeled as “fix it” shops rather than centers for critical thinking about writing and writing processes (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995). The struggle led to writing center policies and pedagogy which limited the assistance writing center staff and tutors could utilize in tutoring sessions. Salem's (2016) ground breaking study highlighted three revolutionary changes to writing center pedagogy: honor what the students using the writing center requested, even if grammar assistance was the only request; acknowledge the current writing center pedagogies could be slanted to support the privileged rather than the marginalized writers; and remove the stigma of writing centers being a “fix it” shop and instead teach students to find and correct a student's own errors.

The study began with an empathy phase to gather preliminary data through document analysis of writing center websites at eight universities, as well as open-ended surveys for current and former writing center staff members and tutors, and students who used writing center services. The scholar practitioner then used the data collected, along

with over 17 years of writing center experience, to define the problem more precisely based on existing writing center practices and perceptions around empathetic language.

During the ideate phase, the researcher consulted a diverse group of stakeholders, with various experiences in teaching writing and tutoring, to brainstorm potential strategies for building empathy into the writing center environment. The stakeholders reviewed the information collected from the empathy stage, and through a focus group, provided an approach to developing the actual intervention of a tutor training module on empathy. The stakeholders also affirmed the document analysis as a means of looking for empathetic language, leading to further study of the practitioner's own institution's writing center webpage.

The prototype centered on three components: 1) an empathy training module for writing center staff, 2) a document analysis of empathetic language on writing center websites, and 3) a survey of students using writing center services. A mixed method approach aligned with the two research questions around how staff implemented empathetic strategies (RQ1) and the tutor's perceptions of the training (RQ2), as well as the null hypotheses about changes in empathy levels pre/post training.

The prototype empathy training module was iteratively revised based on stakeholder feedback to include a pre/post survey using a modified version of the validated Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng et al., 2009), watching an empathy video, reflecting on personal experiences, and answering questions about implementing empathetic practices into tutoring sessions. The empathy training module provided opportunities for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, using an evidence-based tool like the TEQ and having writing center staff and tutors complete reflections.

The pre- and post-survey design was the primary tool for quantitative analysis to assess if empathy levels changed significantly for the writing center staff members and tutors after the training module was completed. However, an unfortunate glitch prevented collecting identifying codes to match the pre- and post-survey responses, so the data could only be analyzed descriptively rather than using a paired *t* test as originally planned. The limitation was clearly acknowledged. Even with the inability to run advanced quantitative analyses, the researcher still examined the pre- and post-survey response means descriptively along with standard deviations to check for potential changes in average empathy levels. An interesting finding was first-year tutors scored higher on the pre-test than more experienced tutors, although scores appeared to decrease slightly post-training, warranting further investigation. Despite a 71-year gap, the TEQ results supported Rector's (1953) study, indicating the more experienced teachers had lower empathy scores.

To assess RQ1 on implementing empathy strategies in tutoring sessions, the staff reflections were analyzed using manual qualitative coding by the researcher to identify themes around specific empathetic practices used in tutoring sessions. Excerpts from the reflections indicated writing center staff and tutors understood the importance of asking open-ended questions, acknowledging struggles, giving encouragement, active listening, making connections, and being attuned to non-verbal cues – when in a tutoring session. The staff and tutors identified many best practices for empathetic strategies in serving the whole person, not just the piece of writing (Bassett, 2021; Driscoll & Wells, 2020).

The document analysis provided useful context on the extent to which empathetic language was already present on writing center websites across different institutions in

the Midwest. The stakeholders suggested the analysis to consider using a more conversational language, second person, to build rapport with anxious students wanting writing assistance and make writing center services appear more inviting to students in need of support (Deringer et al., 2015).

Finally, while only four student survey responses were received, the qualitative data seemed to reinforce the perceptions of empathy in the tutoring sessions. Students using writing center services reported feeling welcomed, supported, and understood during tutoring sessions. The results provided preliminary evidence related to the null hypothesis about student perceptions of empathy.

In addition to the researcher's inability to analyze Null Hypotheses 2 using a *t*-test, the study sample was relatively small, consisting solely of staff and tutors from one university's writing center, all supervised by the scholar practitioner. A larger, multi-institutional sample could enhance the findings. Additionally, only students using writing center services who received remote/email feedback responded to the survey, so perspectives from students using writing center services in-person or through video-based tutoring are still needed.

The mixed-methods design, in conjunction with the design thinking process, produced complementary data from multiple sources and stakeholder groups. The extensive use of qualitative data from writing center staff and tutor reflections provided a look into how empathetic strategies were used by tutors in tutoring sessions. The validation of themes through triangulation with other data sources encouraged further research, despite the small quantitative sample size. While the quantitative analyses did not draw definitive conclusions, the qualitative results suggested the training may have

positively influenced how writing center staff and tutors understand, perceive, and enact empathetic practices, providing a strong foundation for future research to confirm and extend the findings using more robust quantitative methods with larger samples.

Integration into Practice

The scholar practitioner perceived assessment as a critical and integral piece to writing center administration. However, by using a design thinking approach, the scholar practitioner incorporated the assessment into the empathy training module for the writing center staff and tutors. Results from the data collection in the empathy stage of the design thinking process showed the current and previous writing center staff members and tutors identified what empathy looked like in and out of the writing center based on experiences and tutoring sessions. The data collection from the prototype stage confirmed the current writing center staff and tutors' awareness of empathy, empathetic strategies, and how the empathetic strategies were perceived by the students using writing center services.

Integration into the Writing Center Practice

The researcher used the data to create an in-person training workshop on empathy for the writing center staff. The researcher planned a workshop for the first two weeks of the fall semester after the study was completed including a pair and share component where experienced writing center staff members share experiences with the new writing center staff members. A second component to the in-person workshop will include a short brainstorming or ideation session on how to incorporate empathetic strategies into writing center sessions, especially for the written feedback, since several of the writing center staff participants noted the struggle to imbed an empathetic "feeling" using only words. A final component for the workshop will be to review the survey sent to users of writing

center services to review the original set of questions and determine if new questions needed to be added.

The researcher will continue to use the empathy module prototype for new writing center staff members joining in the spring semester. The researcher also plans to hold a focus group with the writing center staff members to determine if the prototyped module increased empathy understanding since no survey question on the original design focused on a direct connection to the information learned in the module. If possible, the researcher will ask a senior staff member to facilitate the focus group to allow writing center staff members to speak freely without a supervisor present. Input from the focus group will be used to revise the prototype Canvas training module on empathy if the group has suggestions for change.

The researcher also planned to integrate ideate sessions with the writing center staff to determine if the writing center webpage included empathetic language. Based on the document analysis, the researcher was curious to see if the university writing center webpage could be improved to use empathetic language. If additional ideation sessions produced suggestions for change, the writing center website could be revised, and then shared with students (stakeholders) to determine which webpage is perceived to be more empathic - the revised webpage or the original webpage.

The scholar practitioner plans to bring the research to an ad hoc group of local writing center directors from a variety of colleges and universities in the Midwest. The researcher would like to gain feedback, either written or in focus group form, on the results for the research study and the design thinking process. One benefit for the group would be to discuss the findings, and perhaps ideate improvements to the prototype for a

second study. The researcher hopes the group would desire to create a large-scale study to further investigate empathy in writing centers.

Results in Action

As a leader in the writing center and within the larger writing center community, the researcher was hopeful the results would encourage more writing centers to operate with mindful empathy, supporting Salem's (2016) research and vision of a "writing center as a kind of pedagogical workshop—a place where writers encounter writing tutors who know their stuff—and a space where pedagogical practices are constantly being developed, explored, and tested" (p. 165). Salem's (2016) research caused quite a discussion among writing center directors and administrators, as the author challenged the traditional ways pedagogy was implemented within writing center environments. As leaders of organizational change in the writing center, and often within the university or college in which the directors are employed, directors and administrators need to assess the center's best practices and determine if changes are needed to best support the students who use the writing center services. As Salem (2016) pointed out:

Orthodox writing center pedagogies for working with grammar and correctness are similarly slanted toward privileged students. Treating grammar/correctness as a "lower order" or "later order" concern, means that frequently we do not address grammar much (or at all) in our tutoring sessions. For privileged students who grew up in homes where a white, middle-class version of English was spoken, this approach might be okay. But affecting a genteel disregard for grammar concerns makes no sense if we are working with English language learners, with students who spoke a

less-privileged version of English at home, or with any students' questions about grammar, this doesn't make those questions go away, nor does it fundamentally alter the terms on which grammar is understood in the university or in society. It simply leaves students up to their own devices to deal with those questions. (p. 163)

The challenge remains for writing center leadership to relax the pedagogy of fixing the product and implement the practice of empathy in honoring what the student requests when using writing center services, but empathy and equity should be in the forefront when examining what the writing center tutors can and cannot do to provide writing assistance.

The design thinking process worked well in determining what the users wanted or needed to resolve the issue; for example, the issues could be writing centers only working on higher-order concerns rather than grammar or word choice, or only allowing sessions for students who have a written draft instead of allowing discussion or brainstorming a topic and outline. Due to the iterative nature of the design thinking process small changes can be made, observed, studied and then implemented. Creative courage is needed for leaders wanting to change the status quo; often starting with small changes and a few colleagues and then moving toward collecting as much data as possible to gently nudge change forward.

Conclusion

Writing center services has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from a traditional focus on crafting the perfect product or piece of writing to a more student-centered approach. The paradigm shift emphasizes the unique writing strategies and

voices of individuals, placing a spotlight on the processes involved in writing rather than fixating on predetermined outcomes. In the wake of the transformation, a crucial theme emerged – the need for inclusivity within writing center environments, which can begin with empathetic practices.

Research conducted on the subject not only documented the shift in focus but also highlighted the pressing importance of serving marginalized students within writing centers. Directors and administrators have responded by integrating strategies aimed at addressing the specific needs of students using writing center services. The evolution of tutor training programs and courses reflects a growing commitment to inclusivity.

Furthermore, the current research noted the limitations of traditional tutoring models and pedagogies in meeting the diverse goals, abilities, cultures, and learning styles of individual students. The call to construct writing centers as inclusive spaces demands a shift toward a more personalized and empathetic approaches to best support the writing center staff and tutors as well as students using writing center services.

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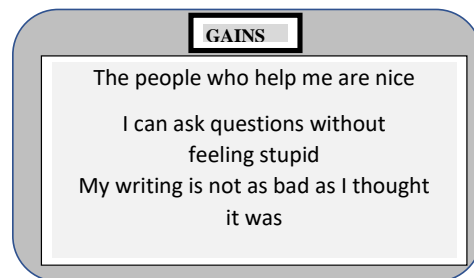
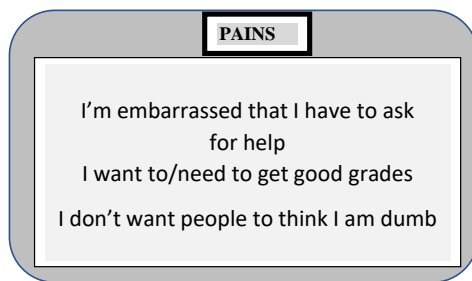
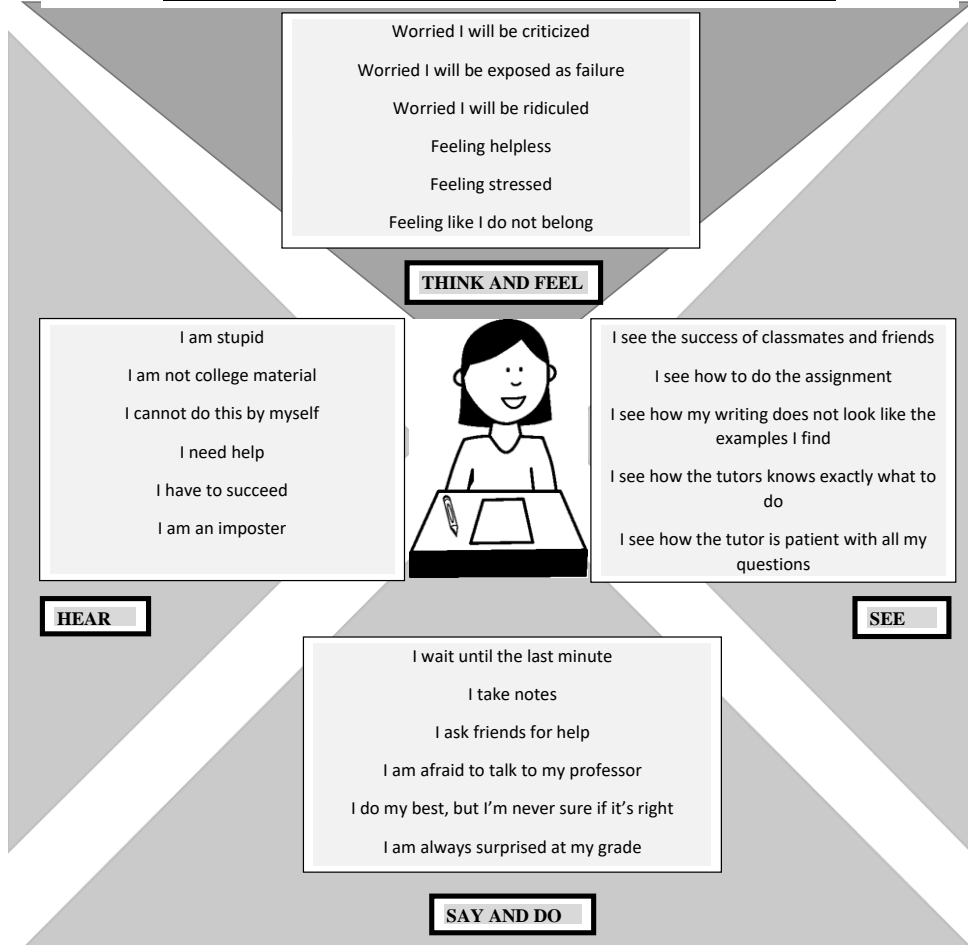
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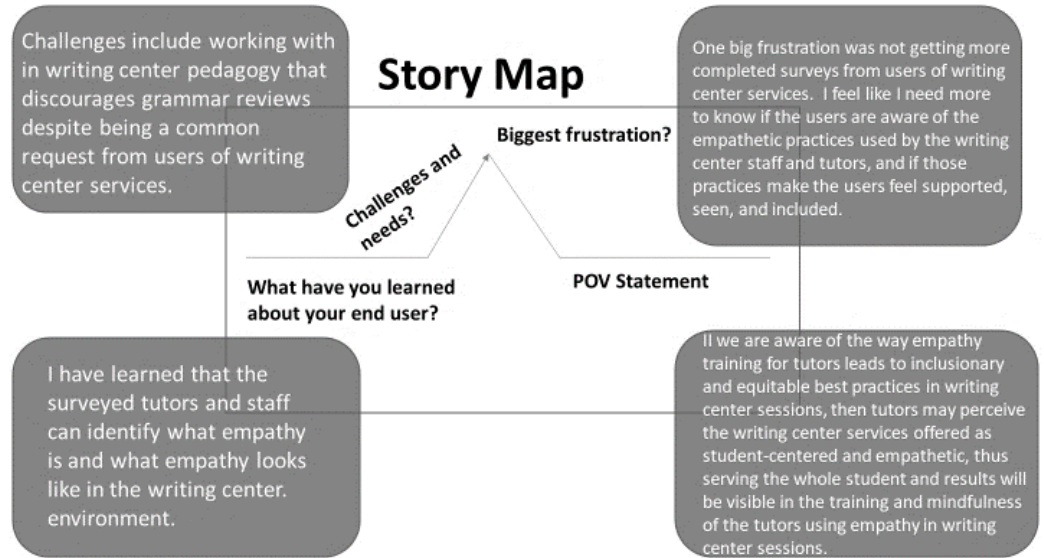
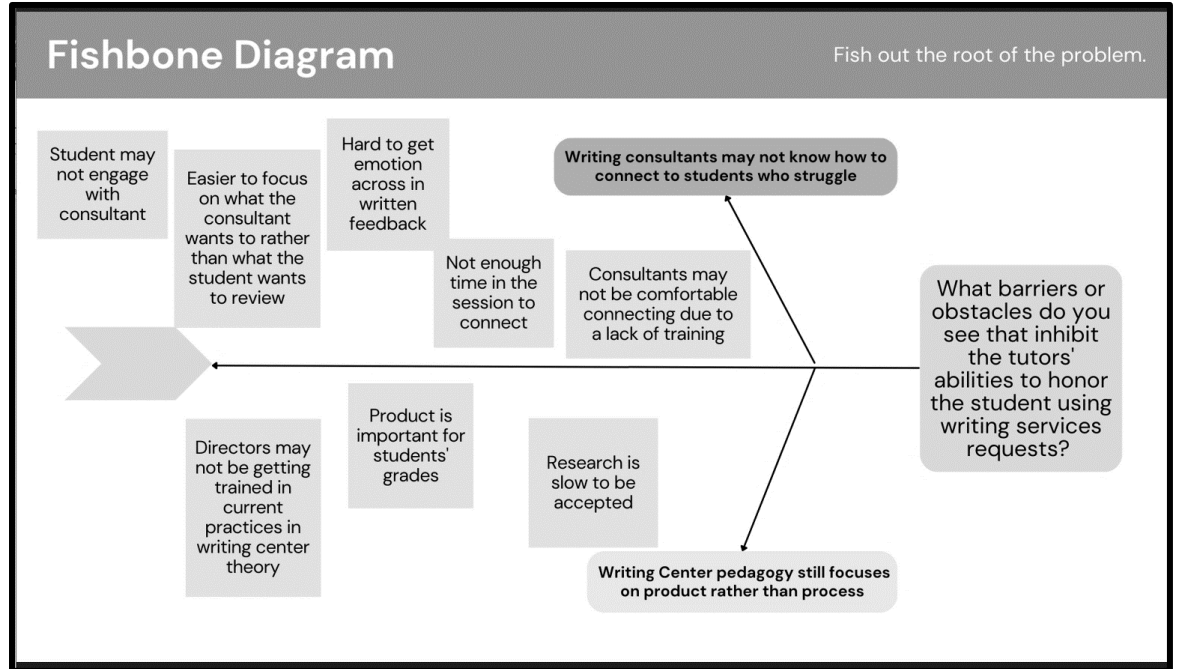
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Appendices

Appendix A: Empathy Map, Fishbone Diagram, and Story Map

STUDENTS WHO USE THE WRITING CENTER





**Appendix B: Original Prototype – Empathy Module for Writing Center
Staff and Tutors**

1. Create a training module within the Canvas learning management system for writing center staff and tutors.

2. Include the following:

Pre-survey (modified TEQ)

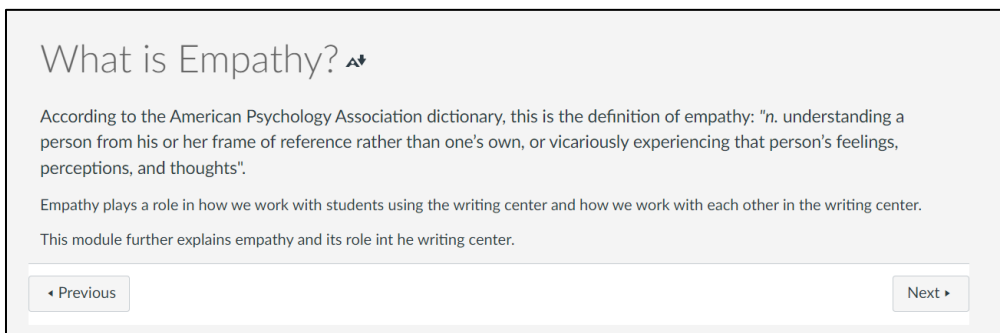
Definition of empathy

Articles about empathy in a writing center environment

Post-survey (modified TEQ)

Reflection

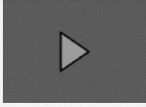
Appendix C: Revised Prototype with Stakeholder Input



Empathy Responses ▲

✓ Published ✎ Edit ⋮

Watch the video on empathy.
<https://youtu.be/ltp21tly8nM>



Respond to the following the questions:

- What suggestions were provided by the video to show empathy?
- How can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?
- How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?
- Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.
- Describe a time when you felt empathy in a stressful or happy situation.

Points 100
Submitting a text entry box or a file upload

Empathy in Action ▲

✓ Published ✎ Edit ⋮

Write a short reflection (300-500 words) describing how you used empathy practices in your tutoring sessions or how you observed empathy in other sessions.

Do you feel that the students you worked with felt your empathetic practices? How do you know?

Points 100
Submitting a text entry box or a file upload

Due	For	Available from	Until
-	Everyone	-	-

+ Rubric

◀ Previous Next ▶

**Appendix D : Pre-Survey Questions for Tutors to Complete Prior to Completing the
Empathy Training Module**

Please choose one.

- I am completing this survey as a requirement for my training as a tutor in the writing center. You may use my information in the data collection for this research project.
- I am completing this survey as a requirement for my training as a tutor in the writing center. You may NOT use my information in the data collection for this research project.

Please create a unique user name that you will use for the pre and post test.

How long have you been a writing center tutor?

- This is my first year as a writing center tutor.
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+years

2. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.

- Strongly agree

- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. I enjoy making other people feel better.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. When a friend starts to talk about their problems, I usually try to steer the conversation toward something else.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. I can always tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. I find that I am often “in tune” with other people’s moods.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. I become irritated when someone cries.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. I am not often interested in how other people feel.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. I find it silly when people cry out of happiness.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel protective toward them.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. I am pretty good at knowing how someone is feeling by looking at their body language.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. The people around me usually have a great influence on my moods.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Appendix E: Post-Survey Questions for Tutors to Complete After Completing the
Empathy Training Module**

How long have you been a writing center tutor?

- This is my first year as a writing center tutor.
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years

1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

5. I enjoy making other people feel better.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. When a friend starts to talk about their problems, I usually try to steer the conversation toward something else.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. I can always tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. I find that I am often “in tune” with other people’s moods.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. I become irritated when someone cries.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. I am not often interested in how other people feel.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. I find it silly when people cry out of happiness.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel protective toward them.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. I am pretty good at knowing how someone is feeling by looking at their body language.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. The people around me usually have a great influence on my moods.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree not disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Appendix F: Empathy Surveys

Students who use the Lindenwood University Writing Center

Empathy in the Writing Center: Training, Tutors, and Inclusion

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Susan Edele at the Researched University. We are doing this study to understand perceptions of empathy in writing centers. Data from the study will be used to understand the role of empathy in tutor training and writing center communication. The goal of data collection is to understand the role of empathy in tutoring practices and in writing center communication. You will be asked questions about experiences with the writing center at the Researched University.

It will take about 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Susan Edele, sme051@researcheduniversity.edu

Dr. Lynda Leavitt, lleavitt@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Dr. Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

https://lindenwood.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5w0mAdEF2viMEV8

Current and Former Tutors at the Lindenwood University Writing Center

Empathy in the Writing Center: Training, Tutors, and Inclusion

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Susan Edele at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to understand perceptions of empathy in writing centers. Data from the study will be used to understand the role of empathy in tutor training and writing center communication. The goal of data collection is to understand the role of empathy in tutoring practices and in writing center communication. You will be asked questions about your tutoring experiences with the writing center at Lindenwood University.

It will take about 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Susan Edele, sme051@researcheduniversity.edu

Dr. Lynda Leavitt, lleavitt@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Dr. Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

https://lindenwood.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0xst8F6SyevQync

Writing Center Administrators and Staff**Empathy in the Writing Center: Training, Tutors, and Inclusion**

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Susan Edele at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to understand perceptions of empathy in writing centers. Data from the study will be used to understand the role of empathy in tutor training and writing center communication. The goal of data collection is to understand the role of empathy in tutoring practices and in writing center communication. You will be asked questions about your experiences and observations in your current writing center.

It will take about 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Susan Edele, sme051@researcheduniversity.edu

Dr. Lynda Leavitt, lleavitt@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Dr. Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

https://lindenwood.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dpxSbYpZj1w20BM

Appendix G: Coded Tutor Reflections After Completing the Empathy Training Module

Participant 1

As a writing tutor, my primary goal is not only to help students improve their writing skills but also to create a supportive and empathetic environment where they feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns. Empathy is a crucial element in fostering a positive tutor-student relationship, and it plays a pivotal role in the effectiveness of tutoring sessions.

In numerous tutoring sessions, I have consciously integrated empathy practices to connect with students on a personal level. One instance that stands out is when I worked with a student who was struggling with self-confidence in their writing abilities. Recognizing their hesitancy, I started the session by asking open-ended questions about their writing process and the challenges they were facing. During the session, I also made a conscious effort to acknowledge their strengths, highlighting specific areas where their writing demonstrated improvement. I also shared my own experiences with overcoming writing challenges, emphasizing that everyone encounters obstacles on their writing journey. This personal touch helped to build a connection, and the student seemed to visibly relax, becoming more open to feedback and suggestions.

Additionally, I observed empathy practices in other tutoring sessions, reinforcing the belief that empathy is not only about understanding but also about actively listening and responding to students' needs. In one session, a fellow tutor skillfully employed empathetic listening when a student expressed frustration with a complex assignment. The tutor patiently allowed the student to articulate their concerns without interruption, creating a space for the student to feel heard and validated. This approach laid the foundation for a collaborative discussion on strategies to tackle the assignment, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

Reflecting on the impact of my own empathetic practices, I believe that the students I worked with did indeed feel the empathy embedded in our interactions. This is evident in the positive shifts in their attitudes and engagement levels throughout the sessions. Students became more willing to take risks in their writing, ask questions about areas of uncertainty, and actively participate in discussions about their work.

Moreover, feedback and follow-up interactions with students provided valuable insights into the lasting impact of empathy on their learning experience. Several students mentioned feeling more confident and supported after our sessions. This reinforces the idea that empathy not only enhances the learning environment but also contributes significantly to students' emotional well-being and self-perception as writers.

In conclusion, incorporating empathy into writing tutoring sessions is a transformative practice that goes beyond addressing academic concerns. It creates a space where

students feel valued, heard, and supported, ultimately fostering a positive and constructive learning environment. The tangible improvements observed in students' writing skills and their overall confidence validate the efficacy of empathetic tutoring practices.

1. Pay attention to other people's feelings

Think before you speak or act

Realize that everyone is different

2. Being understanding of people's struggles with English and writing, regardless of the issue or confusion they are having. What may be obvious to me may not be obvious to them

3. In the comments made digitally on a person's paper, you can avoid sounding condescending and mean. Focus on helping the student in a kind manner, tactfully making them aware of what they can work on in their paper without making them feel bad.

4. I've seen empathy in the writing center when a consultant is particularly patient or understanding with an especially difficult or confused student. The consultant was kind and did their best to help without being mean or getting upset.

5. I've felt empathy when someone I care about tells me about their problems. I may not always be able to relate or understand what that person is going through, but I recognize the difficulty they are facing and do what I can to help.

Participant 2

Empathy in Action Reflection

Empathy is very important for tutoring sessions. It is important to be empathetic with students who come into the writing center. I have seen it used many times since I started working here. One way empathy gets used in the writing center is to help students who are stressed out about an assignment. The goal is to help them work on the assignment and to help them not be stressed out about the assignment.

I have been involved in a session where the student came in and was concerned because they could not understand the assignment and were worried about completing it. The tutor was able to use empathy to understand why the student was worried about the assignment. They were able to then talk the student through the assignment, and they were able to reassure the student that they could do the assignment. They were then able to go through the assignment and get the student on the right track to complete it.

I have also seen a session where the student came in for help on a discussion board post. They were confused about what to do because they had already done one post and were marked off on it. The tutor was able to understand what they were concerned about and go over the assignment with them so that they could understand it. They were also able to

talk to the student about what they missed on the last assignment so that they could understand what they got wrong. After that, they seemed much more confident with the current assignment.

I think that students do feel the empathetic practices. I think that you can tell from the fact that they are not as worried about the assignment as they were before. I think that the fact that they are more sure about it is a good sign.

The video suggested to try and picture yourself in the other person's shoes. That way you would know what they are feeling. It also said to avoid making it about yourself.

You can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session by doing what it talked about. You can try to put yourself in their shoes and use that to guide what you say.

For an email feedback tutoring session, you have to figure out what is going on through what they write. Then you can write a response.

I have seen students come in who are stressed about an assignment. Using empathy helped them to not worry about it as much.

I had a friend who I would talk to regularly. We would talk about what was going on in our lives. If one of us was happy, the other one would be happy about it.

Participant 3

I have not really had many tutoring sessions with students yet. However, I have observed numerous tutors in the center engaging with students in-person, over video-calls, and via email. Some ways that I have seen other tutors practice empathy with students include being cautious with word choice (i.e., thinking before speaking), maintaining eye contact with students while they are talking, and providing validating comments to students when they express concerns.

It is really hard to tell whether or not an individual "feels" one's empathetic practices unless they verbally express it. Nonetheless, I think that there certainly could be distinguishable body language that may exemplify receiving the information. For example, a student may possibly change their body posture in their chair from slouching to sitting up right.

1. Suggestions that were provided by the video to show empathy include paying attention to other people's feelings by paying attention to their body language, tone of voice, and also asking them directly how they are feeling. Some other suggestions provided in the video include thinking before you speak or act and standing up for others.
2. I can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session by observing students body language. Additionally, when they express concerns to me I could make an effort to speak to them in a way that shows I am listening and that I feel for them.
3. An example of a time when I saw empathy practices used in the writing center is when a student who had come in the previous day stopped by to tell the tutor they worked with

that they received a good score on their paper. The tutor responded with empathy by expressing their excitement for the student.

4. An example of a time I felt empathy in a happy situation is whenever my sister called me to tell me she received a job working at a research lab in Columbia, MO.

Participant 4

In the tutoring session I conduct I always make sure to ask the students if there is anything in particular they want me to look at, as in specific areas or issues of concern. While some students just want a general review focused on grammar and syntax as well as any major issues I may see, other student do respond with clear concerns on their paper that are likely a cause of stress. By paying special attention to those areas or issues and providing feedback on them, I hope to help the student feel a bit less stressed. Aside from that, more empathy needs to be applied in brainstorming session with students. Students requesting help with brainstorming or crafting an outline often coming in feeling lost or overwhelm with the assignment. Empathizing with them and letting them know that is a complete normal reaction can often help them to open up about the assignment. From there I usually look at the assignment details with them and help them to organize their thoughts into an outline that will serve as a guide as they write their paper. I also try to help provide suggestion on organization, like the use of headers, to help not only the reader (professor) follow their thoughts, but the student to organized their thoughts into clearly defined sections. My priority in doing this is to help the assignment seem less scary once it's a bit more organized. I also always ask students in for a brainstorming session after we've made as much of the outline as we can, "alright, does that feel a bit better now?" or something along those lines before my typical question of if they have any additional question or concerns. The usual response is relief, which for me means success. Overall I seek to help student stress just a bit less with the assistance I proved in looking over their papers.

What suggestions were provided by the video to show empathy?

Put yourself in the other person situation and imagine how you would feel to connect with them.

"Empathy is not just about caring how someone it feeling, but caring enough to do something about it."

Think before you speak or act

Realize that everyone is different

Stand up for others

How can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?

Students are usually stressed about their assignment when they come to see us. As fellow students, we can relate to that stress an empathize with them by making sure to looking at

particular areas or issues of concern, providing encouragement and praise when needed, listen to their misgivings with their professor or the assignment requirement, as well as help them to see situations in a new light.

How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?

You can show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session by taking extra care to examine your tone and how your words could be interpreted, provide a message of goodwill in your response email, and by reviewing and providing feedback in a timely manner.

Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.

Not too long ago we had a student come in with a young child. The child had lots of energy and didn't want to sit still while his father meet with one of our consultants. At that time, everyone in the Writing Center did their best to try to find ways to keep him entertained. Even though he did get fairly loud at points, no one made a rude comment and instead talked to him, gave him snacks, brought out coloring book and puzzles, and even a small etch a sketch to try to keep him occupied. Near the end, we had to shut the front door to keep him from running out and down the hallway, but we did our best to accommodate the student, show empathy for their situation, and help them through it while they were here.

Describe a time when you felt empathy in a stressful or happy situation.

This might seem a bit distanced from me, but it happened fairly recently and has stuck in my mind. There is a person I wound up meeting in a game through the game's co-op feature. From what they said when we started chatting, they seemed to have really low self esteem and talked really poorly of themselves. At the time, I thought it odd that they'd lay out all this personal baggage to a completely random person they'd never met. I even thought that perhaps it was a scam: get someone to feel bad for them and then ask for money. However, I also remembered that when my brother really struggling with his mental health, he found it easier to talk to strangers about it than us, those closest to him. I decided to do my best to cheer them on, to help them look on the bright side, and see more than just the worst scenarios when they started to overthink. Real or not, I'd rather be a good influence to a stranger that may need it, than say something cold or malicious to a person who may or may not be at the end of their rope. If they ever asked for money, I resolved that I would change my opinion then. In some situations, when they were overthinking all these horrible possibilities, I tried to do my best to help ground them with alternative but realistic possibilities. It's been several weeks now, and though not everyday is sunshine and rainbows for them, they seem to be doing a lot better and have not asked for anything other than someone to talk to. Even though I don't know them offline, I hope their doing well.

Participant 5

I feel like I use empathy in all my tutoring sessions. However, it is easier to show it in in-person sessions than in email feedback sessions for me. I practice empathy by asking how the student is at first. Then, I ask some other things about his/her class and assignment. I pay attention to all answers as words and tone used are important to determine one's feelings. If something does not feel good, I try to be more comprehensive with the student. On the other hand, if it feels like he/she is happy about the outcome of the paper, for example, I try to also be happy for them. One of the reasons why I practice empathy in all sessions is because I have always seen this in the writing center environment. From when I was being trained to today, I have been trying to observe others and learn with them, and I believe that this helped me a lot with that as everyone is very caring here. In addition to that, I do feel that the students feel my empathy practices because they are always very respectful and comprehensive as well, and I believe that people tend to act toward others in the same way that they are treated. The other reason why I feel like they notice the empathy practices is because I have had multiple students who would come back at the writing center or write an email saying how thankful they are for the appointment. In my opinion, a positive feedback afterwards is most caused by how one felt than how one performed on the assignment.

The video provided suggestions to show empathy such as pay attention to other peoples feelings, watch body language and expressions to understand it, listen to others' words and tone used, ask how the person is feeling, and think about you speak and act around others. In an in-person tutoring session, one can show empathy by following all the video's suggestions while actively paying attention to the person. In an email feedback, one can show empathy by paying attention to the words used and by giving positive feedback, always trying to highlight where the person did a good job. I usually see these actions being performed at the writing center. All tutors are very respectful and seem to care about the students. Honestly, I have never seen a situation when a tutor is not approaching a student with empathy.

Participant 6

I worked with a student several years ago who had to write a paper in AMA format and she was struggling with her assignment because she had never been taught to use this format. She was confused and frustrated because she had really only been taught APA and MLA, as is the case for most people who are not going into a medical or science field. I was able to relate to her frustration because I had recently written a paper in CSE (Counsel of Science Editors) format and I had struggled with this for similar reasons. Both of these formats are not commonly used and are usually not going to be covered in your high school writing courses. It can be difficult to find reliable information on these formats and guides for how to use them properly. I was able to empathize with her as we were both learning something new. I was also unfamiliar with AMA, so we were able to share the learning experience together. I think that this was beneficial for the student as she could see that even a writing tutor has more to learn, she is not alone in her struggle and she is not expected to know how to do everything automatically. I think that she felt

better after leaving our session because we dove into researching together and I was able to help her understand the formatting.

This type of thing happens to me often at the Writing Center. Although I have been doing this for a long time, there are still occasions where I do not know the answer. I think that working through this with a student makes them feel like they are not unintelligent, they are simply learning something new and that is normal even for someone who does this for work. Additionally, taking the time to research answers for your student shows them that you are dedicated to helping them achieve their goals and that you are willing to go the extra mile to learn something new yourself so that you can help them.

What suggestions were provided by the video to show empathy?

Ask yourself how you think someone else might be feeling and use this feeling to respond to them. Care enough to take the time to think about how they are feeling and respond appropriately. 1. Pay attention to other people's feelings. 2. Think before you speak or act. 3. Realize that everyone is different. 4. Stand up for others.

How can show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?

I can show empathy by acknowledging a student's frustration or worry over their assignments and working with them to understand the material so they do not feel lost or like they are on their own. I can do this by listening to the student's concerns and giving them the freedom to speak about their problems.

How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?

I can show empathy by observing the appointment notes where the student expresses their concerns and acknowledging that in my comments and my emails to them when I reach out post-appointment.

Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.

I have worked with many students who feel that they are not good at writing; they feel that they excel in other academic areas but not when it comes to writing papers. I have tried to relate to these students by listening and acknowledging their worries and sharing how I struggle in other academic areas, such as math, and telling them they we cannot be the best in every subject and they are making the best decision possible by reaching out for help when they need it.

Describe a time when you felt empathy in a stressful or happy situation.

I have felt empathy for students who are older than the average student because both my mother and I began pursuing our educations later than many others typically do. I especially feel this when I interact with a student who is not familiar with the technology that is often used in school, such as Word documents and all the tools you must know how to use to properly format your projects. I recognize that this can be difficult for

students who are going back to school later in life and did not have this type of technology in their earlier years of education.

Participant 7

I haven't gotten much of an opportunity to work with students in the writing center yet, but I have tutored in the past. I tried to use empathy as much as I could, as I understand that tutoring is something that can be embarrassing and hard to do. I should know, I needed extensive math tutoring in middle school! I use empathy in a few ways; for starters, I try to make individual connections with each student. By making connections with the students, it becomes a lot easier for communication to occur between me and the students. Students are more likely to communicate their needs and feelings. Additionally, I try to pay attention to how the students react in terms of body language or other subtle things. This can also communicate a lot about how the students are feeling. Once I know what the students are thinking or feeling, it's up to me to try and figure out what might benefit them best, based on what they have communicated. If a student expresses frustration and dejection over a class, I try to relate to them and explain my own experiences and how they relate. If a student seems happy with their piece, I make sure to affirm the parts I like. Additionally, if a student seems extremely self-conscious about their piece, I will try to go through and point out an equal amount of things that I like and dislike. Small things like that help the students a lot; it makes them feel a lot more comfortable.

I do feel like the students felt my empathetic practices. I know this because all of the students I worked with did not hesitate to tell me things that were going on in their lives. They felt comfortable telling me what they needed help with, and because of this, I was able to work really well with them. I had a good relationship with all the students I worked with, and I believe this is because of my empathetic practices.

What suggestions were provided by the video to show empathy?

The video suggested that I pay attention to other people's feelings, think before speaking or acting, realize that everyone is different and accommodate accordingly, and stand up for others.

How can you show empathy in an in-person tutoring session?

In order to show empathy in an in-person session, it's important to both pay attention to body language and what the student is saying. Sometimes, a student will tell you what they feel, what they need to succeed, and you can proceed from there. In other cases, it's important to look at body language. Body language can indicate a lot about what a student is feeling, and that can be a good jumping off point to figure out what they need.

How can you show empathy in an email feedback tutoring session?

In an email feedback session, empathy is something that takes a lot more guesswork. It's important to try and figure out how a student is feeling based on the context they

provided. From that point, it is important to figure out what the student might need. This can look like offering advice, or suggesting further avenues of exploration.

Describe a time when you saw empathy practices used in the writing center.

Through various sessions, I have seen tutors treat students empathetically when they seem frustrated or embarrassed with needing help. The tutors in the writing center always come off as considerate and understanding in many ways. They consider how students might be feeling or thinking when they offer input to students. This also occurs in positive ways; a session I observed involved the student writing a letter to a college they were applying for. The tutor that I observed offered some polite encouragement, encouraging the writer through their exciting journey.

Describe a time when you felt empathy in a stressful or happy situation.

I have felt empathy in happy situations before. One time, a student I was tutoring came back and told me he got an A on the essay we worked on together. He had been getting C's and D's up until that point. I was insanely proud of him, and I was overjoyed with the situation. I reacted in a way that let him know I was really happy for him; I was feeling empathy towards the situation, even though it was a good and happy situation.

Appendix H: Raw and Reverse Scored Data Tables

Table 6a

Survey Results Raw Data

ID	TIME	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15
1	1	2	4	1	5	1	5	2	1	4	5	2	5	1	2	2
2	1	1	5	1	5	1	5	2	2	5	5	1	5	1	2	1
3	1	1	5	1	5	1	4	2	2	4	4	2	4	2	2	2
4	1	2	3	1	5	1	3	4	4	3	4	2	5	2	4	2
5	1	1	1	1	4	2	4	1	2	5	3	3	5	1	1	1
6	1	2	5	5	4	1	4	2	2	5	5	1	5	1	1	4
7	1	1	4	2	5	1	5	3	2	4	4	2	5	2	3	2
8	1	1	4	1	4	2	4	2	2	3	4	2	4	2	2	1
9	1	1	4	1	4	1	5	3	2	5	4	1	5	1	3	2
10	2	2	4	1	4	1	4	2	2	5	4	1	5	1	1	4
11	2	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	2	4	4	2	4	2	2	2
12	2	1	4	1	4	1	4	2	2	4	5	2	4	2	2	1
13	2	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	2	5	4	1	5	1	1	1
14	2	1	5	1	4	1	4	1	1	4	4	1	5	1	1	2
15	2	2	3	1	4	1	4	4	4	4	5	2	5	2	4	2
16	2	1	4	1	4	1	5	2	3	4	4	1	5	1	3	3
17	2	1	5	1	4	1	5	2	2	5	5	1	5	1	2	1

Note: Time 1 = Pre-survey. Time 2 = Post-survey.

Table 7a

Survey Results with Reverse Scored Data

ID	TIME	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15
1	1	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	4
2	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5
3	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
4	1	4	3	5	5	5	3	2	2	3	4	4	5	4	2	4
5	1	5	1	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	3	3	5	5	5	5
6	1	4	5	1	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	2
7	1	5	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	4
8	1	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	5
9	1	5	4	5	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	5	5	5	3	4
10	2	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	2
11	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
12	2	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5
13	2	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5
14	2	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	4
15	2	4	3	5	4	5	4	2	2	4	5	4	5	4	2	4
16	2	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	3	3
17	2	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5

Note: The questions that were reverse scored are: Q1, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q11, Q13, Q14, and Q15. Time 1 = Pre-survey. Time 2 = Post-survey.

Appendix I: Empathetic Responses

EMPATHIC RESPONSES					
Naming	Understanding	Respecting	Supporting	Exploring	"I Wish"
This must be... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustrating • Overwhelming • Scary • Difficult • Challenging • Hard 	What you just said really helps me understand the situation better.	I really admire your <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith • Strength • Commitment to your family • Thoughtfulness • Love for your family 	We will do our very best to make sure you have what you need.	Could you say more about what you mean when you say... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't want to give up • I am hoping for a miracle 	I wish we had a treatment that would cure you (make your illness go away). *[Remember we do have palliative treatments to offer the patient]
I'm wondering if you are feeling ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Scared • Frustrated • Overwhelmed • Anxious • Nervous • Angry 	This really helps me better understand what you are thinking.	You (or your dad, mom, child, spouse) are/is such a strong person and have/had been through so much.	Our team is here to help you with this.	Help me understand more about....	I wish I had better news.
It sounds like you may be feeling ...	I can see how dealing with this might be ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard on you • frustrating • challenging • scary 	I can really see how (strong, dedicated, loving, caring, etc.) you are.	We will work hard to get you the support that you need.	Tell me more...	I wish the situation were different.
In this situation some people might feel ...	I can see how important this is to you.	You are such a (strong, caring, dedicated) person.	We are committed to help you in any way we can.	Tell me more about what [a miracle, fighting, not giving up, etc.] might look like for you?	I wish that for you too. [In response to what a patient or family members wishes, such as a miracle]
I can't even imagine how (NAME EMOTION) this must be.	Dealing with this illness has been such a big part of your life and taken so much energy.	I'm really impressed by all that you've done to manage your illness (help your loved one deal with their illness).	We will go be here for you.	Can you say more about that?	I wish we weren't in this spot right now.

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Vitae

I hold an MFA in Creative Writing from Lindenwood University and an MA in English with an emphasis on Composition from the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Since 2007, I have been actively engaged in teaching a diverse range of courses in literature, composition, creative writing, English internships, and freshman learning communities at Lindenwood University. These courses encompass three key areas within the English major: literature, creative writing, and education. I also have the privilege of advising 5-12 students in the English majors and minors.

In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I serve as the director of the university Writing Center. In this role, I supervise, mentor, and train a team of dedicated staff members. My duties include attending staff development meetings, managing budgets and payroll, providing feedback for evaluations, and facilitating professional development and training opportunities. Each fall semester, I lead the recruitment and training of 10 student workers to serve as peer tutors in the Writing Center.

I have also contributed to various committees and initiatives within the university community and served on the First Year Writing Committee and acted as the scribe for the General Education Task force. Additionally, I co-chaired the Co-Curricular committee for assessment and participated in two Communities of Practice: Communication and Diversity.

I have co-authored and published five academic articles and six creative writing pieces and had the opportunity to present my work both nationally and internationally, furthering discourse in my areas of expertise.