VAST POTENTIAL, UNEVEN RESULTS: UNRAVELING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COURSE-EMBEDDED TUTORING SUCCESS

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At the University of Montana Writing Center, we enter each semester encouraged by the promise of academic renewal: another chance to make our writing center a gathering ground for positive change. As writing center administrators, we also begin the semester uncomfortably aware of past less-than-successful institutional collaborations, and we look forward, determined to try again. Ideally, our collaborations should allow for the "possibility of mutual learning" and "a pedagogy of becoming" (Geller et. al 59), leaving room for students, tutors, and faculty to reach new insights and question old assumptions.

Pursuing this pedagogy of becoming, the Writing Center administers a classroom-based, course-embedded small-group tutoring model, the Sidecar Project (SP). Each semester, we link SP to one or two writing-intensive undergraduate or graduate courses across the disciplines. In SP-linked courses, we arrange for small groups of students to exchange drafts of class writing assignments with one another and with a tutor assigned to each group. Group members read and respond to the drafts prior to each of at least four in-class SP sessions. During these sessions, tutors facilitate small-group discussions, providing feedback to students and soliciting feedback from them about their classmates' drafts. SP tutors are experienced and current Writing Center tutors, and we, as administrators, routinely tutor alongside them as they work in the Writing Center and in the SP classroom.

We aim for SP to produce a trifecta of changed students, faculty, and tutors, a goal inspired by the natural relationship between writing center work and writing across the curriculum efforts (Mullin 184-185). WAC programs that enact course-embedded tutoring commonly identify changed student writing behaviors as an explicit goal (Soven 202). While aiming to shape student writing behaviors, SP collaborations also seek to influence faculty teaching practices, perceptions of the Writing Center, and views of writing pedagogy, constructive outcomes Carol Severino and Megan Knight identify in their own writing fellows program. Equally vital, SP should provide tutors with a potentially transformative "developmental experience"

(Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail 2) that will inform their future work as tutors and as writers.

SP collaborations are thus far always worth our effort, with participants often citing the experience as among the most valuable they have had as students, teachers, and tutors. But writing instruction is messy business in its most conventional formats; course-embedded writing tutoring only more so. SP success is striking in its uneven and unpredictable nature, reflecting the oft-reported inconsistencies and challenges of other course-embedded tutoring programs (Hall and Hughes; Soven; Zawacki). Sometimes SP tutors and students learn plenty, but the professor remains unaffected by the collaboration. Other times, the students gain less from the experience, while the tutors and professor are dramatically shaped by each other's expertise. As tutors, we seem to muddle through a tensely unproductive session for every productive one; for every changed professor, another one smiles, nods, and resists new approaches to the teaching of writing. Our experiences demonstrate that at the intersection of students, faculty, and tutors, the potential for change confronts the knotty realities of collaboration and shared authority. When SP collaborations are less than optimal, the missed opportunity for student, faculty, and tutor growth haunts us.

In this paper, we unravel and examine the complicated factors that account for this variance in SP success. At the conclusion of each SP collaboration, we circle back to create local knowledge for ourselves. Engaging in what Sarah Liggett, Kerri Jordan, and Steve Price identify as "pragmatic inquiry," we "proceed cumulatively and recursively" (62) to arrive at "useful knowledge" that "best resolves the dissonance" (61) we experience across SP collaborations. This effort has led us to identify four factors that have had a consistent influence on a SP collaboration's level of success: management of collaboration logistics, demonstrated faculty buy-in, faculty-tutor integration, and student and faculty willingness to consider and respond to feedback. We hope examining these factors will both illustrate their important roles in our version of course-embedded tutoring and invite others to take a similarly reflective

stance in analyzing their own course-embedded tutoring models.

Course-Embedded Tutoring and the Messiness That Ensues

Sometimes in concert with and often in the absence of formal WAC and WID programs, writing centers have long taken on de facto WAC and WID roles, embarking upon the deeply satisfying and inescapably fraught work of institutional change. Expanding their approaches (and reach) beyond one-to-one tutoring to include course-embedded tutoring, writing centers take on the exigent project of influencing not only students but also faculty. As early as the late 1970s with Harriet Sheridan's use of peer tutors in Carleton College's WAC program and the early 1980s with Tori Haring-Smith's vibrant curriculum-based peer tutoring program at Brown University, student *and* faculty growth have been explicit objectives of some programs (Soven 202). A cursory look at the literature on course-embedded tutoring confirms that when writing tutors enter the classroom aiming to foster this growth, students, faculty, and tutors re-negotiate their roles, pursue common and sometimes conflicting goals, and struggle to make room for multiple voices. As in WAC programs where "pockets" of writing-intensive experiences across the curriculum can "appear erratic and fitful" (Blummer, Eliason, and Fritz 22 & 24), the outcomes of course-embedded writing support programs can seem irregular. Candace Spigelman and Laurie Grobman argue that this "hybrid instructional genre...operates amid contradictions within the productive chaos of writing classrooms; it confuses the nature of classroom authority; it encourages noise and collaboration at the very scene of writing" (219). Examples abound of the more vexing noise generated by course-embedded writing support programs. Tensions between tutors and faculty sometimes prevent faculty growth in teaching with writing (Zawacki); faculty may resist fully integrating the tutors, a situation Emily Hall and Bradley Hughes aptly describe as a willingness to 'date' rather than commit (26); and participants may ineffectively negotiate their shared authority (Hall and Hughes 27; Soven 206).

Although noise and collaboration are necessary conditions of Geller et. al.'s "pedagogy of becoming," so much chaos sometimes clouds writing center administrators' ability to accurately account for the factors that contribute to the successes and failures of course-embedded writing support. Andrea Lunsford calls for our humility in such collaborations, reminding us that "[w]e shouldn't fool ourselves that creating new models of authority, new spaces for students and teachers to experience nonhierarchical, shared authority, is a goal we can hope to reach in any sort of straightforward way" (71). And so we loop back at the conclusion of each SP collaboration, patiently mining our growing collection of successes and missteps, hoping to learn how we might try again with a wiser, more purposeful approach.

The Sidecar Project: The University of Montana's Course-Embedded Writing Support Model

The Sidecar Project Model

We describe the University of Montana's SP model here in some detail primarily for context, but also with the hope that other programs might borrow useful aspects. SP is one version of course-embedded writing support in which tutoring sessions take place during class time—what Spigelman and Grobman categorize as *classroom-based writing tutoring* (1). We have integrated SP into fifteen undergraduate and graduate courses across the disciplines, including the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and professional programs. SP tutors, who also tutor in the Writing Center, usually have a graduate degree and some prior experience teaching academic writing. As administrators, we also tutor both in the Writing Center and in SP collaborations. Tutors are "generalists" who have no formal expertise in the course material of the SP course except by happy coincidence.

Before each SP collaboration begins, we and our tutors meet with participating faculty to design course assignments, outline a schedule for submission of drafts and revised work, and discuss faculty expectations and discipline-specific writing conventions. The instructor divides the students into small groups and assigns a tutor to each group. Tutors and faculty decide how to collect and distribute drafts (e.g., via group email, an online course supplement platform, or paper copies) and devise a checklist for tutors to track student participation.

At the heart of SP is the in-class session, usually four or five per course. Prior to each session, students exchange and read the drafts of all members in the group, making notes for workshop discussion. Tutors do the same for the students in their groups. All arrive to class prepared to exchange oral and written feedback, offer advice, and troubleshoot writing challenges. The professor is minimally present during these sessions, usually beginning the class with a few comments and checking in once either during the

workshop or at the end of class. Over the course of the semester, tutors check in with the professor formally and informally to exchange impressions. Tutors also debrief with one another, both before and after the sessions, to reflect on the dynamics of group tutoring, share newly gained discipline-specific knowledge, and discuss especially constructive or problematic aspects of their experiences.

Potential Benefits of the Sidecar Project

The intended benefits of SP for students are multiple. Students receive more timely and frequent feedback on their writing than they would in an otherwise similar class. They are exposed to other students' writing, gradually learning to recognize effective and ineffective choices other writers make when addressing the challenges posed by a particular writing task. They also witness real audiences respond to their writing in real time, authenticating the writing assignment as a communicative task, not just a transaction wherein the student submits an assignment for a grade. The vacuum between the individual-student-as-writer and individual-professor-as-reader becomes less pronounced as students experience the benefits of feedback without the associated risk they often perceive in the student-faculty transaction. SP also generates "the power of collaborative learning...to create educational change among the tutors themselves" (Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail 13 & 25). Tutors encounter opportunities to learn about the methodologies of biologists, economists, and historians, and to grapple with those instances when the literacy practices of one discipline do not map onto another. In short, tutors become students of the SP collaboration.

Faculty become students of the SP collaboration as well, learning new ways to respond to writing and to discuss their students' experiences as writers. By checking in with tutors, faculty also gain intimate knowledge of how students interpret their assignments and the unexpected cognitive and logistical challenges their assignments pose. Like the tutors' assessment of students' writing, this assessment happens before it's too late—faculty have time to address emergent concerns while students are engaged in the assignment. For faculty, this feedback can shape writing instruction both during the SP collaboration and in future courses, fulfilling the potential for SP to influence how writing is taught across the curriculum (Zawacki) and how faculty perceive a writing center's role on campus (Severino and Knight).

Accounting for Uneven Success

Mindful that course-embedded writing support should contribute to incremental progress toward these benefits, we isolate for consideration four factors that have reliably influenced SP collaboration success: management of collaboration logistics, demonstrated faculty buy-in, faculty-tutor integration, and student and faculty willingness to consider and respond to feedback. The systematic, dialectical, and recursive efforts of pragmatic inquiry have thrown these four factors into sharp relief. We have examined each new iteration of SP through dialogue with all participants, allowing us to "test and validate the knowledge" (Liggett, Jordan, and Price 57) accumulated in previous collaborations. We have worked with fifteen professors in the context of fifteen courses, each with an enrollment of eleven to twenty-five students. Each semester, we gather information through post-SP student surveys, mid-semester faculty-tutor discussions, mid-semester and post-semester tutor-tutor conversations, and post-semester faculty-writing center administrator discussions. The four factors we isolate, then, represent "dialectically-tested truth" (Liggett, Jordan, and Price 78) in the context of one course-embedded tutoring program.

Management of Collaboration Logistics

Like any classroom-based tutoring model, SP involves the tedium of additional logistics and deadlines. With our guidance, faculty must strategically integrate SP sessions and revision deadlines into the course timeline, form student groups, match groups with tutors, and establish some method for sharing papers. Scrupulous attention to these details is indispensable. For SP sessions to benefit participants, students must submit papers twice—once before each SP session so that group members and tutors can read submitted drafts prior to meeting, and once after students have revised their drafts in response to group/tutor feedback. Tutors and students note that missed deadlines significantly hamstring the small-group sessions, much more than an individual writer's missed deadline might impact a class.

The number of parties involved further complicates the effort to keep logistics unambiguous; tutor, faculty, or student mistakes can derail a significant portion of the collaboration. Students report becoming understandably confused if tutor and instructor representations of SP differ, regardless of whether this variance occurs as the result of a simple deadline misunderstanding or a fundamental disagreement regarding the students' and tutors' roles. Mismatched expectations muddle the purpose and potential productivity of SP sessions.

To minimize these glitches, we, as administrators, engage faculty in up-front and explicit logistical planning. We share with new SP faculty logistical patterns that have worked in the past, we create deadline grids for tutors and students, and we meet with students at the beginning of the semester to orient them to the SP experience. While this deliberate attention to logistics helps SP collaborations run more smoothly, tutors also have had to develop tolerance for disoriented students and unexpected misunderstandings—tutors accept their role in happily reiterating and translating logistics—and we try to remain attuned to ways we might better clarify logistics in future collaborations.

Demonstrated Faculty Buy-In

Even with well-managed logistics, SP produces only limited success without faculty participants who manifestly demonstrate support for the goals of course-embedded tutoring. Course-embedded tutoring inherently involves the risk that students will treat the work as an extraneous supplement to the course, or worse, an empty stand-in for the "real" work that happens when the professor facilitates class time. To cite some egregious examples, when professors use SP sessions to cover their planned absences, list sessions as optional, or fail to show interest in the feedback generated by tutors and students, tutors report that students are less likely to take SP session feedback seriously. Demonstrated faculty buy-in helps create the conditions for student buy-in.

Experience has taught us that at the beginning of a SP collaboration, adequate faculty buy-in does not require a full understanding of the pedagogical theories that underpin SP—this more nuanced understanding emerges from the collaboration. Of fifteen participating professors over the course of seven semesters, only two began the collaboration with an already deep appreciation for the integral role of writing and reader feedback in students' learning. Of the remaining thirteen professors, twelve used the SP collaboration to develop new understandings of writing as a tool for learning, of the role of reader feedback, and of their own ability to help students learn the literacy practices of the discipline. We accept that these understandings are more likely to grow out of the SP experience than to motivate a professor's initial desire to collaborate. Still, we have become finicky about the faculty with whom we invest our SP time. Like Hall and Hughes, we use preliminary conversations with faculty to identify potential partners who demonstrate they are "willing to collaborate with [tutors] as teaching partners," "willing to experiment with teaching," and "open to building

process and revision into paper assignments" (24). Faculty who are willing to invest time and thought into upfront logistical planning and to adapt their courses to SP goals are those whose level of initial buy-in likely will buoy the collaboration.

As administrators, we also encourage the professor to broadcast to students their reasons for valuing the SP experience. To head off the danger that students will perceive SP as a mere postscript to the course, the faculty participant should explicitly link SP to the goals of the course by discussing the role of writing in the discipline, stressing the importance of reader feedback, and enumerating the added value of the tutors' presence. At minimum, the professor must refer to the SP sessions during regular class time, consciously integrating them as part of the course. At best, the professor, as a fellow learner, should outline for students personal insights gained from the collaboration. Some professors have also emphasized the importance of SP work by assigning points for participation in SP sessions or tracking that participation in other formal ways. Whatever the method, faculty participation should be genuine and evident to students.

Faculty-Tutor Integration

A third factor influencing SP success is the degree to which faculty and tutors share mutually respected interactions. While potential missteps abound when faculty and tutors attempt to share authority in the classroom (Hall and Hughes 27; Kail and Trimbur; Soven 206), siloed faculty and tutor roles preclude shared insights and opportunities for faculty and tutor growth. SP sessions afford a unique student perspective on the course, bringing to light those aspects of the course that advance students' development as writers and to those aspects that flummox students. If tutors have no regular venue for articulating successful or problematic patterns they notice in the students' composing processes, the professor misses an opportunity to see these otherwise invisible patterns. If the faculty participant has little opportunity to openly share concerns and observations, the tutors and students will develop an incomplete understanding of the professor's expectations and of how the discipline may inform those expectations. SP experiences in which tutors and faculty function in two parallel but separate worlds may sidestep messiness and confrontation, but they also bypass the potential for mutual learning.

We have learned that intentionally making room for faculty-tutor conversations *during* the collaboration dramatically improves faculty-tutor integration. When we have trusted that the interaction will simply

materialize, we have been disappointed to watch tutors (including ourselves) and faculty persist in their familiar, static approaches. To foster frequent and meaningful faculty-tutor integration, we build opportunities for interaction into each SP: tutors connect with the professor after each session to summarize patterned observations, such as unfamiliar discipline-specific conventions that stymie students (and tutors) or new insights students have gained about their own composing processes. Ideally, this input from tutors prompts the professor to share insights, questions, and observations in response.

We acknowledge the long-recognized danger that faculty-tutor integration may tempt students to conflate the professor's authority with the role of the tutor (Kail and Trimbur 8). Tutors' insider knowledge of the professor's expectations is an inevitable byproduct of the collaboration. However, we try to harness this knowledge as fodder for our work helping faculty examine their own assignments and teaching strategies. When tutors and faculty demonstrate for students this atmosphere of mutual learning, students become more likely to read faculty-tutor interactions not as confidential conversations about the professor's mysterious expectations, but rather as open explorations of how students might best learn, how the professor might best facilitate this learning, and how tutors might best tutor.

Student and Faculty Willingness to Consider and Respond to Feedback

Student and faculty receptivity to feedback plays perhaps the most consequential role in SP collaborations. Stubborn resistance to new writing and teaching strategies short-circuits the potential for student and faculty learning. Unlike in a student-initiated writing center session, students are introduced to SP sessions as a course requirement, making tutor and peer feedback an external requirement rather than a self-identified need. Tutors report students raising the objections that a) tutors are not experts in the field, b) tutors are not ultimately grading their work, and c) their peers, who they may view as even less expert than the tutors, are not qualified to offer feedback. A history student reflected, "I wanted to hear more from the tutors and less from the peers," a preference occasionally echoed by other students. However, when students become open to peer feedback, they report valuing the opportunity to recognize their "own mistakes in the writing of others" and to "see how others dealt with similar issues." Openness to SP session feedback enables students to recognize writing as a series of choices writers make, a recognition an anatomy and physiology

student exhibited when she described her growing ability "to see different approaches to a writing assignment."

Students sometimes take their cues from a professor who conspicuously requests and considers tutor feedback on classroom activities and assignments. A requisite ingredient in SP success is the faculty participant's willingness to learn from the collaboration and to make public—especially to students—the import of these lessons. This faculty willingness is the ingredient upon which lasting SP success rests most heavily, but it also is the one over which we have the least control. As administrators, we initiate each SP collaboration with our own agenda in mind: influence students who may not otherwise visit the writing center, expose the instructor to our understanding of how students develop as writers, and learn about writing in a particular discipline. Some faculty have initially committed to SP with a vague notion that the collaboration will "fix" struggling student writers and will reinforce the professor's view of writing, however well- or misinformed that view may be. When responding to faculty who bring agendas that conflict with ours, we desperately want to reject those at-first-glance objectionable agendas rather than engage them as opportunities for learning. In the course of SP planning conversations, faculty have urged tutors to use tedious proofreading symbols to edit student work, to help students inexperienced in the discipline write twenty-page research papers grounded in primary research, and—literally—to independently provide all writing instruction in the course.

We subtly sidestep such entreaties, trusting that faculty-tutor interactions, rather than our vocal protests, will "open up healthy discussions about priorities for feedback" (Hall and Hughes 26) and inspire the professor to critically reconsider misguided or ineffectual teaching practices. Resisting the temptation to criticize the professor's view of writing, we make student writing behaviors the subject of each faculty-tutor conversation, posing the collaboration as a problem-solving inquiry rather than an evaluation of teaching strategies. We cannot manufacture faculty willingness to change. However, we can demonstrate our willingness to learn from the collaboration while offering the invitation to join tutors and students in an environment of mutual learning. When faculty accept the invitation to consider our feedback, SP collaborations result in potentially lasting changes in professors' approaches to teaching with writing across the disciplines. Changed faculty initiate new collaborations with the Writing Center and experiment with more purposeful ways to embed support for

student writers in future courses. For us, this counts as incremental, positive institutional change.

Conclusion

Perhaps especially when we allow each new collaboration to fuel reflection, we find SP to be among our best writing center efforts. While the list of factors we mention here is neither exhaustive nor globally applicable, we hope our examination illustrates the value of recursive reflection about course-embedded tutoring. Course-embedded tutoring is uniquely complicated and uniquely powerful, and this reflective scrutiny is crucial if writing centers hope to realize its potential.

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