Writing Groups in the Writing Center

Negotiating Authority and Expertise in Collaborative Learning

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Introduction

Studying Writing Groups as Communities of Practice

Scene: A small but comfortable group study room in a university library. Five undergraduate students and one researcher are grouped around a table. They have laptops out, using one to project a word document on a shared screen on the wall. The students are all working on undergraduate thesis projects, and they have come together on this Monday evening for their weekly writing group. One of the students, Marie, is the writing center consultant facilitating the group. At this meeting, early in the semester, they have been workshopping proposals for a campus-wide undergraduate research forum.

ADANNA, AN UNDERGRADUATE ECONOMICS MAJOR: How do you guys come up for titles for your work?

MARIE, THE GROUP FACILITATOR AND AN UNDERGRADUATE MAJORING IN PHILOSOPHY AND WOMEN'S STUDIES: The night before when I'm really tired. [*group laughter*]

ADANNA: 'Cause this has actually been an ongoing project since the summer and it's probably had, like, seventy different names, so, like, I don't know, I know it can be changed as late as possible, but it'd be nice to like have something that I actually—like, that's catchy and I like.

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MAGGIE, AN UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH MAJOR: I kind of wait until I'm done with the paper. Sometimes it comes out of something I said in a paragraph that relates to my thesis or something like that. Like, I know I wrote about *Gatsby* or something about the ships being beat endlessly into the past, because it was related to, like, biography and stuff like that. But that didn't come down until the end, so it was a last line thing that kind of tied back to the title, so I don't know.

ELEANOR, AN UNDERGRADUATE MAJORING IN ENGLISH AND WOMEN'S STUDIES: I can't really help you. I'm horrible at titles, to be honest. Mine are always too long.

ADANNA: Yeah, and I can't say economists are very creative. I'll be like "Immigration and Economic Inequality." Bam. That's it. [*laughter*]

MARIE: I wouldn't do a creative title, because I don't know much about economics, but every paper I have read—

ADANNA: Not creative in the sense that "oh my gosh!" like, but not boring. A little something and you see it and you're like [*snaps fingers*] "okay, that sounds interesting" at the very least. Not "okay, that's nice."

MARIE: Yeah, I mean, titles in economics just seem a little more descriptive than they are anything else. So yeah, I wouldn't try too hard, I would just, in as few words as possible, describe what your project is and describe and use that as your title.

MAGGIE: I mean, I think your title sounds kind of cool right now.

ELEANOR: Yeah, I think it shows what your project's about, and that's what's important. It doesn't have to be something fancy. I mean it's economics, right?

ADANNA: I want to be a *cool* economist, guys. [*laughter*]

MARIE: Do that when you have a PhD though, not before.

ADANNA: I can do it now.

In this scene, we see and hear a student writing group do what student writing groups do: they come together and ask for insight into one another's writing processes and for feedback on their own writing. In response to Adanna's question, Marie, Maggie, and Eleanor offer their own experiences writing titles, express empathy for the difficulty of the task, praise Adanna's existing title and project, and try to account for disciplinary convention as they give advice. This exchange offers the group opportunities to collaborate on Adanna's title and also to reflect on disciplinary writing conventions and on their own writing processes. This exchange also shows these writers

working out their own identities as emerging scholars and their relationships with each other in the writing group.

Perhaps most interesting in this exchange are the negotiations of authority that shape the collaboration and how those negotiations are part of the writers' emerging scholarly identities. Adanna sees her thesis as a piece of writing through which she can start to craft and perform her emerging identity as a "cool economist." The group, laughing together, recognizes and supports that goal. Interestingly, though, Marie's reaction, "do that when you have a PhD though, not before," combined with her earlier direction, sets up a negotiation of authority between Marie (the group facilitator) and Adanna that I would argue is tied to how Marie and Adanna differ in their relationships with their home disciplinary communities. Adanna, with what seems to be a bit more confidence in her ability to be a "cool economist" (and who, incidentally, had a very cool project), pushes back against Marie. "I can do it now," Adanna says, resisting Marie's directive. Marie, on the other hand, seems to value fitting into existing disciplinary norms in perhaps a less cool but also safer way before becoming more formally recognized as an expert. In this short exchange, then, we see a small community of writers who come together to share practices and feedback and who collaborate across disciplinary boundaries. As they do so, they engage in negotiations of authority and reflect on what it means to emerge as writers in their home disciplinary communities.

As I argue throughout this book, these negotiations of authority are central to writing group work, even in groups that might have tighter, more trusting bonds than the writers in the exchange above, who had only been working together for a short time. When I reflect on this exchange, I see it as a moment that offers insight into collaborative composition practices and into writers' emergence in professional and academic discourse communities. Further, I think that tracking these kinds of negotiations can help us understand the possibilities that writing groups offer for student writing support and for expanding our vision of what collaboration in the writing center looks and sounds like.

Collaboration and Authority in the Writing Center

Collaborative practice is the cornerstone of writing center work. In the writing center, people come together to improve their writing and to build expertise and confidence as writers. Scholarship in writing center studies has come

to understand these acts of collaboration as ones that require complex negotiations of power, authority, and expertise among tutors and writers (Carino 2003; Corbett 2013; Dinitz and Harrington 2014; Grimm 1999; Kiedaisch and Dinitz 1993; Lunsford 1991; Nowacek and Hughes 2015). And yet, as a field, we have struggled at times to move beyond simplistic understandings of these negotiations. For example, the field still works to move beyond prescriptions that tutors engage only in nondirective practices (Corbett 2008, 2011; Denny, Nordlof, and Salem 2018; Nicklay 2012).

Jackie Grutsch McKinney's 2013 book *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* called on writing center researchers to tell a more complex story of writing center work, one that accounts for the many and varied practices of students, tutors, and administrators in writing centers. She argued that the field has been limited in its adherence to a grand narrative that "writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (McKinney 2013, 5). Because we are preoccupied with this narrative, McKinney argued, we don't account for the many activities of writing center work that don't fit the narrative, and so we don't fully prepare future writing center administrators, nor do we communicate our work as effectively as we could to those outside of the center (whether faculty, administrators, or students). In their national survey of writing centers, Jackson and McKinney found that most centers offered some sort of group practice (workshops, group tutorials, etc.) and a significant number offered writing groups (Jackson and McKinney 2012).[1] By not accounting for practices, like these, that fall outside our grand narrative, we miss important opportunities to develop strong, research-driven practices that support those students or tutors who might not find the existing writing center comfortable, inviting, or aligned with their goals. Aligning with McKinney's call for an expanded view of the field are two bodies of writing center scholarship: one focused on empirical research to ground new theories and practices in the field (Driscoll and Perdue 2012; Kjesrud 2015) and one attentive to narrating and theorizing people's lived experiences in the writing center, focused especially on counterstories that center experiences of people of color in spaces where a majority of people are often white women (Denny et al. 2019; Faison and Condon 2022; Faison and Treviño 2020). Recognizing the limitations of current

1. Jackson and McKinney found that most writing centers engaged in some sort of group practice, including writing groups and workshops. Ten percent of survey respondents offered graduate writing groups, 8 percent offered faculty writing groups, and 13 percent offered some other type of writing group (Jackson and McKinney 2012).

theories and narratives of writing center work, both of these bodies of scholarship push for new and expanded guiding theories and practices in the writing center.

In the years since McKinney's book was published, we have weathered a pandemic. Writing centers, like most of higher education, pivoted to completing most of their work online. And now, we have trickled back, doing our best to support students, tutors, and staff during a time when many of us are preoccupied with safety, with little bandwidth to retheorize our core practices. And yet, many in the field also have taken the challenges that disrupted business as usual as an opportunity to talk about how to make our centers more accessible and equitable. A sampling of some of the writing center conferences in 2021 and 2022 shows how, as a collective, writing center administrators and tutors have been taking stock of who we are, what we do, and how we do it, questioning the assumptions that we come together to do in-person tutoring and what it means to make our work accessible in other ways:

- International Writing Centers Association 2021: "Together Again Apart: Reimagining Our Communities of Practice?";
- Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association 2021: "Access and Equity: Writing Centers in Times of Disruption"; and 2022: "Looking Back and Looking Ahead: The Writing Center's Past, Present, and Future";
- Northern California Writing Centers Association 2021: "Adapting to Intentional Student Support: Changes in the Writing Center";
- Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2021: "Trauma and Transformation: Writing Centers in an Era of Change"; and 2022: "Present Tense, Future Perfect: Shaping Purposeful Writing Center Practices"; and
- Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association 2021: "Where Are We? Writing Centers as Sites of Existential Conundrums."

What I see in these conference titles is an interest not only in rethinking our modes of communication with students—online, hybrid, in-person—but an interest in what that means for our communities. Who is invited in, and in what roles? How do we make our practices accessible? How do we set up our practices with purpose and intention? Time and technology move quickly, and though our conference themes might now be full of questions about text-generating AI, I think it important to keep these questions about access, equity, and the human connections in our writing centers at the forefront of our work.

This book attempts to join these efforts to expand our view of writing center collaborations, to use research to carefully open up the richness of those collaborations, and to intentionally develop practices grounded in that research. Specifically, this is a study of writing groups sponsored—that is, advertised, formed, and facilitated—by a writing center. I examine what practices make up the work of writing center–sponsored writing groups and how those practices require tutors and administrators to adapt theories of writing center work. By closely examining the collaborative practices of groups, as well as one-to-one tutoring, writing center researchers may more fully theorize the complexities of collaboration among student-writers, tutors, administrators, and faculty in the writing center. In doing so, we are better able to implement programs that support students, tutors, and faculty from across campus as they engage in reading, writing, and mentoring.

Taking three groups as case studies—one group of second-year undergraduates enrolled in a program promoting student retention, one group of undergraduate researchers writing senior theses, and one group of dissertation writers—I use qualitative methods to study how students collaborate and negotiate their own emerging expertise as disciplinary writers and as readers of one another's texts. Drawing on observation, interview, and survey data, I track the ways that groups negotiate authority, navigate disciplinary difference, and experience emotions associated with the writing process and with writing center practice. I use the concept of "communities-of-practice" (Wenger 1998) as the theoretical framework to analyze these group practices as engagement in collaborative learning. In doing so, I contribute to theories of collaboration in the writing center and recommend practices for supporting student writers and tutors. I argue that writing groups offer a compelling site in which to study how writers collaborate across disciplinary boundaries, how writers emerge as disciplinary experts through collaborative practice, and finally, how writing centers might support such collaborations and learning.

Benefits and Challenges of Academic Writing Groups

Writing groups have received increasing attention in writing studies (Aitchison 2010; Geller and Eodice 2013; Moss et al. 2004) and, more specifically, in writing center studies (Cui et al. 2022; Hixson et al. 2016; Kinney et al. 2019; Kramer 2016; McMurray 2017, 2019; Phillips 2012; White and Miller 2015) as colleges and universities attempt to provide more and better support for student writers, particularly at the graduate level. Writing groups have been

embraced because they can offer writers the benefits of both emotional and intellectual support. Several studies note the communal, caring, and trusting atmosphere that writing groups can provide (Beckstead et al. 2004; Day and Eodice 2004; Julien and Beres 2019; Kinney et al. 2019; Lassig et al. 2013). This scholarship highlights the important role that writing groups can play in countering feelings of isolation, particularly for graduate writers (Lawrence and Zawacki 2018). In addition to emotional support, writing groups can also become spaces that provide participants with unique opportunities to learn about their writing, particularly disciplinary writing conventions about which they may not receive explicit instruction (Gradin et al. 2006; Maher et al. 2008; Paré 2014; Phillips 2012; Thomas et al. 2004).

Writing groups have especially been embraced for helping graduate students gain authority as writers within their home disciplines. For example, Anthony Paré (2014) theorizes writing groups for doctoral students as important sites of "authentic social engagement" and thus learning in academic discourse communities. Following Claire Aitchison (2009), he sees writing groups as sites that can recreate the dynamics of peer review and prepare students to receive and make use of critical feedback. As Paré writes, writing groups offer students the opportunity to "see academic writing as what it really is, or really can be: a dialogue among colleagues" and, further, to "develop a sense of membership and authority" as participants in that dialogue (26). Similarly, Garcia, Eum, and Watt write that a multidisciplinary writing group allowed them, as graduate students, to role-play as experts in their fields (Garcia et al. 2013). They were able to engage as peer mentors while gaining confidence as emerging disciplinary experts. For the writers who took part in the above studies, one of the key benefits of writing groups was the opportunity to develop a sense of authority and expertise in the relatively low-stakes site of a writing group.

This kind of support has been offered as one way to increase diversity and equity in academia by providing sites in which writers both learn about and critique existing disciplinary writing conventions and expectations that overwhelmingly privilege white, standard, edited, American English (Kinney et al. 2019; Phillips 2012; Wilmot and McKenna 2018). Similarly, Beth Godbee found potential in collaborative writing conferences to counter what she calls "epistemic injustice," offering the graduate student women of color who participated in her study an opportunity to engage in feminist co-mentoring that reaffirmed their "epistemic rights, the rights to knowledge, experience, and earned expertise" (Godbee 2020, 36). In other words, a writing group can

be a space that not only allows a student to practice being the expert but also invites participants to redefine, for themselves, what expertise might look like in their field.

The hoped-for outcomes of writing groups—providing students with authentic sites of social engagement around writing, developing writers' expertise and sense of authority, and supporting students in a safe, trusting atmosphere—are not always easy to attain. Implementing writing groups in the writing center also raises a number of challenges both for the center and for the writers who take part. For writing centers, one of the challenges is attrition in writing groups. Writing centers that are already under-resourced may not have the ability to put time and money into training and supporting tutors to facilitate writing groups that ultimately fail. As Claire McMurray (2019) notes, much of the (already limited) literature on writing groups narrates success stories, focusing on what works, yet sometimes facilitators and administrators find that writing groups fail as participants either never show up or drift away over time. It's difficult to find robust scholarship on why writing groups fail. In her small surveys of group participants and interviews with facilitators, McMurray (2017, 2019) found that group success hinged on the role of the group facilitator, the impact of the first meeting, and group negotiation of the structure for giving and receiving feedback. Further, participant satisfaction with writing groups depended on how well the group met participants' goals and expectations. Using a case study of a successful faculty writing group, Smith, Molloy, Kassens-Noor, Li, and Colunga-Garcia found that group members shared similar goals and values, appreciating, among other things, the multidisciplinarity, consistency, mutual support, and important opportunities for learning and professional growth offered by the writing group (Smith et al. 2013). These studies suggest that when participants in writing center–sponsored groups do not share (or do not come to share) similar goals, values, or expectations—when they don't form a community—groups are likely to dissolve.

Clearly, writing group members must find some common ground, some sense of shared purpose and expectations to collaborate successfully. For many successful groups, like those mentioned in the scholarship above that formed tight, trusting bonds, these shared values, purposes, and expectations might seem to come naturally, the result of a homogeneity in the group, for example when group members share the same gender identity (Kinney et al. 2019), or disciplinary background (Phillips 2012; Thomas et al. 2004). However, writing groups that experience challenges make plain the

importance of *negotiating* for shared goals, practices, and values as group members navigate ideological differences and sometimes meet with real conflict between members.

Several studies of community writing groups have attended to these sorts of conflicts. For example, Jackson's (2004) study of groups in a prison classroom explicitly addresses conflict based on racial ideologies. Jackson contends that the ideology of writing groups, which rely on trust, mutual support, and engagement, runs counter to the ideology of a prison. Yet the racial ideologies that were enacted in conflicts among group members reach far beyond prison walls. Westbrook's (2004) ethnographic study of conflict in a self-sponsored community writing group also focuses explicitly on the diversity of group members' race and gender, theorizing the group as a contact zone. In focusing on difference and conflict, Westbrook and Jackson both aimed to fill a gap left in the research by its emphasis on the communal, caring nature of successful writing groups. These studies emphasize the importance of understanding how the particular social and institutional context of a writing group shapes group members' collaborative negotiations of conflict.

The negotiations of conflict and difference are also part and parcel of negotiations of authority that have the potential for the benefits of writing groups listed above. Foundational scholarship on writing groups has been somewhat suspicious of authority in writing group collaborations, viewing authority negotiation as a challenge and possible detriment to writing groups in institutional spaces. Anne Gere's 1987 text, *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, drew a distinction between autonomous, semi-autonomous, and non-autonomous groups based largely upon their context inside or outside of the classroom. Gere theorized autonomous groups as those begun and sustained by participants themselves, such as the community writing groups that she took as the subject of "Kitchen Tables, Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition" (1994). Non-autonomous or semi-autonomous classroom groups, she explained, were limited by how much they deferred to a teacher's authority. Gere's theorization of writing groups as socially situated and context-dependent was taken up in later literature on writing groups. Candace Spigelman's (2000) *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups* identified the challenges faced by classroom peer-response groups whose practice was overshadowed by the presence of the teacher and the classroom context. In the classroom, the usefulness of writing groups was limited by students' concerns about plagiarism, notions of textual ownership, and sense of the teacher as true expert and thus only

source of authoritative feedback. Concerns about classroom-based groups, including those facilitated by course-embedded writing tutors, have centered around how well participants are able to manage and negotiate authority (Berkenkotter 1984; Corbett 2013; George 1984; Gere and Abbott 1985; Spigelman and Grobman 2005). These studies helpfully show how writing groups are context dependent. That is, they function differently in institutional spaces than they do outside of those institutions. It is useful, though, to unpack further how authority and power function in writing groups.

The scholarship above suggests that authority negotiation is a key practice for writing groups, a practice that can raise challenges for group members, but that also provides important benefits for student writers. The benefits and challenges of implementing writing groups point to several rich lines of inquiry for writing groups specifically located in the writing center. How does the location of the groups in the writing center, facilitated by a writing center tutor, impact the particular practices of the writing group? Like the classroom, the writing center is a site of negotiation, as writer and tutor bring different senses of authority and different experience and expertise to their collaborations. How do these negotiations of authority and expertise shape writers' and facilitators' collaboration in writing groups? Do existing theories of expertise and depictions of authority in the writing center account for group practice? What conflicts or differences arise as writers and tutors come together to read and respond to one another's work? For example, what sorts of conflicts or challenges arise due to disciplinary difference, and how are these negotiated? How might a writing group facilitated by a writing tutor support the emerging expertise of its members? What role does a writing group play in the larger writing life of group members and tutors?

In this study, I take up these kinds of questions by examining negotiations of authority and expertise among writers in writing center–sponsored writing groups. This study thus explores (1) how writing center–sponsored writing groups support the varied goals of group stakeholders (including group members, facilitators, and the writing center itself); (2) how participants negotiate authority, navigate disciplinary difference, and experience emotions in the writing groups; and (3) how identifying and describing writing group practices extends theories of collaboration in the writing center.

Theoretical Framework: Authority Negotiation in Writing Groups as Communities of Practice

To better understand how authority negotiation is at work in the writing groups and how the groups thus support writers' learning, I turn to *communities of practice* as a key theoretical concept. Theorizing writing groups as communities of practice is particularly useful for making sense of how learning happens through group interactions. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al. 2002, n.p.). Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner further clarify that through interaction, communities of practice develop a "shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). In this model, learning happens not through transmission (for example, from teacher to tutor to student) but rather through participation in communities. As we act in collaboration with others in our communities and negotiate the meaning of our practices, we learn and we become expert in those practices (Wenger 1998). In *Writing Groups in the Writing Center*, I theorize writing groups as small communities of practice that sit in a liminal space at the periphery of the writing center and the home disciplinary contexts of writing group members. The groups bring together people who share a concern and set of problems about writing and who share experiences, resources, and ways to address those problems. The groups in my study were situated within the writing center, facilitated by tutors who were steeped in writing center theory and practice, and yet also connected to the discursive contexts of the writers' work.

Wenger (1998) initially theorized learning as situated in communities of practice through four key concepts: meaning, practice, community, and identity. In Wenger's model, learning occurs through a process of participating in shared *practices* with others and making *meaning* of our experiences with them through processes he calls "participation" and "reification." Participation is "taking part" in a process or practice with others. Participating in the writing center, for example, means taking part in the practices of a writing center—tutoring, posting on the writing center's social media account, observing a session, even answering the phone or socializing with other tutors—or in the more global writing center community by attending a regional or national conference, publishing writing center scholarship, or

reading or posting to the WCenter listserv. Reification is the "process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (58). For example, we might "reify" our practice through producing handbooks or, as R. Mark Hall theorizes in *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, lists of "valued practices" for observing writing center sessions (Hall 2017). As both Wenger and Hall make clear, however, reification isn't about ossifying meaning or practices but is an ongoing process of negotiation. For example, Hall's list of "valued practices" for observing tutoring sessions was produced, used, and revised through continued conversation with tutors. As a "temporary reification" (Hall 2017, 20), the list of valued practices became an object with which participants in the writing center negotiated the meaning of their tutoring practices and ultimately created a writing center that valued observation and inquiry. As individuals engage in the *community* of the writing center, participating in shared practices and negotiating their meaning, they also engage in negotiations of *identity* as members of that community. Tutors, for example, become active members in the community, learn through the practice of tutoring and through talking with one another to share resources and theorize their work. The writing center coalesces as a community of practice as participants engage together in theorizing and practicing their work as tutors, administrators, and writers.

By taking up communities of practice as a theoretical frame, I focus my analysis on the means by which writers and group facilitators develop and participate in shared practices, shared ways of reading, writing, and talking together. I examine how particular values, conceptions of writing, ways of reading and responding, and ways of theorizing work in writing groups become reified through group practice and negotiation. Finally, I ask what these acts of negotiation and participation mean for the learning of both group members and group facilitators, within the writing groups, the writing center, and their home disciplinary communities.

WRITING CENTER–SPONSORED WRITING GROUPS WITHIN A LANDSCAPE OF PRACTICE

In taking up Wenger's communities of practice (CoP) framework for understanding writing group work, I join a number of scholars who use this frame to theorize writing center work (Geller et al. 2007; Hall 2011, 2017; Phillips 2012) and to theorize writing and learning in academic disciplines and workplaces (Artemeva 2008, 2009; Dias et al. 1999). In *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice* (2007), Geller and coauthors introduced and popularized

the idea of the writing center as a community of practice. They and others take up this model of situated learning because it can be a particularly useful tool for analyzing writing center work that has, at its heart, learning through collaboration and negotiation of meaning (Geller et al. 2007; Geller et al. 2011; Grimm 2011; Hall 2011, 2017). As Hall (2017) writes, "Rather than focus on individual knowing or tutor development, a communities-of-practice perspective turns our attention to the joint activities—the shared *practice*—of the writing center, the transactional process of becoming enculturated into that community, and the resources . . . which mediate that process" (20). To view the writing center as a community of practice helpfully frames engagement in shared practices as a means by which individuals entering the community continually negotiate their identities within the community and renegotiate these shared practices through participation in them.

The writing center scholarship that takes up the CoP frame tends to focus on administrators and tutors, with less explicit attention to student-writers. To some degree, this focus makes sense because communities of practice are built on consistent interaction among members, and administrators and tutors are consistent participants in the community (Wenger 1998). But what is the role of student-writers in this community of practice? Writers who come to tutoring sessions participate in writing center practice regularly, but they don't necessarily see themselves as members of the writing center community of practice. How do these students take part in the community? Shape the community? For Geller and colleagues (2007), they might challenge through "trickster" moments, moments that ask the tutor or administrator to reconsider their practices or frameworks, to see them through new eyes. In one-to-one models of tutoring, unless a student writer visits the center repeatedly, there isn't enough interaction for the writer to establish membership in the community.

Writing groups, however, do engage both tutors and student-writers in sustained interaction within the writing center. I argue that as engaged participants in writing groups, student writers negotiate meaning and participate in the community of the writing center through their interaction with other group members and facilitators. I consider the writing experiences they bring to these negotiations and examine how they engage in and potentially reshape writing center practices. Viewing writing group interactions as participatory practices in the writing center, we can observe how writing groups encourage students and tutors to establish membership, even fleeting or peripheral membership, in the writing center as a community of practice.

At the same time, group members are engaging in other communities of practice outside of the writing center through their writing. A doctoral student's dissertation chapter, for example, is meant to engage with practitioners in their home discipline. As a piece of scholarship, it engages in disciplinary discourses and also is an essential part of the writers' emerging participation in a disciplinary community. Writing dissertations and theses in particular requires that students begin to participate in disciplinary communities of practice and begin to develop a sense of identity as expert participant in their field (Paré 2011; Prior 1994). Within local contexts, students engage with professors as representatives of disciplinary fields and with each other through conversation around disciplinary genre conventions and expectations. When they bring these pieces of writing to the writing group, group members help them to negotiate participation in their home disciplines. Writing group participation is thus a form of peripheral participation in both the writing center and in the communities of practice that students engage with through their writing—their home academic disciplines or workplace communities. By considering writing groups as located at the periphery of the writing center and writers' other communities, this book attends to the way that participants' membership in multiple communities of practice, and their various levels of commitments to writing and to learning in those communities, affects their work in the group. In other words, I consider writing groups within a larger "landscape of practice" (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015). Theorizing writing groups as communities of practice helps us to understand the significance of the writing groups' location in the writing center, to frame facilitators' roles, and to understand how participation in writing groups necessitates negotiation of expertise and authority and also leads to learning in and beyond the group.

In theorizing writing groups as CoP that sit at the intersection of the writing center and student-writers' other communities, I extend the work of several other scholars. Talinn Phillips (2012) found that multilingual graduate writing groups formed communities of practice that helped their members move more fully into their disciplinary communities. Phillips examines the "language of negotiation" through which these students engaged in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) in their home disciplinary communities. Newcomers to a community engage in legitimate peripheral participation as they become expert; that is, rather than simply observing or receiving explicit instruction, newcomers begin by actually participating at the periphery of communities and gradually engage more fully,

eventually becoming experts themselves. For Phillips, writing groups serve as small, low-stakes sites in which student-writers engage at the periphery of their home disciplines. Similarly, Kinney, Synder-Yuly, and Martinez found that their experiences forming and engaging in a writing group as a community of practice provided a valuable site of disciplinary socialization where they learned to interact as emerging experts in their discipline (Kinney et al. 2019). Both of these articles argue for the value of writing center–sponsored writing groups as sites of peripheral participation in academic disciplinary communities, but they are less focused on the impact of the writing center itself as part of the institutional context shaping writing group practices.

Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey emphasize the importance of multidisciplinary writing groups as liminal spaces outside of traditional institutional authority and, particularly, the importance of the location of these groups in the writing center, facilitated by writing center consultants. Reflecting on what the writing center space affords writing groups, they write:

> Writing centers have a standing tradition of working with students at their point of need, whether that need is focused on what's written on a page or if that need is for emotional support and security. In addition, many writing centers employ students as consultants, so the very nature of the interactions that take place between consultant and client exist outside the traditional assessment and grading authority that exists within classes and departments. The graduate writing groups at the MSU Writing Center create rather unique institutional spaces, spaces that exist outside of traditional institutional authority yet inside the institution itself. Because of their nature, they provide graduate students with an important "bubble" in which those students can more objectively examine the practices expected by their departments, classmates, and especially advisors. Like Thesen (2014), though, we want to caution: "It must be said that the circle sometimes feels very fragile, and the flattened hierarchy of the group does not solve all problems" (p. 165). The groups allow students to come together to share and compare experiences, departmental and disciplinary practices, and of course writing knowledge with the hope that such exposure helps everyone become better scholars and professionals (Brooks-Gillies et al. 2020, 207–8).

Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, and Manthey's essay points us to the richness of the writing center space for writing groups, noting the possibilities for authority negotiation and also a caution against underestimating the difficulty of those negotiations by assuming a "flattened hierarchy." In this book, then, I build on their work, considering writing center–sponsored writing groups as at the

periphery of both the writing center and of student-writers' disciplinary communities. I describe and theorize the practices and perspectives of writing group members in this liminal space, especially focusing on the challenges and conflicts that they encounter through this practice.

DIVERSITY, DISSENSUS, AND CONFLICT IN WRITING GROUPS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Theorizing writing groups as communities of practice, importantly, does not require that members of the community are homogenous groups of people, and doesn't necessitate the warm, fuzzy feelings among members that the term *community* often evokes. Rather, participants in communities of practice are connected through mutual engagement. The interrelations of members in a community of practice "arise out of engagement in practice and not out of an idealized view of what a community should be like" (Wenger 1998, 76). Writing center scholarship that has taken up this frame has also emphasized the way that diversity in the community of practice is actually essential to a dynamic and "learning-ful" (Geller et al. 2007) writing center. Geller and co-authors (2007) note that viewing the writing center as a community of practice doesn't eliminate "conflict, disagreement, competition, and disenfranchising hierarchical relations. Instead, we acknowledge that writing centers—like all communities of practice—are neither a haven for togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations" (77). Following from *The Everyday Writing Center*, later scholarship emphasizes the importance of understanding how such conflicts, disagreements, and hierarchical relationships shape our everyday practice, especially when we take on the critical work of reimagining our centers to enact anti-racist pedagogies (Geller et al. 2011; Grimm 2011).

Despite the attention to diversity, dissensus, and conflict in Wenger's presentation of the theory and in the scholarship above, much of the literature on writing groups focuses on the communal, caring nature of these groups. Writing groups can be a powerful antidote to the isolation that often comes with writing, especially for graduate writers and others working on writing outside of a classroom. By attending to conflicts, challenges, and differences within writing groups, I don't mean to negate the importance of shared trust or the powerful feeling of camaraderie that can be so valuable for writing group members. Instead, I find that negotiating conflicts and challenges can be productive. By focusing on mutual engagement in shared practice and negotiation of meaning, the communities of practice framework allows

for a conception of community that does not require homogeneity, whether of discipline, gender, race, or any other identity marker. It requires mutual engagement. The framework thus provides a means for understanding the practices by which group members manage dissensus, conflicting disciplinary expectations, and negotiations of authority as part of their community participation. This book engages in an analysis of how student writers and group facilitators manage conflict and negotiate authority as part and parcel of their group practice.

AUTHORITY AND EXPERTISE IN THE WRITING CENTER AND IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A model of situated learning, the communities of practice framework provides a means for theorizing expertise as developed through practice and negotiation. In the CoP framework, old-timers in a community share their experience with newcomers, and newcomers also continually reshape the community. This framework is useful for considering expertise in the writing center and in writing groups because it offers us a different way of considering tutor and student expertise and authority, which have been fraught in writing center scholarship and in writing group scholarship.

As detailed above, writing group literature has been particularly ambivalent about the role of teacher authority in writing groups, positing a nonhierarchical group as an ideal. Writing center scholarship has been arguably even more uncomfortable with the idea of tutor authority, and its concerns are bound up in understandings of tutor expertise. Foundational writing center pedagogy posits tutors as peers who should use minimalist or nondirective techniques to maintain a nonhierarchical relationship between tutor and tutee (Brooks 1991; Bruffee 1984). Critiques of minimalist tutoring that advocate for allowing more directive tutoring strategies may move us closer to theorizing authority as negotiated through interaction. Peter Carino's "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" called for better understanding how power and authority are distributed in a session, arguing that rigid adherence to nondirective tutoring and total commitment to a nonhierarchical peer relationship between tutor and tutee masks the way that authority and power always already function in the tutorial, whether acknowledged or not. Carino concluded that tutor training should help tutors "recognize where power and authority lie in a tutorial, to what degree they have them, to what degree the student has them, and when and to what degree they are absent in a tutorial" (Carino 2003, 123). Carino's argument, persuasive in

complicating a strict adherence to nondirective, anti-authoritative values, is also still predicated on a particular model of authority and expertise. In the above quotation, power and authority are held by tutor or student by virtue of their knowledge of how to complete the student's assignment. Rather than considering authority as held, by virtue of title or experience, I want to consider authority as constantly negotiated through interaction.

This understanding of authority as constantly negotiated is informed by feminist theories of authority in composition studies as well as in the writing center. In *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement* (2019), Laura Greenfield critiques both a conservative view of power and authority—which assumes that power and authority come from knowing and ascribing to a right way to speak, for example privileging a standardized English and the authority of a teacher—and a liberal view that is suspicious of power and authority, equating all authority and power with oppression, like the minimalist tutoring theories described above. Instead, Greenfield calls for a radical paradigm for writing center work that sees power as exercised (and not inherently good or bad) and authority as not inherent to people or institutions but residing in theoretically informed practices. Greenfield's argument recalls earlier attempts to reconceive of authority in composition studies. In 1993, Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch called for a dialogic model of authority rooted in a feminist ethic of care (Mortensen and Kirsch 1993). For Mortensen and Kirsch, a better, feminist, dialogic model of authority would allow us, "in dialogue with others, to shape what authority does rather than simply attempting to alter what authority is" (566). To enact a feminist critique of authority in the composition classroom, Mortensen and Kirsch call on scholarship to "investigate the discursive practices writers use to invoke authority and the ways readers judge and respond to that authority. . . . By mapping the manifold ways in which authority defines people and relations of power—the discursive landscapes we and our students traverse—we can resurrect authority and make it more democratic, better suited to voices of both consensus and conflict" (568–69). More recently, in *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*, Stephanie Kerschbaum notes how difference is marked and negotiated in the context of student peer-review sessions (Kerschbaum 2014). Her exploration helps us see that even differences that might seem "prenegotiated" (like identity markers such as race, gender, and class) are given meaning through negotiations in ongoing interactions, inflected but not completely determined by existing cultural scripts. The move to retheorize authority, as Greenfield does in *Radical Writing Center*

Praxis, is thus part of an ongoing project in composition studies more generally. What I want to focus on in this scholarship is the idea that authority is not solely held by one person or entity, whether by virtue of their position in the group (the facilitator) or their expertise in writing (or particularly valued forms of writing), or their visible/invisible identifications (though these things matter), but rather that authority is negotiated through practice.

By considering writing groups as communities of practice, in which both tutor-facilitators and group members collaborate to develop their shared practice, I am interested in seeing how authority, power, and expertise are negotiated, shared, and performed. Throughout this book, I examine the conversational practices by which group members and facilitators negotiate authority over their texts and in the group. I see expertise not as an entity to be held but as knowledge in practice and as performed through negotiations of authority. However, these group negotiations and performances don't occur in a vacuum. Writing groups are situated within the larger institutional structures of the writing center and the university, and group members bring with them experiences and pressures from communities outside of the group. In this book, I examine students' and facilitators' sometimes clashing conceptions of authority and expertise, and ask what we, writing center professionals, can learn from how group members manage these differences, negotiate authority, and reflect on their own learning.

Research Site and Methods

WRITING GROUPS IN THE BIG STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

This study examines writing groups located in the Writing Center at Big State University (BSU), a large Midwestern land-grant university. At the time of this study, the Writing Center was led by a full-time director and three to four graduate assistant coordinators and employed approximately thirty-five tutors (both undergraduate and graduate). Each year, the center conducted roughly 3,700 consultations through individual, face-to-face, and online meetings between tutors and clients.

Although well-established, the BSU Writing Center was experiencing a period of change at the time of this study, changes that in part prompted the expansion of its writing group program. The Writing Center was housed in the Writing and Research Center (WRC), a larger center for researching and teaching writing, that had also included the Writing Across the Curriculum

(WAC) program as well as a number of community outreach programs and digital media initiatives. In 2012, the WRC underwent major changes. It moved to a new location and cut its technology and community outreach programs, leaving two programs: the Writing Center and the WAC program. This shift, which scaled back the work of the WRC as a whole, also meant an increase in space and consultants within the Writing Center itself. This increase in resources, combined with additional funding earmarked for international student support (international students made up 48 percent of our sessions at the time), encouraged the center to concentrate new efforts on supporting international and graduate student writers.

At the time of my study, the BSU Writing Center was attempting to increase its offerings of writing groups, particularly to support advanced writers like graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. In the three years leading up to this study, the BSU writing center increased writing group offerings from just two dissertation writing groups to about fifteen, depending on the particular semester. During the spring of 2016, the primary semester in which I collected data, the Writing Center offered twenty groups, seventeen of which actually continued to meet throughout the duration of the term. During this period of growth, the Writing Center experimented with offering a number of different types of writing groups for writers of all ranks (undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral), from different programs (first- and second-year writing courses, ESL), and who were working on particular genres (dissertations, theses, grants, proposals, personal statements, journal articles). Through trial and error, the Writing Center dropped some of these offerings to focus on offering groups for writers working on long-term projects and who did not have other support in the form of a writing class.

Most of the groups offered by the BSU Writing Center at the time of this study had a similar basic structure. Each was facilitated by an experienced writing tutor and often included group members from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Some groups expressly met to sit down and write together, spending only a small portion of the meeting setting writing goals and talking about writing process. Most, however, had feedback as a primary goal and practice. In these groups, one or two group members would distribute a piece of writing each week to be read ahead of a weekly meeting. Groups met for one or one and a half hours, and facilitators received one and a half hours of paid preparation time to read participants' work and keep up with group email. Beyond these generalizations, however, groups each developed their own routine and practices, led by the facilitator.

My Role in the BSU Writing Center

At the time of data collection, I served as a graduate assistant coordinator, after having worked in the BSU writing center as a graduate tutor and as a writing group facilitator, and my role in these positions shaped both the initial exigence for and the methods of this study. As assistant coordinator, I was responsible for scheduling and advertising writing groups, developing training and support for group facilitators, and administering an end-of-term survey to gather feedback from group participants. Additionally, I facilitated one group each term myself. It was my experiences as both group facilitator and as administrator responsible for the writing group program that prompted my interest in writing groups. Although I led a number of satisfying, successful writing groups, I also had experience with two groups that were less satisfactory to group members and that failed to continue over the course of the term. As a facilitator, I experienced a disconnect between writing center theory that had guided my tutoring work to that point and the practices I was engaged in as group facilitator. This disconnect and the need to develop better support for the massive increase in group offerings were the two exigencies that first led me to this project. I was responsible for training and supporting the group facilitators who took part in this study. As I analyze interviews with facilitators, in particular, I aim to account for my position in relationship to them, which may have influenced how they spoke about their work in the writing groups.

Recruiting Groups for This Study

In selecting my three groups for this IRB-approved study, I purposefully sought a mix of graduate and undergraduate groups to learn how writing groups might differ for participants with different goals, needs, and writing experiences. I began by recruiting facilitators who were willing to participate in interviews and have me observe their groups. I interviewed most facilitators before the semester began (described in more detail below), and then followed up to ask them if I could attend their group (choosing the groups I would attend based on scheduling constraints). If they agreed, I attended the first group meeting to introduce myself and the study to participants. In talking with the groups at those first meetings, I explained the purpose of the study, my role in the writing center, and the different possibilities for my involvement as a researcher in their group and their involvement in the research study. I then left the room while they deliberated about whether or

not to allow me to observe the group. If all in the group were amenable to my observations, I continued to attend and observe all group sessions from that point on. I followed up with individual group members who were interested in contributing interviews.

Group Descriptions

The groups I studied varied in their makeup in terms of participants' race, gender, home languages, and disciplinary backgrounds. Below I describe the three groups that participated in this study: a dissertation writing group, an undergraduate thesis writing group, and a group of second-year writers writing grant proposals as part of a program promoting student retention. The information in the following descriptions reflects the ways that participants described themselves to me or to one another at the time of the study.

DISSERTATION WRITING GROUP (DWG). The Dissertation Writing Group met weekly for one and a half hours in a small group study room at the library. One participant each week would send the rest of the group a piece of writing before the group meeting. Group members committed to reading and commenting on drafts, bringing feedback with them to the group meeting, which was facilitated by an experienced Writing Center consultant. Table 1.1 describes the participants who took part in the DWG in more detail. Most of the writers in this group were well into the dissertation-writing process, though they had different amounts of experience with writing groups.

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS WRITING GROUP (UTG). The Undergraduate Thesis Writing Group formed under slightly different circumstances than the other groups. Partway through the previous term, two undergraduate Writing Center consultants, Maggie and Eleanor, approached me to ask if they could take part in a writing group to support their upcoming thesis projects. They also hoped to facilitate a group themselves eventually but were uncomfortable taking on the role of facilitator in their first group experience. Marie, another undergraduate consultant, who was finishing up her senior thesis, agreed to facilitate the group and herself took on the job of helping to recruit more group participants. Before the group was advertised outside of the Writing Center, Marie, Maggie, and Eleanor agreed on their roles as facilitator and group participants (rather than cofacilitating). Table 1.2 describes participants in the UTG.

The group met weekly in the same group study room used by the dissertators, for one and a half hours in the evening, the only time that could accommodate everyone's class and work schedules. The group's initial makeup

TABLE 1.1. Dissertation writing group participants

Facilitator
RADHA: A PhD candidate in literature, Radha had facilitated a range of writing groups, including dissertation and postdoctoral groups. Radha was an American woman of Indian descent.
Group Members
AHMED: Ahmed was PhD candidate in Veterinary Medicine. This was his first writing group at the Writing Center. Ahmed was an international student from Egypt.
HOLLY: Holly was a PhD candidate in Art Education who also had participated in Radha's dissertation group the previous semester. She was a white American woman.
PETER: Peter was a PhD candidate in Sociology. He had not yet worked with Radha, but had participated in several groups before, including one that I facilitated and one in which Emily participated. Peter was a white American man.
EMILY: A PhD candidate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), Emily was in a writing group with Peter the previous term, though she had not been in any of Radha's groups before. Emily was a white American woman.

included students at very different points in the process of writing their theses. Maggie and Eleanor were just starting the process, planning to finish their theses the following academic year. They were using time in the writing group to begin research, do preliminary writing, and compose outlines. Andrew and Adanna had both completed abstracts at the time of the group. Adanna had completed her data analysis, and both of them were in the midst of drafting the thesis itself. Andrew, Adanna, and Marie were all readying themselves to defend their theses that semester.

About five weeks into the term, Andrew and Adanna left the group, explaining that they were juggling too many responsibilities (coursework, jobs) and could no longer commit to the weekly writing group. In consultation with the Writing Center director, the group elected to keep meeting throughout the rest of the term. Because Maggie and Eleanor weren't doing much drafting, many group meetings after Andrew and Adanna left were at least partially devoted to "sit down and write" time, in which group members worked independently and then came back together to share progress at the end of the meeting.

SECOND-YEAR PROPOSAL WRITING GROUP (SPG). This group formed in partnership with another campus program, which was designed to promote student retention. Students in this program lived in the same dormitory, attended co-curricular events, met in cohorts of about twenty throughout the fall semester, and wrote proposals for funding to complete a signature, "transformative experience" or project. Projects could include traditional research

TABLE 1.2. Undergraduate thesis group participants

Facilitator
MARIE: Marie was an experienced undergraduate consultant who had facilitated one group previously. She was double-majoring in Philosophy and WGSS and also writing her senior thesis. She was a white American woman, and she was the first in her family to attend college.
Group Members
ELEANOR: A junior English major and undergraduate consultant, Eleanor was just beginning her honors thesis in English. She was a white American woman.
MAGGIE: A junior English major and undergraduate consultant, Maggie was also just beginning an honors thesis in English. Maggie was a white American woman.
ANDREW: A senior completing his honors thesis in WGSS that semester, Andrew left the group five weeks into the term. He was a white American man.
ADANNA: A senior completing her honors thesis in Economics that semester, Adanna left the group five weeks into the term. Adanna was a Black American woman.

projects, internships, study abroad programs, creative work, outdoor leadership experiences, or community service. If their proposal was accepted, students were awarded up to $2,000 to fund their signature project. The Writing Center created a number of writing groups to help support students as they developed their proposals. The SPG I observed met weekly for one hour in the main Writing Center. Although the writing groups were voluntary, several of the students in the SPG signed up thinking that they were required; however, all of them elected to stay even when they realized the groups were not mandatory. Table 1.3 describes the SPG participants.

METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study of three writing groups is grounded in a qualitative, inductive, and iterative approach to examining how participants engaged in the groups and made meaning through group practice. This study responds to renewed calls for empirical research in writing centers (Boquet and Lerner 2008; Driscoll and Perdue 2012; Gillespie 2002; Kjesrud 2015). In taking an empirical, qualitative approach to this study, I am interested in understanding the lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2011) of writing group participants, and learning from the things they "do, say, and write, in day-to-day life" (Broad 2012). By systematically observing and analyzing the writing groups in these case studies, I have aimed to move beyond some of the initial assumptions that I had in my early group facilitation experiences (assuming that it must be best for the facilitator to speak as little as possible in the group, for example). Examining

TABLE 1.3. Second-year proposal group participants

Facilitator
ELIZABETH: A graduate consultant and PhD student in English, specializing in Rhetoric and Composition, Elizabeth had facilitated a pilot SPG the previous year. She also facilitated dissertation writing groups. She was a white American woman.
Group Members
VIHAAN: Vihaan was a second-year student majoring in Computer Science. His proposed signature project was a computer science research project. At the outset of the group, he was working with a professor to identify a suitable project. He was a male student from India.
JENNY: Jenny was a second-year student majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Her proposed project was a co-op (internship) with a well-known automobile manufacturer. At the beginning of the group, she had already secured her internship. She was a white American woman.
ANA: Ana was a second-year student majoring in Human Development. Her proposed project was an internship working in human resources. Throughout most of the term, she was interviewing for internships that would take place the following summer or fall. She was an American woman.
LINDSEY: Lindsey was a second-year student majoring in Chemical Engineering. Her signature project was a study-abroad experience in Greece with a special focus on engineering. Early in the term, she received confirmation of her place in the study abroad program. She was a white American woman.

writing groups as communities of practice put my focus on the practices each writing group engaged in together as well as my participants' perspectives on those practices. Finally, I was informed by theories of qualitative research design that insist on reciprocity with and for research participants (Powell and Takayoshi 2003).

Data Collection

Data for this book come from four sources: participant-observation of writing groups, interviews with facilitators and group members, documents from the groups and from the Writing Center, and surveys of participants in writing groups (see table 1.4).

PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION. I attended, video-recorded, and transcribed group meetings from each of the three groups throughout the course of one semester.[2] Transcripts were written to privilege readability. I did not closely transcribe all ums, uhs, or back-channeling, except where it was especially

2. I attended all group meetings for each of my case study groups, with the exception of one DWG meeting.

TABLE 1.4. Data collected

Observations (field notes and video recordings and transcripts)	SPG	9 observations (9 hours)
	UTG	11 observations (16 hours)
	DWG	12 observations (17 hours)
Semi-Structured Interviews	Facilitators	Elizabeth (SPG), 2 interviews
		Marie (UTG), 2 interviews
		Radha (DWG), 2 interviews
		Yvonne (interview only)
		Shelly (interview only)
		Rachel (interview only)
	Group Members	Lindsey (SPG)
		Eleanor (UTG)
		Adanna (UTG) via email
		Holly (DWG)
		Peter (DWG)
		Emily (DWG)
Surveys	End-of-Term Surveys of all BSU Writing Group Participants	Autumn 2015–Spring 2016
Documents	Contextualizing Documents	SPG website and proposal guidelines
		SPG writers' in-process writing and finished drafts
		BSU Writing Center facilitator training materials

pronounced. I have noted extended silences and the number of seconds of silence. I also noted interruptions with an em dash at the end of the line. If participants were talking over one another (which was rare), I have indicated that in the transcript. Much more commonly, I have indicated laughter (of the group at large or of individuals), as well as reading aloud. In addition to recordings and transcripts, I also kept field notes as part of my observations. These field notes also included descriptions of the occasional informal conversations I had with facilitators or group members before or after the group meeting, as well as my reflections on my own experience as participant-observer.

My role in the groups was that of participant-observer, and the extent of my participation in the groups was determined in collaboration with each group at the outset of the term. I wanted to establish a reciprocal relationship with the members of these groups so that my presence would be a help rather than a distraction or a hindrance to them. Each of the three groups allowed me to record and observe weekly group meetings, but they also asked me to participate in their conversations, coming prepared to work with them during group sessions. The SPG agreed to allow me to analyze their proposal writing, while both the DWG and UTG preferred that I not include their unfinished writing in the analysis. They asked me to read and prepare for group sessions alongside them, offering my feedback as part of group conversation. Because I read work ahead of time, prepared my feedback, and shared comments in the group, I became a participant in group conversation. I generally did not share my own writing, but in all other ways, I became a participant much like the others in the group. As a contributor to group conversation, my comments make up part of the data alongside comments from group members and facilitators.

My level of participation both complicated and enriched my research. Among the dissertation writers, I was closest to being a peer, as I was also working on my dissertation and had worked with some of the writers before. I had previously taken a graduate course with Holly, one of the DWG participants, and I had facilitated a writing group in which Peter, another DWG member, had taken part. As I gave feedback in the DWG, I positioned myself as another group member and fellow graduate student, but my status as both researcher and writing center administrator complicated that role. In group meetings, I attempted to hold off on offering feedback, waiting first to see what other group members had to say and how the facilitator might invite me or other group members into conversation.

In both the SPG and UTG groups, I was even further removed from a position as just another participant in the group. As a graduate student and experienced writing center consultant and administrator, I had more experience with academic writing in the humanities and with responding to writing from across disciplines. When Marie, the UTG facilitator, introduced me to the group, she framed my role as both researcher and as experienced writer who could be a source of information about graduate school and graduate-level writing. Throughout the first several weeks, I was especially attuned to how and when I decided to speak up in the undergraduate groups. My field notes from these first weeks of all three groups reflect this attention and the

uncertainty that I felt about it. I was aware, in the DWG and UTG, of waiting to offer a suggestion until there had been ample opportunity for everyone else to speak. In the SPG, I was anxious not to detract from Elizabeth's role as facilitator. In later weeks, these concerns are not as prominent in my field notes, though I did note moments in which writers seemed to feel free to disagree with or add to my suggestions. In both data collection and analysis, then, I have tried to account for my position and practices as participant-observer, attending to my own position as researcher and administrator, especially when analyzing negotiations of authority.

INTERVIEWS, SURVEYS, AND CONTEXTUALIZING DOCUMENTS. I conducted semi-structured interviews with facilitators and focal writing-group participants. Interviews were designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the writing groups, including motivations for joining or facilitating groups, their experiences in the group, and how they made use of feedback in revising their texts. Interview questions are included in appendix A. To contextualize my analysis of the case study group practices and perspectives, I also collected and consulted documents that contextualized the work of the writing groups. For example, I collected handouts used for training group facilitators, and I consulted the SPG program website, which included program and proposal descriptions and goals. Finally, I included data from end-of-term surveys sent out to all writing group participants (not just those groups I observed). These surveys elicited information about the overall satisfaction with the writing groups (see survey questions in appendix B). All responses were anonymous. Respondents were asked to take the survey if they had attended at least one writing group meeting.

Data Analysis

Informed by calls in writing center scholarship to rely less on lore and more on empirical research to theorize writing center practice (Driscoll and Perdue 2012; Kjesrud 2015), I approached my analysis inductively, grounding it in the data and using theoretical memos to reflect on data as I collected it. Through an iterative analytic process, I developed a coding scheme from the data rather than applying existing codes, following a similar process to the initial phases of grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2008; Farkas and Haas 2012; Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2016). During my initial coding, I used both in vivo codes, which take their language directly from the data, and process codes, which use gerunds to describe action in the data (Charmaz 2008;

Saldaña 2016).[3] For example, my list of initial codes included, among many others, process codes like "reading aloud," "explaining reading experience," and "resisting advisor" and in vivo codes from interviews such as "authoritative" and "stress-relieving."

Throughout data collection and analysis, I wrote short, theoretical memos to reflect on my developing codes and begin looking for patterns. I developed codes and grouped them into categories through constant comparison, testing the codes and comparing data from the initial open coding to the rest of the transcripts from group meetings, and finally triangulating observational data with interview and survey data (Farkas and Haas 2012). I looked for emerging categories and patterns—for example, feedback strategies used by group members, facilitator-specific strategies, and participant beliefs about their roles in the group—that I thought would help me account for how writing group members negotiated authority, how facilitators and group members engaged with one another, and how all participants navigated disciplinary difference within the writing groups. Finally, using the coding scheme I developed, represented in appendix D, I compared and contrasted group practices and perspectives in all three groups, using the communities of practice framework and writing center and writing studies theory to help interpret my findings.

I also took the opportunity, when possible, to member-check, or discuss my emerging findings with study participants (Merriam and Tisdale 2016). Toward the end of the semester in which I collected data, I spoke with the UTG about the emerging findings and about a conference presentation I gave on the topic, soliciting their perspectives. I also spoke with Radha and Elizabeth after the groups had ended, during writing center sessions in which they read and commented on portions of the work. Finally, during the final follow-up interviews, I took the opportunity to speak with Radha, Elizabeth, and Marie again about the findings as I had articulated them thus far.

3. Following Mackiewicz and Thompson (2015), who developed a coding scheme for analyzing talk in one-to-one writing center tutorials, my unit of analysis for the coding process was the topic episode, "strings of conversation that coherently address one subject" (16). Each topic episode could include either one or multiple speakers and could be explicitly closed (for example, when a facilitator explicitly told the group to move on to a new topic), allowed to peter out (when a group might fall into silence), or ended by a speaker who, within a single comment, might move from one topic to another or one strategy to another (for example, praising the writer, then asking a separate question).

Chapter Summaries

The following chapters of this book are organized around key findings of the study. Chapter 2, "'People Thinking Differently About Writing': The Role of the Group Facilitator," investigates the role and practices of writing group facilitators. I triangulate facilitator perspectives, gathered through interviews, with those of writing group members and my own observations of facilitator practice. Whereas facilitators were somewhat uncertain of their role and particularly ambivalent about their own authority or expertise in the writing groups, group members saw facilitators as a valuable source of knowledge about how to write and revise and how to read and provide feedback. This chapter argues that although facilitators, steeped in a tradition of nondirective peer tutoring, were ambivalent about their own authority, they actually engaged in important conversational practices that made use of that authority to scaffold writing group practice. In this chapter, I identify and describe the key practices that facilitators used to scaffold reading, writing, and feedback practices that would nurture a successful group. I group these practices into three distinct categories: logistical support, emotional and relationship-building support, and intellectual support for reading and writing across disciplinary boundaries. Thus, I theorize the role of facilitator as one that is less about attempting to mitigate authority so as not to overtake the group and more about actively finding ways to share expertise in writing, genre, and feedback, and to invite group members to take up, enact, and reshape those writing center practices.

Chapter 3, "'It's Not Necessarily Science': Disciplinary Clashes, Convergences, and Learning in Multidisciplinary Groups," investigates the challenges and opportunities that arose for group members as they collaborated across disciplinary boundaries. The chapter tracks moments of disciplinary conflict and examines the particular intellectual and emotional challenges and benefits for writers in multidisciplinary groups. This chapter argues that writing groups challenge each group member to act as expert in their home field and to perform their expertise through explaining their research and writing choices to the rest of the group. And yet, reading and responding as outsiders to other group members' writing was one of the key challenges articulated by the group members. Multidisciplinarity challenged group members to seek the rhetorical resonances across disciplines in order to write and revise together. As group members deliberate over revision choices, they also consider and make use of authoritative voices beyond the writing group,

like their advisors. In observing students at different stages of their educations (second-year undergraduates, undergraduate thesis writers, dissertators), with different investments in disciplinary discourses and knowledge building, this chapter adds to the growing body of literature on literacy and writing development across disciplines. Following scholars like Roozen and Erickson (2017), I argue that the development of academic literacies is multifaceted, emotional work, and it takes place in community with others, even others outside the discipline. Thus, even though *Writing Groups in the Writing Center* uses communities of practice as a framework, it sees literacy learning within a larger landscape of practice, one in which writers' work and movement across and through multiple communities influences their emergence as participants in academic disciplines.

Chapter 4, "Storying the Difficulties: Emotional Labor in Writing Groups at a PWI," digs further into the emotional life of the writing groups, exploring the tensions that arose within and between group members' experiences of group practices. In particular, it stories difficulties around inclusion and exclusion in group dynamics, layering individual group members' perspectives and stories of group practice. This chapter attends to the key difficulties that participants expressed in performing the emotional labor that allowed them to navigate collaborative relationships in this institutional context: a writing center in a large, predominantly white research institution.

Finally, chapter 5, "Expanding the Boundaries of Writing Center Work," explores the practical and theoretical implications of this research for writing center scholarship and writing studies more generally. It synthesizes the arguments of the three previous chapters and takes up the practical implications for these arguments by offering some goals and possible activities for training group facilitators. While I don't offer prescriptive advice, which could never account for the many and diverse circumstances of different kinds of writing centers and institutions, I do explore some of the ways that this work helped writing group facilitator training evolve and the ways that it has impacted my own work with students in other spaces.