"The Book Can't Teach You That": A Case Study of Place, Writing, and Tutors' Constructions of Writing Center Work

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“THE BOOK CAN’T TEACH YOU THAT”: A CASE STUDY OF PLACE, WRITING, AND TUTORS’ CONSTRUCTIONS OF WRITING CENTER WORK

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER J. DIBIASE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2016

Department of English
“THE BOOK CAN’T TEACH YOU THAT”: A CASE STUDY OF PLACE, WRITING, AND TUTORS’ CONSTRUCTIONS OF WRITING CENTER WORK

A Dissertation Presented

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CHRISTOPHER J. DIBIASE

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ABSTRACT

"THE BOOK CAN’T TEACH YOU THAT": A CASE STUDY OF PLACE, WRITING, AND TUTORS’ CONSTRUCTIONS OF WRITING CENTER WORK

FEBRUARY 2016

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This project questions the relationship between place, writing, and constructions of writing center work. Applying a case study methodology, I investigated how and why writing center tutors draw upon experiences of writing in non-writing center spaces in the course of their tutorial work. Participants completed a survey (Appendix D) detailing their contemporary spatial usage with respect to writing, tracked their writing practices for a two-week period, were observed tutoring in multiple writing center sessions, and participated in a series of interviews exploring their experience of writing in multiple spatial contexts as well as their approaches to writing center work. Using a framework of spatial epistemologies developed by Edward Soja, I analyze the data with an eye to how participants developed understandings of and attitudes towards academic space, writing’s
role(s) in academic space, and their role(s) as writers in academic space, as well as how these understandings shifted as participants moved between a range of writing spaces. I argue that the movement between different writing spaces leads to the emergence of a writerly agency with respect to place. This agency, along with an investment in one’s writing process, meta-awareness of one’s writings goals and needs, and access to flexible writing spaces, produces conditions where writers are better able to adapt problematic writing spaces to meet their needs as writers (and in the context of the writing center, as tutors).

In their writing center work, participants frequently drew upon material practices, discourses, and values developed in non-writing center spaces. I argue that this process of bringing outside practices into the writing center tutorial serves as a way for tutors to revise their understandings of what can or should happen with writing center spaces, thereby producing new understandings of that space more closely aligned with their needs and goals as tutors. I conclude by suggesting the need for writing center scholars to attend more carefully to the range of writing spaces tutors occupy in their lives as writers outside the writing center and the role their experience in these spaces plays in shaping their tutorial practices.
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CHAPTER 1

ACCOUNTING FOR TUTORS’ KNOWLEDGE: A SPATIAL APPROACH

Writing centers as they currently operate depend upon the work of peer tutors (often undergraduates), yet very little of writing center research has focused on these tutors’ writing experiences outside of the writing center. In particular, little research has been conducted into how writing tutors understand the writing center in relation to the other contexts that are part of their writing identities. More often than not, writing center scholarship positions the writing center and its associated practices at the center of tutors’ understandings of writing and revision. These understandings—if one were to accept the assumptions of the extant literature—have been shaped exclusively by tutors’ work in the writing center and/or any tutor education/training they may have received prior to/during their writing center work. The field has largely foregone investigations into the kinds of writing and rhetorical practices that tutors bring to their writing center work, and practical tutoring manuals often operate under the assumption (or fail to acknowledge) that tutors have little to no relevant prior experiences to draw from when beginning their work as tutors. Indeed, a body of writing center literature, both scholarly and practical, has constructed a set of strategies, assumptions, and writing practices that are considered appropriate for use within the writing center without taking into account the sorts writing experiences tutors may have encountered outside the writing center and how those encounters may be valuable in the course of writing center work.

Without a better understanding of how tutors’ various writing experiences—past and present—influence their approaches to working with writers, we are left to assume
that these approaches are shaped primarily by the training or education programs that 
these tutors go through prior to and/or during their tenure as writing center tutors.

Though it is reasonable to assume that these programs have some effect on how tutors 
carry out their work, it would be naïve to assume that these training programs (e.g. 
classes, workshops) are the only influence on how tutors work with writers. That is to 
say, formal training is likely only one of several factors that influence how tutors make 
sense of the writing center and their role within it. Investigating possible factors other 
than writing center training can enable writing center scholars to put that training within a 
more meaningful context. Such a context is necessary if we are concerned with the 
efficacy and value of tutor training, as it helps move us past questions such as “What 
aspects of training do tutors embrace?” and “Which do they ignore?” to questions of why 
they embrace or reject aspects of their tutor education. A reevaluation of the role that 
tutor training plays in shaping tutors’ practices may also enable a reconsideration of the 
goals and methods of that training. If tutors are drawing from practices cultivated or 
experienced outside of the writing center--practices that go beyond those articulated in 
tutor training courses--is there a value in bringing those practices into conversation within 
these courses? And how might those conversations reshape the way we talk with tutors 
about tutoring, the tutor/writer relationship, or the way all student writers (including 
tutors) are positioned within the academy?

Additionally, a better understanding of how tutors make sense of their writing 
center work within the context of their other writing experiences, both past and present, 
may have broader implications for composition studies. Such an investigation may lead 
to insights as to how student writers make sense of, accept, reject, or revise formal
writing instruction. Although writing center training programs and first-year composition courses may differ significantly in content and context, they both embody situations in which students are asked to take on new approaches to composition and revision without, as Julie Drew has argued, much consideration for or attention to students’ existing practices. In her article “The Politics of Place: Students Travelers and Pedagogical Maps,” Drew argues that the composition classroom is not the only place where students learn and practice writing and rhetorical conventions. Drew labels these multiple places collectively as “sites of discursive pedagogy” (60). Each site of discursive pedagogy carries with it certain approaches to and assumptions about writing, revision, and rhetoric—what and how you write, for whom and to what end. It would be shortsighted to assume that student writers abandon these sites and what they represent when they enter the composition classroom, particularly if that classroom does not occupy a central position in a particular student’s writing geography.

Exploring the gap between sites of college writing instruction and the everyday spaces of students’ lives, John Mauk has conducted research into commuter campuses, raising new questions about the role of place in writing instruction and how the field’s spatial assumptions have worked to the detriment of students at non-residential universities. Describing his campus, Mauk notes that the large commuter population has no central meeting space on campus and that students have opted not to “buy into” the academic “real estate” of the university (370). The lack of physical spaces for students to congregate reflects the university’s own discourse about its role in its students’ lives: that of a transitional space where students are expected to pass through rather than settle (371). Because students do not choose to invest in campus real estate and/or because their
own material conditions prevent them from doing so, class attendance is uneven across the semester. The lack of regular attendance disrupts Mauk’s attempts to implement process pedagogy approaches, which depend on regular participation and drafting. Such pedagogy relies upon assumptions about students’ spatial practices that may not match the reality of students’ everyday lives. Ultimately, Mauk concludes that writing pedagogies designed and implemented without taking into account the reality of students’ spatial experiences are pedagogies that will likely fail to meet students’ needs.

As of yet, writing center scholarship has been unable to provide a nuanced account of tutors’ writing lives outside of the writing center. I would argue that this oversight has resulted from a set of issues that are grounded in both the spatial assumptions and spatial realities of writing center research and practice. At a practical level, I suspect that for many directors or writing center administrators, the bulk of their interactions with their tutors are within the spatial context of the writing center. When in the writing center, these tutors are expected to take on the conventions of writing center work as constructed by their encounters with tutor education classes, training sessions, and developmental workshops, each of which has likely been influenced at some level by dominant understandings of writing center theory and practice. One’s identity as a writing center tutor is contingent on one’s participation in the work of the writing center, work that is more often than not located in a physical space marked as the writing center. As such, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that “tutor” is only one aspect of any tutor’s identity, particularly if the writing center is the only or primary site where writing center administrators interact with tutors.
But who are these tutors before they walk into the writing center? And who are they when they leave? On these questions, the scholarship has been largely silent, yet it is problematic to assume the answers to these questions are unimportant or unrelated to what tutors do when they are in the writing center. To investigate the answers of these questions, I am inclined to ask: where are tutors coming from when they get to the writing center? Where are they going when they leave? And though these questions may seem simplistic, they reflect a belief that our identities are shaped largely by the places that we (choose to) occupy. In turn, understanding the spaces where tutors participate/have participated in writing/revision practices and how these spaces have shaped these practices may lead to a more nuanced understanding of writing center work as it is actually practiced, lived, and experienced by the individuals who perform it. Although one might question the necessity of attending to the spaces where tutors engage/have engaged in writerly activity rather than focusing exclusively on their writing practices, I would argue (and my data would suggest) that participants’ attitudes about and approaches to writing are often strongly connected to the spaces where those attitudes and approaches first emerged. Understandings of academic writing are shaped by the intersection of material resources, discourses about the purpose of writing and education, and the social interactions with other teachers and students within the spatial contexts of participants’ prior educational experiences.

To better make use of space as an inroad to understanding the degree to which outside writing practices influence the decisions tutors make when working with student writers, I use spatial theory as a means to analyze the relation between tutors’ writing practices, the spaces where these practices occur, and their work within the writing
center. Cultural geographer Edward Soja has argued that “All social relations become real and concrete, a part of our lived social experience, only when they are spatially ‘inscribed,’”—that is, concretely represented—in the social production of social space” (46). Soja argues for a trialectic of spatiality that accounts for the materiality of spaces (Firstspace), the discourses that produce a particular space (Secondspace), and the lived experience of a space (Thirdspace) (22). The significance of this approach to space is that it acknowledges the effects that material space can have on everyday practice without relegating material space to a mere backdrop for other actions or abstracting it to the point where thinking about space becomes removed from everyday experience.

Applied to my line of inquiry, discourses about tutoring practices and tutor training constitute Soja’s Secondspace. If writing centers are defined primarily by the tutoring that occurs within their physical spaces, then these discourses construct the writing center by establishing a set of acceptable practices that determine the kind of writing work/tutoring that can take place at the writing center. Not only have these discourse functioned to construct writing center spaces, but this construction has historically been a primary function of writing center scholarship.

Far less emphasis has been placed on what Soja would refer to as a Thirdspace approach to the writing center. Describing his conception of Thirdspace, Soja writes that it is “the space where all spaces are, capable of being seen from every angle…Everything comes together in Thirdspace” (56, Soja’s emphasis). In other words, when considering a place from a Thirdspace perspective, one needs to keep in mind how a multiplicity of spaces (“lifeworlds”) overlap and coexist simultaneously. Accounting for this multiplicity of spaces, with respect to sites of writing, means accounting for a space’s
physical properties, for the rhetorical and composing practices that define a space, for the
various audiences that inhabit a space, and for the writers who compose within a space.

The writing center is more than just the physical space that comprises it. Similarly, the writing center is more than a set of defining practices established within the scholarship’s discourse. These are only two of several types of spaces that converge with others to create the entirety of a writing center space. They converge with the spaces constructed by the lived experience of the tutors employed in the writing center, including their actual practices and how these practices work with or against those established by the professional discourse. They converge with tutors’ lifeworlds, worlds themselves that are comprised of their experiences across multiple sites. However, much of writing center scholarship, intentionally or otherwise, has bracketed tutor knowledge and experience, failing to consider that which exists outside the bounds, both physical and discursive, of the writing center. As Soja argues, however, “Anything which fragments Thirdspace into specialized knowledges or exclusive domains – even on the pretext of handling its infinite complexity – destroys its meaning and openness” (56-57).

This concern about fragmentation reflects my own concerns regarding issues of space. Like Soja, I agree that “space” can be understood in multiple ways, that space is constructed both physically as well as discursively, and that space is also constructed by the lived everyday practices of those who inhabit it. These practices, however, are shaped by more than just the physical site or by the discourses associated with that site. They are also shaped by the totality of the practitioners’ experiences across a range of contexts. In order to fully appreciate the way that tutors both shape and are shaped by the writing center, we need to recognize that the writing center never operates as an isolated
site; it is always located in relation to the multiple other spaces that tutors inhabit and travel through. An appreciation for this range of spaces is necessary in order to properly account for the fullness of tutors’ experiences within the writing center.

**Dividing Spaces**

At a theoretical level, writing center scholarship has often sought, with respect to pedagogy, to separate the writing center from other institutional sites of instruction and from the university itself. As Philip J. Gardner and William M. Ramsey argue, “the prevailing view of [writing center] theorists has been that writing specialists do their best work when opposing the practices of mainstream education, creating an anti-space where the oppressive and mass template methods of the academy can be undone” (26). In the process of “creating an anti-space,” I would argue that writing center scholarship has often constructed the writing center as an educational site unto itself, making it difficult at times to thoroughly conceptualize the ways in which the writing center functions as a crossroads of sorts, a physical site where multiple approaches to writing and revision (developed at various other places) converge. Although writing center scholarship—particularly that dealing with ELL writers and postmodern notions of subjectivity, has given increasing attention to the range of students’ literacies and discursive practices, the same cannot be said for the field’s approach to the tutors who inhabit the writing center.

This discursive construction of writing centers as “anti-space” is reflected in the range of spatial metaphors in writing center scholarship that emphasize its outsider status. Lil Brannon and Stephen North argue in “Uses of the Margins” that the “viability” of the writing center stems in part from the institutional space—tenuous as it is—that it
occupies, a space free of grades, compulsory attendance, or professors (10). They suggest that to maintain this viability “writing centers will need to exploit their marginal position, that is, develop a rhetoric of marginality that will use their status for institutional advantage” (10). For Brannon and North, this means developing an understanding of writing center work that is firmly grounded in the assumption that writing centers often operate out of sight of the larger academy, which offers writing center workers a freedom of practice not present elsewhere.

Seeking to move past the trope of marginality, Bonnie S. Sunstein posits “liminality” as a more apt metaphor for understanding the role of the writing center. For Sunstein, “A writing center cannot define itself as a space” because “Writing centers defy spatial definition” (8-9). It is the disconnected and “in-between” nature of the writing center that enables it to “transplant” a writer and his or her words. And although Sunstein’s concept of liminality seeks to avoid some of the more defeatist connotations of marginality, it represents perhaps an even stronger push towards Gardner and Ramsey’s anti-space. As outside as the marginal writing center may be, it always remains connected to the central university, in that each defines the other; Sunstein’s liminality presents the writing center as a non-space, establishing its connection to the university in which it is situated as unclear at best and irrelevant at worst.

Nedra Reynolds has argued that spatial metaphors require a critical approach, as they can often mask the underlying material conditions from which they emerged. While many writing centers lacked, and indeed still lack, the kind of institutional authority afforded to other departments, I would argue that embracing a position of marginality does not reflect the complex reality of writing center work. Whereas Gardner and
Ramsey approach the problem from the perspective of advancing more meaningful communication between writing centers and their home institutions, claiming that “Exile, boundaries, borders and other liminal zones are tropes that foreground tension and antithesis, not shared institutional mission” (29), I am more concerned about how this anti-space/marginal/outsider approach makes it more difficult to conceptualize tutors as individuals who engage in a variety of writing tasks across multiple spatial contexts. As Gardner and Ramsey point out, although talking about margins and borders can lead to talking about “crossroads” and “border-crossing” (Welsh “Migrant”; Soliday), writing center scholarship has not investigated in any meaningful way how tutors operate as border crossers, what borders they might be crossing, how they cross those borders, how those borders are defined, or which borders constitute a tutor’s stomping grounds.

Turning to Nancy Welch’s “From Silence to Noise: Writing Center as Critical Exile” may help illustrate my point. In this article, Welch posits that the writing centers’ transformative power rests in its ability to provide students an opportunity to step away from the multiple public realms they inhabit: “the public realms of the classroom, family, workplace, campus and civic organizations, courtrooms, and military” (4). To support her argument, she presents the her experience of working with Margie, “who sought to write about her experience of workplace sexual harassment but who also struggled as she wrote with competing off-stage voices” that emerged from the various public realms that Margie occupied. Welch documents how their work enabled Margie to separate herself, at least temporarily, from those realms and how Margie, through enacting a variety of writing practices (e.g. Peter Elbow’s loop writing exercises, found poetry), is able to work through her issues of writing (8, 10). And if we keep our attention squarely on
Margie, then yes, the writing center operates as site of “critical exile” where she has room to explore outside of the pressures of those public realms she ordinarily occupies. But from a Thirdspace perspective, this conclusion seems premature. That is, Welch’s conception of the writing center as critical exile only holds if we treat Welch as separate from that space, which is, of course impossible. The writing center is not simply a neutral space that Margie enters. While its Firstspace materiality does provide a space apart from those that Margie regularly inhabits, from a Thirdspace perspective, it is also a space that is socially co-constructed in the interactions between Welch and Margie. The alternative practices that Margie participates in do not emerge within the writing center ex nihilo; rather, they are brought there, presumably, by Welch from the range of public realms that she inhabits. The writing center, when understood properly as a socially constructed space, can never truly function as a site of “exile”; it is only the romantic draw of the metaphor of the outsider and of the margin that makes it appear so.

The recurring use of marginal/outsider discourse has masked, or at least downplayed, the reality that writing centers are always (and have always been) already intimately bound up in the worlds of their home institutions because their tutors—the core constituents of those centers and those who most define the nature of their writing centers—are themselves intimately bound up in the worlds of those home institutions. Not only are these tutors tied to the worlds of their colleges and universities, but also to other lifeworlds that extend beyond the college campus. A spatial discourse grounded in university marginalization has obscured this reality, potentially leading to an insufficient inquiry into how the fullest range of tutor’s experiences across multiple contexts shape the nature of their work.
We can see this spatial discourse demarcating the writing center as a bounded space almost from its inception as a subject of formal scholarly attention. Although writing centers have been in existence since the early 20th century, it was perhaps during the mid-1980s that the case for both writing centers and the use of peer tutors in those centers was most clearly and prominently expressed. In particular, the case for the use of peer tutors was most clearly articulated by Kenneth Bruffee in 1984. For Bruffee, the use of peer tutors, understood to be undergraduate tutors, is justified largely by their influence on the context of the student’s writing work. First, Bruffee argues that the peer tutor (and writing center by extension) exists as an alternative to the context of “traditional classroom learning” (206). This shift in context was a needed corrective to what Bruffee perceived as students’ reluctance to make use of “ancillary programs staffed by professionals,” programs that students “avoided…and droves” (206). In other words, part of the writing center’s value is its outsider status. Additionally, Bruffee argues that peer tutors are valuable because they mirror the kinds of audiences that students will need to write for once they leave the academy, audiences of their peers. He draws on Richard Rorty’s ideas of normal discourse, which Bruffee interprets as “conversation within a community of knowledgeable peers “whereby the conversation is bound(ed) by agreed upon conventions for contributions, questions, arguments and critiques (211). Bruffee suggests that the work done by students and peer tutors engages them in the processes of knowledge-making and of determining what constitutes an appropriate and relevant contribution to the normal discourse of a particular community.

In both of these instances—knowledge-making and determining relevant contributions—it is the peer tutor’s status as “peer” that is most responsible for his or her
value in the tutoring process because it is this peerness that allows for the kind of conversation that Bruffee sees as necessary for collaborative learning to occur. While Bruffee does argue that tutors also bring knowledge of discourse conventions to their work, this knowledge does not seem to be central to their value, and in fact serves only to defend tutors from the charge that they have nothing relevant to bring to the tutorial session. For Bruffee then, it is a tutor’s identity rather than a tutor’s knowledge that is central to his/her value. This valuation is problematic, however, because if what tutors do is engage with writers in the process of knowledge construction through conversation, it seems reasonable to assume that this process will be influenced by the types of knowledge that tutors access during their conversations with writers. For Bruffee, tutors can draw from their understanding of normal discourse to aid student writers; however, reliance upon the assumption of normal discourse is problematic because it runs the risk of silencing alternative discourses that students (and tutors) might use. John Trimbur’s reassessment of “consensus” notes the critique of left-wing critics of Bruffee, who argue that “Rortyian conversation downplays its own social force and the conflict it generates, the discourses silenced or unheard in the conversation and its representation of itself” (468). That tutors themselves might make use of or embrace alternative discourses, ones that may be “silenced or unheard” in the conversation of normal discourse, is a scenario left unexplored in Bruffee’s understanding of peer tutoring.

Even though Bruffee’s “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” was written three decades ago, it is a logical starting point for an investigation into the field’s scholarly treatment of tutors and tutoring practice, as much of the discussion regarding the role and function of peer tutors in the writing center has focused on questions that
emerge directly from Bruffée’s argument. First, if the value of peer tutors is located in the fact that they can play a role in conversations about writing that is different than the role played by a traditional instructor, what should the nature of that role be? Second, if this different role allows for a different type of conversation (or “talk,” as it often referred to in the literature), what is the nature of that talk? And third, if the knowledge that peer tutors bring to the tutorial session is primarily in terms of discursive norms, how should writing centers be organized to make use of this knowledge?

These three questions (role, tutor knowledge, and talk) have, I would argue, dominated the discussion of tutors in the professional literature. And, as I will later argue, approaches to these three questions have led writing center scholars to devalue or ignore the knowledge that tutors bring to their work, to limit their approach to understanding this knowledge, or to understand this knowledge in limited and limiting ways. This study seeks to complicate our understanding of how tutors work with writers by exploring how the full range of tutors’ writing experiences shape their work in the writing center. Specifically, I am interested in understanding if and how tutors opt to incorporate writing and revision strategies developed outside of the writing center into their writing center tutorials. Put another way, how do the variety of writing practices that tutors engage in on a day-to-day basis, as well as the practices that they have engaged in prior to their writing center work, influence their tutoring?

To better understand the role of outside writing practices on tutors’ understandings and executions of their writing center work, I investigate the following questions: How do tutors negotiate between established writing center practices and other sets of practices that have been developed in other contexts? What assumptions/attitudes
towards writing, revision, and academic space accompany these alternative practices? Or, do tutors’ understandings of established writing center practices deter them from accessing non-writing center experiences in the course of their work? Additionally, I explore the degree to which tutors' outside writing practices (and the assumptions about writing and revision that shape these practices) complement, contradict, and/or complicate prevailing understandings and models of writing center work.

**Defining the Role of Peer Tutors**

Discussions regarding the role that tutors should play have taken a number of forms over the past twenty-five years. Shortly after the publication of both Stephen North's “The Idea of a Writing Center” and Bruffee's “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” John Trimbur called into question the potential contradiction inherent in the need for tutors to perform both a “peer” and “tutor” role simultaneously. Judith K. Powers has argued for the need for tutors to play the role of “cultural informant” when working with students unaccustomed to various language or discourse conventions. Other scholars, such as Nancy Grimm and Marilyn Cooper have advocated for tutors to play a more active role in helping writers reclaim their agency as writers. And Elizabeth H. Boquet has drawn attention to how tutors' roles are always positioned with respect to the writer and the instructor, arguing that there exists no neutral space for tutors to occupy within this triangle.

Most often, however, “role” has been defined in terms of the strategies that tutors implement in the course of a session, as illustrated by debates over non-directive versus directive tutoring methodologies. Steven North, in his 1984 article, lays the groundwork...
for a non-directive approach in his effort to separate the writing center pedagogically from the composition classroom and in his insistence on the writing center’s primary mission being to assist the development of writers rather than the improvement of their papers. As he describes it, the writing center tutor performs the function of an outside observer attempting to understand a writer’s natural process. Jeff Brooks, pushing the idea of the hands-off tutor even further, argues that “we need to make the student the primary agent in the writing center session…The tutor should take on a secondary role, serving mainly to keep the writer focused on his own writing” (2).

Other scholars have challenged this model, suggesting that there are many situations where a tutor would be justified in taking on a more “teacherly” role, particularly if the writer does not have the knowledge necessary to solve his or her writing problems. Linda K. Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns, writing in opposition to what they see as “the orthodoxy of current practice” turn to alternative models of tutoring. One such alternative is the “master class” found in music education. The model of the master class runs counter to “orthodox” writing center ideals such as non-directive and non-hierarchal dynamics (232). Instead, the master class method demonstrates the value of more directive approaches and of modeling techniques for less experienced practitioners. Additionally, Judith Powers argues that the assumption that non-directive strategies will help writers access the knowledge that they already have often fails to hold for certain student populations, particularly ESL students, and in such cases, a more directive role may be necessary to facilitate a writer’s development.

Avoiding the directive/nondirective binary, a number of writing center scholars have advocated what can best be described as a collaborative model of tutoring. Kenneth
Bruffee’s “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind” draws heavily from his work on collaborative learning and suggests that as peers, tutors are able to engage in conversations with writers in which the pair operate as co-builders of knowledge. And although Andrea Lunsford cautions that establishing a collaborative writing center is “damnably difficult” and that uncritical collaboration might only serve to reinforce the educational status quo (8, 9), she argues that the collaborative model repositions the center of knowledge in the tutorial session so that it belongs neither to the writer or tutor exclusively. Rather, knowledge in the collaborative center is something that is negotiated by both writer and tutor (10). Within the collaborative model then, the tutor is positioned in the role of co-learner.

Although discussions of a tutor’s role are nominally concerned with the nature of the interaction between tutor and writer, such debates often deal with tutors as abstract entities. As such, they represent Secondspace epistemologies, attempting to construct the space of the writing center through discourse with little attention to how tutors actually engage with their work on an everyday basis. Although Brook’s “Minimalist Tutoring” and Shamoon and Burns’s “Critique of Pure Tutoring” are often cited as examples of the non-directive/directive debate and are frequently paired in writing center anthologies and tutor handbooks (Allyn and Bacon, St. Martins), neither article presents descriptions of actual tutors making use of the strategies for which each article advocates. And while Boquet’s discussion of tutors’ roles is grounded in descriptions of her own experience—she describes her struggle to maintain a “neutral position” when working with a student who took issue with the quality of one of his English classes—it is in the context of challenging writing center scholarship to accurately reflect the lived experience of
tutoring (“Tug of War” 120). For Boquet, writing center scholarship has failed in this regard due to its preoccupation with establishing an ideal model of what a tutor should be. Attempts at carving out a particular role for tutors to play and establishing tutoring practices appropriate to that role have failed to fully account for the actual practices used by tutors in the moment of interacting with writers and what factors drive these practices.

Put another way, though articles such as “Minimalist Tutoring” and “A Critique of Pure Tutoring” each attempt to argue for why one should want to develop a set of tutoring practices based on a tutoring role grounded in a set of assumptions about writing, revision, and literacy, the authors of such articles do not fully consider how their assumptions may be in conflict with or be complicated by the attitudes and approaches towards writing, revision, and literacy that tutors have developed in other sites. This lack of consideration demonstrates the kind of “fragmentation” that Soja warns against. This fragmentation carries with it several risks. First, it results in theoretical models of writing center work whose viability must always be suspect, as they separate the practice from the practitioners. Second, such fragmented approaches do a disservice to tutors who might not see room for their experiences within the discourse and, especially in the case of new tutors, who might feel they lack the authority necessary to challenge that discourse, the authority of which has been established by its status as a published text and by a director’s choice to include that text as part of a tutor education program. Third, such fragmentation runs the risk of tutors experiencing undue “feelings of guilt” when they believe their approaches to a session go beyond the “rules” of proper writing center work (Nicklay 15).
My project attempts to avoid the trap of fragmentation by making use of a case study approach that examines tutors' strategies as they are enacted in the moment of instruction, moving beyond mere description of tutors’ choices to investigate the rationale behind these choices and, in particular, how these choices are influenced by both tutors' formal training and their writing experiences outside their work as tutors.

**Defining (and Bounding) Tutor Knowledge**

Whereas discussions of directive versus non-directive tutoring strategies often leave out considerations of tutor knowledge, this knowledge is at the core of the debate over the value of generalist versus subject specific tutors, a debate with roots in the late-1980s (Luce, Hubbuch) but continues to be present in the field’s discourse (Dinitz and Harrington). In agreement with Bruffee’s argument that tutors bring a knowledge of discourse conventions to bear in their work with writers, those involved in discussions of generalist vs. subject specific writing centers seek ways to best harness this knowledge in service of their student populations. It is worth noting, though, that tutor knowledge in this discussion is narrowly defined in terms a specific kind of knowledge: disciplinary discourse conventions.

Arguments for subject-specific tutors tend to emphasize that tutors who are already familiar with the discourse conventions of a particular discipline are better able to offer meaningful guidance when working with students who are writing in the same discipline. Shamoon and Burns contend that generalist approaches lead to the perception writing center tutoring as “a low-skilled approach to improving writing,” as the primary qualifications for a good tutor are interpersonal skills rather than knowledge (“Labor
Pains”). This perception, they argue, leads to a devaluation of writing center work and leaves tutors vulnerable to low wages, directors to being passed over for promotions, and centers to being defunded.

For generalist proponents, however, the key knowledge that tutors can bring to their work is rhetorical in nature. Recognizing that tutors are unlikely to have an exhaustive understanding of a wide range of disciplinary conventions, tutors can use their knowledge of the rhetorical situation to guide student writers through questions of audience and purpose while encouraging writers to draw from their own disciplinary knowledge of their fields’ discourse conventions. For example, while acknowledging the limitations of generalist tutors, Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz argue that many writing center tutorials do not require in-depth disciplinary knowledge to be successful, nor should tutors be expected to take on the responsibility of teaching writers the conventions of their respective disciplines. Additionally, Susan M. Hubbuch suggests that while subject-specific tutors may be able to ask good questions of their clients, there is always the risk that tutor become too directive, “encourag[ing] students to pursue certain topics based on [the tutor’s] own particular scholarly interests or biases and may discourage other line of inquiry even though these other topics are potentially viable and are really what the students wants to investigate” (26). For Hubbuch, not only are generalist tutors less likely to commandeer a writer’s paper (28), but because they lack in-depth disciplinary knowledge, their “primary objective must necessarily be to comprehend the student’s ideas” (27). In other words, the generalist tutor is less likely to approach the paper with preconceived notions of what it should be, allowing the tutor to give the writer adequate space for the writer’s idea of what the paper should be. Like Kiedaisch and
Dinitz, it is generalist tutors’ rhetorical awareness—that different discourses have
different forms of writing with different expectations for style, audience, content, etc.—
that enables them to engage with writers in a way that brings the writer’s knowledge and
intentions to the fore of the tutorial session.

Without devaluing the importance of the ongoing discussions regarding the
effectiveness of certain tutorial practices or the design of writing center operations, it is
important to acknowledge the limitations of these discussions. The goals of both the
directive/non-directive and generalist/subject specific debates have been to establish a set
of practices most appropriate for work in the writing center. The establishment of these
practices rests upon assumptions about tutor knowledge: either tutors have little (or no)
knowledge that is relevant to tutoring work or their value as knowers rests on their
mastery of disciplinary conventions. For example, regardless of whether one supports
directive or non-directive approaches to tutoring (or rejects this binary entirely), the
debate itself rests upon the assumption that the knowledge, experience, and strategies that
tutors have made use of as writers prior to the work in the writing center are inadequate
for or disconnected from the work they will be asked to do. Bruffee states clearly that the
validity of his argument for the value of peer tutors is contingent on the training that
tutors receive prior to tutoring. And while tutors’ prior experiences are devalued or more
often rendered invisible in arguments over which tutoring practices are most effective,
arguments over generalist versus subject specific tutors frame tutor knowledge and
experience in a very limited fashion.

A primary result of these discussions has been the codification of tutoring
practices in handbooks and tutor training curricula that fail to take into account the fullest
range of tutor’s writing experiences and practices and a bias within the profession towards scholarship more interested in establishing what tutors need to learn than to the hereunto unrecognized skills, experiences, and practices that tutors can and do make use of while tutoring. Such a trend reflects a Secondspace approach to writing instruction in general and tutor training in particular. That is to say, the codification of practices within tutor handbooks represents a move towards a codification of tutor practice within the center. The writing center, then, becomes more defined by the discourse surrounding its practices rather than by the ways that those practices are enacted, reshaped, reformed, or rejected by actual practitioners. Ultimately, those producing this discourse run the risk of presenting decontextualized accounts of writing center practice, ignoring the fact that writing centers exist within a range of material (or Firstspace) and institutional contexts, as do the directors, tutors, and students who occupy those writing centers.

Practical tutor training manuals rarely call on tutors to draw from other writing experiences when handling tutoring situations. These manuals position themselves to provide solutions to the kinds of questions and issues that tutors will routinely encounter when working with student writers. Guides such as The Practical Tutor and A Tutor's Guide are often organized by presenting a particular tutoring “problem” and then offering a set of strategies as a “solution.” In The Practical Tutor, this is accomplished by the presentation of tutor/writer interactions. In presenting these interactions, the authors usually introduce a challenge, describe this challenge, and then offer a description of what the tutor should have done to overcome this challenge. Occasionally, this presentation will then be followed by a description of a tutor/interaction in which the tutor made the “correct” choice.
What's troubling, however, is that these tutor/writer interactions are fictional, rather than descriptions of actual tutoring. Because the authors use fictional examples, they are able to construct scenarios that appear to clearly have correct and incorrect ways of dealing with them. As such, the authors are able to present the correct approach. For example, when discussing the kinds of dialogue that are productive in a session, the authors present a fictional tutor, Gail, working with a fictional writer, Genevieve, on a paper about Genevieve’s (fictional) friend Stella. (30). Gil suggests that Genevieve further develop some elements of her paper, but in the fictional conversation, Genevieve struggles to make sense of Gail’s suggestion. The authors then state that Gail’s comment (“This seems like a good beginning, but it needs to be more developed”) shows that “Gail is unaccustomed to talking about writing, anybody’s writing, and she is unfamiliar” with what it might mean to develop ones writing. They then present an “alternate conversation” where Gail reframes her commentary in terms of wanting to know more: “I think you have a good beginning here, but I’d really like to know more about your friend” (31). The reader, then, should not be surprised that when the fictional tutor employs the correct strategy with the fictional writer, the fictional concern resolves itself. In this alternate conversation, Genevieve opens up to Gail, providing clear details and anecdotes that could be used to further develop her paper. The apparent effectiveness of the solution—effectiveness guaranteed by the contrived nature of the problem—creates a compelling argument for why tutors need to master these strategies and forwards an understanding of writing work wherein a) there are problems that will be encountered, b) these problems have effective solutions, c) we (the authors) will provide these solutions,
and d) these solutions are sufficient for resolving the problems that you (the tutors) will encounter.

*A Tutor's Guide* follows a similar organizational structure, though it approaches tutor education with greater nuance. Much like *The Practical Tutor*, each chapter focuses on a particular issue. The chapters are written by different authors, but the format is the same: present a problem that tutors might face, offer some background information on the issue, and then provide practical “how-to” advice in order to solve it. In a chapter on engaging reluctant writers, Muriel Harris outlines a range of reasons why a student might be reluctant to be at the writing center, such as being forced to be there or not seeing how writing is connected to their larger goals (24). She then proceeds to offer suggestions in a section of the chapter titled “What to Do” (27). In this section Harris presents suggestions framed as a series of imperatives (“Empathize about feeling forced to do something,” “Acknowledge the lack of interest in writing and try for a small success”) with accompanying descriptions (27). Each imperative directly corresponds with one of the reasons for reluctance discussed earlier. However, these solutions are then followed, as they are in all of the chapters, by a “Complicating Matters” section that suggests how the solutions provided earlier in the chapter may not cover all iterations of the chapter’s issue. In these “Complicating Matters” sections, the authors often encourage tutors to remain flexible in their approaches and to keep in mind that no two sessions are the same. Regardless, this manual, much like *The Practical Tutor*, positions tutors in terms of what they need to know/don’t currently know rather than as individuals with experience in a range of writing practices. Even in Harris’s “Complicating Matters,” where she
acknowledges that these strategies will not always work, the solution is the acquisition of even more strategies (31).

Steve Bailey discussed current issues with tutoring training manuals at his talk during the 2010 IWCA/NCPTW conference. In particular, he critiqued the limited range of tutor experience reflected in the current crop of tutor handbooks. Bailey argues that these handbooks construct tutors as monolingual/monocultural and ignores any experiences that fail to fit this mold. He goes on to argue that not only do such representations deny and devalue the practices of multilingual/multicultural tutors within the writing center, they also make it difficult to imagine the existence of these types of tutors within the writing center.

Moreover, when multilingual tutors are shown to be central to writing center work, it tends to be in the context of international writing center work, such as Lynne Ronesi’s “Multilingual Tutors Supporting Multilingual Peers: A Peer-Tutor Training Course in the Arabian Gulf.” In discussing the training of her tutors, Ronesi emphasizes the presence of a “gap” between the texts her students are asked to read (and the context in which those texts were produced) and their experience of working in a very different context (88). As Ronesi puts it, her tutors are “multilingual, multicultural students...who have yet to be addressed in the literature” (88). The lack of representation of “multilingual, multicultural students” in the discourse of writing center scholarship speaks to Bailey’s concerns that the assumptions of the field regarding the language and literacy backgrounds of its tutors are positioning these students as outsiders, making it more difficult for such students to envision a place for themselves within the writing center. In a sense, Bailey’s argument demonstrates the interconnections of Soja’s spatial
trialectic. For Bailey, current tutor training manuals (and, I’d argue, the broader discourse of the field) produce a (Secondspace) understanding of writing centers that does not account for (Firstspace) presence of multilingual/multicultural tutors and, as such, cannot begin to discuss they way their presence affects the lived experience (i.e., Thirdspace) of writing center work. The image of the writing center portrayed in this discourse (Secondspace) risks discouraging multilingual/multicultural tutors from entering the writing center (Firstspace) and participating in/shaping its culture (Thirdspace).

In *Facing the Center*, Harry Denny reflects upon the effects of this process: “For the wider writing center community the absence of experiences and voices of Others has been conspicuous, but also jarring. It isn’t as though people of color, working-class folks, and non-native speakers of English aren’t often part of the conversations or considered in debates; more often than not, these groups are the objects of inquiry” (5). In sense, Denny is identifying the same problem as Bailey--that writing center scholarship, at both a practical and theoretical level, is undergirded by assumptions about who “we,” the writing center people, are (e.g. monolingual, monocultural, white, native speakers, the inquirers) and who “they,” those served by the center, are (multilingual, multicultural, people of color, working class, the “objects of inquiry”) that produce unwelcoming spaces for those who do not fall neatly into the image of the default tutor produced by this discourse. As such, they remain underrepresented on staffs and in leadership roles, and when they are present, they may feel pressured to conform to certain assumptions and standards or risk be considered a “problem tutor” (Denny 51).
Bailey is correct with regard to the treatment and (lack of) construction of multilingual/multicultural tutors, but his argument can also be expanded to raise questions about the inadequate construction of tutors in general. What Bailey is pointing towards, I would argue, is a generally impoverished view of tutors that fails to take into account the wide range of writing experiences that tutors, both multi- and monolingual, participate or have participated in outside of the writing center. Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet suggest as much, claiming that “[tutoring] textbooks don’t fully account for or value the range of what tutors learn as they work in writing centers and, in fact, what they bring to us when they first enter our staff preparation courses” (64). Following Bailey’s line of argument, the lack of representation of these practices within writing center discourse (particularly in the context of discourse surrounding tutor education) makes it difficult to imagine a place for these practices inside the writing center. Rather than suggest that tutors may have a range of practices to draw from, these handbooks often work toward the construction of a specific set of practices that will serve exclusively as a tutor’s toolbox. In doing so, they perpetuate an attitude toward tutors that emphasizes the experience and knowledge that tutors lack rather than the experience and knowledge they have already accumulated prior to stepping foot in the writing center. This is not to suggest that tutors have nothing to learn; conversations about what they might experience can certainly benefit new tutors. However, these conversations should serve to open up tutors’ understandings of writing and of working with writers. An overemphasis on acquiring strategies runs the risk of presenting writing center work in a reductive and prescriptive fashion, closing off the need for more nuanced conversations about writing center work.
**Talking in the Middle, or Talking amongst Ourselves?**

Additionally, writing center scholarship's emphasis on the importance of “talk” has contributed to an approach to writing center space that runs the risk of being bounded and isolated. Stephen North writes that “[writing centers] are here to talk to writers” (440), “the essence of the writing center method...is talking” (443), and that “If the writing center is to ever prove its worth [...] it will have to do so by describing this talk: what characterizes it, what effects it has, how it can be enhanced” (444). The value of talk has been reaffirmed numerous times within the scholarship. Carol J. Singley and Holly W. Boucher begin “Dialogue in Tutoring Training: Creating the Essential Space for Learning” with the declaration that “Conversation is the essence of peer tutoring” (11). Connecting Paulo Freire’s concept of “problem-posing education” to writing center work, the authors argue that peer tutoring’s value as a pedagogical model is grounded in its ability to create a context where “teacher and learner cannot be distinguished. The participants interact to change each other—no one monopolizes knowledge, no one receives knowledge passively, because knowledge cannot be separated from the dialogue itself” (14).

For Muriel Harris, the importance of writing tutors rests in the “collaborative talk” in which they engage with writers (“Talking” 30). She argues that college writers “both need and want discussion that engages them actively with their ideas through talk and permits them to stay in control [of their writing]” (31). Although Harris positions the tutor as being situated in the middle of the teacher and the writer, it is the writing center’s
position outside of and separate from the classroom that affords the space in which this collaborative talk can occur. In particular, she distinguishes between the kinds of talk that are possible in a tutorial session but not in a classroom context. Drawing from the work of Douglas Barnes, Harris associates writing center work—and collaborative talk in general—with “exploratory talk,” which encourages students to play with ideas, take risks, and consider alternatives. She connects traditional classroom and student-teacher contexts with “presentational talk,” which contains an inescapable evaluative component that constrain intellectual possibilities (31-32). This argument echoes that of Kenneth Bruffee, who argues that the peer-tutor (and writing center by extension) exists as an alternative to the context of “traditional classroom learning” (206). In this echoing, however, Harris more clearly articulates the way that writing center “talk” is a function of the center’s unique institutional position.

Although the importance of talk as a fundamental practice is difficult to dispute, an overemphasis on talk within the field carries its own set of risks. I would suggest that this emphasis on talk has focused the field’s attention on the writer-tutor interaction in the moment of tutoring without exploring how these interactions are shaped by tutors’ and writers’ experiences outside of the writing center. That is to say, whereas tutoring manuals tend to fall short in their lack of attention to the reality of actual tutorials, the fetishization of talk within writing center discourse can lead to research projects that focus too narrowly on the immediate context of the tutorial without thoroughly investigating the larger context in which the tutorial and its participants are situated. For example, in order to examine if tutors engage in the kind of collaborative work called for in writing center scholarship, Susan R. Blau, John Hall, and Tracy Strauss conducted a
linguistic analysis of several tutorial sessions (17). While acknowledging that the talk that occurs during a session is only part of the larger picture, the authors focused their attention on that talk to better understand “how language reveals the dynamics of the tutoring relationship” (19). Their analysis points to certain linguistic features that they characterize as reflecting collaboration (e.g. open-ended questioning, echoing), but they offer little insight into what caused those features to emerge in some tutorials rather than others. Although they claim that their analysis “take[s] into account the social context of the tutorial,” the only social context that we are given as readers is the institutional standing of the writer and tutor (i.e. graduate or undergraduate). Similarly, Isabelle Thompson and Jo Mackiwicz have recently conducted research into the function of questions within tutorial sessions. In this study, the authors focus their attention on 11 tutorial conferences and the 690 questions produced during those sessions (39). Though the authors are able to draw conclusions about how patterns of question-types emerge serve to help tutors meet particular goals during the tutorial such as “facilita[ing] the dialog of writing center conferences and attend[ing] to students’ active participation and engagement,” we gain little insight into where tutors’ approaches to question-asking develop (i.e., are they employing strategies developed as part of their training? modifying such strategies? drawing upon similar strategies from other contexts?). Such questions may have been outside the scope of Thompson and Mackiwicz’s project, but they would likely contribute to a deeper understanding of how tutor employ question-asking in the context of a tutorial session.

I would argue that approaches seen in Blau, Hall and Strauss and in Thompson and Mackiewicz are representative of a Firstspace mentality with respect to
understanding writing center space. This claim may seem odd given that Firstspace generally refers to the *material components* of a space; however, Firstspace epistemologies suggest that one gains knowledge of a space by accounting for what is present—a place is nothing more than a list of the things inside it. By fragmenting “talk” from its broader context, “talk” is treated as if it was only a material component of the space, something that can be counted and listed with the assumption that this counting and listing leads to understanding. Whereas the authors operate under the assumption that one can treat the linguistic features of a session apart from its broader context, which extends beyond the center itself, I would argue that the broader context is necessary if one wants to obtain a meaningful understanding of what occurs in the moment of the tutorial session. Although linguistic analysis can be an important methodological tool for conducting writing center research, that analysis ought to be supported by other lines of inquiry. Blau, Hall, and Strauss’s approach can suggest how collaboration manifests itself during a session but offers little in the way of understanding why it manifests or why any particular manifestation is effective. Talk may be “the essence of peer tutoring” (Singley and Boucher 9), but the field’s emphasis on talk also reflects a limited spatial imagination.

Other studies of tutorial conferences have done a more thorough job of considering how tutors’ multiple contexts may affect the nature of their tutorial conferences. In an attempt to determine whether writing center conference dynamics fit into categories of conferencing dynamics observed by Thomas Reigstad in his study of professional writing teachers, Willa Wolcott observed twelve writing center conferences that were led by seven tutors. Reigstad identified three categories of conferencing
dynamics—teacher-student, collaborative, and student centered. Of these, the collaborative model proved most common. Wolcott’s observations, however, revealed that the tutors at her writing center most often employed a teacher-student model, in which the tutors controlled and directed “the course the conferences take” and that “Often tutors use the conferences to provide mini-lessons for students. Without exception, the conferences are task-oriented and businesslike” (25).

Wolcott attributes this tendency towards a more directive approach to the tutors’ backgrounds. The tutors in her study are described as “mature graduate students ranging in age from their early thirties to their mid-forties” who were experienced teachers and who had not participated in a formal tutoring training program, though “they were required to study a graduate manual and to read essays [on conferencing]” (17). She speculates that the tutors may simply have felt more comfortable with the teacher-as-authoritarian role rather than the teacher-as-facilitator role. Not only were all experienced teachers, but many were also conducting classes during the same term that I was observing them. They may not have been able—or willing—to shed the more formal role for that of the student centered model in which the student assumes charge. (21)

Wolcott’s analysis begins the process of thinking through the role that tutors’ lives outside of the writing center play in shaping their tutorial work. But though Wolcott is able to identify some connections between the lives of the tutors outside of the writing center (that they are graduate students, that they are experienced teachers, that they are teaching classes at the same time as the study) and their tutoring practices, it remains
unclear how the tutors understand these connections and the roles they play. And so, although we get a sense that conference dynamics are shaped by outside experience, we get little insight into the meaning of that experience, the process by which tutors negotiate and navigate that experience, or what implications these connections might have on future research on writing center work. This is not unexpected, however, when one considers how the relation between these tutors’ teaching and tutoring lives is framed. Wolcott is quick to point out the tutors’ “lack” of formal training, offering it as an excuse for their behavior when working with other students. The tutors’ teaching experiences are treated as a poor substitute or stop-gap measure, rather than as a meaningful source of knowledge and experience that tutors could draw from within a writing center context. As such, we should not be surprised when Wolcott shows a lack of curiosity regarding tutors’ outside experiences and moves on from her observations without a fuller consideration of their significance.

This issue of being (in)sufficiently curious is central to Anne DiPardo’s “‘Whispers of Coming and Going’: Lessons from Fannie,” in which she argues that valuing talk does not necessarily lead to a corresponding valuing of listening, nor does talk guarantee that tutors will come to an appreciation of how a writer’s choices are shaped by experiences and relationships that may not be readily apparent within the bounded context of the tutorial session. In her article, DiPardo describes a tutor’s failure to engage with a student in a meaningful way when discussing that student’s struggles with writing about the environment. This failure, DiPardo argues, is largely due to the tutor, Morgan, being exposed to the value of talk as a product of her writing center training and her exposure to discussions about working with writers at the Conference on
College Composition and Communication (CCCC). DiPardo argues that in the process of internalizing these, what I would consider Secondspace, approaches to the issue of talk in the writing center, Morgan comes to disregard or undervalue the role of listening in a tutorial session. As a result, she never makes a move to understand how the writer that she is working with, Fannie, may relate to the concept of “environment” in a fundamentally different way due to their very different social and cultural contexts.

Pulling back from the immediate space of the session, represented by transcripts of their conversation, DiPardo provides context for the larger lifeworlds of both Morgan and Fannie. We learn that Morgan is an African-American tutor who downplays her racial identity and who is beginning to come into a sense of her professional identity through her attendance at the CCCC (113). Fannie is a Navajo with a complicated and complex educational history and whose “dream was to one day teach in the reservation boarding schools she’d once so despised, to offer some of the intellectual, emotional, and linguistic support so sorely lacking in her own educational history” (102). Although DiPardo’s argument is primarily about the way that tutors talk in their sessions and how they are trained to talk (and perhaps to listen), her article also serves to make a broader point about the nature of writing center scholarship and its limited geographic imagination.

Discussing the role that Morgan could have played in her sessions with Fannie, DiPardo suggests that “Morgan be respectfully curious, ever attentive to whatever clues Fannie might have been willing to offer, ever poised to revise old understandings in the light of fresh evidence” (114). DiPardo’s own curiosity leads outside of the space of the writing center, to places where Morgan and Fannie have been (CCCC and reservation boarding schools, respectively), places that have had a profound impact on how they understand
themselves in multiple contexts—as writers, as potential teachers, and as learners. DiPardo’s curiosity leads her to take an approach to Fannie and Morgan consistent with Soja’s Thirdspace. This kind of curiosity requires a spinning outward from the account of what happens in a session to a recognition and investigation of the broader and more complex contexts in which “what happens” is located.

Such an approach is often demonstrated in the edited collection *Stories from the Center*. Editors Lynn Craigue Briggs and Meg Woolbright open the collection by arguing that each of its chapters reflects a kind of rigorous narrative “that tangle[s] story and theory inextricably” (xii). Many of the chapters in the collection do so by moving from a localized narrative of tutoring practice to an exploration of the broader factors that influenced the events of the narrative. In their respective chapters, both Lynn Craigue Briggs and Stephen Davenport Jukuri examine how assumptions about coherent subjectivities prevent writing center workers from engaging with students and their contexts in meaningful ways. Describing her work with Mary Ann, an older, non-traditional student, Briggs argues that through their conversations she came to the realization that “we were not alone in that room…it was, in fact, very crowded with people we could not and did not abandon” (12). Mary Ann was not a writer writing in isolation. Understanding Mary Ann as a writer required that Briggs take into account the “web of readers” that Mary Ann’s text might encounter and realize that the tutor is never alone with a writer in a tutorial session. Similarly, Jukuri argues that the writer in a tutorial session is always constructed of multiple subjectivities contingent upon the multiple contexts the writer exists within. The writing center, then, is a place where tutors and students can explore these subjectivities and have the space to do so. This isn’t
to say that institutional forces and the subjectivities they impose do not exist in the writing center, but Jukuri argues that the writing center might offer more “breathing room” than the classroom to explore where stepping into different subjectivities might lead. I would suggest that the arguments that both Briggs and Jukuri make regarding the multiple subjectivities of the writers who make use of writing centers can and should be equally applied to the tutors who make writing centers possible. In other words, while Briggs presents the reader with a cross-section of Mary Ann’s subjectivities, we get very little about her own and how they may have influenced her interactions with Mary Ann. Likewise, although I feel Jukuri is correct in suggesting that the writing center’s value is due in part to its potential to offer writers a chance to play with subjectivity, I wonder if the writing center affords tutors the same potential and whether tutors engage in this play. A Thirdspace approach to writing center work requires that we investigate where the subjectivities of both writers and tutors are grounded and the ways in which both travel in, among, and through multiple contexts.

**Opening up the Writing Center’s Thirdspace**

That the representation of tutors’ experiences has been partial at best should come as no surprise given the field’s overwhelming preoccupation with what tutors need to know. This focus has distracted the field from paying serious attention to those skills and practices that tutors may have developed outside of writing center that may have value within the writing center. Elizabeth Boquet argues that the field’s understanding of what it means for tutors to have relevant experience is problematic. For Boquet, if tutor training is about experience, “[writing center scholars] need to recast our understanding
of the nature of experience so that we think of it in terms of training, not as something someone ‘gets’ (so that peer tutors always fall short of graduate students who fall short when compared to professional staff who fall short when compared to faculty)” (Noise 80). Instead, she suggests a shift to a model [that] ask[s] us to reformulate the question ‘what (or how much) do tutors need to know?’ and to cast it, instead, in more musical terms: how might I encourage this tutor to operate on the edge of his or her expertise? And, for tutors: where is the groove for this session? Where’s the place where, together, we really feel like we’re jammin’ and how do we get there? Where, as Welch has framed it, is there space for play?” (81)

The space for play that Boquet mentions is a reference to an earlier article by Nancy Welch (“Playing) that argues that writing center scholars need to be more open to creating a space between theory and practice that would allow for growth. Whereas the space that Welch discusses is conceptual, I believe that there is value in rethinking about this space in more concrete terms. Namely, has the discourse surrounding writing center scholarship, specifically discourse about tutoring practices and training, shut down the possibility of the writing center being a space where tutors feel able to make use of the fullest range of their experiences as writers?

The authors of The Everyday Writing Center would argue that this is the case. They claim the strategy-driven approach to writing center discourse and tutor training has resulted in “The Holy Trinity of Tutoring: The Opening, The Body, and The Conclusion,” a “five-paragraph essay” approach to tutoring that shuts down room for experimentation and the incorporation of strategies and approaches that might result from
connections between tutors’ existing range of writing practices and the work they do in
the writing center (64). As one of their tutors puts it, in what I feel are appropriately
spatial terms, “When the tight walls of clarity are sought, the roomy ambiguity is lost”
(64).

Although this student was speaking metaphorically about her experience of
negotiating her work as a tutor, I think she speaks to a larger set of concerns that drives
this project. At a recent conference, I overheard a writing center director state how
excited she was that her new writing center space had transparent walls. She felt that if
the tutors knew they were being watched, they would be easier to handle. Another
regretted the presence of a couch in her center, as it encouraged tutors to spend too much
time at the writing center; as far as she was concerned, tutoring was a job and the writing
center was no place for tutors to hang out. And though I believe these attitudes are not
the norm among writing center professionals, they are symptomatic of a larger problem in
the spatial imagination of writing center scholarship, a problem with two distinct, yet
complementary, components.

The first of these problems is a tendency for writing center discourse (especially
with respect to tutoring handbooks) to adopt a prescriptive approach to tutorial practice.
The danger in this is that such an approach not only attempts to define writing center
practice, but that, in defining, attempts to control the practices that occur within writing
center spaces. And the extension of this logic, although I suspect that the authors of tutor
manuals may disagree, is that the writing center loses some of its potential for openness,
for creatively engaging in the work that writers do. A Secondspace, top-down approach
to constructing the writing center cannot avoid dealing with what occurs when discourse
and ground conditions do not match. As these anecdotes suggest, responses to the tension between “what should occur” and “what does” are not always positive or constructive.

This problem is compounded by the sentiment expressed by the director who regretted the presence of couches in her center, the sentiment that when tutors entered the space of her writing center they ought to be tutors only, sloughing off whatever traces of where they had been (or where they would be going) at the door. The assumption here is that the writing center can and should operate as a site independent from the rest of tutors’ experiences—experiences as writers, critical and creative thinkers, and problem solvers that have been accumulated and shaped outside of the writing center’s walls. This assumption is problematic for a number of reasons that I have raised throughout this chapter, but which I will now distill.

First, the writing center cannot operate in isolation from the range of other sites where tutors do engage/have engaged in meaningful writing work. To explicitly ask tutors to leave this experience at the door devalues the whole of their experience. And to implicitly encourage them to do so by remaining insufficiently curious about these outside experiences impoverishes the conversations about writing that take place in the writing center and in the classes where tutors prepare for their work as tutors. Second, the failure to explore how tutors’ experiences with and understandings of writing have been and are continuously shaped by their lives outside of the writing center leaves writing center scholars ill-prepared to fully consider the factors that drive one-on-one tutorial interactions. If talk truly is at the core of writing center work, then greater attention needs to be paid to where that talk is coming from. Finally, an acontextual, top-
down approach to tutor development coupled with the treatment of the writing center as a site of writing divorced from others that tutors have occupied, do occupy, and will occupy runs the risk of denying tutors the opportunity to act as co-constructors of the writing center as a space where individuals come together to engage in the process of writing.

I think this critique of the influence of writing center discourse on tutors’ sense of freedom, or lack thereof, to make use of the fullest range of their experiences as learners and writers when working in the writing center raises important questions that have yet to be fully explored. In particular, if the prevailing arc of writing center discourse has resulted in a closed set of practices for writing center work, can we find instances where tutors draw from a fuller range of learning and writing experience than traditionally accounted for in the scholarship? If so, from where are they drawing these experiences? Or do tutors feel unable to access these experiences when working in the writing center?

To explore the effects of writing center discourse on the range of strategies, skills, and experiences that tutors do or do not, can or can not, use in the course of their work in the writing center, I want to turn to the idea of space as discussed both in composition and rhetoric studies and the field of postmodern geography. I believe there is value in reading Boquet’s and Welch’s idea of a “space for play” in a more material sense. That is to say, our understanding of the work that tutors do in the writing center, and the effectiveness of that work, would be improved if placed within a context that acknowledged that the writing center serves as only one of many sites of writing in which tutors participate/have participated in.
Julie Drew makes this argument with respect to composition and rhetoric’s tendency to only address student writers in the context of the composition classroom, but this argument can be extended to writing center scholarship, which has both ignored the importance of the writing that tutors have participated in outside of the writing center and under-theorized the function of space in writing center work. Jackie Grutsch McKinney raises this issue in her article “Leaving Home Sweet Home: Towards Critical Readings of Writing Center Spaces.” Challenging the ubiquitous presence of cookies, coffee, and couches in the writing center, McKinney challenges the attempts of writing center administrators to create generic “home” spaces. McKinney attempts to deconstruct the discourse of “home” that prevails in descriptions of writing center spaces. She concludes that homes are never value-neutral; rather, they are always “culturally marked,” and what might be a comfortable space for one student may not necessarily serve the needs of another (16-17). Although McKinney’s analysis of writing center space and the questions she raises regarding the assumptions about this space are valuable, she presents an incomplete approach. The strength of McKinney’s argument is how she is able to expose a gap between assumptions about writers’ spatial practices and a meaningful understanding of those practices. As such, she is correct to question whether constructing a writing center space that directors and tutors are comfortable with has any value for the writers who make use of the writing center; however, if we are to rethink writing center spaces in terms of whether they meet the pedagogical needs of those who visit the writing center, then we must also ask the same questions about how writing center spaces meet the needs of the tutors who occupy them. Likewise, compositionists at large would benefit from asking similar questions regarding the spaces they make available to
students, both at the classroom level and at the broader university level, and how these spaces support or hinder our student writers’ abilities to tackle the range of writing challenges they encounter both within and beyond their classrooms.

To do so, this study considers how agency, writing, and spatial experience intersect in the lives of three writing center tutors. The results of the study demonstrate that spatial experience is a key factor in the emergence of a student’s sense of writerly agency in terms of the ability to make meaningful decisions about the spaces where writing takes place, and about the writing that takes place in those spaces. Students who develop a strong sense of this kind of writerly agency, when coupled with investment in their writing tasks and meta-cognition of their writing practices, are often able to reconfigure and take advantage of the spatial contexts available to them in order to overcome a range of writing needs and challenges, which are often tied to limitations of those very spatial contexts. In the course of their writing center work, tutors exercise this agency in order to produce localized Thirdspaces designed to both meet the perceived needs of the students with whom they work as well as to overcome gaps they encounter between the idea of the writing center produced by published discourse in the field and their lived experience of working with real writers dealing with real challenges in a real spatial context.

**Chapter Outline**

The following chapters further develop my research into the intersections of agency, space, and writing and the effects these intersections have on tutors writing practices outside and inside the writing center. In Chapter 2, I establish my role as the researcher, the site and participants in the study, as well as my methods for data collection (including
survey work, interviews, writing journals, and tutoring observations) and analysis. Chapter 3 develops and expands Soja’s concepts of Firstspace and Secondspace, using them as analytical lenses for exploring participants’ pre-UMass histories of spatial experience with respect to writing and establishing a relation between those spatial histories and the development of participants’ feelings of writerly agency with respect to space. In Chapter 4, I elaborate on Soja’s concept of Thirdspace as a means for analyzing how participants have exercised their agency with respect to the range of spaces they encountered at UMass. I argue that their application of agency results in the production of Thirdspaces that enable participants to overcome a diverse set of writing challenges, and consider the factors necessary to increase the likelihood of success of such efforts. Chapter 5 centers the focus of my analysis of the participants’ spatial experiences to a single shared site—the UMass Writing Center—to consider how participants bring the range of their spatial experiences to bear upon their production of localized writing center Thirdspaces in response to their needs as tutors and the assumed/perceived needs of their students. In Chapter 6, I summarize my findings, discuss implications for writing center scholarship and administration, and suggest possibilities for future research.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH METHODS

In 2008, Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner published an article entitled “After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center,’” a critical analysis of the historical implications of Stephen North’s seminal “The Idea of a Writing Center,” which had been published over two decades before. Commenting on the ubiquity of North’s essay within writing center discourse, evidenced by the frequency with which it is cited, Boquet and Lerner argue that “this loyalty to North’s first ‘Idea’ … has limited the reach of writing center scholarship” and that the “reception of North’s ‘Idea’ has become an intellectual position that often substitutes for collective action and rigorous scholarship” (171).

This article prompted me to design one of my area exams around the topic of writing center theory post-North, and to explore for myself the directions that this scholarly field has taken in the past 25 years. Whereas Boquet and Learner’s inquiry focuses primarily on the reception history of North’s text, I wanted to use my area exam preparation as a means to more deeply explore the development of writing center theory over time, primarily so that I would be better prepared to think about what it would mean to participate in the construction of body of “post-North” writing center scholarship. In my readings, and as discussed in Chapter 1, the need to define what the writing center was/is/should be had been (and to a certain extent continues to be) a common trend. These definitions often took the form of broad theoretical statements contributing to what Jackie Grutsch McKinney refers to as “the writing center grand narrative” of writing
centers as “comfortable iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-on-one help with their writing” (*Peripheral* 3).

Largely absent from this grand narrative, however, was a substantive discussion about the undergraduate students who often serve as the backbone of writing center operations—who they were, what they brought to the table, how they wrote, and/or what writing center work meant to them. And the discourse seemed relatively unconcerned with or uninterested in explorations of who tutors were outside of the context of the writing center and what bearing their non-writing center identities might have on their writing center practices.

The writing center frequently served as a central hub of both my academic and “extracurricular life” as undergraduate: my academic advisor's office adjoined the writing center (she was the director), my circle of creative writing friends met there for workshopping after hours, and the couch served as prime nap real estate between classes. My future wife and I would drop by during each other’s shifts (when we weren’t tutoring on the same schedule). Beyond being a physical hub, the writing center was a place where I could explore connections between all of my curricular and extracurricular interests. I could find people (frequently my advisor) who would talk with me about how music or physics or games applied to what we were doing in the writing center. Staff meetings and projects gave tutors, myself included, opportunities to use art and music to explore different ways of thinking about the work of the writing center. For many reasons, the writing center was (as Mauk might put it) campus real estate that I wanted to invest in. A central reason, perhaps, was that the writing center was a space where I felt I
could bring all of the experiences I accrued in other “sites of discursive instruction” into conversation with one another.

When I began working at the UMass Writing center as tutor, and later as the assistant director for three years, I saw that it also seemed to serve as a hub of sorts for some, if not all tutors. Tutors would drop by during off-hours (or come early/stay late) to visit other tutors, to eat or get to work done in our tutors’ lounge, or to talk to the director or assistants directors about anything from writing center work, to grad school applications, to whatever else was going on in their lives--academic or otherwise. In the course of these conversations, those overheard and those I was directly engaged in, I became increasingly aware of the many ways that tutors engaged in writing outside of their role as tutors--as creative writers, as emerging scholars, as employees (or potential employees), as actors and playwrights, as bloggers and coders, as gamers and geeks. And I began to consider how tutors move through writing center spaces, how they brought different writing practices from outside the center into their tutoring work, and how they might be taking some of the work of tutoring with them when they finished their shifts and went about their days.

In an attempt remedy what I believed to be significant blind spot in writing center scholarship, I designed a qualitative study to gain deeper insight into how tutors’ accumulation of literacy practices as a result of their movement between and among different sites of writing shape/have shaped their writing center practice. To that end, I developed the following research questions as the basis for this project:
1. What writing and composing practices do tutors participated in (or have participated in previously in) outside the context of their work as writing center tutors?

2. Which sites are associated with these writing practices? Which writing practices are associated with these sites? And how do these associations develop?

3. What assumptions/attitudes towards writing, revision, and the role of the writer accompany these situated practices?

4. What strategies (e.g., language, body language, use of resources) do tutors employ when working with student writers, and in what ways are these strategies informed by tutors’ various writing practices?

5. Do tutors report instances of deciding to incorporate or not incorporate outside writing practices into their tutoring work, and, if so, in what contexts and for what reasons do these instances occur?

In what follows, I describe the participants, site, and approaches to data collection and analysis for this study.

**Study Design**

This study was conducted in two phases: a survey phase and a case study phase. The goal of the two-phase design was to use survey work to establish a baseline of knowledge regarding writing center tutors’ current writing practices and the spatial factors that shaped those factors prior to engaging in more intensive case study work. Moreover, my hope was to use the survey phase to aid in the process of narrowing down the participant pool to the few tutors who would ultimately end up as the focus of the
case-study portion of this project. The case-study phase of this project involved the participants’ use of writing journals, tutorial observations, and a series of interviews (each of which, along with the survey, is described in greater detail in the data collection section below).

My use of a case-study methodology was driven by my interest in understanding how tutors understand the unique relation between the different writing contexts that they occupy. That is to say, I was not simply interested in documenting the “how” of tutorial work (and how that “how” might be influenced by spatial factors); rather, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the “why,” of the questions of meaning that underlie writing and tutorial practice. My hope was that these individual cases would help raise questions and provide insights into these issues of meaning. In that sense, my approach is similar to Robert Stake’s concept of “instrumental case study” in which

a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. The case is looked at in depth, its contexts, scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps the researcher to pursue the external interest. (437)

This description of instrumental case study seems to me to be in line with Dyson and Genishi’s assertion that the “relationship between a grand phenomenon and mundane particulars suggest key theoretical assumptions of case-studies, particularly those involving the production of meaning and its dependence on context” (4).
Although Stake draws a distinction between “instrumental case study” and “intrinsic case study” (where the case is “undertaken because, first and last, the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case”), he notes that “there is no line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental; rather, a zone of combined purpose separates them” (437). Although my use of multiple cases might technically qualify as “collective case study,” I would like to distance myself from this terminology. Stake associates the use of multiple cases with “even less intrinsic interest” in each case, yet I do not believe that my intrinsic interest in each case is diminished by the fact at that I studied more than one. My years of exposure to the tutors at the UMass Writing Center have taught me that each tutor has his or her own unique and deeply fascinating story to tell. And though, as Stake cautions, “We cannot be sure that a case, telling its own story, will tell all or tell well,” my hope is that the variety of methods involved in this case study will bring forth as much of this story as possible in order to better understand how tutors make sense of (or perhaps locate, in keeping with the spatial theme) and enact their writing center practice experience within the broader context of their writing lives.

The use of a case study methodology seems particularly appropriate given the importance that “context” places within this study. As Robert K. Yin argues, one of the primary values of case study as a research methodology is its ability to examine “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (18). The research questions I am proposing are driven by a theoretical assumption that tutorial practice and the meaning of that practice cannot be understood without accounting for the context in
which it occurs or for the multiple contexts that tutors move between/among in the course of their writing lives.

**Research Site**

The UMass Writing Center is centrally located on the UMass campus, situated within the W.E.B. Du Bois Library Learning Commons on the lower level of the library. The Learning Commons is designed to be a “space [that] brings together library, technology, and other campus services in an environment that fosters informal, collaborative and creative work, and social interaction” (“Learning Commons”). This commitment to collaboration is reflected in the presence of multiple group-work spaces including group study rooms, tables that can accommodate as many as ten people, and certain computer banks configured for collaborative work. In addition to these common work spaces, the Learning Commons features space for exhibitions, a technology teaching classroom, digital media services, and an OIT kiosk. Additionally, the Learning Commons houses the Writing Center.

At the time this study was conducted, the Writing Center was in its third location in the Learning Commons in four years. In its first two iterations, the Writing Center occupied locations in two different corners of the Learning Commons, and was built of transparent, cubicle-style, modular material. In its third iteration, the Writing Center was moved into a more “permanent” (and centralized) location that featured traditional (and permanent) exterior walls. Modular material was used within this space to subdivide it into an administrative office (for the director and assistant directors), a primary tutoring
space, and a tutor lounge. The primary tutoring space featured a reception desk and five tutoring workstations, each equipped with a desktop PC in a dual-monitor configuration. The tutor lounge featured a single desktop PC, two chairs, and a combination microwave/refrigerator (such as one might keep in a dorm room). This space could also be used as an overflow tutoring space if necessary. In fact, many of the tutorial observations for this study took place in the tutor lounge, though this decision was made primarily to facilitate clarity in audio recording during “high traffic” times rather than as a result of over-crowding.

According to Writing Center’s homepage, the UMWC operates with the belief that “every writer deserves a reader.” Writers are assured that tutors can work with them at any stage of their writing process, and that the tutorial will require active participation by both parties (i.e., the UMWC is not a proofreading service). During this study, the Writing Center offered students 45 minute face-to-face tutorial sessions, with 15 minutes allotted between sessions so that tutors could process post-session client report forms (though in reality sessions frequently extended into this 15 minute window). Tutorial sessions generally began with an introductory conversation (assuming the tutor had not worked with the student previously) to establish why the student was visiting the writing center and to develop a working agenda for the remainder of the session. This often involved either the tutor or student reading a document aloud, followed by (or coterminous with) a conversation about that writing. Ideally, sessions would conclude with tutors and writers discussing future steps, whether that involved additional revision, making contact with a professor or TA, and/or scheduling another appointment.
Occasionally sessions bled into one another, with tutors requesting assistance or opinions from other tutors or administrators working during that shift.

My choice of the UMass Writing center was driven by two central factors: familiarity and logistics. During the data collection portion of this study, I was completing my fourth consecutive year of working at the UMWC. Those four years included a year of serving as a graduate tutor and three years of serving as an assistant director. As assistant director, I twice served as both a teaching assistant for ENG 329H “Tutoring Writing: Theory and Practice” and an instructor for ENG 298H “Honors Practicum: Teaching in the Writing Center.” The four years I spent at the UMWC featured three different Writing Center directors and involved multiple writing center relocations. My deep level of involvement in the center’s functioning, as well as my role in helping to develop curriculum for both of the training courses made me intimately aware of the context in which my participants conducted their work. I believed, and continue to believe, that my awareness of this context (and meta-awareness of the degree to which I shaped this context) would offer added insight into my analysis of participants’ accounts of their experience as tutors. More specifically, I felt that my familiarity with the curriculum of the pedagogy courses they took would enable me to better contextualize participants’ discussions of the role formal training played in shaping their tutoring personas and approaches. Moreover, I believed that my familiarity with undergraduate academic writing at UMass (through my experience as both an instructor and tutor) and my general familiarity with the campus and its surrounding areas would help me better contextualize the relation between participants’ writing practices and the
spaces associated with those practices (or, alternatively, their writing spaces and the practices associated with those spaces).

A second, more personal, reason for choosing this site was a desire to better understand how my own role as “gatekeeper” may have shaped participants’ understandings of writing center discourse and, in turn, their sense of what tutorial practices were “sanctioned” for use in the writing center. Although I thought, and think, of myself as an instructor who values the full range of my students’ literacies and although I believe I do my best to foster a space for play in discussions of writing and pedagogy, the experiences that helped pave the way for this project left me acutely aware of how little I did to actively invite tutors to bring those literacies into the tutor education classrooms and the writing center proper. This study, then, is also in part an attempt to develop a better understanding of how an instructor or writing center administrator, despite his or her “good intentions” (as Grimm might put it), may inadvertently contribute to the construction of a writing center space that is more closed off to tutor experience than need be.

**Participants**

My participants for this study were undergraduate peer tutors at the UMWC. In the following sections, I will describe how students become tutors at the UMWC, how I determined which groups of tutors would be eligible to participate in this study, how that group was recruited, and how I selected a final subset of participants for case study work.

**Tutors at the UMWC**
At the time of this study, the hiring process for undergraduate tutors was a multi-step process. Undergraduate students submitted an application towards the end of the spring semester. This application consisted of a letter of interest, resume, an academic writing sample, and contact information for a faculty member who can speak to their abilities as writers and peer-responders. After reviewing these initial applications, the director and assistant director(s) selected a subset of applicants to come in for interviews. During the interview process, potential tutors were asked questions about their writing experience, writing process, approach to revision, and reasons for wanting to become tutors. Applicants who made it through this stage of the interview process are then enrolled in ENG 329H, the first of a two-course training sequence. This course focused on topics such as discourse communities, writing as a social act, multiple literacies, and theories of composition and writing center pedagogy. Midway through ENG 329H, students began work as unpaid intern tutors, working 2 hours per week at the UMWC, adding practical experience to the class’s theoretical considerations of writing center work. Those who completed ENG 329H with a grade of B or higher were then enrolled in ENG 298H and continued interning at the UMWC for 4 hours per week. This course served as a tutorial practicum that offered tutors-in-training an opportunity to continue explorations of issues related to writing center work, as well as a space to discuss any concerns or questions that emerge during their internship hours. Those who completed ENG 298H with a grade of B or higher were then offered contracts as paid tutors at the UMWC.

Both undergraduate and graduate tutors are encouraged to continue thinking about and developing their approaches to tutoring pedagogy. This process was encouraged in
multiple ways. All tutors were required to undergo observation by the director or assistant directors, followed by a conversation that served as both an opportunity to discuss what happened during the observed session as well as a general “check-in” regarding the tutor’s semester as a whole. Tutors’ ongoing development was also supported by the requirement that tutors participate in a number of mandatory developmental workshops, which focused on a range of topics, such as working with ESL writers, gender and tutoring, or dealing with challenging sessions. These workshops, combined with regular observations, provided a structured environment for tutors’ ongoing development.

**How Participants Were Recruited**

In planning this study, I needed to make several decisions regarding the criteria for participant recruitment and selection. At the most basic level, these decisions were related to the various categories of tutors employed at the UMWC. At the time of the study, and at present, the UMWC employs both paid tutors and unpaid interns. Paid tutors consist primarily of undergraduate students who have completed the ENG 329H/ENG 298H sequence, although several graduate students also serve as paid tutors. Additionally, at the time of the study, there was one paid undergraduate tutor working in the UMWC who was not required to fulfill the entire ENG 329H/ENG 298H sequence due to participating in a tutor training program at a previous institution. Unpaid interns consist of students interested in working as paid tutors and currently enrolled in the ENG 329H/ENG 298H sequence. Ultimately, I decided to exclude both paid graduate student tutors and unpaid undergraduate interns. My decision to exclude graduate tutors was
motivated by my desire to increase the applicability of my study results as much as possible; given that only a limited set of colleges are able to staff graduate students as tutors, I felt a focus on undergraduate tutors would prove more valuable to the broader writing center scholarly community. My decision to exclude unpaid intern tutors was motivated by my concern that these individuals, due to their relative lack of experience working in the writing center, would be more inclined to stick with tutoring strategies that they saw as being in line with the “official” discourses presented in the ENG 329H/ENG 298H sequence.\(^1\) Additionally, I felt that the interns would have had insufficient experience to allow them to effectively reflect on their writing center work.

At the beginning of the 2011 spring semester, I sent all paid undergraduate tutors an email (Appendix A) describing both the survey phase of the study as well as the possibility of participating in the case-study portion and a description of what that portion might entail. Additionally, reminders about the study were sent out in the UMWC weekly newsletter to tutors. Eight (8) tutors volunteered to participate in the survey portion of the study. I met with each in person to describe the study and to provide them with Informed Consent documents (Appendix B). Seven (7) tutors agreed to participate in the survey and, if requested, the follow-up case study. One (1) tutor agreed to participate in the survey but declined any further participation in the study.

**How Case-Study Participants Were Selected**

Of the seven (7) tutors who volunteered to participate in the follow-up component of the study (detailed later in this chapter), I chose three (3) as case study focus for this

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\(^1\) One case-study participant suggested that, in her experience, this was in fact the case and she it wasn’t until she had gained more experience that she felt comfortable experimenting with her approach.
After all participants completed the surveys and week-long writing journals, I made my selection. My choice of case-study participants was motivated by several factors. One participant was excluded for failing to complete the writing journal portion of the study. One participant was excluded because we were unable to coordinate a schedule for tutorial observations. Of the remaining participants, the final three were chosen due to the following factors: expressed comfort with being observed and recorded, diversity of survey and journal responses, and interview and observation scheduling flexibility and compatibility. Additionally, I sought to choose a sub-set of tutors that would roughly approximate the demographics of the paid undergraduate tutor population. Ultimately, I selected my three case study participants: Mary, a senior English major with a concentration in professional writing who had been involved with the UMWC for three years; Joel, a junior English and Philosophy Major who was completing his second year of working at the UMWC; and Brianna, a senior English and Psychology major who joined the UMWC tutoring staff in her final year at UMass.

**Data Collection**

**Survey**

This study was conducted in two phases. Undergraduate tutors who had completed their two-semester internship period were informed about the study via email. Those that responded and expressed interest in participating were provided with an informed consent form. Participating tutors were entered into a raffle for a $50.00
Amazon.com gift card as compensation for their time. Eight (8) tutors volunteered to participate.

The first phase featured an online survey that asked tutors about their usual weekly writing habits: what they write, where they write, and details about how and when they write where they write. I chose to begin with a survey for several reasons. First, because I was interested in understanding the relationship between the writing center and the other spaces that tutors associated with their writing practices, a survey offered me an entry point to gaining an initial sense of the range of writing spaces that tutors occupied. Given the professional nature of my relationship with the UMWC tutors, I generally knew very little about their writing lives beyond what they chose to share in class or what I might have overheard while working in the center. This survey was then, in part at least, a preliminary step in addressing my general concern (reflected in my own ignorance) that writing center studies have not to this point sufficiently considered how the writing center fits into the broader web of writing sites that tutors navigate on a daily basis. To that end, the survey questions were designed to offer an initial insight into the variety of writing practices in which tutors were engaged and to begin to map those practices onto specific sites. In asking for details about the material conditions of these sites, as well as the resources tutors made use of in these sites, my goal was to gain a preliminary sense of what made certain spaces “good” or “desirable” and to produce data that would serve as a starting point for developing interview questions about case study participants’ writing practices.

At a more pragmatic level, because I knew that I ultimately wanted to move this project into a case-study format, I needed a means for identifying potential case study
participants. My hope was that the low-stakes nature of the survey would encourage a
greater number of tutors to express interest in the study than if I began by looking for
case study volunteers. This approach proved relatively successful, drawing
approximately just under half of eligible tutors into the participant pool.

After signing their informed consent forms, participants were sent the survey via
email. Participants were asked to list up to ten (10) different types of writing that they
engage in during a standard week. For each type of writing, they then listed the locations
where this writing takes place. Out of all of the places they had listed, the tutors then
selected five (5) to elaborate on. They were asked to describe the features (physical and
otherwise) of each place, their frequency of use, and the types of resources that they
make use of when at a particular site.

This survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey. To protect the identity
of the participants, each participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifying code. A
unique survey URL was generated for each alphanumeric code and emailed to the
participants. The keys identifying which participant has been assigned to each
alphanumeric code and which alphanumeric code corresponds to each unique URL were
stored on a secure password protected hard-drive. All data collected through the surveys
was stored on secure servers and password protected. After all survey data had been
collected, it was deleted from the servers and stored as a hardcopy in a locked filing
cabinet separate from any identifying keys. The purpose of this phase was to gain a better
baseline understanding of the various spatial contexts where tutors were writing. In
particular, a primary goal of the survey was to establish an initial sense of the scope of
tutors’ extracurricular writing practices and to gain insight into how their writing lives
extended beyond walls of the writing center, as well as the campus proper. The data collected in this portion of the study was meant to establish a context for further inquiry into how tutors situate the writing center within the broader context of their writing experience.

Writing Journals

All case-study participants were asked to keep a journal of their writing activity (Appendix E) for one week following their selection to the case study portion of this project. For each instance of writing that they performed during this week, they were asked to record the date, time, and location of their writing, along with a brief description of their writing. Each participant met with me individually to receive a copy of the writing journal and instructions for how it should be completed. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask for clarification regarding expectations for the writing journal. The purpose of this journal was to provide insight into the question of what writing practices tutors engage in outside of their writing center work. During this weeklong period, participants were asked to save copies of their writing where possible, with the hope that these samples might provide insight to the assumptions about writing/revision that accompany the practices that tutors engage in outside of the writing center.

Observations
In order to better understand how tutors might draw from or incorporate writing practices developed outside the writing center, I chose to perform a series of tutorial observations for each participant. Although I could have asked participants about the approaches and strategies they employed in their tutoring work, doing so would have produced less useful data. To begin with, responses to such a question would be generalizations at best. I was also concerned that an interview-only approach could result in participants, intentionally or not, giving me answers that they thought I might want to hear. Of course, this risk was also present in observations; there’s always a chance that the act of observing will change the nature of what is being observed. My hope was that being absorbed in the moment of tutoring would mitigate whatever influence my observations had on participant behavior. Moreover, observations provided a more robust context for analysis of tutorial practice, as well as clear examples of the kinds of strategies that a tutor might describe in more general terms in an interview. For example, both Joel and Mary described their approach to tutoring as “casual,” but when observing their sessions it was clear that creating a casual atmosphere involved different approaches for each tutor. As will be discussed later in Chapter 5, Mary relied heavily on the use of dialect and slang to deconstruct the formality of the writing center space, whereas Joel was more likely to slow down the pace of a session to create a more relaxed setting.

Finally, I chose observations as a research method because it would allow me to observe elements of sessions that tutors may not have thought of as particularly important and therefore may not have brought up during the interview portion of the study.

Participants were observed during three (3) of their tutoring sessions over a 2 to 3 week period. Observations were scheduled to coincide with participants’ regular tutoring
schedules. Observations were only rescheduled in the event that no student had signed up for a session during the scheduled observation time or if a student had signed up for a tutorial session but did not show up. The purpose of these observations was to better understand the kinds of strategies that participants make use of during these sessions.

Prior to the start of the observed tutorial sessions, I explained the study to the writer with whom the tutor was working. I explained that the writer’s decision to participate or not participate in the study would have no bearing on his or her ability to receive services at the UMass Writing Center. I also emphasized that the tutor, and not the writer, was the focus of the study, as well as the fact that the writer was free to end his or her participation in the study at any point. Finally, I explained that all data collected during the study would be kept confidential. After conveying this information, I presented the writer with an informed consent document (Appendix C) and encouraged the writer to carefully read it over, to ask any questions that he or she may have, and to take his or her time in considering whether or not to participate. Signed copies of the informed consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet. The writer was also given a copy of the consent form for his or her records.

Sessions were audio recorded digitally. Following the sessions, audio files were removed from the recording device and transferred to a password protected computer. File names were coded to remove any identifying information. Each audio file was transcribed, with any identifying information removed.

**Interviews**
Following the tutorial observations, I conducted a series of interviews with my participants. Each participant was interviewed three times. The first interview focused on the participant’s history as a writer, the second on the participant’s current writing practices, and the third on the participant’s experience as a tutor (including his/her observed tutorial practices). The purpose of these interviews was to provide another set of data with which to explore the question of how tutors understand their movement across multiple sites of writing and how this movement is enacted in their tutoring practice, “to understand how the phenomenon matters from the perspectives of the participants” (Dyson and Genishi 81). Each interview was about 60 minutes long and interviews were spaced out with approximately one week between interviews. The gap between interviews provided me time to review the interview material in preparation for subsequent interviews.

For the purpose of my interviews, I took a formal and largely unstructured approach. The interviews were formal in the sense that they took place at pre-arranged times and locations, rather than occurring spontaneously “in the field,” as it were. Due to the nature of writing center work, it would have been impractical to strike up an interview in the middle of a tutorial session, regardless of how useful an in-the-moment conversation might have been. Additionally, given the small space of the writing center, open floor plan, and the presence of multiple additional tutors and students at any given time, impromptu interviews in the field would have jeopardized (and likely eliminated) participants’ confidentiality, as well as the confidentiality of the writers with whom participants were working. Interviews took place at the writing center, generally either before or after hours of operation, in the hopes of providing participants a familiar and
logistically convenient setting. However, as Charles L. Briggs argues, the context of the interview is not merely when and where it takes place; rather, “contexts are interpretive frames that are constructed by the participants [of the interview] in the course of the discourse” (12). Of course, I am aware that in the course of the interview, this space was occupied not only by the participant but by myself in all my subjectivities (researcher/colleague/teacher/supervisor) as well. As such, I tried to be mindful that “It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” and approached these interviews as negotiated texts in the course of my analysis (Schwandt 1997, quoted in Fontana and Frey 663). This argument reflects a certain Thiridspace sensibility, and in my analysis of the interviews, I was careful to consider the ways that the context for these interviews both constructed and is constructed by the discourse of the interview itself.

Although the interviews were formal with respect to occurring at an arranged place and time, the approach to the content of the interviews was primarily unstructured. Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey argue that “the very essence of unstructured interviewing [is] the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain” (654, authors’ emphasis). An unstructured approach, then, seems most appropriate, given my interest in understanding the meaning of place in the context of participants’ tutoring and writing experiences, rather than simply attempting to explain the effects of place on tutorial practice.
Although I went into each of the three interviews with several predetermined questions (based on previously collected participant-specific data), the majority of interview questions were generated contextually, either in response to other previously collected participant-specific data or as follow-up questions to other points of discussion in the interviews.

Whereas “[in] a structured interview, hopefully, nothing is left to chance” (Fontana and Frey 650), I saw value in allowing space for chance, and believed that a primarily unstructured approached was in keeping with the spirit of both Welch’s and Boquet’s arguments for a “space for play” where possibilities and potential remain open. Although I recognize that the choice of questions in some way determines the range of possible responses offered by participants (thereby potentially influencing the range of themes that may have emerged), my hope is that my use of largely unstructured interviews restricted as little as possible the paths that participants traveled in the course of our conversations.

The first interview focused on each participant providing an informal “writer’s autobiography” and served to help establish what outside writing practices tutors have participated in and where these practices have been situated, providing necessary background information regarding the history of the participants’ development as writers. In other words, this interview explored where participants have written in the past, and how these sites may continue to influence the participants’ current writing practices. Given that writing practices are developed over both time and space, it was likely that participants would have had meaningful writing experiences connected to places that they may have no longer frequented and, as such, would not have been reflected in this study’s
other data collection methods or in conversations regarding their contemporary writing practices. Several days prior to the interview, participants were asked to reflect upon their “writing autobiographies,” to think about particularly meaningful experiences of writing, and to be ready to discuss their growth as writers over time.

Interview questions were open-ended and follow-up questions were contingent on participants’ responses to earlier questions. Though participants were asked different questions during their interviews, representative questions included the following:

- Can you recall your earliest memory of learning to write?
- What are the most important things that you’ve learned about writing? Where and when did you learn these things? From whom did you learn them?
- What types of writing did you do as a kid? As a teen? Where did you do this writing? With whom? For whom?
- What types of writing have shaped your sense of self as a writer?

The second interview focused on the participants’ survey results and journal entries. The purpose of this second interview was to get a better sense of the kinds of writing that tutors do outside of the writing center and the features of that writing, in particular the processes used in its production. This interview also served as an opportunity to address any discrepancies between the survey results (where tutors listed what they usually write and where they write) and the journal entries (which documented tutors’ actual practices). Ultimately, the goal of this interview was to provide participants with the opportunity to clarify or to reflect/elaborate on their earlier study responses in order to begin to answer the question of how the participants’ writing identities have been shaped by their experience of writing in multiple spatial contexts.
Although the specific questions asked during this interview were contingent on their survey responses and journal entries, representative questions included the following:

- In your survey, you mentioned that you do [type of writing] at [location X], but your journal showed that you also do [type of writing] at [location Y]. What factors into your decision about where you do [type of writing]?

- Of all the locations where you write or engage in writing related tasks, which do you most closely associate with your sense of self as a writer? Why?

- When writing at [location X], are you writing with others? Are your respective writing projects the focus of conversation?

- When did you begin using [location] as a place to do your writing? Why?

The third interview focused on the participants’ tutoring strategies as represented in the observed tutorial sessions. The purpose of this interview was to gain a better understanding of the range of strategies that tutors implement during their work with writers and where/when these strategies were first developed. In order to answer the question of whether tutors report instances of deciding to incorporate or not incorporate outside writing practices into their tutoring work, and, if so, in what contexts and for what reasons, this interview provided participants an opportunity to talk through their thought process regarding the strategies they implemented in both their sessions and, more generally, the context of their work in the UMWC. This interview began with a general discussion of their tutoring experience (e.g., lessons that stuck with them from the course, attitudes about tutoring, general approaches to working with students, general session goals). From there, the interviews moved to a conversation about the specific sessions
that I observed. Prior to this interview, I reviewed the recordings and transcripts of these sessions, as well my notes. Based on this review and the content of the previous Phase 2 interviews, I made decisions about what aspects of these sessions to discuss, though I remained open to other conversational directions when participants raised new issues in the course of the interview or wished to revisit moments from their tutorials (or from previous interviews) that I had not planned on discussing. Although the specific questions asked during this interview were contingent on the specific nature of the tutorial sessions, representative questions included the following:

- Are there any writing practices that you use outside of the writing center that you have incorporated into your tutoring strategies? Why? In what situations? How have writers responded?
- How have your interactions with other tutors shaped your sense of what practices are appropriate for writing center work?
- Are there any writing practices that you use outside of the writing center that you will not, or feel you cannot, incorporate into your tutoring strategies? Why? What effect, if any, do you feel this has had on your effectiveness as a tutor?
- If you were discussing this writing with the student outside of the writing center context—for example, if this student was an acquaintance and asked you for advice in an informal setting—how might your approach to the writing and revision differ?

**Data Analysis**
My approach to data analysis was both inductive and reflexive. Working through my data frequently involved multiple, recursive readings of the data to generate thematic frameworks for analysis. An inductive approach was necessary to my analysis as a means of preventing my theoretical commitments from overshadowing or “talking over” data. Given my emphasis on understanding how participants negotiated the movement between multiple sites of writing and how this negotiation played out in their tutorial sessions, as well as (and perhaps more importantly) the meaning this negotiation held for these participants, it was important that I give the data space to speak back to the theoretical framework (Soja’s spatial trialectic) that guided my analysis. The recursive nature of my approach afforded me the opportunity to critically (re)consider and revise several of the theoretical assumptions of this study.

Although I went into this project with the understanding that my thinking about issues relating to space, writing, and participants’ ideas about writing center work would likely shift in response to the data, I did not anticipate how quickly this point would be driven home. As I’ll discuss in greater detail below, the results of the survey revealed that my ideas about (and privileging of) what constituted the material resources of a space (ideas strongly influenced by my reading of Soja) did not fully comport with how study participants thought about the resources, and that my approach to Firstspace epistemologies needed to expand to include the presence of bodies in space. This revelation initiated what would be a project-long process of exploring the dialectical relationship between the data and Soja’s theory of spatial trialectics. Soja’s theory offered a framework for understanding how individuals come to know the spaces they occupy and how spatial meanings accrue through lived experience, and as such offered a
critical lens for exploring how participants came to understand a variety of writing spaces (academic and otherwise) and their role within those spaces.

Simultaneously, their experiences, as reflected in the data, served as an impetus for critical reflection on the explanatory power of Soja’s approach in this specific research context. In particular, Soja’s lack of attention to how individual occupants within a space might participate in the construction of Thirdspace led to a gap in the theory that could only be filled through a careful consideration of the many ways participants modified, reconfigured, challenged, and adapted the various writing spaces they occupied. Throughout this project, the participants in this study demonstrated creativity and thoughtfulness in their approaches in both their tutoring work and their efforts to produce spaces of writing more conducive to their own needs in writers. In turn, I have tried my best to employ similar creativity and thoughtfulness in my efforts to negotiate Soja’s theory, the experiences of my participants, and my own role as researcher in this analysis.

Making Sense of the Survey and Rethinking My Questions

The initial design of my survey had two goals. First, I hoped to identify the range of writing practices that tutors engaged in outside of their experience as writing center tutors. Second, I wanted to foreground the materiality of space of those practices. Although I did not intend to privilege materiality over other spatial epistemologies in my final analysis, I wanted to proactively work against losing sight of materiality in my treatment of space. Aware of the power of metaphor to occlude the material conditions
of where and how writing, tutoring, and teaching transpire, I wanted to ensure that the materiality of the participants’ experience was not lost.

My analysis of the survey results began with assessing the range of writing practices they engaged in, and to a degree, the survey results began to help answer the question of what kinds of writing are tutors engaged in outside of the writing center. In fact, the survey results demonstrated that most participants engaged in a robust range of writing practices, which I organized into the following thematic categories: General Academic, Creative, Writing Center-related, Work-related (non-Writing Center), Social, Future-Oriented (e.g., resumes, cover letters), and Non-Creative/Work-related Extracurricular (e.g., to-do lists, news writing). These categories were generated either from terms that participants used in survey responses or created through an amalgamation of similar genres or tasks. For example, General Academic writing consisted of writing tasks associated with their coursework, including writing practices involved in varying stages of the drafting process (e.g., note-taking, brainstorming, drafting). Creative Writing included genres such as poetry, short fiction, and playwriting, as well as creative non-fiction. Several of the examples of writing were tied to issues of employment; I opted to divide these examples into two categories. The Work category included writing that was tied to a job the participant currently had, whereas Future-Oriented writing included writing that was related to writing focused on securing new (mainly post-graduation) employment, such as resumes and cover letters. Graduate school applications were also included in this category, given how closely they were tied to post-graduation and longer-term employment plans.
Unsurprisingly, all of the participants reported academic writing as a major “type” of writing that they were engaged in at the time of the survey. Examples of academic writing ranged from thesis work, to short reflective writing, to notes and brainstorm activities. Equally unsurprising was the social role that writing played for many of these participants, with all but one student reporting the use of email, texting, and/or Facebook as an important current writing activity. Many participants also reported participating in a range of creative writing activities, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and screenplays.

Table 1: Participants’ Writing Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of writing</th>
<th>Number of Participants Reporting Category</th>
<th>Category Frequency across Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Writing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future-Oriented</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job (non-WC)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then assessed the locations where participants did their writing, both to get an overview of where this writing was taking place and to see if there were any preliminary
trends regarding correlations between types of writing and where that writing was happening. In terms of where writing occurred, participants listed the UMass Library, Writing Center, and their dorms/apartments/homes as the most common sites where writing took place. Some version of dorm/home/apartment appeared in every response, while “library” appeared in all but one response and writing center in all but two. All categories came directly from survey responses with the exception of “Work” and “Anywhere.” The Work category was an amalgamation of responses such as “job” and “boring meetings,” while “Anywhere” reflects survey responses that indicated that either the writing was not associated with any particular site, that there were no spatial constraints regarding where a kind of writing could be done, and/or that the writing was associated primarily with a mobile device (e.g., texting) and therefore not bound to or associated with a single location.

Table 2: Writing Spaces and Number of Associated Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites of Writing</th>
<th>Average number of associated writing practices per participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apartment/Dorm</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library (Non-Writing Center)</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>2.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>2.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Anywhere&quot;</td>
<td>1.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Commons</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>0.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people's homes</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee shops</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lounge</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobin</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isenberg</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In organizing the survey responses into these categories, my intent was to examine any possible correlations between the kinds of writing that tutors engaged in and the spaces where they engaged in that writing. Although I intended to explore spatial associations within specific participants during the case study portion of project, the survey data also provided an opportunity to look at this question across participants. In other words, I was interested in whether there were any spaces that seemed particularly “fit” to certain categories of writing across participants. Although I didn’t assume that there would be any overarching correlations, the presence of any across-participant correlations would have had an effect on my interview process (i.e., I would have made sure to pursue the “why” of such correlations to determine the ideas about writing and space that prompted them, both to better understand that “why” and to determine whether common spatial assumptions were present among participants).

Meaningful correlations were difficult to discern, however, as these spaces frequently served as locations for multiple writing practices, creating overlaps for their usage. Several participants had an average of as many as 4 locations for every type of writing listed, with an average of 2.3 locations per writing practice across the entire participant pool. Similarly, some participants listed a single location for as many as 6-8 distinct writing practices. In fact, on average, each participant’s most frequently
referenced writing location was assigned to 5 distinct writing practices. As such, the surveys proved useful in providing a baseline context for each individual participant’s current writing practices/spaces, but less so in terms of drawing any broader preliminary insights into whether certain spaces, as a result of their general features, led to clearly associated writing practices. Yes, participants tended to do academic work in their dorms, but they also tended to do much of their other writing work there as well, and their dorms may only have been one of several locations where that kind of work took place, making it difficult to draw useful conclusions about why participants associated certain spaces with certain writing practices.

I also reviewed participants’ descriptions of each space they described in question 4-8 in order to identify general trends, as well as to a) identify potential phase 2 participants and b) make note of potential interview questions emerging from the surveys. During this section of the survey, participants were asked to choose 5 common writing sites and answer a series of sub-questions for each site. One of these questions asked participants to identify any material resources they made use of at each site and whether it was a resource that was a feature of the site or one they brought with them to the site.

A common theme was that with the exception of the resources participants used when working at the library/writing center (some participants didn’t distinguish between the two), most of the material resources they described were ones they brought themselves. Participants often reported bringing their own computers, books, and pens to writing sites (although one participant did acknowledge that each site he used provided the electricity). For non-library/non-WC spaces, participants used self-provided material
resources more than 3 times as frequently as resources that were provided by the respective writing sites.

A second trend that caught my attention was that (some, though not all) participants seemed to think of material resources in broader terms than I had when constructing the survey. While I anticipated responses such as computers, notebooks, and pens/pencils, many items caught me by surprise. Some were simply material resources I hadn’t considered such as refrigerators, headphones, or favorite novels (for “inspiration”). Others were more ambient environmental factors such as lighting, fresh air, or noise levels. Some of the resources were more abstract, such as “multiple languages” or “distractions.” People, including other tutors, students (“to hide what you’re doing”), parents, and instructors also appeared in several of the responses.

These trends--participants’ tendency to supply most of their own material resources at most sites and their broader sense of what they saw as a resource--forced me to rethink some of the assumptions that shaped the survey design. First, my assumptions about what “counts” as material was perhaps too narrow. Clearly things such as fresh air and the sun are material components of an environment, as are the people who occupy that environment. And less concrete features such as noise (or quiet) and distractions certainly point towards the materiality of their respective spaces. As I moved on from the surveys and into preparing for the interview portion of the study (as well as during my data analysis), I tried to be more mindful of considering the materiality of space more broadly. In particular, attending to the role of people as a material component of a space would be essential to my analysis of the interview data.
Moreover, I assumed that many, if not all, decisions about where participants wrote would be driven by a desire for certain material resources, or at least bounded by material circumstances; however, the fact that participants frequently supplied all or most of their high priority resources at most sites undermined this assumption. If participants were able to bring what we might consider the bare necessities of writing work (i.e., something to write on/with), then other factors were certainly at play. This became more evident in the course of the interviews that followed. My conversations with my participants revealed that some of these factors were in fact material, but on a scale larger than I had originally considered. The spatial constraints imposed by commuting, as well as the way economic factors limited participants’ access to certain spaces was an issue that arose in all three participants’ narratives. Furthermore, decisions regarding which spaces participants chose to occupy often contained an affective dimension that was frequently tied to the materiality of a space (i.e., a space was chosen because it made the participant feel a certain way or reminded them of other places that evoked a particular feeling), but wouldn’t have been considered a “resource” per se and therefore was not given much attention in the survey. Were I to revisit the survey design for future projects, I would take care to reframe the questions so as to encourage more thorough discussion of both broader material contexts and the affective dimensions of spatial experience.

Writing Journals

My analysis of the case study participants’ writing journals took place prior to observations and interviews. One of the central goals of the writing journals was to get a
snapshot of participants’ writing practices across space as compared to their general assessments of their writing practices in the surveys. In particular, I was interested in identifying any discrepancies between the two accounts. For example, I was curious to see if any sites appeared in the journals that had not been listed in the surveys or whether a particular site seemed over- or underrepresented in the journals relative to surveys. I created separate files for each participant and documented any locations or types of writing that did not appear in their survey results. I used these notes in my preparation for interview two, which focused on participants’ contemporary writing practices. I believed that a conversation about these discrepancies would offer deeper insight into specific writing practices and the contexts of those practices. Furthermore, I hoped that such a conversation might lead to some useful meta-insights on my survey design (i.e., did the fact that a participant did not reference a particular kind of writing or writing site result from an element of the survey design, or did it simply reflect a change in what was going on in a participant’s writing life at the time they were tracking their writing?)

Based on these notes, I composed and incorporated participant-specific questions into my preliminary script for the second planned interview. These questions were largely ones of clarification, asking participants to elaborate on their entries in general and to explain the presence or absence of any sites/types of writing that appeared on the surveys.

One example of a discrepancy I found between a participant’s survey responses and her writing journal was “home” as a writing space for Mary. On her survey, “home” was associated with almost all of her listed writing practices. Upon looking at her writing journal (reproduced below), however, I noticed that “home” was conspicuously absent.
Table 3: Sample of Mary’s Writing Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Writing Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>2:00pm</td>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Brainstorming for Thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>6:00pm</td>
<td>Library Mac Lab</td>
<td>In-class work writing HTML</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>9:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Adding more to my thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>10:00am</td>
<td>Bartlett Lab</td>
<td>Helping students writing code for Web Help software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>10:15am</td>
<td>Bartlett Lab</td>
<td>Emailing professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>2:00pm</td>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Writing notes for tutees about ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Writing code and content for new Writing Center site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>11:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Adding content for Thesis draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23</td>
<td>10:00am</td>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Revising Thesis draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23</td>
<td>3:00pm</td>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Working w/ tutor on Thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23</td>
<td>8:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Revising Thesis draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Bartlett Lab</td>
<td>Helping others generate content for software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>2:00pm</td>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Website content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Emailing potential employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>5:00pm</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Facebook and texting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>Thesis draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25</td>
<td>2:00pm</td>
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<td>Apartment</td>
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In addition to opening up new lines of discussion, Mary’s explanation for the difference between her survey and writing-responses suggests that there may be value in a more longitudinal approach to future iterations of this project to better account for the shifting circumstances that can shape a writer’s spatial practices and to provide increased data points to provide a more complete picture of relationship between participants’ writing and spatial practices.

**Interviews**

In order to establish a context for situating participants’ experiences of writing across multiple spaces, I began my analysis of the interviews and observations with interview one, which focused on exploring participants’ experiences of writing prior to their arrival at UMass. After the interviews had been recorded, I proceeded to transcribe the audio. I then reviewed each interview multiple times. On my initial reads, I took an open approach, noting elements that might require greater attention, any general trends I noticed in how the participant engaged with writing as a concept, and any points that might require further clarification in a follow-up interview in a series of informal research memos. Below is a sample of a research memo composed after an early pass of the first interviews, which focused on writing experiences before arriving at UMass. In this section of the memo, I describe my emerging sense that changes in writing environments might be tied to changes in attitudes towards and understandings of writing:
The effects of spatial experience vary from participant to participant:

That is to say, the meaning of the role and influence of place is necessarily going to vary depending on the individual case, however:

**Some similarities are emerging…**

In each participant's’ first interview, I am getting the sense of something that for the time being I’m going to call “spatial dissonance.” By “spatial dissonance,” I am referring to moments where the participant experiences a “gap” between expectation and reality in their spatial experience, particularly when entering into a new spatial context. This dissonance, in various cases, then serves a catalyst for reevaluating the role of writing or the participant's sense of self as a writer.

[Review of Mary’s interview]

Again we have an instance where a disconnect emerges between expectations of space (in this case the spaces of writing and the English major) and the realities of the experience. Obviously this is just a small snippet of her experience, and many of its threads tie into other spatial experiences that the participant had early in the formation of her sense of self as a writer (the connections between these experiences support Soja’s point about the dangers of fragmentation). However, this section of the interview demonstrates how spatial dissonance led to a significant reappraisal of the subject’s attitudes towards writing and English as a major, a reappraisal that would have consequences for how she understood her responsibilities as a writing center tutor.
From my earliest readings of the interviews, it became clear that movement between different spaces of writing could effect a change in how participants thought of writing and of themselves as writers. Once this portion of the interview review was complete, I shifted my focus and began reading the interviews for moments where each participant described his or her understanding of and attitude towards writing, paying careful attention to when shifts, if any, occurred. One of my research questions dealt with whether participants associated attitudes and understandings of writing with specific sites (or “types” of sites). Attending to issues of “attitude” and “understanding” was important because it enabled me to lay the groundwork for drawing connections between the places where writing occurred and what writing might mean in the context of those places.

To that end, I recorded general impressions of how each participant’s approach to writing shifted over time and then turned my attention to the role of place in each interview. On this pass, I coded the interview for distinct sites of writing and then in a separate file I reorganized each interview based on this list of sites in order to better parse how these sites might be related to specific developments or shifts in how participants thought about writing in general (e.g. its role, its value) and, given the nature of their tutoring work, academic writing more specifically. For example, after going through this pass of Joel’s first interview, I restructured its content and organized it around the various spaces that Joel discussed. These spaces were then arranged in order chronologically by when Joel made use of each space, although the chronological organization was fairly rough as several spaces overlapped in time or weren’t associated with any particular time in Joel’s life.
Joel’s Interview 1 Spaces

- Home
- Movie Theaters
- Parochial K-8
- High School
  - English Classes
    - 2nd Year
    - 3rd Year
    - 4th Year
  - History Classes
  - Germany
- “Basements”
- Digital Spaces
- College
  - WRT112
  - English Classrooms
  - Philosophy Classrooms

Reorganizing the content of the interviews by space allowed me to pick up on patterns and issues that may not have been immediately apparent. As an example, pulling all of the moments where Joel discussed his K-8 parochial school helps bring into focus the ways that one’s understanding of a space can shift over time when placed into context with other spatial experiences.
On the value of K-8 school…

[When I was a little kid I … went to a parochial school up until 8th grade, and like had a strong background in grammar, like it was really pushed into me, and a really hardcore 5-paragraph essay, and I had like really good teachers, and you could tell they really loved it, ‘cause it’s just like they're getting paid not so well, and like it was small classrooms. I was with them for a while, so really like how to write well there. At the time I didn’t think anything of it.

Value of K-8 continued

Well, it’s kind of interesting because it was very, drills, it was like, I remember one course we had to memorize all the prepositions and like the test was, here's lines and just write down every single preposition, and at the time I was just like, oh whatever, the grammar stuff, it was a lot of grammar was drilled into us, and like, I didn't realize how helpful that was until like high school and now, and people are like, “What's a preposition? What's a prepositional phrase?” and like it kind of made it easier, and um things like that, like the 5 paragraph [essay] we were drilled into, hey there's this process, and this process, and this process, and at the time like, that really helped because like in my 6-8 grades, 6-8 years, I was very like organization, you know, I had plans, fill out those plans, like, set to a schedule, set to an organization, and it really helped me do that creative side but not like going too far out of my comfort zone. That, it was kind of
interesting how that could have been bad for other individuals how like strict it was, but it was actually helpful for me…

**K-8 Reassessed during High School**

I learned like, certain, you know, like, when I was in middle, when I was at St. Mary's, which is my parochial school, you can't begin a sentence with “but,” you can't begin with “and,” you know you can't end a sentence with a preposition, and I saw like, authors doing that and I was like oh, I can kind of do what I want, you know, like I realized that's when I learned like hey I can like kind of break the format if I want, so about maybe sophomore year into junior year [I] learned to bring the format with the new, more intuitive, more what sounds right.

Looking at theses passages together reinforced both the centrality of formality, order, and structure to the ideas about writing Joel developed at parochial school, but it also drew my attention to how his understanding of the value of that space only could be understood in the border context of other spaces Joel later occupied. It wasn’t until he experienced writing in high school and college that he recognized how important those lessons in structure and organization had been. And it wasn’t until he had the experience of feeling lost and unnoticed in a larger public high school classroom that he could fully appreciate the importance of small class sizes as well as the commitment to students demonstrated by his K-8 instructors. Meanwhile, exposure to more complex literary styles in his high school classrooms help Joel recontextualize the importance of always following the rules or over-valuing grammatical correctness for its own sake.
My analysis of this section and other similar examples in the participants’ narratives reinforced my belief that shifts in space come with shifts in attitudes towards writing, but it also caused me to think more about how the spaces that participants’ occupy/occupied do not exist as discrete, independent sites but rather as a network or web of spatial contexts, with each space potentially informing participants’ understandings of each other space.

The portions of the interviews that demonstrated how understandings of writing spaces were contextually bound to one another suggested the value of Thirddspace as an analytical lens because a central goal of Thirddspace is to help uncover the “long hidden lifeworlds” often occluded by approaches to spatial understanding bound by material and discursive considerations. Joel’s account, however, demonstrates that understandings of space involve an experiential component as well, as the lived experience of parochial school that he carries with him into high school contextualizes his understanding of high school space. Similarly, his accumulation of experience in high school classrooms leads to a recontextualization and reevaluation of his parochial school experience. A consideration of the role this experiential component plays seems crucial to fully understanding how Joel makes sense of the writing spaces he occupies and the role he plays within these spaces—including his role as tutor in the writing center. This component does not fit neatly into either material or discursive approaches to spatial epistemology, speaking to the value of Thirddspace as an analytical lens, as it encourages the exploration of lived experience as a means of interrogating how one comes to know and understand the meaning and value of a given place.
Moreover, because my understanding of space assumes some degree of fluidity in all spaces and because my later examination of participants’ tutoring practices would involve looking at how tutors might be engaged in the process of creatively adapting writing center space, I was curious as to whether participants’ accounts of their pre-UMass writing practices included examples of creatively repurposing academic spaces. To that end, as I reviewed the interviews, I paid particular attention to any portion of the interviews where participants appeared to describe actively modifying a space. In looking at these instances, I wanted to understand whether such modifications were present and, if present, how modifications occurred and what prompted or necessitated the modifications. Although not present in every participant’s narrative, Joel’s account of his pre-UMass experiences offered a fairly clear example.

After feeling like his junior-year high school teacher was uninterested in getting to know him as a writer or provide meaningful feedback on his work, Joel decided to that he was “gonna write the way I wanna write. I don’t care what [the instructor is] doing because she’s not helping me at all.” This attitude persisted into his senior-year English class. However, instead of confining his “I’m gonna write the way I wanna write” approach to just his papers, Joel (with the help of his close friends) began using class presentations as a way to bring his interests to the forefront of the classroom space and his new teacher’s attention.

We'd sometimes make movies for class and like a lot of times in that English course we'd like, there was a movie project, like one time we had to do *Canterbury Tales* and we made a video of “The Knight’s Tale,” and I don't remember ever reading it, but I mean, like I don't remember that
having, reading *Canterbury Tales* again, it did NOT follow *The Canterbury Tales*, but um, my [new] teacher loved it, and she thought it was hilarious. We actually got like one of the highest grades in the class, which again, I don't know if that was, I don't know if there was any integrity in that piece, but um it was funny, and um, we did other projects like that.

Even though Joel was unsure just how well the film incorporated the content and themes of *The Canterbury Tales*, he did note the film was filled with “wicked nerdy video game references,” references that reflected the broader importance of pop-culture and “geek” literacy practices in Joel’s sense of who he was as a writer and a thinker.

Responding a perceived gap between what he thought his high school English classes should be (i.e., a place to explore ideas and receive meaningful feedback on those ideas) and what they had been for the first few years of high school, Joel draws upon literacy practices developed outside of the classroom as a way of expanding both the potential of what an English classroom could be as well as the role he could play in such a classroom. Although evidence of spatial modification was promising, this incident also led me to rethink some of Soja’s Thirdspace theory. Soja posits Thirdspace as something that exceeds material and discursive ways of understanding a space, and even though Joel’s actions can be seen as trying to expand the range of discourses permitted in his classroom space, his actions were also prompted by an affective dimension of his experience of that classroom space. This affective dimension, and the way that it was grounded in the social relations present in his classroom, did not neatly fit into First- or Secondspace categories. Although to that point I had been focused on looking for
material or discursive factors that might prompt spatial modification, my analysis of this portion of Joel’s narrative led me to revise my focus and to pay closer attention how social relations and affective dimensions shape one’s response to writing spaces as I continued to analyze the interview data.

My approach to analyzing the second interview, which focused on participant’s contemporary writing practices, was similar to that which I employed with the first interviews. After transcribing each interview and reviewing both the audio and transcript several times to immerse myself in the conversation, I turned my attention to any moments within the interview where the participant reflected on his or her attitude(s) towards writing, both in terms of broader attitudes towards writing in different contexts as well as attitudes about how the participant’s viewed/identified themselves as writers at the time of the interview. I also attended to any moments where shifts in these attitudes, relative to those reflected in interview one, were discussed. As I did so, I tracked possible themes and patterns that I saw emerging with respect to how participants talked about writing and their roles as writers.

In addition to establishing a better sense of participants’ present contexts as writers, I also was interested in thinking about how their approaches to writing spaces as well attitudes towards writing may have shifted (or remained constant) over time. As the final step in this analysis stage, I compared research notes and memos from interviews one and two in order to identify any patterns or shifts with respect to attitudes towards writing and use of writing spaces that may not have been apparent from looking interviews one and two alone. For example, in her first interview, Mary talked at length about how her high school experience positioned skilled writing as a way out of her
economically depressed home city, and that good writing could open the door to a college education that could in turn open the door to opportunities for greater economic success and the mobility such success affords. In her second interview, the relationship between education and her city shifts, as she finds college (especially as an English major) to be a place mired in “lofty abstractions” and disconnected from the real world. In juxtaposing these two narratives of “home,” I was left with a more complex understanding of how Mary made sense of academic writing as both a tool for escaping the limited opportunities of her home environment as well as a literacy practice that risked distancing herself from values she had cultivated in that environment. Looking at participants’ past and present spatial practices enabled me to avoid constructing artificial boundaries around their experiences across various spatial contexts and to develop a more robust context for situating their tutorial practices during that phase of analysis.

Revisiting the data in this way also suggested that a Thirdspace approach to data analysis was justified. Mary’s description of the relationship between her conflicted feelings towards her home city and her ideas about writing (as well as her identity as a writer) demonstrated the complex ways that materiality, discourse, and social relations intersect in constructing participants’ understandings of the relation between writing and place. In turn, such data point to the need for a theoretical framework, such as Thirdspace, that accounts for (and encourages the exploration of) the complex web of factors in which all understandings of space are bound.

In examining their discussions of their contemporary spatial usage, I encountered multiple examples of participants actively attempting to modify or adapt writing spaces to better suit their needs. Because practices relating to altering or modifying spaces were
central to my research questions, particularly with respect to writing center space, I wanted to better understand the nature of these modifications in non-writing center spaces to establish a more robust context for future analysis. In subsequent passes I focused my attention on how participants were adapting spaces.

As I reviewed the data, three categories of spatial adaptation emerged: material, discursive, and social-relational. Material adaptations refer to moments where participants altered the physical elements of their writing environment, either by reconfiguring the material elements already present or by introducing new material elements to supplement existing ones. An example might include Joel’s transformation of his car from a tool for commuting into an impromptu writing space. His recent acquisition of a smart phone enabled him to work on creative writing projects in spurts while stuck in traffic as he travelled between campus, home, and work. Discursive adaptations refer to moments where participants introduced a new discourse or attempted to shift an existing discourse in an effort to change the nature of a space. As an example, Brianna made a conscious effort as an ed-op writer to inject a more “objective” voice into the UMass daily student paper in response to what she saw as the paper’s promotion of a highly charged, deeply partisan discourse via the rest of the ed-op staff. Social-relational adaptations refer to efforts by the occupant of a space to alter his or her experience of the social relationships in a given space to make that space more conducive to achieving his or her writing goals. As an example, Mary often identified writing with notions of alienation, noting that “writing can be so lonely.” To combat her feelings of isolation, Mary found ways to make creative use of space so as to place herself into relationship with other writers to mitigate the loneliness she felt when engaged in writing work.
In examining these moments of adaptation more closely, I found myself surprised by two elements present in many of the examples regardless of the category to which they belonged. First, the significance of many of these adaptations could only be fully understood when taken in the context of the broader spatial experience of the participants. As an isolated event/space, Joel’s use of a smartphone to compose while (he assured me) stopped in traffic may not seem particularly significant; however, in the broader context of Joel’s spatial experience, the use of a smartphone to do creative writing in a car was a response to the larger geographic constraints placed on him by his need to commute extensively during the semester in order to keep the multiple jobs that helped support his education. Moreover, this frequent commuting combined with the fact that many of his friends went “away” to college meant that it had become difficult to recreate the collaborative creative writing spaces that were a hallmark of his high school experience. The smartphone, with its internet connectivity, transformed Joel’s car into more than just a space for private composition—it transformed his car into a mobile collaborative writing hub that enabled Joel to stay connected, if in a diminished way, to the writers that mattered to him.

Secondly, I was surprised by how frequently these adaptations were motivated, at least in part, by participants’ affective needs. While I had anticipated that participants might adapt certain spaces as a result of material needs (e.g., a lack of necessary resources or poorly configured design), I had not anticipated the role emotion would play in driving participants’ decisions.

The emergence of these surprises suggested the need for an analytical framework that could facilitate considerations the interconnectedness of participants’ spatial
experiences and the predominant role that affective concerns played in shaping their respective practices. Soja’s conception of Thirdspace seems particularly appropriate, as it emphasizes the need to consider multiple “lifeworlds” that individuals inhabit as well as the need to account for those elements of spatial experience that are intangible and/or which cannot be reduced to material or discursive elements. Moreover, as Thirdspace is concerned with ideas of “excess,” I believed that participants’ actions could be read as a kind of Thirdspace production— an effort to alter existing spaces in order to produce new understandings of those spaces that exceed existing limitations.

That said, Soja’s discussion of Thirdspace presented limitations of its own. Specifically, Soja’s treatment does little to explain or pin down the process by which Thirdspace is produced, nor the conditions necessary to encourage or facilitate the production of Thirdspace at the level of the individual. In order to better understand what participants were describing in their interviews (and what I would come to observe in their tutorial sessions), it was important for me to understand what conditions needed to be in place for participants to engage in successful Thirdspace production. As one of my research questions deals with whether or not tutors incorporated “outside” practices in their sessions (a potential form of spatial adaptation), I felt it was necessary to develop some form of explanatory framework that could account for either the presence or absence of participants bringing outside practices into the writing center. As such, I returned to interviews one and two, looking for patterns in what enabled participants to successfully adapt their environments. I revisited moments where participants described adapting their spaces, reviewed my initial notes, and began composing memos where I
documented my initial impressions of common factors among participants. In one memo, I noted that

...one thing that seems clear is that the participants all have a pretty strong sense of agency. That is, they all felt capable (though maybe not always comfortable?) in adapting their environments. They feel like changing their writing conditions is something they can do (I mean, if they didn’t I guess they wouldn’t bother trying). It also seems like participants were more willing to adapt their spaces after some experience of “spatial dissonance” (am I still using this term?). When they realize that space doesn’t need to be the way it is (Joel and his high school classroom, Brianna in Richmond), it seems to click that change is an option.

In addition to a sense of agency, which seemed a prerequisite to taking action, I was also struck by how consistently, in both sets of interviews, the participants were able to articulate the kinds of spaces and conditions that “worked” for them as writers as well as the types of spaces and general conditions that worked against their success as writers. This meta-awareness of their own strengths, weakness, and needs as writers seemed crucial to the efforts they were making to adapt their spaces, as it enabled them to assess the “fit” of a given space relative to their needs as writers and then identify changes that might improve that fit.

The final commonality that seemed apparent was that in order for participants’ to adapt a space, the space itself needed to be relatively adaptable or flexible. That is to say, the production of Thirdspace seemed to be best facilitated by spaces where the constraints of a given space did not overly impede the kinds of adaptations that a
participant was attempting to make. For example, the classroom that Mary used to do late evening writing was relatively flexible in that a) she had unrestricted access to the room after-hours and b) the absence of any other occupants allowed her to arrange the classroom space as she deemed fit. Similarly, some of Joel’s classroom spaces were more adaptable than others due to the willingness of his instructors to entertain his interest in merging pop-culture and scholarly interests. Joel described one class where, for most of the semester, he felt his ideas and interests were unwelcome: “my professor was very just, not very clear and not very, didn't seem to want student participation as much, it almost seemed like she had her own agenda, political agenda about, I remember we read a lot of vegetarian books, and she didn't really care what you had to say, and like I remember for that class, like I kinda just followed with it.” In what he perceived to be a very inflexible space, Joel opted to just do as he was expected. These three factors--a sense of agency, a well-developed meta-awareness, and the relative flexibility of a space---served as core foci for the remainder of my analysis.

In addition to gauging participants’ current attitudes towards writing in general, I also hoped to establish a clearer sense of their understandings of and attitudes towards writing center work in particular. To that end, I began by revisiting the transcripts and audio of interview two, as well as my spatially-reorganized transcripts, in order to parse out participants’ discussions of their writing center experience. Although the bulk of our conversations regarding the writing center took place during the third interview, the writing center also featured in interview two, as it was a site that all participants discussed making use of in their surveys and writing journals. As such, it was a point of conversation during portions of the second interview. Our discussions of the writing
center in interview two primarily dealt with how the participants used the writing center space for non-tutoring activities, but some participants did talk about their work as tutors when discussing the writing center as a site of writing. I made note of any such instances and then turned my attention to the third interview.

In analyzing the third interviews, which focused on participants’ experiences as writing center tutors, my central focus was on establishing as thorough an understanding as possible of how these participants understood the writing center and their work as writing center tutors within the broader context of their lives as writers. During my analysis, I focused on how participants define their roles and values as tutors, with particular attention to the language they used to describe these roles. On my first pass of the data, I noted all instances where participants described their roles and values and used these references to establish whether there were general trends or patterns in how participants talked about themselves as tutors. In a second pass, I paid greater attention to moments where these descriptions drew from the language of writing center discourse, which participants had been exposed to through their training and work at the UMass Writing Center, and how that language functioned in the larger context of how the participants described their roles as tutors.

In my first pass of Joel’s third interview, for example, I noticed he frequently talked about his role as a tutor in terms of being “comfortable” or creating a comfortable experience for other writers, and that part of this involved being more personal and “more open” in sharing his own experience and making connections with his writers. In creating a more “personal” experience for writers, Joel emphasized that “I’m not curriculum focused, I’m more individual focused and like ‘what do they want?’ and not,
‘I have strategies in my head of when they sit down,’ … I’m very very open to change, you know that’s, that’s I think the most important thing.” The importance of this “openness” to Joel became more apparent as I returned to the data for a second pass. In talking about his role as a tutor and his approach to tutoring in general, Joel often made use of terms such as “collaborative,” “directive,” and “nondirective” (terms frequently invoked in class readings and discussion) but rarely identified with any one style. Instead, his use of these terms was often in the context of describing how he felt that the terms themselves were limiting and that he felt that each class reading was “clearly biased towards a specific type, saying oh you should definitely do this way,” a position Joel felt was unproductive.

I wanted to investigate these self-descriptions because several of my research questions involved better understanding the kinds of writing practices and values participants associated with the writing sites they occupied and the factors that contributed to the development of those associations. With respect to the UMWC as a space, I believed that understanding how participants understood their roles and values as tutors would offer insights into how they understood the UMWC as a site of writing work. My reading of Joel, for instance, led to a realization that participants may define their roles and values as tutors against, rather than in terms of, the writing center discourse that they encountered as part of their tutor preparation and development. This realization suggested a need to pay closer attention to other possible moments of tension between tutors’ understandings of writing center work and the values they held, as well as how such tension might shape their tutorial practices, and became a key element in subsequent stages of data analysis.
In addition to how participants understood themselves as tutors, I was also interested in how participants understood the writing center as both a specific place (i.e., the UMWC) and as a type of place. As I reviewed the interview data, I looked for emerging themes in how participants discussed their understandings of what writing centers are/are supposed to be. I was interested in both what tutors “knew” about the writing center and how they came to that knowledge. Using Soja’s conceptions of First-, second-, and Thirdspace epistemologies as a framework, I looked for patterns both within and across participants regarding how they understood writing centers/writing center work and how they came to those understandings.

Finally, once I had established a firm understanding of participants’ views about their own roles and practices as tutors as well as the ways they understood (and came to understand) the writing center as both a specific place in their writing lives and as a larger category of academic space, I revisited the interview three transcripts to identify moments where participants placed these views and understandings in the broader context of their experiences as writers. In particular, I attended those times when participants drew comparisons between their writing identity as a tutor and other writing identities they inhabit, as well as comparisons between how writing works, for lack of a better term, in the writing center and how it works in other sites of discursive practice that the participants occupied.

**Tutorial Observations**

My analysis of the tutorial observation audio recordings and transcripts occurred in two phases. Because interview three involved some discussion of each participant’s
tutorials, it was necessary to do some preliminary analysis in order to develop appropriate questions for that portion of the interviews. To that end, my initial efforts focused on identifying the strategies that tutors implemented during their sessions. Drawing on my analysis of all the previous data as well as my meta-knowledge of what these tutors had learned as part of their formal training, I was especially attentive to any strategy that seemed to fall outside the range of strategies that tutors were exposed to through their tutoring coursework and their participation in ongoing developmental workshops. As someone involved in both developing and executing the curriculum for both courses in the training sequence, as well as one of the individuals tasked with developing and implementing tutoring workshops and semesterly orientations, I was well-equipped to identify practices that fit within the general range of strategies to which tutors would have been exposed as part of their training as well as those strategies that appeared to go beyond this training. In keeping with my research questions, I was particularly interested in those strategies that seemed as though they might have ties to or have been developed in some context outside of the writing center. For my purposes, I treated the concept of strategy broadly, including more formal strategies such as agenda setting, note taking, or reading documents aloud as well more fluid strategies such as how tutors used body language, pacing, tone, and rapport-building tactics. I paid particularly close attention to strategies implemented by participants that blurred the lines between expected writing center practices and practices that seemed to go beyond what usually occurred in UMWC sessions. For example, in one of Joel’s sessions he worked more slowly with a student and covered less text than was typical. Ultimately, they only made it through the first page and half of a 12-page paper, largely because so much of the session was spent
simply talking about the ideas that the writer was trying to express and explain. Whereas many inexperienced UMass tutors might be inclined to rush in order to cover as much ground as possible when dealing with a long paper on a short deadline, more senior staff were generally comfortable with the idea that they couldn’t effectively cover everything in a paper in 45 minutes. That said, Joel’s decision to leave almost 90% of the paper untouched in favor of extensive conversation about science fiction and fandom (issues related to the paper) was one that I felt most UMWC undergraduate tutors would not have been comfortable with.

In addition to tracking the strategies that participants were applying, I was also interested in the resources they used to implement those strategies. As I considered how participants enacted their strategies, I organized resources into three categories: material, discursive, and social/interpersonal, though at times there was some overlap in these categorizations. Material resources referred primarily to physical resources that participants made use of, including computers, notepads, writing instruments, handbooks, or handouts (e.g., worksheets on resume writing). Discursive resources referred to knowledge-based resources, such a participant drawing upon his or her knowledge of disciplinary or genre conventions (or in the case of Joel, *Star Wars*) in the course of a tutorial session. The use of social/interpersonal resources was marked by participants reaching out to other individuals during a tutoring session to draw upon their knowledge or experience. These resources included other tutors, myself, and the students with whom the participant was working (e.g., asking a student-writer to provide more context about an assignment in order to offer more effective feedback).
After this phase was complete and following my analysis of all of the other data, particularly the interview sessions, I revisited the session recordings and transcripts, as well as my previous notes on these data. My goal was to apply my now better-formed insights into how participants understood their role and that of the writing center as a lens for reconsidering how participants were negotiating the perceived needs of their students, their own needs as tutors, the expectations of the writing center (or at least their sense of what those expectations were), and their broader contexts of writing as they worked with their student writers.
CHAPTER 3

SPATIAL EXPERIENCE AND THE PRODUCTION OF WRITERLY AGENCY

A key assumption of this study is that writing center tutors do not arrive at the writing center as blank slates; instead, they arrive with unique understandings of academic space, writing’s role within academic space, and their identities as writers within academic space. A correlating assumption is that these previously formed understandings affect how tutors come to understand academic space, writing’s role within academic space, and their identities as writers within academic space within the new spatial context of the writing center. These assumptions echo Julie Drew’s argument that first-year students do not arrive at the composition classroom without some preexisting knowledge about/understanding of what it means to write or to write in an academic space. This chapter, then, is an attempt to answer Drew’s call for compositionists to pay more serious attention to those “sites of discursive pedagogy” that have already played some role in the formation of students’ understandings of academic writing; however, this chapter also extends Drew’s call in considering not only how prior spatial experiences produce a certain understanding of writing but also how these spatial experiences affect students’ identities as writers in academic space. I would argue that tutors’ understandings of the space of the writing center are shaped by their broader understandings of “the university” as academic space, and that these understandings of the academic space of the university were shaped, in turn, by the varieties of spatial experiences had by tutors prior to their university experience. In this chapter, then, I raise two main questions: 1) What is the role of students’ spatial experiences in shaping their
understandings of academic space and the role of writing within academic space, and 2) How might differing spatial experiences of writing account for the emergence of differing senses of writerly agency among students?

To do this, I make use of Soja’s concepts of First- and Secondspace as a means to interrogate the various spatial features that define the key “sites of discursive pedagogy” occupied by my case study participants during their pre-UMass educational experiences. The concepts of First- and Secondspace are useful analytically as they serve as a reminder that spatial experience is a multifaceted affair. Paying attention to these epistemological categories serves as a reminder that no single aspect of a given space can adequately account for one’s experience of that space. The categories also provide a framework for examining the various spatial factors that contribute to this experience. As First- and Secondspace will be central to the analysis in this chapter, it is important to establish a working definition of these terms.

Firstspace is grounded in the materiality of space and is, according to Soja, “fixed mainly on the concrete reality of material forms, on things that can be empirically mapped” (10). That is to say, one of the central ways that we can know a space is through the “stuff” of which it is comprised. To account for a space in this model boils down to listing each of its elements. If we were to apply this concept, as described by Soja, to a typical composition college classroom in order to define what a college classroom “is,” we might focus on elements such as the desks (or other writing surfaces), the arrangement of those desks, the presence or lack of certain technologies (computers, projectors, overheads), or its physical dimensions, among other things. In other words, we could determine whether or not a particular space “counts” as a composition
classroom by whether or not the classroom in question conforms to the material expectations of what a classroom should have. We recognize as classrooms those spaces that are made up of the material “stuff” that we understand classrooms to be made up of. Although I agree with Soja’s general framing of Firstspace, I include an additional component not accounted for in Soja’s original formulation. Specifically, I consider the presence of individuals as embodied subjects to be an essential “material” feature of a given space. Although Soja describes Firstspace “as both medium and outcome of human activity” (66), I would argue that such a definition runs the risks of producing a spatial analysis that renders the individuals who occupy a space separate and apart from that space as it fails to account for the epistemological significance of bodies; the presence (or absence) of certain bodies in a space surely communicates as much knowledge about what a space is—its purpose, its values—as any other material feature. Moreover, as Marilyn Cooper argues in her discussion of rhetorical agency, “all actions are embodied, including what are thought of as ‘mental’ actions—speaking, writing, reflecting” (424). That is to say, we cannot account for “human activity,” without accounting for the embodied nature of that activity. Soja challenges the limitations of traditional Firstspace epistemology’s appeals to empiricism and the failure of such approaches to account for how “material geographies … affect subjectivity” (77), but I would suggest that this critique does not go far enough, as it does not recognize that subjectivity is always embodied. Accounting for bodies within Firstspace is essential for a fuller consideration of how participants come to know a space, as these bodies are often deeply involved in production of other kinds of spatial knowledge through the discourses they circulate or the social dynamics they establish. Additionally, recognizing bodies as
a part of Firstspace enables me to better consider how my participants, as embodied subjects, bring a range of subjectivities (e.g., classed, gendered) to bear on their experience and understanding of their spatial contexts, a consideration not necessarily accounted for in Soja’s account of Firstspace.

In contrast, Secondspace is grounded in the discourses of a particular place, “in ideas about space, [and] in thoughtful re-presentations of human spatiality” (10). For Soja, Secondspace represents an understanding of space in the abstract—in plans, in designs, in descriptions—and that the spatial knowledge produced by Secondspace occurs “primarily … through discursively devised representations of space” (79). In a Secondspace epistemology, we come to know the “truth” of a space through its attending discourses, particularly those associated with authority or privilege. Located within Secondspace “are the grand debates about the ‘essence’ of space” (79), a central feature in the history of writing center discourse (e.g. North, Lunsford, Cooper, Grimm). If we were to apply this concept, again, to a composition classroom, we would be less concerned with the material features of the classroom than with the discourses that circulate around that space, discourses which may have very little to do with the actual physical manifestation of that space.

Because Soja’s spatial model is epistemological in nature, any consideration of the discourses to which one ought to consider with respect to Secondspace depends upon whose process of coming to know a space is the focus of one’s inquiry. The discourses through which a tutor comes to “know” what the writing center is likely differ from those that shape a student-writer’s understanding of that space. Similarly, the discourses through which a graduate student comes to know a composition classroom (perhaps in
preparation of teaching his/her first composition course) are going to differ from the discourses through which students in that class come to know the composition classroom.

With respect to the graduate student, we might be interested in the kinds of discourse that circulate in professional journals about what should occur in a composition classroom—for example, its goals or purpose, the approaches to writing that should be implemented, or the relationship between instructor and student. We might also pay more specific attention to the texts that graduate student might have been assigned as part of his/her course work that pertained to composition pedagogy. Additionally, if we were considering a more specific context like composition classrooms at a particular institution (rather than as a more abstracted category of space), we might be interested in official references to the role and purpose of composition within that institution’s curriculum. In a Secondspace epistemological model, these kinds of discourse serve as ways through which a graduate student comes to know the composition classroom.

A student’s understanding of the composition classroom, however, would likely be shaped by other discourses, discourses more bound to a specific classroom than to a broader sense of composition classrooms as academic spaces. In particular, we might consider the discourse produced within the class as a product of the ongoing conversations about writing that occur among the professor and students over the course of the semester. We might also consider course texts (e.g., the syllabus, assigned readings, assignment sheets, course websites) and how they contribute to a student’s emerging understanding of the composition classroom as both a space unto itself and a space situated in a larger spatial framework (i.e., the college or university). The discursive elements, then, that contribute to Soja’s conception of Secondspace
epistemology can be thought of as encompassing both those discourses that both explicitly describe a space and its “essence” (e.g., those of city planners, architects, philosophers) (81), as well as those discursive features that contribute more implicitly to one’s sense of place and from which the existence of a more robust, if tacit, spatialized discourse may be inferred.

My decision to expand upon Soja’s conceptions of both Firstspace and Secondspace was necessitated by the data presented in this chapter and others. Whereas Soja’s conceptions of First- and Secondspace are adequate analytical approaches when considering the larger single spaces that are often the subject of his analysis, the analysis in this chapter tends towards significantly smaller sites. My emphasis on smaller sites produced data that required my shift from thinking of Secondspace as comprised as “discourses about” and expanding it to include “discourses within,” as participants’ accounts of the discourses produced and circulated within these smaller spaces (e.g., conversations with and feedback from teachers) had a profound on their broader understandings of academic space as a type of space. And although Soja’s analysis does include the comparison of different urban sites, he is not looking at movement of individuals between those sites, whereas the analysis presented in this chapter hinges on the movement of the case-study participants between writing spaces. As such, bodies must be taken into account when considering Firstspace because it is the movement of the bodies of these participants that enable the case study participants—Mary, Joel, and Brianna—to develop nuanced understandings of academic writing spaces, understandings that disrupt any notion that the space of academic writing is a singular, unified entity. Moreover, as will be discussed in later chapters, these participants carry their prior
understandings of academic spaces into ones they will occupy in the future. In the process, they both shape and are shaped by the spaces they come to occupy. As will become evident throughout this chapter, each participant’s unique pre-UMass experience produces a unique understanding of academic space, the role of writing in academic space, and his or her sense of self as a writer.

In addition to establishing the understanding of academic space that each participant brings to UMass Amherst, I will also demonstrate in this chapter that to achieve agency as a writer, to consider writing as a means of affecting change, requires the ability to envision what that change might look like and to recognize that places as they do exist are not necessarily places as they must exist. The production of writerly agency—the sense that one can make meaningful decisions as a writer with respect to both one’s writing and the space(s) where that writing takes place—is contingent, then, upon a writer’s access to and ability to occupy and move between multiple writing spaces with substantive differences in the overall understanding of the role of writing in that space as produced by their First- and Secondspace characteristics. Although the relationship between space and the production of agency was not an initial focus of my analysis (nor one that I expected stumble upon), an analysis of spatial interactions (especially the effect of movement among varying writing spaces) offers unique insights into agency in a spatial context that are missing in Soja’s work, due to his emphasis on the production of space, rather than the production of spatial agency.
Mary: Academic Writing as a Way Out

At the time of this study, Mary was in her senior year at UMass Amherst preparing to graduate with a B.A. in English and a concentration in Professional Writing and Technical Communication (PWTC) and was excited about beginning a position as a technical writer at a major multinational technology company. One of the most experienced tutors at the UMWC, Mary was finishing her sixth semester of tutoring (including her two semesters as an intern tutor). Mary was one of the first tutors I had an opportunity to work with in my role as assistant director, and in the course of three years, she transitioned from perhaps the least confident student in 329H (in terms of her sense of her ability to tutor other student writers) to one of the most confident tutors at the UMass Writing Center (UMWC), one whom other tutors (including several in this study) identified as a particularly strong tutor. One aspect of Mary’s tutoring that distinguished her from her fellow tutors, and which played an important role in her tutoring, is a persona that she sometimes adopted during her work in the UMWC that in our interviews we referred to as “Worcester Mary.” Worcester, Massachusetts, the city where she grew up and where she lives when school is not in session, is an important part of Mary’s identity; describing the emergence of this persona in the context of the UMWC, Mary says “[Y]ou can’t unplug me during writing center hours. You know, like, I am from a place, I’ve seen some shit, I understand where these kids could have been coming from who don't feel good about their writing, like, I came from places where the writing was awful” [my emphasis].

In what follows, I will focus our attention on the intersections of place, economy, and schooling during Mary’s pre-college experience and how these intersections
contributed to an understanding of writing and academic space wherein the value of school and school discourse exists only to the extent that it might help her to secure the kinds of employment that would enable her (and those from similar circumstances) to “get out” to a better place. Additionally, I will argue that although Mary is able to identify retrospectively significant problems with the spatial context in which she developed her identity as a writer, the spatial configuration of that context, in its First- and Secondspace dimensions, produced conditions that prevented Mary from developing the ability to imagine alternative possibilities within that context, to imagine herself as one who might effect change within that context, and to develop a robust sense of agency as a writer and student.

Reflecting on her early writing experience, Mary saw little connection between writing and school. With the exception of some creative writing assignments when she was in elementary school, Mary had difficulty recalling any significant writing component to either her elementary or middle school experiences: “I don’t know that we did very much writing… I don’t really remember writing that much. I just remember that it wasn’t really that important and maybe that’s reflective of the schools that I went to.” Mary considers this lack of writing, particularly at the middle school level, to be a reflection of the quality of schools that she was attending. Mary attended schools in Worcester, an economically depressed city in central Massachusetts. Although the economic conditions of a space emerge from factors that are both material and discursive, I align Worcester’s economic conditions (and the possibilities for social and economic advancement associated with these conditions) with Firstspace. As an epistemology of space, Firstspace reflects the way we come to know a space through its material
conditions. “Economy” is something which we can come to learn about a space; for Mary, this knowledge comes from her Firstspace experience of material lack in her educational spaces and is reflected her repeated use of “inner city” as a descriptor, which I read not as an attempt by Mary to clarify her neighborhood’s geographic location within Worcester’s city limits but as an attempt to evoke an image of an inner city space and its attending material conditions. When referring to “the schools I went” to, Mary is drawing a connection between the quality of her schooling and the “place” where those schools were situated. Throughout our interviews, Mary referred to her neighborhood and schools as being “inner-city”, and although she did not talk about this neighborhood or these schools in terms of their socio-economic class, there was a clear sense that she understood where she comes from to be a place with limited opportunities for jobs and lacking material resources. Both of these factors would come into play in her discussion of her high school educational experience, where for the first time writing is treated as a valuable skill.

This lack of material resources, a defining Firstspace characteristic of Mary’s high school experience, is most prevalent in her description of her Advanced Placement (AP) English class. Describing the work that she did for that class, she notes a lack of focus on writing, then transitions into a commentary on the material resources tied to the course: “We didn't do much writing at all and we never read books; we watched the movies in class. Again, inner city school…we didn't have enough books and the books that we had had pages torn out.” In explaining the situation by claiming “Again, inner city school,” Mary builds on a theme that emerged in the course of our conversations—that underperformance, a failure to meet expectations, and sense of tangible limitations were
part and parcel with the experience of coming from a place like Worcester. Although we cannot be certain how much of Mary’s recollection of Worcester is factually accurate versus how much is exaggerated (e.g., the number of students attending college, the number of individuals ending up in jail), the accuracy of her account isn’t necessarily important.

First, an individual’s future actions and choices are not driven by the accuracy of our memories of past experiences, but by our belief in the accuracy of those memories. The fact of whether or not only two of Mary’s friends actually went to college is less important than the fact that this is how Mary understands and recalls her experience of attending school in a particular city. It is this sense of experience that will go on to shape her sense of self as one who is “from a place.” Similarly, we cannot be certain that Mary’s description of the material conditions of her high school is entirely accurate (e.g., with respect to the availability of books for her AP English course); however, that Mary chooses to describe her experience in such a way speaks to her broader understanding of the (impoverished) material conditions of her education, and more specifically her writing education.

Second, and related to points raised in the preceding paragraph, even if these statements aren’t 100% accurate, they still offer powerful insight into Mary’s sense of class consciousness and what it means to be from a particular place. Although Mary never identified herself in terms of a particular economic class nor discussed class-as-such during the our interviews, I would argue that Mary is aware of her subjectivity as a classed individual and that this awareness is revealed through her emphasis on claiming Worcester as central to her identity. Moreover, I would suggest that by defining
Worcester (and its contribution to Mary’s sense of self) in terms of her experience with its “inner-city” elements and its lack of material resources, Mary is aware that her experience in this place has been affected by its overarching economic conditions, conditions which Mary recognizes as both unique (in that they are not the “norm”) but also shared (in that she imagines she is not the only student at UMass coming from similar conditions). Although Mary does not claim the label of “working class” for herself, she understands that her experience does not necessarily align with the experience of many others. That said, she also understands that there is also a group or subset of people who do come from places similar to Worcester or with similar economic and material conditions. This sense of shared circumstance reflects, I believe, Mary’s understood (if unnamed) sense of classed subjectivity, a subjectivity which is tied to her understanding of Worcester as a place of material lack and limited opportunities.

This understanding of Worcester, shaped by its Firstspace features, was reinforced through the Secondspace-producing discourses about the city that were built into the lessons about writing that Mary experienced in high school. As noted before, Mary cites the lack of emphasis on writing during her elementary and middle school experience as an indicator of the poor quality of schools she attended. Even in high school, Mary suggested that writing did not play a major role in her educational experience until her junior and senior years: “High school was a little more about the writing at least in, you know, my two English classes. I was lucky enough, ‘cause like the inner city school I went to, they didn’t really care about writing except for Junior Honors English and Senior AP [Advanced Placement] English, and those were the two I was in.”
In general, writing did not play a major factor in Mary’s AP English classes, or reading for that matter. As mentioned earlier, Mary reported that writing rarely factored into her course work, and that instructors showed movies of novels instead of supplying students with the books. One exception was short stories, which were read and discussed in class. This analysis of short pieces, absent a writing component, served as preparation for the first section of the AP exam, which features multiple choice questions based on shorter reading passages. The use of movies allowed students an opportunity to provide responses to the open ended Part II questions, and it is in this context where writing preparation came into play. Discussing writing in her senior year, Mary recalls that “we were mostly focused on the AP test so we learned how to write 40-125-125-40 and those are the words respectively in each paragraph.” With a focus on the final product and writing to secure an acceptable score on the AP exam, Mary and her classmates were provided with a to-the-word formula for success. Such directives contributed to a discourse that produced a Secondspace of academia where the primary role for writing in an academic context was as a metric for externally measured success rather than a means by which one might develop as a thinker and/or writer. The influence of such a Secondspace is evidenced by the fact that this formula was the only thing that Mary recalled when discussing what she learned about writing from that course.

In the same way that Mary was provided with a formula for success on the AP English exam, she recalls benefitting from a very hands-on approach to the college admissions essay:

Writing for [the college admissions essay], I remember, um, it was the same, was the same, the same teacher who I had for junior year.
in high school English. She told us how it should go, how your like application letter, application essay should read, and then we also had, we were one of the only classes that had a guidance counselor come in once and give us a real rundown of how a college essay should look. This is what you start with, this is what go to, if you need any help you go to your guidance counselor, you show them your essay, so, um I did that and apparently it worked, so, yeah, um yeah, that's kind of cool.

Although Mary does not go into the same degree of detail regarding what the proper formula is for a college admissions essay, it’s clear that her instructors and guidance counselor put significant effort into making sure students understood what that formula was. For Mary, this particular approach—directive, guided, interventionist—proved valuable because, as she put it, “it worked.” It worked in the sense that she was admitted to the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The product-oriented process that she participated in produced a tangible reward: a college acceptance.

In these two classes, the only two that Mary identified as having any concern for writing, there was a clear message about why writing was important: “They kind of gave us this confidence saying if you can write you can get anywhere, because most kids in the school dropped out or just didn't do anything with their lives, so they kind of pushed for that and taught us how to write really well.” I would suggest that what Mary is describing here is a component of the “discourse within” her high school that produced Mary’s Secondspace understanding of school as a writing space. A recurring theme in my interviews with Mary was her sense that the city that she lived in and the schools that she
attended represented places that she did not want to “invest in” following the completion of her education. Writing was, as presented by her junior and senior year instructors, a way out of the material conditions and social stagnation of her home environment. This discourse of the importance of “getting out” establishes a Secondspace understanding of Worcester that complements Mary’s Firstspace understanding of Worcester. It also establishes a clear relationship between writing and place: writing is a means to a material end; effective writing is writing that results in the acquisition of that end. In Mary’s instance, the most desirable end was to “get out.”

The idea that one must “get out” of Worcester in order to secure a better livelihood suggests that change within this location was not possible. The choices are either to stagnate “here” or prosper “there.” The possibility of effecting change “here,” of local agency, is absent. The spatial conditions of Mary’s educational experience had a similar effect on her subjectivity as a writer and student. As noted throughout this section, Mary is certainly able to identify, in retrospect, the shortcomings of her educational experience and writing instruction within her specific spatial context. Unlike the other participants in this chapter, however, Mary never seems to reach a point prior to her arrival at UMass where it occurs to her that she might in some way transform or adapt the places of her education. In fact, it is unclear how aware Mary, in high school, was of the shortcomings of her educational context. I would argue that the First- and Secondspace factors of her educational context were in such resonance with one another that they produced a singular understanding of academic space, and because this educational context was the only space where Mary developed a sense of what writing can do or be in such a setting, she had no alternative sites of writing to compete with the
space of her school (and particularly, high school) experience. In the absence of an alternative site of writing, and the alternative understandings of writing and writers that such a space might produce, Mary is left with no point of comparison. Moreover, the lack of access to an alternative space prevented Mary from obtaining a full understanding of the “constructed” nature of these spaces. The spatial context of Mary’s pre-college education, particularly with respect to writing, appears so monolithic as to preclude this envisioning. With no point of comparison or experience of how things could be different, Mary is left to accept conditions of her academic space as they are and to go along with her instruction in the hopes that it might eventually allow her to get out.

Although Mary latched on to the idea of writing as a means to “get out,” it is worth nothing that the idea of “getting out” is situated in a complex context, as evidenced by Mary’s ambivalence about her home city and the potential for success within it. Reflecting on others’ reactions when they learn she comes from Worcester, Mary noted that “When people hear that I’m from Worcester, they’re, ‘Oh, that’s not a good place,’ instead of like, ‘oh, there are ten colleges there, oh that’s great.'” Mary’s response illustrates the tension between her sense of the promise of her city’s potential and her experience of seeing that promise so rarely delivered. In attempting to justify her city’s value, Mary points out that the city hosts many institutions of higher learning, including several highly competitive ones. In fact, Worcester has a college or university for every four square miles of area.

Given the density of colleges and universities located in this urban area, it perhaps seems odd that the message that Mary received in high school was that writing was a way “out.” At the very least, it seems to make it more difficult to understand “out of what.”
However, for Mary, there is a disconnect between the presence of these institutions and their accessibility or the likelihood that one might end up there: “We have like ten colleges, you know, like that’s pretty good, but I mean it’s like, it’s hard because my experience itself is also that, I only know two people who went to college that I was friends with in high school, and everyone else has been in jail at least once and is just in a really, really bad place, and going nowhere fast.” There is a prevailing sense that the opportunities represented by the material presence of multiple colleges, and the attending discourses of upward mobility afforded by such institutions, are intended for outsiders, for those who will spend four years cloistered in their dorms and then leave the city for bigger and better things upon receiving their degrees. For those who are local, those who are products of the city’s school system, the mere presence of colleges is no guarantee of success or of a ticket “out.” I would argue that Mary’s sense that her city’s colleges were meant for outsiders rather than residents reflects her growing realization that the geography of “The College” and the geography of the city operate in separate spheres of experience. I would also suggest that Mary’s feeling that these college spaces are inaccessible to those from Worcester, despite being situated in Worcester, is connected to the lack of agency that she experiences as a writer and student in the context of her high school. In her high school context, Mary is unable to act in response to the conditions of that context because she had not had the opportunity to occupy other spaces of writing that might suggest an alternative to those conditions. With respect to colleges within Worcester, Mary seems at a loss to imagine how the relationship between college spaces and other spaces within her city might be different or reconfigured. Without direct access to these college spaces herself and without the ability to see (or hear of) others like
herself gaining access to those spaces, Mary is left with an experience of space that reinforces the tendency to accept spaces as they are, which in turn undermines her agency by reducing her options to accepting the conditions on the ground or moving on to (hopefully) a better spatial context; the solution is never to change the conditions but to relocate to a space where better conditions are already in place. Ultimately, for Mary, this relocation must involve leaving Worcester, and leaving Worcester requires a degree.

To facilitate this, Mary’s high school instructors took a directive and product-oriented approach to writing in preparation for college. That is to say, writing was presented as a goal-oriented endeavor. Successful writing was defined as writing that achieves a goal. More specifically, successful writing is writing that achieves a goal that is either material in and of itself or that forwards the individual’s progress towards a material goal. This approach can be seen in Mary’s experience of preparing for the AP English exam and for her college applications.

For Mary, then, the value of writing is located primarily in the results, rather than in the process. And while it certainly is not uncommon for students to fixate on the product rather than the process, I believe Mary’s early experiences of attending high school in a particular geographical context contributed to a deeper understanding of the value of the product. Out of the space of Mary’s high school emerges a discourse about the relationship between writing and local environment that simultaneously produces discourses about that local environment as well as what constitutes effective writing. In presenting writing as a means of “getting out,” Mary’s high school produced a Secondspace understanding about her local environment that served to confirm her sense that Worcester, based on her experience of its Firstspace conditions, is a bad place, a
place that one should want to get out of. Staying is not an option, or at least is not an option in Mary’s memory of her experience. Importantly, Mary did not at that time (nor at the time of this study) consider “getting out” as only a personal struggle; rather, she understands that the struggle to get out is one that is shared by her peers, many of whom were/are unable to do so—she remembers that almost half her classmates failed the state mandated writing exams, that several ended up in jail or involved with drugs, and that very few made it to college. In an important way, Mary’s experience of space, both in terms of Worcester as a city and academic space, is strongly connected to the broader experience of the social space produced in these places by Mary’s co-occupation of these sites with others also struggling to get out. As will be discussed later, this sense of the shared struggle to get out will come to greatly influence the spaces Mary later chooses to occupy and construct.

Additionally, this high school experience produces a particular discourse about what constitutes good or effective writing. In this place, writing’s value is contingent on its ability to produce material results that lead one out of this geography, or at least contribute to the process of leaving. While many students, particularly first-year college students, exhibit a preoccupation with the writing product rather than the writing process, the experience of Mary suggests that one’s assessment of the “value” of the writing product can be determined by the material conditions of one’s local environment in ways that composition instructors may fail to fully understand. Moreover, I would argue that, at least in Mary’s case, valuing the writing product as a means to transcend a particular geography did not diminish attention to the writing process; rather, such a valuation had
significant implications for Mary’s approach to the writing process, both in terms of her own work and in terms of her approach to tutoring.

Finally, Mary’s lack of exposure to alternative sites of writing with alternative First- and Secondspace features, which might have resulted in alternative understandings of academic space and how writing operates in that space, led to a tendency to conceive of space as fixed or given, rather than malleable and constructed (in the broadest sense). The spatial conditions of her high school education foreclose the possibility of Mary developing a sense of herself as a writer with agency, let alone one who might use writing as a means to transform, adapt, or reconfigure academic spaces. As such, during her high school years, we do not see Mary engaging in any activity that might seek to alter her academic spaces or the role of writing in those spaces. Instead, Mary develops a response to problematic spatial conditions centered on relocation rather than transformation. In the next chapter, we will see how this response initially drives Mary’s use of space in college, but also how this relocation enables the development of a sense of agency that enables Mary to take on transformation as an adaptive spatial strategy.

**Brianna: Academic Writing as a Way to Take a Stand**

Like Mary and Joel, Brianna was also in her senior year at UMass Amherst, majoring in English and Psychology. However, her path to the writing center differed significantly from that of either. Unlike those tutors, Brianna did not begin her college career at UMass Amherst. Originally from Belchertown, a small town in Western Massachusetts near UMass, she began college at the University of Richmond in Virginia and transferred to UMass after completing her first year. Although she had some
experience working at a writing center at Richmond, she did not get involved with the UMass Writing Center until her senior year. Unlike other students who became involved in their senior years, Brianna was not required to complete the full two-course training sequence; instead, given her past experience, she was only required to participate in certain parts of the fall semester course. Additionally, she was required to attend developmental workshops in her second semester in the same way that paid tutors (those who had completed the two-course training sequence) were also required to do so. As a tutor, Brianna brought multiple writing experiences to bear on her work. In particular, more so than either Mary or Joel, Brianna approached writing with a strong belief that what counts as “good writing” was always context-dependent and that writing can be important in different ways in different environments. Although she did not draw as clear a connection between her hometown and her identity as Mary, she does articulate a clear sense that many of her beliefs and assumptions are a direct result of having grown up in a part of the country (Western Massachusetts) with a particular political bent, a connection that she did not realize until she started college in Virginia and one that would go on to affect profoundly her approach to and understanding of writing.

Because of the timing of this realization and its importance in shaping Brianna’s approach to writing at UMass, this section (unlike Mary’s or Joel’s) will touch upon Brianna’s first year of college as well as her pre-college experience. Brianna’s experiences in high school established a foundational, if abstract, understanding of writing as a rhetorical act and this understanding was made real and tangible when she began to inhabit the academic space of a Southern college. I will argue that by attending a year of college in Virginia, Brianna came to occupy a truly alternative site of writing.
and that this occupation established the conditions necessary for a stronger sense of agency to emerge. Whereas Mary’s lack of spatial options prior to her arrival at UMass prevented her from developing a sense of academic writing space as variable, and therefore adaptable, Briana’s experience of moving between significantly distinct academic spaces, from Massachusetts to Virginia, led to the emergence of a robust sense of writing agency prior to her arrival at UMass.

In talking about her development as a reader and writer, Brianna claimed that growing up she always considered herself more of a reader than a writer and that she would read “just about anything I got my hands on.” Although she acknowledged that writing began to play a more important role when she began school, it wasn’t until high school that she became truly aware of writing’s importance in an academic context. Talking about writing in high school, Brianna noted that writing was featured in many of her courses, including English, history, and the various science courses that she was taking. Brianna realized at that time that “good writing” really depended on the instructor and that “different teachers wanted different things”; however, she also recognized that in addition to teachers’ preferences there were other distinctions that could be made depending on the kind of class she was in, both in terms of what one was expected to write and what was valued about writing for that class. Discussing the differences and how she came to recognize them, she noted:

I think they were all kinda looking for, here's your thesis, here's your evidence, here's your topic sentences, like that was kinda the same English to history. For science I think we had different formats for papers so it was a little more like, here's your methods
section, here's your discussion sections, um but they [her teachers] didn't really talk about difference in writing style except I guess English was a little more, you were allowed to be a little more flourishy or use bigger language I guess, or more complicated language.

What we see here is that although Brianna generally did not receive specific writing-in-the-disciplines instruction (i.e., her teachers never talked about their writing expectations in terms of how those expectations were grounded in certain discipline-specific understandings of what constitutes good writing), she was able recognize certain patterns that applied to writing in certain courses. Both English and history required a thesis supported by evidence, but one had more flexibility with your style and language in the former. Writing in science classes meant understanding the more formal components of that writing, in particular the various sections of a lab report (e.g., methods, discussion). Although these various understandings are not especially complex and are certainly limited by the range of Brianna’s writing experiences at the time, they reflect a burgeoning sense that what counts as good writing varies with the audience (“different teachers wanted different things”) and that audiences’ expectations may be shaped by their various disciplines.

Although Brianna did not receive explicit instruction in writing in the disciplines, there were other contexts in which her instruction was more directive. In particular, Brianna noted that preparing for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams was a core focus of much of her writing instruction, as was preparing texts for college applications and other professional purposes. The presence of the
MCAS exam had a significant effect on Brianna’s high school education: “Our whole curriculum was like let’s pass the MCAS.” As part of her preparation, Brianna learned that “You need to write it in a specific format, there’s gotta be like the intro paragraph, thesis, topic sentence points, I kinda forget what else they were teach[ing] us back then, but it was just very follow the same basic structure and don't change it at all.” Although her instructors were very clear about the formula necessary for a successful MCAS essay, they were also very clear about the limitations about this formula: “Most of [the teachers] said things like, ‘I'm going to teach you this structure and then I want you to forget it and never write this way ever again.’ So we learned how to write for the test and then were told don't write this way for normal papers … They mostly just said it was a bad way of writing, like a very obvious way of writing, like answer, just answer points, write the way they want you to write and then don't like think creatively, don’t like have your own ideas.” The discourse produced in her classrooms about the role and value, or lack thereof, of these exams mirrored the discourse in her home. Her parents, both educators, had strong feelings of their own about MCAS testing, suggesting to Brianna that “it messes up how teachers teach.”

Although Mary and Brianna both talked about the importance of learning a formula for standardized tests, the larger spatial contexts in which they learned those formulas are quite different. Brianna’s instructors were clear in expressing that while there was a purpose to learning to write in a specific way to pass an exam, this kind of writing was counter to the “real” goals of education and writing in general. The assumption in this context seemed to be that although these exams were required, they weren’t necessarily “important.” By not important, I mean that Brianna did not express
any concerns about whether she or her classmates would be able to pass these exams or get into college. This might suggest that moving on from high school to college was an expectation of the community; as such, Brianna’s teachers recognized the importance of standardized exams insofar as those exams are required and may play a role in a student’s collegiate options, but they also downplayed the broader importance of these exams, the writing they encouraged, and their relationship to the “real” learning they were doing in school and would continue to do in college; however, Mary never gave a sense that her instructors believed that this formula was inherently problematic. Nor did she suggest that her instructors placed this kind of writing into any sort of larger academic context. When considered in the context of where these schools were situated, Brianna’s in a middle-class town situated near the state’s flagship public university and Mary’s in what she describes as an “inner city” area of a larger metropolitan area, and given the attitudes of the instructors as reported by the participants, we can make some inferences between the intersection of First- and Secondspace conditions and their effects on writing education. Attending college is never a given at Mary’s high school, at least according to her description of her experience there. Instead, there is the overwhelming sense that “getting out” is the goal to which students should aspire, with the recognition that doing so is challenging and that not everyone will succeed. Brianna’s and Mary’s understandings of the goals of schooling differ dramatically, and this difference is reflected in the differing emphasis on writing for standardized exams. Whereas these tests were positioned (reluctantly) as a requirement for Brianna by her parents and teachers, for Mary these tests were treated as a high-stakes necessity. The preparation may have been the same (although Mary’s description of her instruction suggests it may
have been more prescriptive), but the difference in the framing of that preparation due to (in part) each school’s Firstspace context results in the production of very different Secondspace construction of academic space and writing’s role within that space.

For Brianna, this Secondspace construction is bolstered by the presence of a clear discourse about the role of education within her home space as well. As educators themselves, Brianna’s parents’ discourse about the role and purpose of education (and the ways in which standardized exams and the pedagogical approaches they demand undermine this role and purpose) may carry added weight. Brianna, unlike Mary, had access to multiple sites in which understandings of academic space might be developed; however, I would suggest that the discourses that represent the Secondspace of Brianna’s educational context\(^2\) are so closely aligned in message as to produce an understanding of writing and academic space as singular as that produced by Mary’s spatial context. In our interviews there was no sense that Brianna questioned the validity of this understanding of space; rather, her assessments of her high school instructors suggest that she had internalized this conception of academic space, noting that “the best teachers I had were the ones who wanted your opinion instead of just give, regurgitate what is said in class” rather than those who emphasized teaching for the test.

Although writing clearly played a major factor in Brianna’s high school experience, it wasn’t until she arrived at college that she truly thought of herself as a writer or felt convinced of writing’s personal importance. Following her senior year, Brianna enrolled at the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia. It was here that

\(^2\) And possibly Firstspace conditions as well, given the presence of teachers in both spaces. Although the subject position of “teacher” was likely not the dominant one occupied by Brianna’s parents as part of her home life, its seems clear that their statements regarding the detrimental effects of standardized testing are made, in part, from this subject position.
the importance of audience and the factors that shape an audience truly came into focus. In our conversation, Brianna identified this time of her life as the moment she became a writer because “I had things I wanted to write about.” Given that one of her key lessons from high school was that good writing is writing that takes a stand, I asked her to elaborate on what it was that she wanted to write about, and why she wanted to write about these things now. The transition from western Massachusetts to Virginia was the catalyst.

[M]y first year in college, I went to Richmond, Virginia, so it was like a really big difference from Western Mass, and there was just a lot of things that were happening down there that I thought were interesting and like had an opinion on and wanted talk about. There were a lot of, well, like, the liberal vs. conservative perspective was very different down there, like how different people think about different issues, there were certain things that were going on with like racial groups on campus that I’d never seen before, and it was just things that were happening in classes that I had never seen before, and it just, a lot of stuff was changing really quickly, and my perspective on it was changing really quickly.

When asked why her perspectives on these issues were changing, she said that because “I had been raised in super liberal Massachusetts where everyone hates conservatives, and like has the same opinions about certain things, so I sort of just had the same opinions as everyone else around here and I think going down there sort of makes you step back and be like, ok, the rest of the world isn't just like New England, how do I deal with this, how do I adjust the way I think to way these people are thinking.”
In high school, Brianna figured out that audience matters and that audience expectations can be shaped by factors such as the academic field of the audience. Here, however, Brianna comes to a realization about another major factor that can shape an audience’s expectations, assumptions, and attitudes--their geographical context and the dominant discourses that circulate within that context. Even more so, it is here that Brianna recognizes that her own expectations, assumptions, and attitudes are in part a factor of where she comes from. In a sense, we might say that Brianna’s sense of writing space grows in recognition that her experience of academic space is situated in and interacts with a larger spatial context. In Richmond, Brianna finally comes into contact with the kind of alternative space necessary to destabilize both her current understanding of academic space and writing as well as her more general understanding of academic space as fixed or given. As such, the presence of an alternative space (separated from the spaces of Brianna’s academic past in terms of its geographic location and the unfamiliar discourses that circulate within it) leads to a transformation of subjectivity with respect to Brianna’s sense of agency as a writer. I would suggest that the presence of a truly alternative space denaturalizes Brianna’s understanding of academic space. Brianna’s understanding of academic space is denaturalized in the sense that she can no longer take for granted or ignore the constructed nature of academic spaces, including how the specific geographic context of those spaces contributes to their construction.

The experience of encountering alternative constructions of academic space evokes a sense that academic space is not fixed, and, therefore, that choices can be made. In Brianna’s case, the choices available are of such high stakes as to require her to make a choice/take an action. In other words, Brianna cannot not act once she becomes aware
that the space of classroom in Richmond is fundamentally different than the space of her high school classes (and New England more generally) with respect to important issues, such as race relations, that she had previously taken for granted. In her interactions in her first year writing course at Richmond, she becomes more aware of how her own political values have been shaped by growing up in a geographic area with a large “liberal” demographic, an experience not shared by many of her classmates. Her response to this realization is telling. In light of these conditions, her goal becomes to find a way to both respond to issues that she sees playing out before her (issues she had not encountered in New England) and to formulate a response that will account for the perspectives of these classmates. Through the experience of occupying a significantly different type of academic space, I would argue that Brianna comes to understand that she cannot take her own perspective for granted and that writing, now more than ever, can offer an opportunity to give her opinion and to take a stand on issues that she cares about.

For Brianna, the academic spaces she experiences in high school and in Richmond contrast because, although the Richmond classroom has many of the same Firstspace features of other academic spaces that she has occupied before (e.g., desks, a teacher leading the class, classmates as co-occupants), the social space of these classroom is fundamentally different, due in part to the larger Firstspace context in which each classroom is located. The Richmond classroom produces a different social space because those classmates who co-occupy it introduce new discourses into the classroom space, discourses that are (as Brianna interprets it) a function of these classmates’ own experiences of having spent much, and possibly all, of their lives growing up in the American South. This reality affirms the idea that where education happens affects how
education happens. Brianna’s experience, read through the lens of Soja’s spatial trialectic, reinforces both the importance of taking Firstspace elements seriously (i.e., we can’t ignore the “where” component of education when assessing educational contexts) and the degree to which Firstspace considerations are important because they are so inextricably bound to other ways of knowing a space. That is to say, if one is to arrive at a fuller, more robust understanding of a space, one cannot ignore the material, but neither can one divorce the material space (in this instance, a geographic region) from discourses, attitudes, and values that have emerged from and permeate that space.

Brianna’s emerging awareness of a new kind of social space in the classroom leads her to a new understanding of her role within that space. In high school the social space of the classroom was primarily defined in terms of the teacher-student relationship where the teacher was the primary audience for her writing. At Richmond, Brianna comes to a more complex understanding of academic social space, one where her classmates play a far more active role in shaping the nature of that space and one where she must actively engage these students as an audience if she hopes also participate in the construction of this particular social space. For Brianna, these classmates have now become important players in the academic space she occupies, because while the teacher will still be the final judge of Brianna’s work, the issues that she is concerned about, such as race, are issues that affect and are affected by more than just herself and the instructor, and as such require her to broaden her understanding of the actors within academic space. This need to account for the actors within a space support my claim that considerations of Firstspace need to be especially attentive to the bodies occupying those spaces, as bodies bring with them a range of discourses, material realities, and spatial understandings that
can disrupt traditional understandings of a space, even if the other material and discursive elements of that space are closely aligned. This is even more true when considering the space of a classroom, in which bodies (the students and instructor) represented highly variable Firstspace elements are not only shaped by their occupation of a space, but also shape the space by their occupation of it.

As Brianna’s understanding of academic space shifts, so too does her sense of agency as a writer. On one level, she now understands that the nature of the space that she occupies can be shaped by the discourses that circulate within that space. Additionally, she understands that her ability to circulate certain discourses within that space affords her the opportunity to participate in the construction of that space. In order to avoid having the spaces she occupies “written” for her, Brianna comes to appreciate writing as a means to shape or reshape the nature of these spaces. On another level, the experience of the unique social space of the Richmond classroom, I would argue, leads Brianna to a broadening of her understanding of the scope of academic space. That is to say, the discourses that circulated within her composition classroom dealt with issues that extended out of the classroom and into the space of the university and the community in which that university was situated. By extension, Brianna’s sense of writerly agency extends in that she comes to see writing as a means to reshape not only the space of her classroom, but also the larger spatial contexts to which it belongs.

Moreover, Brianna also comes to realize that in order use writing to effect change within the spaces she occupies, she must be able to recognize and thoughtfully consider the experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints of her audience, especially when those experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints run counter to her own. In her final high school
semester before coming to college, Brianna dabbled in journalism, interning for a local independent newspaper. During that internship, she spent most of time covering local high school sports. After getting back into journalism upon her return to New England to attend UMass, her focus shifted to a newfound sense of the importance of using her writing to engage in issues of significance. Instead of reporting, Brianna signed on as part of the op-ed writing team and found that her approach to writing had changed as a result of her experiences in Virginia: “I think [the experience] was good because it like, since then, I've been much more of a neutral writer, that’s the approach I take with my columns. There's two sides to everything, let's hear both sides instead of like the full-on ‘this is the right way to think and I'm going to tell you what it is.’” Brianna’s approach to writing, then, focuses on a balance between taking ownership of her own ideas (harkening back to her preference in high school for assignments that asked for an opinion, as well as her need to take a stand in Richmond) and being open to the possibility that others may hold views that run counter to her own. In the chapters that follow, we will see how the experience of writing in this alternative site of her Richmond classroom reconfigured Brianna’s understanding of writing and academic space, and how this understanding has shaped Brianna’s choices as a both a writer and writing tutor at UMass.

Joel: Academic Writing as a Way to Make Connections
Like Mary, Joel was in his senior year at UMass at the time of the study, though he planned on taking an additional semester before graduating in order to complete the requirements for his various majors and minors, as well as to give himself some time to decide whether or not he wanted to pursue graduate school after graduating. Joel was majoring in both English and philosophy, and had also completed significant course work in psychology and history. Joel entered UMass the same year as Mary; however, he was only in his second year of working at the writing center, having enrolled in the training classes as a junior. Unlike Mary, I was not involved in teaching either of Joel’s training courses, although I was somewhat familiar with his work prior to the study in my capacity of assistant director. Several of Joel’s shifts had overlapped with my own in the past, and we had several exchanges over his first three semesters at the writing center about shared interests as well as about the graduate school application process. (I had given a guest lecture in one of Joel’s training courses on how not to write a personal statement, based on my own disastrous experience when I was an undergraduate.) As a tutor, Joel describes himself as casual, with an emphasis on “bouncing” ideas around or “playing” with ideas. Though he is confident in his tutoring abilities, he has a clear sense of his strengths (brainstorming and idea development) and weaknesses (working with ELL students). During the course of our interviews, Joel never drew a strong link between his hometown and his sense of self, though his connection to his hometown would play a role in his writing experience in college. More important for Joel’s spatial experience was the fact that, unlike either Mary or Brianna, Joel had access to and experienced writing in multiple spaces, each with different sets of First- and Secondspace features, which produced unique understandings of the potential role of writing. Joel’s
experience of transitioning between two very different educational contexts as he made the transition from parochial elementary and middle school to a public high school, combined with his experience of producing personally meaningful writing with friends in an extracurricular context, afforded him a greater awareness of the constructed nature of writing and educational spaces. As we will see, this awareness produces a degree of writerly agency during Joel’s high school years that is not present in either Mary or Brianna’s narratives.

Discussing his earliest experiences as a reader and writer Joel emphasized that although he came from a family with a strong engineering tradition (a tradition he anticipated continuing up until the end of high school), his parents were both educators and as such put an emphasis on reading and writing, stating that “ever since I was a kid it was ‘read books and write.’” Despite his parents’ encouragement, Joel was not an avid reader as a child. In terms of his early writing experience, Joel recalled that it was focused on grammar and formal structure:

I went to a parochial school up until 8th grade, and like had a strong background in grammar, like it was really pushed into me, and a really hardcore five-paragraph essay, and I had like really good teachers, and you could tell they really loved it, ‘cause it’s just like they're getting paid not so well, and like it was small classrooms, I was with them for a while.

Joel did not appreciate the value of these lessons at first (“at the time I didn’t think anything of it”); however, he acknowledges that this instruction played a key role in his academic success later on, providing him with a solid grounding in fundamentals and organization that would later enable to him package unorthodox topics in more
recognizable and acceptable packages. It was at his parochial school where he learned “how to write well.” Although Joel acknowledges that the strict nature of his instruction “could have been bad for other individuals,” the emphasis of his teachers on the “five paragraph [essay] we were drilled into” provided a structure and a process that enabled Joel to channel his creative impulses into actual writing, rather than getting lost by “going too far out of my comfort zone.”

In addition to an emphasis on the importance of “correctness” and organization, an emphasis that Joel refigures as the importance of being clear, he also notes the value of his small class sizes and the dedication of his instructors as defining features of this K-8 schooling experience. I would suggest even though we cannot be certain of his instructors’ degrees of commitment (what Joel reads as a sign of commitment may in fact be a sign of a weak job market), because Joel’s early classes were so small, it may have been easier for his instructors to give each student more attention and in doing so present an image of concern and commitment, regardless of whether or not this appearance matched the reality. This isn’t to say that Joel does not identify committed instructors in larger classes when he arrives at high school and college (both public institutions in contrast to his private K-8 schooling); he does. But even at this early stage there is a sense that Joel aligns a certain set of First- and Secondspace- characteristics with an understanding of what constitutes an ideal educational environment. These characteristics are closely linked to the “private” vs. “public” nature of Joel’s education experiences. From a Firstspace perspective, Joel’s private K-8 school afforded important material benefits, particularly in terms of the student/teacher ratio. With respect to Secondspace, Joel understands “private” and “public” as distinct types of academic
space, privileging the former not just for the material benefits it might afford but also because of his sense of what the former represents. In a separate interview, this privileging is expressed in Joel’s assertion that he never expected to be at a school “like [UMass]” (large, public, local) and that he was supposed to go to a school “like Boston College or something like that” (smaller, private, “away”). In making this comparison, Joel is making clear his sense that schools like Boston College represent a superior type of academic space.

This intersection of First- and Secondspace characteristics seems to have enabled Joel’s K-8 instructors to more effectively transmit a particular discourse about what “counts” as good writing. Not only does Joel develop an understanding of what counts as good writing; he also develops an understanding that in this educational space good writing counts. That is to say, Joel may not have enjoyed the skill-and-drill nature of those classes, but his belief in the quality of his teachers convinced Joel that there was value to what they were teaching (even if the way they approached teaching it wasn’t all that engaging).

This experience stands in contrast to Joel’s experience with writing instruction in high school. Whereas Joel came out of his K-8 education with a clear sense that educational spaces were ones where his teachers valued writing and where writing was valued as an important skill, Joel’s early high school experience left him with the impression that the space of public education was one where instructors overwhelmingly were not concerned with writing. He noted that his sophomore and junior year writing instruction was weak. More specifically, Joel felt that his teachers’ approaches to
assessment left him without a clear sense of what they valued in writing or whether his writing mattered at all. He describes his sophomore year as such:

Sophomore year … was weird. I don't remember learning much that year. It was really weird because, like I'd send one paper, and I'd go, “oh, I don't think that was good,” and I got a good grade on it, and then the next time it would be like, “oh, I thought that was a really good paper,” and I'd not do so well on it, and I was like, “oh, I don't know how to really negotiate these grades, and I don't know what I’m doing right, what I’m doing wrong.”

In terms of Secondspace epistemologies with respect to the classroom, few discursive forms serve to reinforce or define for students the values of academic space as well a teacher’s grades or comments. In Joel’s experience, the grades that he received and the lack of feedback as to why he received those grades, served to define the classroom as a space where writing is inconsistently valued. The value of academic writing is further undermined by Joel’s experiences the following year when Joel attests that he “got the same grade on every single paper ‘cause I frankly don’t think that teacher knew my name.” This feeling was justified by the teacher’s frequent confusion about who Joel was, often mistaking him for other students in the class (and mistaking other classmates for Joel).

Taken collectively, Joel was left with the impression that writing was not something that was important to these instructors; to Joel, their indifference towards grades that corresponded with his sense of the quality of his writing (both good and bad) suggested that in this school context, writing didn’t matter. It may also be worth nothing,
especially with respect to his experience in junior year, that Joel’s negative response to his teacher (“She was a terrible teacher”) may reflect a broader dissatisfaction with the material conditions of his high school. Whereas his K-8 experience was marked by small class sizes and individualized attention, his experience in high school was defined by large classes where he was rendered anonymous, one among many other students to the point that his instructor could not remember his name. From Joel’s perspective, in this academic space, neither his writing nor he, as a writer, particularly matter. 

Simultaneously, I would argue that it is here where Joel develops a degree of spatial awareness that neither Mary nor Brianna access until later in college. In the experiential gap between his two main academic spaces and the role of writing that emerges from these spaces, Joel comes to understand that the natures of these academic spaces are not neutral; rather, their respective natures are products of distinct sets of First- and Secondspace features. As such, Joel is able to recognize that his high school classroom spaces do not need to be the way they are and that alternative formations of academic space and the role of writing in that space might be possible.

The gap between the academic space of Joel’s K-8 education and his high school education was not the only gap Joel experienced, however. In addition to finding a meaningful experience of writing within the space of his K-8 parochial school, Joel also had access to and made use of extracurricular writing spaces where writing took on value that was absent in his high school context. For Joel, reading traditional books had never been a primary literacy interest. From his perspective “it began with movies,” although his attitude shifted as he made his way through high school. In an attempt to describe his literacy interests, he identifies himself as “a movie-goer, that’s where my literary roots
would come [from].” A significant part of Joel’s literacy development came from the process of bringing the stories he experienced at the movie theater into other spaces. We talked in our interviews about whether he could remember any early writing experiences, given that he had mentioned his parents always encouraged reading and writing: “When I was a little kid like my parents always said I had an imagination and I would love to like, as cheesy as this is, we put like chairs and like video game controllers and stuff and pretend like we're in Star Wars and stuff like that, and kind of make our own stories about that. Did I do any writing in that? No not necessarily.” Although Joel distances these activities from writing, the idea of taking an existing pop-culture text and repurposing it in a new space is a thread that weaves throughout Joel’s account of his literacy development and will, in fact, carry over later into his writing center work. In particular, Joel noted that during high school, although he didn’t do much formal writing, he did keep a journal of potential movie and story ideas and that he and his friends “made movies a lot.”

Using various friends’ basements, Joel collaborated on writing and film projects. His collaborators were “a very close knit group of friends” who “all took advanced placement English and history and all that together.” In this space, Joel engaged in a variety of writing and film projects. Sometimes these were truly collaborative works while other times he and his friends engaged in sharing individual writing projects. Working with his friends over the course of several years, Joel was impressed by how he and his friends had matured as writers and found a way to collaborate despite each having unique approaches to the writing process and often disagreeing over the direction of their collaborative projects. What I find most interesting about this particular “space” of
writing is that it exists across multiple physical locations. In this case, the Firstspace feature that most clearly defines the space is the consistent set of friends who occupy it and who serve as the writers and audience. This space is further defined by a clear focus on the writing activity that transpired among these friends, which primarily involved projects that drew from various pop-culture film genres such as fantasy, science fiction, and grindhouse. It is a space where Joel and his friends are able to engage in literacy activities that interest them.

Although the focus of the writing in this space differs significantly from that of Joel’s K-8 education, it does share certain key features. Like his parochial school classroom, there is a sense of intimacy (in terms of size) present in Joel’s basement writing spaces that is absent from his high school experiences. And although he learns different lessons about writing in his K-8 classrooms and his basement writing space, there is no question in either space that writing is an activity with value. There are, however, factors that set this basement writing context apart from Joel’s other writing spaces. In particular, Joel’s basement writing space is in many ways a gendered space. His writing/film making group is all male, and the genres they emulate (fantasy, sci-fi, grindhouse) could well be considered “masculine” genres. In recounting his parochial school experience, Joel made no mention of how gender factored into his experience, but clearly identified his high school classroom experiences being dominated by female students, with his writing group comprising the only male students in most of his classes. Again, the data here support the need to extend Soja’s conception of Firstspace to pay

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Note, these genres are understood to be “masculine” in that science fiction, fantasy, comics, and other “geek” discourses tend to circulate primarily among audiences of men and not in the sense that such interests mark one as being particularly “masculine” or “manly” (particularly in the case of fantasy and sci-fi, where one might argue that the opposite is often the case).
particular attention to the bodies that enter/occupy that space, as the effects of First- and Secondspace upon a body may differ depending on issues of gender and/or class. This basement space then both serves as a counterpoint to the sense of anonymity produced by his high school space by restoring a sense of individualized attention. This space also afforded Joel the opportunity to write about topics and in certain styles that he felt would not be appreciated in his high school space, partly because his school audience (other than those in his writing group) would be all female and would not, Joel suspected, “find it funny” or otherwise be interested. The “basement,” then, offers Joel a third site of writing that stands in contrast to both of his educational writing sites. Both the basement and his parochial school spaces were sites where writing was valuable and where Joel was valued as a writer, but the basement was also a site where Joel could pursue the kinds of writing and topics of writing that he valued. In these ways, the basement stood in stark contrast to the space of writing available to Joel in high school. This contrast, in conjunction with Joel’s increasing awareness of the “constructed” nature of spaces and his ability to influence that construction, would position the basement as a model of sorts in Joel’s later efforts to reconfigure his high school writing spaces.

Left with a feeling that his teachers did not especially care what he chose to write about or to provide him feedback on that writing, Joel saw this an opportunity to bring new ideas into his writing: “Maybe it was the lack of direction that I was just like, I’m gonna write the way I wanna write, I don't care what she's doing ‘cause she's not helping me at all.” Joel’s decision to “write the way I wanna write” is the first in a series of actions taken in response to what he saw as unacceptable conditions within his high school classroom space. These actions, I would argue, were an attempt to reconfigure the
space of his classroom, in order to make it more closely align with other sites of writing which he occupied and which better met his existing and emerging needs as a writer. The process unfolded over several years. At first, in the perceived absence of meaningful feedback from his instructor in sophomore year, Joel’s response was to write the way he wanted to without concern for what the reaction from his teacher would be (as he assumed the reaction would be no more or less significant than if he had followed the instructor’s expectations). Joel’s decision to write for himself, so to speak, begins a series of events that involve pushing the proverbial envelope to escalating degrees.

Although Joel’s early actions of taking on “creative” approaches to his writing assignments may have challenged the status quo, they don’t really qualify as an example of producing a new classroom space, as they were limited to the page and to an audience of only the teacher. As such, they could not effectively reshape the social space of the classroom (in which Joel was ignored) or the discourse about writing that circulated within it. Unlike Brianna, Joel’s new approach is not really intended to affect an audience outside of himself. However, during Joel’s senior year, his approach to writing begins to reshape the classroom space of his AP English course, particularly through group work involving collaborative writing to produce skits and short films. Through his use of collaboratively composed skits and short films, Joel engaged in the process of transforming his classroom space.

In his senior year AP English class, Joel found himself in a classroom space more amenable to his creativity. Unlike other high school English teachers who had left Joel feeling ignored or anonymous, the teacher in this class was more open to Joel’s incorporation of his extracurricular interests into his academic work: “I always had crazy
ideas, like I'm like on one paper I compared, was it Hamlet to like Kill Bill and other
Quentin Tarantino movies and [my teacher] actually loved that and she encouraged it,
and I'm just like, it just kind of became a joke, like I would try to just get weirder things
to bring up in my papers and she like loved the creativity aspect.” This enthusiasm was
surprising in light of the indifference that Joel perceived from his previous instructors.

But this instructor did not just enjoy Joel’s creativity; she validated his decisions
as a writer. Returning to the importance of Star Wars, Joel recalled that

I love Star Wars, so I’d talk about Star Wars in the papers and [my teacher
would] totally encourage that, and she's like yeah, that's literature, in a
way, so you could analyze it that way, and it was really fun doing that, and
kinda seeing English isn't so much, well its work, but you can have fun
with it, and what I already do is like love literature, and like in a different
way, and from there that’s when I decided I don't want to be an engineer,
like I actually really liked the creativity of the writing process, and um
that's when I decided to [major in English].

Being shown that one could apply the same kinds of literary analysis to pop-
culture like Star Wars that he might previously been expected to apply to Hamlet is a
crucial moment in Joel’s formation of his writerly identity. Whereas Joel’s
experimentation in his sophomore and junior year English classes resulted from a sense
that nothing matters so he may as well write about something he likes, the instructor for
his senior-year AP English course recontextualizes why such experimentation is valuable.
Joel should experiment not because nothing matters or is important or valuable; he should
experiment because it is all important and valuable.
One central way that Joel was able to experiment with the intersection of popular and scholarly discourses was through opportunities to write and present skits and shorts films for class assignments. Composing scenes was a familiar literacy practice for Joel, and one that he participated in frequently outside of the classroom with his friends in their basement space and who also happened to be in this particular class. Working in conjunction with his friends, Joel would collaboratively compose skits and films for class that drew heavily from the pop-culture genres that were central to their extracurricular literacy practices. As an example, Joel described a project where he and his friends produced a short film based on, in theory, The Canterbury Tales:

We'd sometimes make movies for class and like a lot of times in that English course we'd like, there was a movie project, like one time we had to do Canterbury Tales and we made a video of “The Knight’s Tale,” and I don't remember ever reading it, but I mean, like I don't remember that having, reading Canterbury Tales again, it did NOT follow The Canterbury Tales, but um, my [new] teacher loved it, and she thought it was hilarious. We actually got like one of the highest grades in the class, which again, I don't know if that was, I don't know if there was any integrity in that piece, but um it was funny, and um, we did other projects like that.

These projects, much like Joel’s other work in the course, frequently included references to the “geek” culture that he and his friends were immersed in when engaged in their extracurricular composing practices. The difference here, however, is the public nature
of these efforts to bridge the popular and the academic and to bring his extracurricular literacy practices into the space of the classroom.

If the “how” of Joel’s spatial reconfiguration is the incorporation of extracurricular literacy practices in an academic space, then what is the “why”? I would suggest that Joel was motivated by a set of writing/educational needs that were not being/had not been met by his classroom experiences in high school (at least until his senior year) but were being or had been met in other spaces. We can see Joel’s use of skits and film as an extension of his need to find ways to bring together his academic and extracurricular literacy interests. Although these interests already had a set space (the basement), I believe Joel was motivated by a desire to find a way to enjoy writing across his multiple spatial contexts, rather than relegate that enjoyment to a single space. In sophomore and junior year, Joel approached meeting this need at an individual level, bringing non-traditional texts into conversation with the texts from his course in his writing. In his senior year, however, Joel extends this approach beyond just writing for himself. Instead, he takes advantage of AP English assignments that enable Joel to use the classroom as a performance space where he (and his friends) can literally “act out” the process of synthesizing diverse literacy practices and, in the process, transform the classroom from an anonymizing space into one that affirms his identity as a writer.

Additionally, Joel’s actions suggest the need to produce a classroom space that would work against his growing sense of anonymity within his classrooms brought on by his sense of instructor disinterest and larger class sizes. Joel’s films and skits are produced with the understanding that they are going to set him (and his friends) apart from the rest of the class. By bringing his interests, which he suggests are not shared or
would not expect to be shared by his female classmates, into what could be seen as a female-dominated space, Joel reshapes the classroom to both distinguish himself within that space and to make room within for the kinds of “masculine” literacy interests that are important to him.

Related to his frustration with anonymity in the classroom space, one could see Joel’s transformation of his classroom space as an attempt to fulfill the need to have an audience. Joel and his friends often worked together to compose/produce story and film ideas; however, Joel also noted that these projects did not always result in finished products and rarely, if ever, circulated outside of his circle of friends. Although he suggested that he did not expect his female audience to “get” what he and his friends were trying to do, implying that he wasn’t especially concerned with his audiences’ reaction, I would argue that having an audience was important to Joel, even if he didn’t expect them to appreciate his work, because it provided him a degree of recognition he otherwise would not have. In these performances and in his own individual work, Joel continued to blur the line of what did and did not count as acceptable academic discourse. In fact, his decision to submit projects that he expected would draw a negative reaction or that might be described as “weird” could be read as attempt to ensure that this classroom space would be one where Joel and his friends could not be ignored.

Unlike Brianna or Mary, here we can see Joel exercising his agency as a writer. He makes active decisions not only about the forms his writing would take but also about the nature of the space where that writing would appear. Joel’s experience of working across multiple writing spaces in meaningful ways destabilizes the fixed nature of any given writing space, opening up the realization of options necessary for the emergence of
agency to occur. When presented with a type of writing space—the high school English classroom—where Joel has frequently felt his needs going unmet, he enacts his agency to reshape the space to bring it into closer alignment with his goals as a writer.

Despite his belief that his broader audience would not appreciate his work, his teacher at least had a positive response to Joel’s efforts to bring these his “basement” literacy practices into the classroom. Regarding his *Canterbury Tales* video, “my teacher loved it, and she thought it was hilarious, we actually got like one of the highest grades in the class.” This response, much like her reaction to Joel’s individual writing projects, reaffirmed Joel’s ongoing exploration of merging extracurricular, “geeky,” pop-culture interests with formal academic considerations of subjects and texts that might be considered to belong more properly to academic space.

Previously, the lack of an official discourse about writing created a vacuum in Joel’s understanding of what writing could and should do within academic spaces. His senior year teacher’s response to his work, however, establishes an official discourse about the value of writing that validates Joel’s attempts to reconfigure the space of the classroom, suggesting that the classroom space Joel is trying to construct is actually representative of a kind of academic space that does in fact exist but one that Joel has yet to actually experience. In this yet-to-be experienced academic space, Joel’s attempts to bring various discourses together through writing are not only valuable; they are in a sense the very purpose of writing within the academy, in that writing is a means to explore new and diverging ideas, to bring these ideas together on the page, and to circulate those “pages” among an interested audience.
To that end, not only did this teacher sanction Joel’s approach to writing through her grading, she also took the time to help Joel hone his writing technique so that he would be able to explore these ideas more effectively. He talked about how she explained approaches to writing that other teachers had never discussed, in particular ways to play with the traditional five paragraph essay that he had learned in parochial school and had relied on throughout high school. At the same time, “she would tell me when I was going a little too far, when I was like being, you know, not being so clear.” Through their interactions, Joel’s teacher establishes a more clearly defined understanding of writing’s place in this new kind of academic space, what it can do, and how to “do” it effectively. In doing so, she establishes that Joel’s experimentation is welcome in the academy, but she also harkens back to Joel’s previous understanding (developed in his parochial school) that there is “this process” to writing that involves the kinds of revisions towards clarity that she is pushing Joel to make.

Ultimately, in the social space produced by Joel’s incorporation of “basement” literacy practices and his instructor’s response to these practices, Joel comes to occupy yet another distinct space of writing that will serve as a model of what academic spaces should be. In this new form of academic space the scope of ideas that Joel understood to be appropriate for consideration within the academy was increased to include the various other literacy interests in which Joel was invested. Reflecting on his literacy development, Joel noted, “It began with movies, and um, and I loved cartoons when I was a little kid, and Batman, and comic books, so I learned…that still has a place.” That these literacy practices and interests “still ha[ve] a place” is especially important for Joel, as the “basement” spaces where he would ordinarily go to engage in these practices and
interests would eventually disappear. As his friends went away to colleges in locations where regular in-person collaboration was longer possible, Joel would need to locate new spaces in which to continue these pursuits. This new version of classroom space would come to serve this purpose.

Before leaving Joel’s high school experience behind, it is worth noting one form of academic writing that did not come up during our conversations: writing for standardized tests. With Joel, we learn more about the role of testing in the formation of his understanding of writing and academic space by its absence than by its presence. Unlike either Mary or Brianna, Joel never references receiving the kind of directive instruction in preparation for major exams (e.g., MCAS, SAT, AP) that is present in the other narratives, even though he participated in these exams. There are several possible explanations for the absence of testing in Joel’s account of his literacy development. It is unlikely that Joel received no feedback or instruction with regard to preparing for the written components of these exams, given their high-profile nature; however, it is possible that his instructors did not place the same degree of emphasis on these exams as Brianna’s or Mary’s instructors did. Joel’s experience may have been an extension of Brianna’s insofar as college attendance was taken as a given and, as such, the value or importance of these exams was downplayed but to a greater extent, pointing to the possibility of an implicit class-based understanding within Secondspace discourse. In our conversations, it was clear that Joel had internalized the sense that he was supposed to attend college (and perhaps a “better” college than UMass Amherst). Whereas Mary often referenced her struggles (as well as the struggles other writers faced) with writing and with anxiety about the possibility of “getting out” and taking the next step to college,
Joel seemed never to doubt his own abilities as a student or a writer and experienced genuine confusion when the grades he received in his sophomore and junior year classes failed to match his sense of self as a consistent “A” student. This degree of confidence, coupled with the assumption of college attendance on the part of Joel and the community in which his schooling was situated may have transformed these exams from gate-keepers to minor stops on the inevitable path to college.

Another explanation, not mutually exclusive with the first, is that the kinds of writing and writing instruction associated with these exams fall so far outside of Joel’s understanding of what really “counts” as writing that it did not occur to him to discuss these issues in our interview. That is to say, Joel leaves his senior year of high school with a very clear idea of what counts as writing in an academic context, that writing is an opportunity to bring together creatively ideas from various places and disciplines to explore their meaning. And as we will see in the next chapter, this idea of what “counts” is reinforced throughout Joel’s college experiences. There, it may be that there is no place, so to speak, for the kinds of writing associated with these exams in Joel’s understanding of academic space and what it means to write in that space. Although Brianna and Joel come from similar contexts in terms of class and college expectations (especially when compared to Mary) and come out of their high schools with a sense that writing’s value is more than its ability to serve as a means to an end, Brianna’s experience left her with a broader understanding of writing in the academic landscape, an understanding broad enough to include, if begrudgingly, the kinds of writing and writing instruction involved with standardized tests. Situated in an academic space where writing was present across more disciplines, Brianna’s sense of academic writing is perhaps more
diverse than Joel’s. Although Joel values the interdisciplinary opportunities that writing affords, his sense of academic writing remains more singular, and he is perhaps less willing to acknowledge those forms of writing that do not as easily fit within his definition.

That said, Joel’s realization of the “creative work” that writing can perform in the “new” classroom space that he comes to associate with the academy, and its ability to bridge “popular” and academic discourses and literacies, is what leads Joel to abandon his plans to pursue an engineering degree and instead cast his lot with English, a major that would presumably allow him to continue this process of bringing together ideas from multiple places through writing. For Joel, writing’s ability to build connections is powerful, even more so when sanctioned by the academy. This understanding of writing and its role within academic space blurs the lines between curricular and extracurricular, and will prove to be a driving force in Joel’s approach to his education in college and to his approach to tutoring in the writing center.

**Conclusion: Spatial Dissonance and the Emergence of Agency**

A key component of writerly agency is the sense that one has some measure of control of the decisions one makes not only about one’s writing but also about the environment where that writing takes place. In order to believe that one has the ability to make decisions about what occurs in a particular environment, it is necessary for the writer to think of space not as given or fixed, but as constructed and malleable; the writer must achieve a destabilized notion of space. One way in which static notions of space can become destabilized is the experience of moving between a variety of spaces where
one encounters and participates in writing in a meaningful way. Agency, then, with respect to writing, can be considered to be at least partly a product of a writer’s spatial experience. Working across a variety of spaces expands writers’ “spatial imaginations” and enables writers to envision spatial alternatives and act to reshape, reclaim, or reconfigure their various sites of writing to produce new spaces that better suit their needs.

Before arriving at UMass, Mary did not demonstrate any efforts to reconfigure her pre-UMass academic spaces. I would argue that due to her spatial experiences prior to her time at UMass, Mary arrived with less fully developed sense of writerly agency than Brianna or Joel, at least in terms of the ability to affect change on one’s writing spaces. Even though Mary may have recognized that things were not ideal in her high school writing spaces, her approach to that space might best be described as one of resignation. Without a robust experience of competing academic spatial contexts, it may have been difficult for Mary to envision alternatives. As Brianna noted, it was not until she went to Virginia that she experienced a significant departure from her prior experience of academic space that she became aware of the “constructed” nature of her spatial context and the role she might play in shaping that context.

Joel’s experience is similar, in that it was not until the familiar features of parochial academic space—thoughtful feedback from his instructors that confirmed his sense of self as a strong writer—disappeared and a truly alternative extracurricular writing space emerged that he considered challenging the status quo of the spaces of his high school education; however, Joel’s experiences enabled him to develop a stronger sense of writerly agency pre-UMass than either Mary or Brianna as evidenced by his
behavior in his senior year English class. Joel not only anticipated how, based on prior spatial experiences, this writing space might not meet his needs; he also employed his agency to reconfigure the space the classroom to address his needs for attention, identity, and relevance.

Moreover, the data in this chapter demonstrates not only that access to a range of spatial experiences is an important factor in the emergence of a writer’s sense of agency, but also that one’s sense of agency is also affected by the intersection of bodies (along with the experiences and discourses they carry) with First- and Secondspace features. That is to say, a writing space’s First- and Secondspace features will affect different bodies differently based on factors such as class and gender. The way Mary “reads” the space of the academy while in high school in Worcester is certainly shaped by her experience as someone aware of her “classed” status as working class. Although Mary might have found it problematic that reading was largely excised from her AP English experience, there was little she could do as a student to change the material conditions of the school that produced this curricular approach. And in an educational context where writing and education itself are presented as means to a particular end, Mary may have felt it more expedient to simply go along with this approach rather than to voice her concerns. In a context where the teacher holds the authority (and presumably the answer/solution to the problem of “getting out”), expediency seems reasonable. Likewise, Joel’s reactions to the space of high school classrooms were colored, at least in part, by his reading of those spaces as gendered in such a way as to discourage the inclusion of humor or topics that he assumed the women in his classes (including his instructors) would not be interested in or appreciate. These examples both support my
argument for the need to expand conceptions of Firstspace to include the bodies present within a site and to expand Secondspace to include the more tacit discourses that still manage to produce powerful understandings of what as space is and what things can or cannot be said within that space. Using these expanded spatial analytical lenses, in conjunction with a third lens to be introduced in Chapter 4, compositionists may be able to arrive at new insights into the formation of writerly agency both prior to students’ arrival in their colleges and classrooms, as well how that formation continues once students “arrive” at college.

Going forward, one of the core differences between academic spaces of the participants before they attended college and after they arrived at a college is that of scale. That is to say, for these participants “academic space” prior to college was largely, if not entirely, defined by the classroom. In a traditional primary, middle, or high school, students move from classroom to classroom according to a set schedule with few or limited opportunities to make active decisions about what spaces they want to occupy and how they want to occupy those spaces. College, then, represents a significant change in academic geography. A college campus, as a kind of space, marks a significant departure for most students. Rather than single, central, classroom-dominated building defining the space of their academic experience, the college campus is more decentralized. Academic buildings are spread over a wider geography and contain both classrooms and professors’ offices. Dorms feature prominently and introduce a new kind of space to many students’ academic experiences. Other spaces such as computer labs, libraries, and learning commons offer academic spaces not tied to particular classroom commitments.
Changes in students’ “time” also affect their relationship to academic space. Bells signaling one’s need to move from one classroom to another are absent. Instead of six to eight hours a day, five days a week, students’ class schedules might become more dispersed, with large gaps between classes or days where they have no classes at all. And for those who live on or near campus in student apartments, time changes more fundamentally, as they are situated within academic space for larger portions of time, even if that time isn’t spent in classrooms. Taken together, changes in students’ experiences of academic time lead to significant changes in their experiences of academic space. I would suggest that more time in/near academic space coupled with greater flexibility in how that time is arranged offer college students greater freedom in making choices about how, when, why, and where they choose to invest themselves in the real estate of the academy.

With these changes come new opportunities for students to further develop their sense of writerly agency, and, in exercising that agency, to take advantage of and make use of campus and extra-campus spaces in order to meet a variety of writing and educational needs, often in ways that exceed the material and discursive constraints of those spaces. The freedom afforded by their college experiences relative to their previous educational experiences opens up the possibility for students in general and these participants in particular to work towards the production of what Soja might call a Thirdspace of the academy. That is to say, academic spaces are typically defined both by their First- and Secondspace characteristics. The spaces have certain material features that encourage certain uses and prohibit or discourage others, and these spaces are typically tied to an “official” or set of “official” discourses that establish the intended
usages of these spaces. Both factors, often in concert, seek to establish an understanding of what a space means—its purpose, its role, and its “location” with respect to the larger collection of spaces in which it is situated. What we will see in Chapter 4, however, is that when students have a strong sense of writerly agency and are presented with the opportunity to reconfigure the spaces they encounter, students find ways to go beyond these intended purposes and produce new meanings and understandings of space aligned with their own needs and goals as learners, thinkers, and writers. If “the classroom” represents the dominant space of the academy up until high school, college offers Brianna and Mary their first opportunities to evaluate the degree to which classroom spaces meet their needs as developing writers and to act in response to that evaluation, and offers Joel a more diverse geography in which to enact his growing sense of writerly agency. How they act and why they act the way they do should be important to compositionists because, in these actions, participants may reveal where the traditional classroom experience falls short.
CHAPTER 4

PRODUCING THIRDSPACE IN UMASS CONTEXTS

In Chapter 3, I considered the relationship between the production of agency and spatial experience, and concluded that agency with respect to writing includes a sense of agency in terms of spatial practices. Agency, in this context, involves more than just the ability to decide the writing space one occupies. It also involves the sense that one has the ability to control the writing activities that occur in that space. When we treat agency as a singular concept (i.e., only pertaining to the choice of site) that exists as part of a binary (i.e., one has agency or one does not have agency), it becomes easy to lose sight of this second facet of agency, because it becomes subsumed in the privileged half of the binary. However, such an approach ignores the fact that writers can often have the ability to choose a space, but have significantly less than full control over what occurs in that space for a variety of reasons. Similarly, only considering agency in terms of one’s ability to choose a writing space precludes a conversation of instances where a writer is compelled or required to occupy a particular space, but feels in control over what is occurring (or will occur) in that space (e.g., Joel in his senior year high school English class). When participants had experienced working with writing in a substantive manner across divergent spatial contexts, their “spatial imaginations” expanded and they were less likely to think of spaces as fixed or static. Instead, spaces could be understood as constructed and malleable. This understanding enables writers to envision alternatives to the spaces they occupy, and in envisioning these alternatives, writers may come to envision themselves as the ones who might make such alternatives possible.
In this chapter, I move away from the relation between the development of writerly agency (broadly understood) to an examination of what insights can be gained regarding agency, space, and the conditions for “successful” writing. In other words, I’m asking how participants exercise their agency as writers in relation to space as they attempt to meet a range of needs and resolve a range of constraints. What can compositionists learn by carefully considering the spaces our students (and tutors) occupy and/or transform as they go about the business of writing in a university context? I would argue that such consideration offers valuable insights into what happens at the intersection of a writer’s agency and the spatial context in which that agency is exercised. Moreover I would argue that attention to the range of spaces that students occupy, and to how they exercise their agency in those spaces, can enable compositionists to think more carefully about how they might better prepare their students to exercise their agency as writers in ways that would enable those students to transform available spaces into ones more closely aligned with their needs as writers and as learners, as well how compositionists might engage in the process of designing accessible and flexible writing spaces that might facilitate these transformative practices.

These transformative practices, I believe, are particularly important as they tie into Soja’s concept of Thirdspace. I say “concept” instead of definition because as Soja insists, Thirdspace is “intentionally incomplete, endlessly explorable, resistant to closure or easy categorical definition” (36). That said, he does make several efforts to pin down this concept. For Soja, “Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body,
consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (56-57, emphasis original). More usefully, perhaps, is Soja contention that Thirdspace “is both a space distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental) and a transcending composite of all spaces” (62). That is to say, Thirdspace is a space that is both a product of the First- and Secondspace, but it is also a distinct space that exceeds or goes beyond First- and Secondspace. Although Thirdspace tends to evade definition in the abstract, I would suggest that one definition we can apply, within a localized context, is that of Thirdspace as the lived experience of space produced by the successful application of agency to reconfigure the First- and/or Secondspace features of that localized context with the goal of overcoming inherent limitations of those features.

In the previous chapter, agency was developed in the contrast between multiple spaces to generate a broad conception of writing’s possibilities, but such broad conceptions do not direct us toward agency within moments of writing. Soja’s concept of Thirdspace, then, is a productive framework for compositionists because it offers a window into what happens at the intersection between agency and the spaces students occupy. This intersection is important because, as my data will suggest, students arrive at college with differing sense of agency, but even students with strong senses of agency can be stymied by unforgiving or uncooperative First- and Secondspace conditions. On the other hand, given flexible conditions, students with a relatively solid sense of agency, coupled with a meta-awareness of and investment in their writing practices, are able to take advantage of that flexibility in order to produce Thirldspaces that exceed the bounds of a location’s First- and Secondspace conditions. In this chapter, I’ll be looking at those sites where participant’s attempt to reconfigure, reconstruct, and transform the First- and
Secondspace conditions of their writing spaces in order to produce a Thirdspace which both includes and exceeds these conditions. Considering the moments in which students produce Thirdspace is valuable because doing so gives us access “to the long hidden lifeworlds of … lived space” (29). These are, Soja contends, “spaces for struggle, liberation, [and] emancipation” (68). For compositionists, it also behooves us to pay close attention to what kinds of First- and Secondspace features are most conducive to the “production” of Thirdspace” and are most able to offer students the tools to push past their challenges as students and writers, because although we have little to no control over the sense of agency these students feel when they arrive, compositionists have a great deal more control at both the institutional and classroom levels over the kinds of First- and Secondspace conditions they will encounter once they arrive at our colleges and universities.

Moreover, I contend that attention to the intersection of writing, agency, and space might reveal in greater detail the hidden struggles that our student writers might encounter in their writing lives and how their use of space might factor into the process of negotiating and hopefully overcoming those struggles. In his discussion of Thirdspace, Soja emphasizes the need to resist easy and perhaps obvious or intuitive binaries when engaging in critical analysis. As mentioned earlier, in the analysis of my interview data, it became apparent that “agency” as understood by participants with respect to their spatial experiences as writers could not be adequately explained through binary logic. Although one’s sense of agency as writer can be understood (and expressed) in a variety of ways, for the purpose of using agency as an interpretive lens with respect to participants’ spatial experiences of writing, I was concerned with two primary questions.
First, how much control does the writer feel he or she has over the decision to be at a particular writing space? Second, how much control does the writer feel he or she has over the kinds of writing activities that occur within that space? Framing the issue of spatial agency this way, rather than as “do they/do they not have agency” is necessary because even when participants had a choice in what spaces they occupied, not all “choices” were equivalent. Participants often found themselves making choices that felt “forced” because the choices were heavily influenced by a variety of constraints. Constraints can take on a variety of forms, from personal (lack of confidence, lack of sense of self-efficacy), to material (lack of resources, inability to be in two places at one time), to discursive (lack of familiarity with the conventions of a discourse community), to familial (obligations at home), to institutional (the need to fulfill certain requirements, difficulty navigating institutional processes). Taking seriously the effect these constraints have on the participants’ feelings of agency means that agency itself must be treated as a nuanced and potentially shifting experience. Thus, in this context, success is understood as relative to the goals of the individual writer, rather than in terms of purely external assessment. That is to say, if a writer’s goal was to simply not fail a writing assignment, and that writer received a C+, that would be considered a success. Similarly, if a student earns an A on a writing assignment, but feels as if he was not challenged or failed to see value in the project, we might consider that to be an unsuccessful writing experience, assuming that being challenged or finding value was one of his initial goals.

“Scale” proved to be a complicating factor when assessing students’ understandings of their agency with regard to writing spaces. Writing spaces are rarely islands unto themselves, and are often situated in larger geographic networks and
contexts. As an example consider a hypothetical course in abnormal psychology, offered as an upper-level elective within the psychology major. In addition to class meetings, students in the course are expected to spend a “lab” hour each week visiting a local day shelter for the homeless to observe and interact with its residents. Now let’s imagine a hypothetical student who does not enjoy these lab sessions and would prefer not to attend them if possible. How much agency does that student feel regarding his presence at the day shelter? If only focusing on the shelter (a hyper-local focus), the student may feel he has little agency at all. Or he may take ownership of his presence there, framing his discussion of agency in terms of broader context (“I chose to enroll in this class, and even though I don’t want to put in time at the shelter, it was part of my decision to take this elective”), in which case the student may feel a greater degree of agency.

My tendency in this analysis has been to defer to whatever scale participants made use of when considering their sense of agency with respect to the spaces we discussed. Often, this means an emphasis on “local” versus broader contexts, as this generally was how the participants framed their own sense of agency/control/decision making in recounting their experiences. Joel, for example, may have felt that he should have attended a “better” university than UMass and that the decision regarding which college he would attend was not entirely his to make; however, even though he may have felt a lack of agency at the global scale, this does not factor into Joel’s assessment of his ability to make meaningful “local” decisions within the context of his being at UMass. Although “UMass” itself may have been a space that Joel did not associate with strong feelings of agency, he described many of his spatial experiences within UMass in ways that suggest a great deal of agency. Similarly, although Mary’s decision to major in
English was her own (again, suggesting strong agency), she described her experiences in a number of spaces within that major (e.g., literature classrooms, her thesis workshop) in ways that suggest a perceived lack of agency that is compartmentalized from the stronger sense of agency she feels about her decision to be an English major.

In the course of our interviews, participants described exercising their agency by making use of a range of writing spaces, from the expected (e.g., the library) to the unanticipated (e.g., empty classrooms after hours), and in ways ranging from pragmatic (going to a professor’s office to ensure a better grade), to subtle (e.g., using college newspapers ed-ops to reshape the political climate on campus), to the possibly dangerous (e.g., composing creative work in a car at red lights while traveling between campus, home, and work obligations). In many of these spatial experiences, participants attempted to reconfigure, with varying degrees of success, both First- and Secondspace elements of the spaces they occupied in order to bring those space into closer alignment with their respective needs and goals as writers.

**Conditions for the Production of Thirdspace**

Although participants described a variety of writing spaces (and ways those spaces were encountered and used), there were some common themes that emerged which can offer specific insight into the intersection of writing, agency, and space. In this chapter, I will argue that the likelihood of successful Thirdspace production is contingent upon four key factors: investment, agency, meta-awareness, and access to spatial flexibility.
Investment

Because the production of Thirdspace is, generally speaking, an effortful and active process, its occurrence depends on student writers being invested in their writing work to the point that they see a value in seeking out or creating better environmental conditions for that work, a value in exceeding the boundaries and limitations of their available spatial options. A hallmark of the participants in this study is that they have writing goals that they care enough about to exert the effort (and take the risks) necessary to act. Without an investment in a particular writing goal or project, a student may be more likely to accept the status quo, even if the status quo doesn’t further (or actively impedes) his or her development as a writer (i.e., if a student is not concerned with his/her development as a writer, he/she is not going to be very concerned about whether or not the writing spaces he/she occupies support that development).

Meta-cognitive Awareness

In addition to a high degree of investment in their writing endeavors, each of the case study participants demonstrated a high degree of meta-cognitive awareness of their writing processes and needs. That is to say, Mary, Joel, and Brianna were each able to articulate how they approached writing as well the conditions in which they did their best work. The ability to identify what works or doesn’t work for oneself as a writer is crucial for the successful production of Thirdspace for writing. When forced, compelled, or required to make use of a particular writing space, this type of meta-cognitive understanding enables a student to identify what features of their environment are supporting their writing, which features are impeding their writing, and why. When free
(relatively speaking) to choose a writing space, these meta-cognitive skills enable a student to identify spaces that will support, or which can be adapted to support, their needs and goals as writers. Without the meta-cognitive ability to identify what does (or does not) support their writing process, students are unlikely to be able to make informed decisions about how they might improve their choice of writing spaces or better adapt the ones they find themselves in.

**Sense of Agency**

In order for the production of Thirdspace to occur, students need to feel as though there are meaningful choices they can make about their writing environments in terms of which environments they occupy, as well as in terms of what occurs within those environments. As seen in Chapter 3, the recognition that there are important choices to be made can be supported by the experience of engaging in writing work across varying spatial contexts. Additionally, students need to have not only a sense that there are meaningful choices to be made, but also a belief or feeling that they are empowered to make these choices. This sense of empowerment may at times require (or at least benefit from) the support of another person, perhaps an authority figure (e.g., As discussed in Chapter 3, although Joel took the initiative to introduce his own interests and literacy practices into his senior high school classroom, it is difficult to overstate the importance of his teacher’s support for these endeavors with respect to the long-term development of Joel’s agency as a writer).
Access to (Relatively) Flexible Space

Certain spatial qualities can increase the likelihood for successful Thirdspace production. More specifically, spaces that are relatively flexible are more likely to afford students the resources and latitude necessary for engaging in Thirdspace endeavors. Flexibility refers to the range of usage options (e.g., material configurations, allowable discourses, authorized uses or purposes) that are supported by a given space, relative to the space’s function as defined by its First- and Secondspace features. Less flexible spaces tend to have clearly defined purposes. Spaces that are defined as having a single purpose tend to have less flexibility than spaces that are defined as multipurpose or which lack a clear definition. By “defined” I mean the way a space’s features communicate knowledge about what the space is and what should occur in that space. The design of a space, its material features, its name, and other factors all contribute to defining the purpose of a space. For (a dated) example, the purpose of a phone booth—to provide space for an individual to make a private call—is communicated by its name, by the presence of a phone, by spatial dimensions that restrict comfortable occupancy to a single individual, and perhaps transparent walls to discourage any “alternative” uses of the space. The phone booth, then, might be an example of a space with low flexibility, as it does not readily support a range of usage options beyond its primary function.

Reconfiguring Firstspace

One of the primary ways that participants engaged in the production of Thirdspace was through reconfiguring or creatively making use of the Firstspace features of the spaces they occupied. In some of these instances, participants’ exercised their agency in order to bring the Firstspace conditions of a place more into line with their
needs as writers. In others, participants reconfigured Firstspaces by using them for purposes in excess of their primary function.

We see an example of writerly agency being exercised this way in Brianna’s descriptions of her experience of frequenting coffee shops to work on her writing. In both the survey and her writing journal, Brianna noted that coffee shops, particularly one close to campus, were some of the most important places for her to write (as well as one of the most frequent, making use of them almost weekly). We discussed what exactly led her to work in coffee shops and why she found them so productive.

C: So, um what's the appeal to Rao’s in particular or some of the other [coffee houses] you mentioned, let’s see, Woodstar Cafe and The Thirsty Mind?
B: Yeah, um, it’s just the noise level is good, it’s a comfortable place to work, having the coffee and food right there is nice too. It’s convenient. It’s just like a place to go with friends where you can all just be doing homework and kinda talking and kinda being quiet.

Brianna wasn’t required to write in these kinds of spaces; rather, she sought them out because her well-developed meta-cognitive abilities enabled her to identify coffee houses as having Firstspace features closely aligned with her needs as a writer. To elaborate on why she chose these spaces, she drew a comparison between these spaces and library spaces (which were also important to Brianna, but generally less preferable):

B: Well, like, I hate working in the library sometimes because if you're in the [Learning Commons] it’s too loud, but if you’re upstairs [in the stacks] it’s so quiet that, it’s almost worse and you can hear like every little like a
pin drop or every little conversation. So it’s like there’s conversations going on [in coffee shops] but they’re not like intrusive.

In addition to coffee houses being an example of Brianna having agency over where she would write, they are also an example of flexible spaces where Brianna had the agency to determine the kind of writing that took place there, as well as control over the social dynamic in which the work was done. For Brianna, writing at the coffee houses was “kind of a way to make studying fun, it’s like let’s go as a group to Rao’s and hanging out there.” In choosing to work in a place like Rao’s, Brianna was choosing a site that would afford her the flexibility necessary to mold it to her needs. This isn’t to say that there were no constraints at all. Brianna noted that sometimes it could be difficult to find enough space in the coffee shop for her entire group; however, this constraint was relatively minor and not significant enough to profoundly affect her ability to make use of the space as she desired.

Mary also engaged in the process of reconfiguring Firstspace to produce a Thirdspace more aligned with her needs as a writer. As an English major, Mary spent a significant amount of time in Bartlett classrooms. Although she acknowledges that part of her association of the building with her identity as a writer is drawn from the fact that she had “so many classes there and they’ve all been writing classes or most of them have been writing classes,” she emphasized the importance of her use of these spaces afterhours, outside of their intended purpose:

The best place that I’ve found is working in a basement classroom in Bartlett and just sitting there for hours working on a paper, it’s got the academic feeling you know, so I can't just like dick around, but it’s also
um like open and I usually go at night so there's no one really around to distract [me] so that's kind of nice, it’s nice….I find empty classrooms usually, in the evening, into the night, in the basement of Bartlett, because there's hardly anyone around, there's no one in the classroom, and it’s in a classroom I've had two classes in, and classes that I've really liked, so I go in there and I sit in a seat that I used to sit in, or right next to where I used to sit and plug in my computer and I just work and it just you know it’s um, I don't know, I feel like part of me feels like I'm channeling all the English majors that have ever been in Bartlett, you know the placebo effect there, it’s nice because I can just get it done, it’s a big open room, I don't feel like I'm trapped, the lights are on, its bright, you know, can't fall asleep so, it’s nice.

There is quite a bit to unpack in this description. First, it is clear that part of Mary’s decision to occupy this site is shaped by the Firstspace features offered by the location. At one level, one could argue that Mary chooses to work in the space because its material characteristics meet several of Mary’s writing needs. The building, which during the day is bustling with activity, is quiet in late evening after classes have ended and students, faculty, and staff have concluded their working days. Mary notes the classroom provides her a distraction-free environment to engage in her academic writing, a space where she able to can settle in “for hours.” As campus spaces go, the classrooms in Bartlett are relatively accessible, suggesting type of Firstspace flexibility. The building itself is rarely locked, providing Mary access, and the same goes for many of its classrooms with the exception of the computer labs. Although the room itself is fairly barren with the
exception of desks, this provides it with a high degree of flexibility; this space, then,
demonstrates flexibility at both the larger scale of the building and the smaller scale the
particular room. Mary’s work (writing for her English major) requires little in the way of
material resources, but the ones she requires are already present or are ones Mary can
easily supply.

That said, the material conditions of the classroom space cannot, by themselves,
explain why Mary chooses to conduct her writing there. Likewise, an inventory of the
material conditions of the classroom cannot fully account for Mary’s experience of
working in that space or the significance of that experience. If all she required was an
empty space with a writing surface and internet access, there were certainly more
materially convenient locations to choose. Although Bartlett is, for the most part,
centrally located on campus, it is not as close to Mary’s on-campus apartment as other
academic buildings. The campus library, though generally busier in the evenings than
Bartlett, has many quiet areas to work and better access to other Firstspace resources
(e.g., food, coffee, books, and reference librarians). In order to understand Mary’s choice
of, and affinity for, the space of the Bartlett classroom, we need to consider other
components of space that more closely align with Mary’s goals and needs as a writer.

In discussing why Bartlett works for her as a writing space, Mary suggested that
in addition to being relatively distraction-free, there are qualities about the space that
keep her from straying off task. Mary has the necessary meta-cognition to recognize that
she “just can’t dick around,” so a distraction-free environment is important. While we
might attribute the lack of external distractions to the space’s Firstspace features (i.e.,
empty and unused), what might account for the space aiding Mary in overcoming those
internal distractions that might otherwise keep her from focusing on her writing? To begin, she describes Bartlett as having “the academic feeling.” For Mary, the classroom does not cease being the classroom even though class is not currently in session. In a way, the desks in the room are more than just generic workspaces/writing surfaces; they mark the room as one aligned with a particular set of discourse practices, such as those of the academy. In addition to “the academic feeling” of the classroom, I believe that its location in Bartlett Hall aligns it, for Mary, with the discourse practices of the English major, which is housed in the building.

In our conversations, Mary recounted how, out of all of the kinds of writing that she engaged in as an English major, she felt most disconnected from the writing required in her literature classes. Although she arrived at college “ready to be a snooty English major,” she often found herself “stuck” or “lost” in work that she felt was characterized by loftiness and abstraction. And although Mary might visit a professor’s office or the writing center in order get “unstuck,” I would argue that these sites (and the interactions that occur within them) are better suited to dealing with specific moments of struggle in a given writing task than with addressing the fundamental disconnect that Mary felt towards her writing. I would suggest that Mary’s decision to write in an empty classroom in the English department reflects an attempt to bridge the gap between her identity as a writer, which at this point was firmly grounded in her PWTC specialization, and her understanding of the function of academic writing in English and its attending discursive conventions. By exercising her agency to reconfigure the Firstspace features of Bartlett (and this specific classroom), Mary “places” herself within the disciplinary Secondspace represented by these Firstspace features. Recall that this is not just any classroom in the
English department; it is a classroom Mary “had two classes in, and classes that [she] really liked,” and she sits in the same desk (or approximately the same desk) that she sat in when taking these classes. In replicating the spatial conditions of times where Mary felt connected to (and successful in) her work as an English major, Mary may be attempting to replicate, temporarily at least, that sense of connection in order to more fully invest herself in the writing task at hand.

Mary’s use of the Bartlett classroom offers a possible solution to her sense of being disconnected from the traditional discourses of her major; however, this sense of disconnect is not the only stumbling block for Mary as a writer. Indeed, although Mary has generally found success as a writer in college, particularly in PWTC, she still has broader concerns about writing. Despite her success as writer and recognition of her ability as a writer (in the form of her appointment as a writing center tutor), Mary still perceives writing as a struggle. Moreover, Mary believes this struggle is not unique to her experience but is shared by many writers, particularly those coming from similar school systems and neighborhoods.

In addition to the classroom’s material features and discursive connections, Mary was also attracted to elements of the room that are harder to categorize. For Mary, being in this classroom connects her not only with English as a discipline (and the discourses that circulate within that discipline); at night, in the quiet of an empty Bartlett classroom, she feels a connection with “all the English majors that have ever been in Bartlett.” Mary, channeling her reading of North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center,” confided that “writing can be so lonely.” And although she may have described this feeling of connection as “hippy-dippy,” choosing to occupy and transform an otherwise empty
space into one that enabled her to feel as though she could overcome this loneliness was crucial to Mary’s success in the English major.

Mary and Brianna’s actions in these examples demonstrate the four features that I feel are necessary for the successful production of the Thirdspace of writing. Both Mary and Brianna are clearly invested in the work they are doing. The fact that both of these participants are willing to make use of out of the way places to meet their writing needs suggests as much. Moreover, both Brianna and Mary exhibit strong meta-cognitive skills in the way they discuss the value of their respective spaces. Brianna chooses coffee shops over libraries when she is able to because she has identified that as a writer she tends to be most successful when she is in an environment that has a particular volume level and where she can freely talk with other writers. The coffee house, with Firstspace features such as coffee, snacks, and moveable furniture (so that she and her friends can ensure they have room for everyone) facilitates the kind of social context in which Brianna works best. Similarly, Mary understands that “focus” is an issue she struggles with, so she seeks out a place that affords her a distraction-free environment as well as one that will keep her in an “academic” mindset. She understands that the discursive conventions of her literature classes do not play to her strengths as a writer, so she chooses a space where she has experienced success despite these struggles. Mary recognizes that the loneliness of writing unsettles her process, so she identifies and makes use of a space that enables her to exceed these feelings. Their strong sense of writerly agency is apparent in their decisions to take ownership over their writing processes, which in these examples also means taking ownership of and reconfiguring the Firstspace elements of those spaces. Finally, the relative flexibility of these spaces affords Brianna and Mary
opportunities to apply their agency successfully. Although not designed explicitly as writing spaces, the Firstspace of the coffee house is both flexible and permeable, affording Brianna the ability to both reconfigure its existing elements and well as introduce new ones (such as the technology she needs to accomplish her writing). Similarly, none of what Mary accomplishes in this empty classroom happens if that building (and/or classroom) is locked. Even though this may not be a space that the university intended for Mary to be able to access in this way, its availability and relative adaptability mean that Mary has a location into which she can channel her writerly agency. The space that Mary needs to succeed as a writer is not one that the university intentionally provided, but which existed nonetheless due to Mary’s ability to convert the space she was “given” into the space that she needs.

Reconfiguring Secondspace

In addition to the reconfiguration of Firstspace, participants also were able to produce Thirdspace successfully through the reconfiguration of Secondspace-producing discourses that circulated about and within several of the writing locations they occupied. This reconfiguration of Secondspace can be understood as attempts by participants to 1) shift the discourse of either what a space is or should be; 2) alter the rules of what could or could not be said, or what discourses were welcome, within a particular space; and/or 3) identify and resituate themselves in alternative discourses within a particular space.

Joel experienced the need to reconfigure Secondspace early in his college career while enrolled in EN112, his required First-year writing course. Describing the course, Joel stated that “the English Writing 112 course … wasn't that positive of an experience. It wasn't that good… then that was really my only negative English course…experience
[at UMass].” Asked to elaborate, Joel offered that “My professor […] didn't seem to want student participation as much. It almost seemed like she had her own agenda, political agenda about, I remember we read a lot of vegetarian books, and she didn't really care what you had to say.” Joel’s reference to the instructor’s politics and choice of reading materials reflect his developing awareness of the classroom as a “constructed” site, and that the nature of its construction includes the dynamics of power reflected in the discourse that circulates within that space. Here, the discourses circulated (and/or prohibited) by this instructor created a classroom Secondspace where Joel felt marginalized and voiceless. It is understandable, then, that Joel, whose high school English education ended with a course where he was afforded multiple opportunities to bring his outside interests into the classroom and thereby transform it (as well the presence of a teacher willing to encourage and support his attempts to do) would find a classroom where the thematic focus was outside of his interests and where he felt his contributions to the classroom environment were unwelcome to be problematic and discouraging.

In terms of what he was asked to do in the course, Joel “kinda just followed with it,” doing as he was instructed; however, although Joel was not necessarily invested in the writing that took place in EN112, he was still invested in writing as a creative and intellectual practice. By the end of the semester, Joel was no longer content to relegate the types of writing in which he was invested to extracurricular writing spaces. Joel recognized that the discursive context of his EN112 classroom was not working for him as a writer, and so he finally chose to introduce a new discourse through his final paper. 
The final for [EN112] was a research paper and I ended up researching with the lens of *James Bond* villains. I researched private military corporations. I remember like going to her and she was just like, “What?”. I’m like, I really like *James Bond* and I'm always like, how do they afford these armies of guys, and she gave me a crazy look but then I actually went into research with it and did extensive research and like I got a good grade on that and again that kind of mirrors the creative out-of-the-box aspect that my senior year English teacher supported.

Without the sense of agency Joel developed as a result of his high school writing experiences, the culmination of which took place in his senior high school class with the support of his instructor, it seems unlikely that Joel would have had neither the confidence nor the inclination to “rock the boat,” as it were. What I think is important to note here is that the freedom to take ownership of his writing does not emerge from the classroom itself. Rather, it is a freedom that carried over from Joel’s prior experience of taking risks and being rewarded for doing so. I would argue that Joel, in his decision to write about the economic underpinnings of private armies, was attempting to reconfigure EN112’s Secondspace into one that met his needs and goals as writer by broadening the range of discourses allowable within that space, thereby producing a broader EN112 Thirdspace similar to those Joel produced in his senior high school classroom. Joel’s range of writing experiences (particularly academic writing experiences) prior to arriving at UMass provided him with the meta-cognitive skills necessary to identify how a space was not working for him and to formulate a plan for how to remedy that situation, as well as a sense of writerly agency that empowered Joel to act on that plan. And although Joel
may not have perceived the Secondspace of his EN112 classroom as particularly flexible, it seems that this perception changed, at least slightly, by the end of the course. This perception of increased flexibility is evidenced by Joel’s decision to propose the idea for his final paper to his instructor, suggesting he felt she might be open to the idea, rather than simply forging ahead without approval.

I can only speculate as to what the effects on Joel’s sense of agency and understanding of the space of academic writing would have been had his instructor not responded so positively to his final paper. Perhaps it would have established a belief that the First- and Secondspaces for academic writing at the college level were not as open to creativity as those in high school. Moreover, I wonder whether or not a student such as Mary, whose high school writing experience was significantly more “fixed” than Joel’s, would have considered attempting the type of reconfiguration that Joel did or would consider that such a reconfiguration may even be possible. My sense is that she would not.

Indeed, it wouldn’t be until after her first year at UMass that Mary would develop the necessary agency to instigate the kind of reconfiguration present in Joel’s EN112 experience; however, in the process of acquiring a stronger sense of agency, Mary participated in an act of Thirdspace production, producing a Thirdspace of the English major by rejecting the Secondspace produced through the dominant discourses of her literature classes and by seeking out alternative Secondspaces to occupy within that major. Although it may be unclear at first how a major constitutes a space, I would argue that in most non-online college experiences, there is a clear association between majors/disciplines and their attending spaces. As described in the preceding section,
Mary felt a clear connection between the English major in the abstract and her lived spatial experiences of participating in that major based on her experiences in English courses, almost all of which were located in a specific campus building. Although a major may not be a space-in-of-itself, majors certainly have a spatial component comprised of Firstspaces (e.g., buildings, classrooms, labs), and Secondspaces (e.g., syllabi, course descriptions, lectures, writing assignments). It was the Secondspace of the English major, as constituted through its writing assignments, that left Mary disconnected from her writing practices.

Having chosen to be an English major, Mary found herself in literature courses that featured writing activities with no clear connection to material goals outside the classroom—a significant difference from a high school experience where writing’s value was its assumed ability to secure a better “place” for oneself after academics were completed. With this experience, Mary came to the realization that she would need to be responsible for making decisions that would put her in writing spaces that would be more closely aligned with her post-graduation goals.

Mary's decision to shift the focus of her English major from literature to Professional Writing Technical Communication (PWTC) can be read as an example of a writer exercising agency to produce a Thirdspace of the English major that exceeded the limitations of its Secondspace, a space produced through the discourse within its literature classrooms. Mary described the nature of this Secondspace as “filled with flowery language” that was “often very lofty and abstract.” The space of the English classroom, as understood through a Secondspace lens, was one that Mary perceived as being fundamentally disconnected from the real world experienced outside of the
classroom. Whereas the discourses that Brianna experienced in her Richmond composition class produced a Secondspace that ultimately expanded her understanding of the boundaries of academic space, the discourse that Mary experienced in her literature classes produced a Secondspace that drew established a tight perimeter around academic space, binding it to the Firstspace of the classroom. Not only did Mary perceive the Secondspace of the English major as disconnected, in general, from the world at large, it was also disconnected from the kinds of places she might want to occupy as a professional after she graduated, noting that one of the reasons she felt the need to extricate herself from that kind of English major space was that she “didn’t want to teach, and…didn’t want to be a starving artist”.

Although Mary needed little help in recognizing that a literature-based approach to the English major was not working for her as a writer or a learner, the idea of looking at the major from the lens of PWTC came from former high school math teacher, who passed along to Mary’s mother the idea that Mary might give technical writing a try if she didn’t like her literature classes but still wanted to write. It was upon his recommendation that Mary decided to consider switching the focus of her major rather than switching the major itself.

Curious about the possibility of an alternative space to occupy within the English major, Mary decided to take a shot at the PWTC track. She described the process by which she decided that she wanted to invest in the “real estate” of PWTC:

I tried it and um I didn't hate it, and then toward the end, like towards the middle and then end I realized I really liked it, really structured, I, and like a lot of time like with my disorder I have a hard time coming up with ideas
or putting my ideas on paper and um the structured format was really great because it says "this is what you're going to have to do, you input this stuff that is most important but you can basically copy from any existing template," and that was kind of a relief and then when it came to writing manuals, it’s the same things, it’s like okay we have to get this done and I can think very logically, and here's the setup. You have to use an action word to begin your action, your step, and then as short as possible, as concise as possible, so I really like that and decided that I wanted to do the entire certificate.

PTWC and its attending spaces represent sites that Mary occupied and where she could take full ownership of that occupation. Mary’s account of her PWTC experience suggests that the Secondspace of PTWC (as established by how writing was presented in terms of process and function) was one more suited to her needs as a writer. Moreover, Mary felt that this Secondspace was one to which she could contribute productively, thereby increasing her sense of investment in the work. Mary’s movement into PWTC is an example of the production of Thirdspace through the reconfiguration of the Secondspaces available within a broader spatial context. Mary’s initial experience of PWTC classes disrupts any notion of a unified Secondspace within the English Major. Within the Firstspace of her PWTC classes, Mary is exposed to an alternative and more personally valuable Secondspace within the broader Secondspace of the major. Another important Firstspace connected with the Secondspace of the PWTC program was the PWTC lab, which Mary worked in as a teaching associate for the course “Advanced Technical Writing.” In that space, Mary helped other PWTC students with their
assignments. In this lab, Mary gained “more confidence” in her ability to work within the Secondspace of PTWC as she assisted other students in the process of navigating its terrain. Although the Secondspace of PWTC may appear rigid based on Mary’s emphasis on the role of structure within that Secondspace, it was flexible enough in the context of the PTWC lab to allow Mary to experiment and play around with different interactional styles, such as using humor as a pedagogical strategy, in order to determine what worked best for the students she was assisting. By choosing to buy into the alternative Secondspace of PTWC and by occupying the Firstspaces with which it was associated, Mary produced a new Thirdspace understanding of the English major in terms of what the English major is/can be and in terms of what it means to be someone occupying that space, both of which increased her level of investment in her writing. As a result Mary was able to overcome the obstacles that she felt were presented by the dominant First- and Secondspaces of the English major.

Joel and Mary’s examples, I would argue, demonstrate why compositionists can benefit from a serious consideration of Thirdspace with respect to writing. Students with the components necessary for attempting the production of Thirdspace—investment in the writing process, meta-cognition of their writing practices, and strong sense of agency—are students who are far better equipped to handle those moments when the writing spaces in which they find themselves fail to provide, in and of themselves through their first and second space elements, the conditions necessary to support their growth as writers and the achievement of their writing goals. And although Joel may not have perceived the Secondspace of his EN112 classroom as particularly flexible, it seems that this perception changed, at least slightly, by the end of the course. This perception of
increased flexibility is evidenced by Joel’s decision to propose the idea for his final paper to his instructor, suggesting he felt she might be open to the idea, rather than simply forging ahead without approval.

**Reconfiguring Uncooperative Spaces**

In both “Reconfiguring Firstspace” and “Reconfiguring Secondspace” participants were able to exercise their agency and reconfigure elements of the spaces they occupied in order to successfully produce Thirdspaces that enabled the participants to overcome limitations of those places. The examples described in those sections featured relatively flexible spaces, spaces with features that facilitated successful reconfiguration. The examples in this section present scenarios where participants felt that although they had chosen to make use of a given space (or use a space in a particular way), their choices (or ability to enact those choices) had been significantly compromised by any number of constraints. These are situations that go beyond minor inconveniences such as, for example, having to use one group study room rather than their preferred group study room because it was being occupied at the time. Although “last resort” might be too strong of a descriptor for the spaces participants chose in these instances, there was a clear sense that there were not spaces that would have been chosen had any other reasonable options been available. They are examples, then, of what occurs when writers struggle to produce successful Thirdspaces because they cannot reconfigure the necessary elements and/or because the site lacks the proper elements for successful reconfiguration. They call our attention to the role that spatial conditions play in the production of writing Thirdspace, regardless of the writer’s investment, meta-cognitive
skills, or agency; moreover, they demonstrate how reconfiguration-resistant spaces can have detrimental effects with respect to a writer’s sense of agency, particularly when reconfiguration attempts are not successful (and sometimes even when they are).

As an example, we can consider Joel’s attempts to reconcile his creative writing goals with the financial and material realities of his broader spatial experience in college. As noted in Chapter 3, much of Joel’s creative writing work in high school took place in a collaborative, face-to-face context as he worked with his friends in each other’s basements. Although collaborating with his friends became more difficult when he arrived at UMass, Joel was still invested in his creative writing projects and maintained an interest in developing ideas for stories, sketches, and movies. Engaging in this writing work, however, required extracurricular writing time—time which Joel did not consistently have enough of. One of Joel’s most pressing Firstspace realities was the limited amount of time he could commit to actually occupying extracurricular writing spaces on or near campus. In order to meet his college expenses, Joel worked multiple jobs, two on campus and one off campus near his family’s home about forty minutes away from UMass. As such, in addition to the time committed to working these various jobs, Joel also lost time commuting back and forth.

In order to maximize his writing time, Joel found it necessary to become creative with the writing spaces he had available. For Joel, this meant finding ways to write “on the go,” which was a phrase that appeared in both his survey response and his writing journal.

C: How do you compose “on the go”?
J: I’ve got an iPhone and I’ve got, I forget what it’s called, it’s like a
document writer, and you just type like normally, it’s like a pain to do, but
I’ve kind of gotten used to it, and like I said, I’m usually driving either
back between here and [my job in Westfield] or um I’m often at one of my
friend’s houses [back in Westfield] or I’m at work so I just like write
while I’m there hanging out, and I get ideas. I get ideas while in the car
and when I stop I’ll write them down so I don’t forget them.

Joel’s response goes beyond my question of “how” he composes on the go, and reveals a
great deal about “why” he composes on the go. “Like I said” refers to an early part of our
conversation where Joel revealed that although he was paying for a dorm room (a
decision he regretted), he was only spending 3-4 nights a week on campus due to his
work schedule. In order to exceed the limitations of his broader Firstspace experience,
Joel opts to reconfigure a much more specific spatial context (i.e., the interior of his car)
through the introduction of a new material component (i.e., his smart phone) into that
Firstspace context in order to produce a mobile creative writing Thirdspace.

Joel’s choice to adapt Firstspaces such as his car into creative writing
Thirdspaces, as well as his feelings about that choice, reflect a very different type of
spatial experience than those described in “Reconfiguring Firstspace.” Joel’s efforts to
make any available space work to further his creative writing endeavors (even when that
involves writing while operating heavy machinery) and his frustration with his inability
to more deeply invest in that practice demonstrates a deep investment in the creative
writing “project”; however, although Joel is invested in his writing, his agency is
compromised. Joel doesn’t choose his car as a writing space because he thinks it is
uniquely suited to the kind of writing he wants to do or the type of space he wants to do it. He chooses this space because the only other option, given his material and financial circumstances, is to further distance himself from this kind of writing activity. The success of his efforts is only partial; his car-based creative writing activities are limited to short notes and lists of ideas, the majority of which will never develop beyond what’s written on Joel’s cell phone. Joel’s multiple commitments across the macro-scale of his Firstspace experience prevent him from occupying the kind of writing space necessary to take these ideas to the next level.

Joel’s material and financial circumstances prevented him from fully engaging in the kinds of writing work that he desired. This was also true for Brianna, whose financial situation prevented her from fully investing in her work as a writer for *The Collegian*, UMass’s student-run daily newspaper. For Brianna, taking on a position at *The Collegian* seemed like a natural choice. Her experience of spending her first year of college at the University of Richmond had exposed her to how she had taken her own political views (a product of where she grew up) for granted, as well as how challenging it can be to write for an audience who may be coming from a very different place (both literally and metaphorically).

As an ed-op writer, Brianna had hoped to reconfigure the Secondspace of *The Collegian* in order to produce a UMass Thirdspace where students would be more open to thoughtfully considering ideas and beliefs contrary to their own. Describing her writing post-Richmond, Brianna reflected that “since then, I’ve been much more of a neutral writer, that’s the approach I take with my columns. There’s two sides to everything, let's hear both sides instead of like the full on this is the right way to think
and I’m going to tell you what it is.” This style of writing (and broader approach to ed-op writing) was a departure from writing culture at The Collegian where writers, especially the ed-op [writers] can get very violent with their opinions and they'll be like they're always yelling about something down there so it’s just like, I think it helped to be a little more neutral about everything. Ed-op usually, it’s the liberal and conservative thing that's really big, that really divides people there so there's people there who'll write either, they're mostly writing about politics or certain issues, there are people who write extremely conservative ones, and the people who write extremely liberal ed-ops, and I’ll usually be like, I'll choose an issue and I’ll try to find a balance between them, the two sides, and see like, this is why these people think this, this is why these people think this, what do we think about this now, asking what do I think about this now.

Brianna’s hopes of changing the Secondspace of The Collegian, and perhaps the broader campus environment that it may have both reflected and produced, would have to be limited to the writing she submitted remotely to her editors. Whereas “some people basically live in the Collegian offices in the basement of the campus center and for them it’s very collaborative and they all just hang out together,” her class and work schedule, and their attending Firstspace commitments, largely prevented her from being a regular presence at the newspaper’s offices, thereby limiting her ability to potentially influence the status quo of The Collegian’s Secondspace during meetings. In fact, although her editor suggested that she apply to take his leadership position following his departure, Brianna felt she had little choice but to decline: “my editor was leaving and he wanted
someone to step up after him, and he asked me if I was interested, and I was…working
two jobs at the time and so I was like I need money more than I need [this position].”
This is a decision she looks back upon with “regret.”

Like Joel, Brianna’s material and financial situation put Firstspace constraints
upon her level of involvement at *The Collegian*. Furthermore, I would argue these
constraints severely limited the success of Brianna’s attempt to reconfigure the
Secondspace of *The Collegian*. Brianna was unable to reconfigure her broader spatial
experience in such a way as to fully resolve the constraint of needing/wanting to be
invested in more places than time would allow. Although she was able to participate in
*The Collegian*, generally submitting bi-weekly columns to an editor via email and
attending the occasional meeting, her multiple jobs on top of a full course schedule
prohibited the kind of spatial investment necessary for expanding her role (and influence)
on the paper. Although Brianna could attempt to reconfigure the paper’s Secondspace
through her writing, I would argue that her attempts a reconfiguring *The Collegian’s*
Secondspace would have been more effective had she been able to spend more time at
*The Collegian* offices, thereby grounding her Secondspace critique within the paper’s
Firstspace context.

In both these instances, Joel and Brianna were able to find ways to make the most
of their writing experiences given the constraints present, yet the accounts they provide
clearly suggest that each felt as though something was being lost in the process, that
whatever success they found was partial. Joel was able to produce a Thirdspace where
creative writing could occur, but only in a limited form (e.g., lists and notes) and without
resolving the overarching spatial constraints on his ability to fully develop his ideas.
Brianna was able to reconfigure the Secondspace of *The Collegian* by using her writing to introduce a less ideologically-driven discourse into the ed-op section of the paper, but as a result of her spatial constraints she was unable to take on a leadership role at the paper that may have allowed her to address her concerns with *The Collegian* in a more direct and substantive fashion. Even so, Joel and Brianna were fortunate that partial success was attainable, as sometimes the constraints a writer faces are too significant to afford the successful production of Thirdspace, regardless of that writer’s drive, motivation, creativity, or meta-cognition.

At the time of the survey portion of this study, Mary was in a serious conflict with her roommates. Mary said that at that point of the conflict she was spending a minimum of four nights a week off-campus in order to avoid the people she was living with at the time. As her parents lived roughly an hour away from the university, Mary had little time on-campus to get her writing done, so much of it was done at her parents’ house out of necessity. Reflecting on writing at her parents’ home, Mary demonstrated her meta-cognitive awareness of her own writing needs, admitting that it was a less than ideal place to get her writing done: “I did a lot of writing there, and you know I never really get writing done too well there, because there's a lot of distractions, you know, it’s home, it’s too comfortable.” In general Mary tries to avoid writing at home because she knows that as much as she enjoys her cats and her parents, neither work towards successfully completing her writing projects.

Jackie Grutsch McKinney, in “Leaving Home Sweet Home: Towards Critical Readings of Writing Center Spaces,” argues that in terms of their spatial imaginations, those involved in writing center work have been preoccupied with designing their writing
center spaces in such a ways as to create a comfortable “home” space (7). In her article, McKinney deconstructs the idea of home, suggesting that ideas of “home” and “comfort” are never neutral, and that writing center directors may be more concerned with their own spatial preferences than in creating spaces that meet students’ learning needs (16). Given McKinney’s critique of both “home” and “comfortable” as dominating tropes in writing center discourse, I was intrigued by Mary’s assertion that home was an unproductive writing space. Asked what she meant by “too comfortable,” Mary elaborated, focusing primary on Firstspace elements of “home”: “Um, you know, there are couches, there are chairs, there are cats, so like, oh man I could do anything but work right now. My car’s there, I can go out and do stuff, my parents are going to distract the shit out of me, you know um, so that was, that was the ‘too comfortable.’”

There are two points that we can take away from Mary’s description of “home” as an unproductive space for writing and the reasons for it being so. First, Mary’s description of her parents’ home as a writing place confirms McKinney’s concerns about assumptions regarding comfort. While features such as couches, chairs, and cats may be desirable in and of themselves, they are material features of a Firstspace that fail to afford Mary any perceivable advantage in advancing her writing tasks and/or features that Mary is unable to reconfigure for the purposes of producing a Thirdspace of home more aligned with her needs as a writer.

That is to say, I would argue that it is not the presence of “comforting” Firstspace elements (couches, chairs, cats, cars, parents) as “comforting things” that render “home” an unproductive writing space. Instead, I would argue that the problem for Mary is not that the material components of “home” are “too comfortable,” but that they fail to
provide the *kind* of comfort necessary for Mary to productively engage with her writing tasks. The comfort afforded by the Firstspace elements of Mary’s home is one of escape and distraction. These comforts enable Mary to distance herself from her insecurities as a writer by removing her from the writing task both geographically (40 miles away from school and a car to take her further) and mentally/emotionally (“I could do anything but work now”; “my parents are going to distract the shit out of me”). Coupled with the understandable disruption to her writing process caused by the untenable living situation on campus, I would suggest that Mary’s “home” (along with the broader context in which the decision to go home was made) created conditions that worked powerfully against the type of “focus” Mary needed to maximize her success as a writer.

Mary’s experience of writing at home represents an unsuccessful attempt to produce Thirdspace. Unable to access the types of spaces she would choose under normal circumstances, she was placed in a situation where she would need to turn her parents’ home into a viable writing space. And in theory, one might assume that “home” would be a fertile ground for the production of Thirdspace. Although out of her environment, so to speak, and even though her choice to work from home was one of necessity more so than one of preference, she still had relative autonomy over how she would use that space. The problem here is not a lack of agency within the space. The problem is that, unfortunately, a sense of agency and the willingness to exercise that agency is not enough for even the smartest, most motivated, or most driven student to reshape her environment in support of her writing goals. Although Mary had the freedom to work as she wanted within that space, it was likely beyond the freedom she was afforded to significantly reconfigure the material conditions of that space to create a
“focused” environment. Mary’s home space is superficially flexible (i.e., Mary felt free do as she wanted), but it’s difficult to imagine a scenario where Mary would be able to remove the Firstspace elements (e.g., the cats, her parents, the car) that were not conducive to her writing practices from the home space.

As these examples demonstrate, investment in the writing process, a well-developed sense of agency, and meta-cognitive awareness of one’s writing practices are not sufficient for the successful production of Thirdspace. The flexibility of a space plays an important role in determining the likelihood of success. If a writer does not have access to the available First- and Secondspace elements of a place, and/or does not have the ability to remove problematic elements from (and/or introduce more productive elements to) a place, then the flexibility of that spatial context is likely insufficient for a wholly successful production of Thirdspace to occur. Joel cannot move his hometown closer to campus thereby removing his commute, nor can he eliminate the financial situation that requires he take on multiple jobs. He can, however, introduce a smartphone into the Firstspace of his car to create a partial workaround. Similarly, Brianna cannot reconfigure her spatial obligations to put more time into the offices of The Collegian, but she can take advantage of the flexibility of the newspaper’s policies (also part of The Collegian’s Secondspace) that enabled her to stay active in The Collegian primarily through e-mail. That said, neither Joel nor Brianna would mark these as entirely successful solutions to their spatial challenges, and there was a clear sense of disappointment and diminished agency their assessment of how they approached these challenges. Similarly, Mary’s account of her failed attempt to create a productive writing space at home was equal parts recognition and resignation; Mary recognizes
incompatibility of “home” with her writing needs and seemed resigned to that incompatibility, regardless of her efforts.

**Conclusion: Thirdspace Production as Adaptive Strategy**

Case study participants made use of a range of strategies to reconfigure both the First- and Secondspace elements of their respective sites of writing in order to produce Thirdspaces more aligned with their goals and needs as writers. Participants’ accounts of their experiences suggest that they often felt that they had significant control over their spatial experiences, both in terms of their choice of space as well as what writing activities transpired in these spaces. Employing their strong meta-cognitive skills in their decision making process, participants frequently were able to select spaces that were either already closely aligned with their writing goals and which supported their needs as writers, or spaces that could be modified to do so. Participants also demonstrated the ability and willingness (due to their investment in their writing tasks) to make spaces “work for them” in cases where they did not have control of the choice of what spaces they needed to occupy. However, participants’ decisions about the spaces they occupied and how they occupied those spaces were also driven by the need to reconcile their needs and goals as writers with constraints (frequently material/financial) that prevented them from achieving desired levels of writing success within those sites. Sometimes this took the form of being unable to write productively or produce work of a satisfactory nature; other times this took the form of being unable to fully invest their efforts in a particular space. In these instances, success was often partial and never guaranteed. Moreover,
these experiences were often marked by a sense of diminished agency and dissatisfaction with their inability to fully realize their writing goals.

Based on the participants’ experiences, then, it would appear that the production of Thirdspace is most likely to be successful when writers are invested in their writing, have strong meta-cognitive skills, have developed a sense of agency that leaves them feeling empowered to make decisions about the spaces they occupy and what occurs in those spaces, and have access to flexible spaces that can be configured to meet their individual needs as writers. One positive implication of this analysis is that students, under the right conditions, are able to exceed the limitations they encounter as writers, proactively making use of creative solutions in order to seek out and produce the kind of spaces necessary for their own success. This is a valuable ability, as there are no one-size-fits-all spaces that will meet every student’s writing needs. Students will not always find the spaces available to them to be ideal in terms of their needs and goals as writer, and often students will find themselves in classrooms that they did not choose be in. In these cases, students’ abilities to produce a Thirdspace in these environments, to adapt/transform/reconfigure/exceed their First- and Secondspace features may be crucial to their growth and success as writers.

That said, not all students develop the same drive, meta-cognitive skills, or sense of agency as these participants. The participants’ experiences, I believe, require those of us involved in composition work to be acutely aware of how we “construct” our classrooms. Do we encourage creative problem solving and invite students into our conversations (like Joel’s senior high school instructor), or do we leave them with impression that there is only one way to accomplish a task and that their voices are
unwelcome (like Joel’s EN112 instructor)? Do we make a conscious effort to expose students to a range of writing spaces and encourage and empower them to try these spaces on for size? Additionally, the data suggest the importance of composition instructors guiding their students into the development of strong meta-cognitive skills so that students are better able to identify spaces that provide (or can be adapted to provide) the best environment for their continued development as writers. As will be discussed in the following chapter, these case study participants were likely better equipped than most students to make good decisions about their writing spaces. Through their year-long training curriculum and participation in ongoing development workshops, Mary, Joel, and Brianna had far more opportunities to critically reflect on their writing processes. The irony, perhaps, is that weaker student writers (those who might benefit most from the development of these kinds of decision making skills) are not afforded as many opportunities to do so, as their formal writing education may very well end following their first year writing courses.

Julie Drew has argued that one of the primary limitations of composition pedagogy is that we so rarely encounter and interact with our student writers outside the context of the composition classroom, and that this fundamentally imposes limits on the kinds of knowledge and understanding we can gain about our students as writers. Unfortunately, based upon my work with these case study participants, I am inclined to agree. The participants in this study were students that I interacted with on a regular basis. I had been Mary and Brianna’s teaching assistant for their writing center theory course, and I had been Mary’s instructor for her tutoring practicum. And although I had not taught Joel, I interacted with him multiple times a week as the assistant director of the
writing center. I worked with each of these participants over multiple semesters, and yet I could argue that I learned more about who they were as writers in several hours of focused conversation than I had in all the previous semesters I had worked with them combined. The reality of our students’ experiences as writers is largely hidden in those spaces outside our everyday interactions, inhibiting our ability as educators to develop and implement the types of spaces and curricula that might better support our students’ growth as writers and scholars.
CHAPTER 5

PRODUCTIONS OF THIRDSPACE IN THE UMASS WRITING CENTER

As I argued in Chapter 4, the ability to proactively alter one’s writing environment to bring that environment in closer alignment with one’s writing needs enables a writer to take greater ownership over the successful accomplishment of one’s writing goals. I considered how Mary, Joel, and Brianna, through their respective productions of Thirdspace, were able to reconfigure the First- and Secondspace features of the writing spaces they occupied in order to overcome the limitations of those spaces, meet their writing needs, and accomplish their writing goals. In that chapter, I referred to this process as “producing Thirdspace” and identified personal and spatial factors necessary to facilitate successful Thirdspace production. A sense of investment in a writing process, a strong sense of writing agency, a developed meta-awareness of one’s writing process, and access to relatively flexible space were all key contributors to the facilitation of Thirdspace production. Similarly, I would argue that these same principles hold with respect to writing center tutors. Tutors who are invested in their work and who have a strong sense of agency, a well-developed meta-awareness of their writing and tutor practices, and access to a flexible writing center space should find relative success in adapting writing center space to better suit their needs as tutors (and the perceived needs of their writers).
Whereas Chapter 4 explored a range of writing spaces, both within and across participants, in this chapter I will turn my attention to a common location shared by Mary, Brianna, and Joel: The UMass Writing Center. In addition to its analytical value as a commonly occupied site among participants, the UMWC is also a valuable investigative site because it serves as a relatively flexible location that helps develop tutors’ investment, agency, and meta-awareness of their writing and tutoring practices.

Because the nature of the UMWC as a space and institution establishes conditions that facilitate the production of Thirdspace, I believe there is value in examining the moments where such production occurs in order to understand why it occurs. As the production of Thirdspace often reflects an attempt to overcome a failing, gap, limitation, or obstacle present in a space, attending to those moments of Thirdspace production can offer meaningful insights into how tutors make sense of the work they do within the context of their specific writing centers as well as within the broader context of writing centers as an academic space.

After revisiting Thirdspace’s relationship to Firstspace and Secondspace to help illustrate how these concepts might be applied to the UMWC in particular and writing centers more broadly, I consider how various aspects of the UMWC, though not explicitly designed for this purpose, serve to provide tutors with the necessary conditions for the production of Thirdspace. Such an examination sets the context for how Thirdspace production emerged during my participants’ tutorials as a result of the
participants’ understanding of themselves as writers and tutors, their understanding of the UMWC as a specific academic space, and the idea of the writing center as a broader category of academic space. Examining moments of Thirdspace production in these tutors’ sessions reveals that tutors frequently draw upon values and practices developed in non-writing center spaces as a strategy for producing Thirdspace in the writing center. Moreover, in exploring tutors’ moments of third-space production and discussing the meaning and rationale behind the decisions they made in their tutorials (i.e., the “why” of Thirdspace production), it becomes apparent that even when, on the surface, tutors are engaging in practices that seem aligned with contemporary “conventional” writing center theory, these practices may in fact be a result of a tutors pushing back or resisting some aspect of their understanding of what the writing center is (or is supposed to be) that the tutors perceive to be problematic and in need of remedy.

**Revisiting First-, Second-, and Thirdspace**

In the context of Soja’s trialetics of space, First-, Second-, and Thirdspace are tied to epistemologies of space. In other words, Soja model is concerned with the various ways by which an individual comes to know a space. In this model, we come to know space through different categories of spatial features. Firstspace reflects the ways one comes to know a space through its material components--the “stuff” we find in a space as well as “stuff” that space is made of. It also, as I’ve argued in Chapter 3, includes the
presence of bodies in that space. Secondspace refers to the understanding of space that is produced through the discursive elements of a given space, particularly discursive elements that emanate from a position of authority and therefore serve to provide an authorized definition or idea of what a space is or is supposed to be. Thirdspace, then, represents the ways by which we come to know spaces that go beyond, exceed, or do not neatly fit into a material/discursive binary and therefore fall outside of the categories of First- or Secondspace. As Soja notes, Thirdspace reflects “another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental space of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning” (11). As an epistemological framework, then, Thirdspace understandings emerge in response to not only the material and discursive elements of a space but also from the experiential and affective dimensions of one’s encounters with space that cannot be easily be reduced to their material or discursive components.

It is also possible, as a form of shorthand, to make use of these terms to represent elements within a space that give rise to their respective understandings. That is to say, the UMWC’s Firstspace refers to the material components of the writing center space that may give rise to one’s understanding of that space. This might include its physical configuration, the books and other writing resources present, its technology, or even the people who occupy that space. In this vein, the UMWC’s Secondspace would refer to discourses related to the writing center and its work that produce an understanding of
what the UMWC is. This discourse, with respect to UMWC tutors, might be reflected in required readings and class/workshop discussions. Thirdspace, in contrast, may refer to the those elements of a space that extend beyond the material/discursive binary but still contribute to one’s overall understanding of the UMWC space.

In both forms of use, the concept of Thirdspace hinges on the idea of going beyond material and discursive ways of coming to know a space. Excess might occur in several ways. For example, one’s experience of a place frequently has an affective dimension, a feeling we have about a place that contributes to our understanding of what that place is. Although our affective response to a space might be grounded in or triggered by some material or discursive element in a space, our affective response (i.e., “feeling”) goes beyond discursive or material categorization. As an example, we can consider a child who is scared of the dark or insists upon a nightlight before going to bed. Even though little has changed with respect to the material and discursive elements of the bedroom, the absence of light provokes an affective response that changes the child’s understanding of that space. And as we saw in Chapter 4, Mary’s response to an abandoned classroom was largely defined by what she felt in that place.

Our understanding of and affective response to a place can also be grounded in our memories of prior experiences of that place or similar places (e.g.,, places that fit within the same conceptual categories such as subways, classrooms, boats, or writing centers). Combined, these understandings and responses work to produce spatial
meanings that emerge outside of our own intentions. As Marilyn Cooper argues, meaning can be “built up unconsciously through living” (“Rhetorical” 437). Thirdspace understandings of space, then, can be said to emerge at least in part as a result of the accumulation of lived experience that accrues through the very act of being present in a space. For example, I often feel anxious outdoors during summer because my experience of being attacked by a wasp while working for state park has left me with a crippling fear of stinging insects. Even in the absence of bees, wasps, and other monstrosities, I struggle with my anxiety in outdoorsy contexts because of my sense that those are the places where such things might be. The feelings, memories, and experiences that shape our understanding of a given location do not neatly fit into the material/discursive binary that Soja argues has frequently defined the ways we come to know a space, but that does not make them any less real or less crucial to how we make sense of the spaces we occupy. In fact, for Soja a “lifeworld of experiences, emotions, [and] events” constitutes one of the “defining qualities of Thirdspace” (31). These elements cannot be fully accounted for by epistemological approaches to space that privilege the material/discursive binary and are representative of the importance of that which exceeds or goes beyond in the context of Soja’s trialetics of spatiality.

Given Thirdspace’s connection to the concept of “excess” or “going beyond” I would submit that the production of Thirdspace can be thought of as the application of one’s agency to alter the conditions of a space in such a way as to exceed or go beyond
what one knows or understands the space to be (or to have been). As such, the production of Thirdspace can be thought of as a response to one’s subjective understanding of a space. This understanding is subjective, in the sense that the process of fully coming to know a space is always an interpretative act because it involves a question of meaning. Even in the case of materiality and Firstspace, spatial understanding is always an interpretive process. As McKinney argues, how one “reads” the presence of Firstspace features such as coffee-pots, couches, and cookies depends can vary widely depending how closely one associates these items with the concept of home (the intended association) and what the concept of “home” means for the person making sense of the space.

It is also important to note that the production of Thirdspace can occur in response to existing First-, Second, or Thirdspace understandings of given space. That is to say, while the production of Thirdspace is often tied to applying agency to overcome material or discursive limitations of a given space, Thirdspace production can also be tied to an individual’s effort to change how he or she feels about (or within) a given space (i.e., producing a new Thirdspace understanding of a space). Returning the example of the child who is afraid of their bedroom at bedtime, parents might help that child check under the bed to confirm a lack of monsters or teach the child a monster repelling song or phrase in order to address the affective component of the child’s understanding of the
bedroom at night, and in the process aid their child in producing a new Thirdspace understanding of that bedroom.

**The UMass Writing Center as Facilitator of Thirdspace Production**

A well-developed meta-awareness of one’s writing practices, a strong sense of writerly agency with respect to space, a sense of investment in one’s writing, and access to flexible sites of writing are key factors with respect to facilitating successful Thirdspace production. Meta-awareness enables writers to more critically assess both their strengths and weakness as writers, but it also enables them to be more reflective about the conditions for writing that are most conducive to meeting their writing goals. This awareness, combined with strong writerly agency enables the writer to assess the “fit” of a space to his or her needs as a writer, identify changes that might bring the space into closer alignment with those needs, and (if the site is sufficiently adaptable) execute those changes. A sense of investment in one’s writing provides motivation for pursuing change rather than accepting the status quo. Helping tutors develop the skills to successfully produce Thirdspace was never a stated goal of the UMWC; however, its approach to tutor selection and development, along with a relative degree of flexibility in terms of how that space was used, certainly laid the foundation for such skills to emerge.

**Cultivating Investment**
Prospective tutors applied to work at the UMWC for a range of reasons. In their written applications and in their interviews, applicants were expected to be able to discuss why they want to become writing tutors. For some, a job at the writing center represented a chance to help other writers. For others, becoming a tutor might have offered some additional experience as they pursue future career paths in education. Some students were motivated by the relatively generous pay scale (the UMWC offered one of the highest undergraduate hourly salaries). And others were seemingly more motivated by the desire to show off their skills as writers then to actually help other students. In building a strong community of tutors, it was important to make sure our staff was invested in the work the work of the writing center.

In part, the nature of being a UMWC tutor was a test of one’s investment in the process. The requirements to become a tutor were rigorous, and after being hired tutors were held to high expectations for participation in the life of the UMWC (e.g., participating in developmental workshops, attending semiannual orientations, working on projects related to the UMWC). I would suggest that for a tutor to be successful at the UMWC, he or she would need to be sufficiently invested in the work being done. Those who shirked responsibilities, showed a lack of interest in developing their practice, or proved irresponsible were subject to dismissal.

Simultaneously, those involved in the direction of the UMWC sought to cultivate investment in tutoring work by inviting tutors to participate in projects, lead committees
or workshops, and participate in local, regional, and national conferences. By offering such opportunities, the directors of the UMWC worked to produce conditions that would offer tutors a return on their investment in the life of the center. Moreover, as will be discussed shortly, the writing center space (particularly its inclusion of a dedicated tutor lounge) was designed to invite tutors to invest, in Mauk’s sense of the word, in the UMWC as a space important to their lives as writers.

**Developing Meta-Awareness**

The hiring process at the UMWC generally ensures that prospective tutors are skilled writers with a strong, albeit still developing, meta-awareness of their own writing processes. At the UMass Writing Center, both of these qualities factor significantly into the determination of which students make it through the application process. At the time this study was conducted, a portion of the application process involved prospective students submitting a scholarly writing sample from one of their previous classes. Quality of writing was certainly a consideration when choosing which students would move to the next stage of the application process, but it was not the only consideration. Equally (and possibly more) important was an applicant’s ability to discuss their writing process, both in general and with respect to their writing sample. Applicants needed to demonstrate the ability to critically reflect upon the writing choices they made in their writing samples, explaining both why they made those decisions and which decisions
they might revisit if they had the opportunity for further revision. Moreover, those students who did make it through the application process were expected to continue to develop their writing and metacognitive skills. As Mary put it, the first course in the tutor training sequence, “was just like a whip your writing into shape class,” that pushed her to be more critical about her writing choices and more attentive to her writing process. I would argue that a variety of rigorous writing assignments, multiple opportunities for feedback and revision, and the expectation that these opportunities would be taken seriously provided students in the tutoring class a supportive framework for the continued development of their meta-awareness as writers.

In addition to stronger meta-awareness about their writing processes, the tutor training process for the UMass writing center is also intended to help foster tutors’ meta-awareness of their own tutoring approaches. The First-semester training course introduced tutors to a range of pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing and exposed tutors to different theories related to discourse communities and literacy development that tutors could draw from in the course of their work. The second semester training course, designed as a practicum, offered tutors significant opportunities to reflect on their tutoring work, and tutors were frequently asked to consider their tutoring experiences in light of class readings and discussions, as well as to consider class readings and discussions in light of their tutoring work. The tutors who occupy the writing center, then, are individuals with strong writing skills who have developed
(and/or are in the process of developing) a robust meta-awareness of their writing and tutoring practices.

**Providing a Flexible Space**

All spaces place certain constraints on how those spaces may be used and modified by their occupants. Almost all spaces contain certain physical constraints (e.g., immovable structures, size limitations) that may limit what one can do to (and/or in) a space, and many spaces—through the implementation of certain policies—may attempt to constrain certain behaviors by outlining what kind of behavior is or is not acceptable within a particular place. When considering the flexibility of a space with respect to the production of Thirdspace, the concern is the degree to which a space’s already existing constraints impede the desired actions of an occupant. No space is entirely inflexible; even highly structured spaces such as prisons are subject to modification by their occupants. That said, some spaces afford greater flexibility than others despite their constraints. With respect to the production of Thirdspace, the UMWC offered tutors a relatively flexible space, one where participants felt capable of adapting the space to meet both their needs as writers and the perceived needs of the students with whom they worked and where the constraints that were present did not significantly prohibit the participants from making use of the space in whatever way seemed fit in the context of their tutoring goals.
At the material level, the UMWC in many ways represented a tension between fixity and transition. Located in the UMass Library Learning Commons on the ground floor of the Du Bois Library, the writing center had occupied three separate locations within that space over the course of three years. In its first two locations, the writing center had been constructed out of transparent, modular, cubicle-like materials and occupied one corner of the Learning Commons until it was moved to another corner to accommodate HVAC repair activity. In its third location, the writing center was moved to the center of the learning commons, occupying space that had been previously used for administrative offices. Whereas the first two iterations of the writing center featured immovable desks bolted to the interior walls, the desks in the third location were movable in theory, though not in practice. As each desk featured a desktop PC with a dual monitor configuration and because this technology was locked to the desks, they were for all intents and purposes as fixed as those in the writing center’s previous two locations.

Moreover, as a shared space, the writing center only “existed” during hours of operation; outside of those hours the main tutorial space became a common study space for all students. At a logistical level, this meant that the writing center’s tutorial space had to be reproduced each day when it opened, with tutors cleaning whatever had been left behind by other students overnight, cleaning off white boards, hooking up our phone, and setting out supplies and resources (e.g., pens, notepads, candy, reference materials). Similarly, the end of each tutoring day would feature tutors “breaking down” the writing
center, so to speak: locking up supplies, the phone (and phone cord after it had been repeatedly damaged by other students using the space), and signage. Although the need to reset the space every day put clear constraints on what could be done with the space, I’d argue that it also means that every day represented an opportunity for a fresh start and relatively clean slate.

Although the interior of the writing center was largely “fixed,” other elements of its design afforded tutors greater flexibility in how they made use of the writing center space. The writing center was stocked with a wide array of materials that tutors could make use of both during and between sessions. Tutors had access to variety of writing tools (pens, pencils, markers, various kinds of paper, post-its) as well reference books in order to help tutors pull together whatever materials would best meet their needs as well as the needs of their student writers, building blocks with which they could construct their micro-environments. And even though the writing center desks were functionally immobile, tutors could reconfigure chairs to bring in an extra set of eyes to offer a fresh perspective. Moreover, because the desks lined the writing center’s wall, the computers did not obstruct lines of sight in the middle of the tutorial space, allowing for unimpeded cross-talk among tutors within the center and making it easier for tutors outside of a session to initiate or join in conversations (both on- and off-topic). The “openness” of the interior space mitigated the constraints of the fixed desks because it allowed for forms of tutor-to-tutor collaboration that didn’t require the movement of workstations.
Attached to the main tutoring space, tutors had private “lounge” that could be locked at night. Featuring a refrigerator, microwave, bookshelves, and a computer, this was a space that belonged to the tutors and one that they could adapt without having to worry about undoing everything at the end of the day. In this space, tutors might leave notes for one another, post up humorous images or comics related to writing, or just drop off some dinner to be eaten between tutoring shifts. In terms of its use, the space functioned both an informal social space where tutors could spend time before or after shifts and as a site where many tutors would come to get some writing done, even if they weren’t scheduled to tutor that day. Ultimately, how this space was used was largely at the discretion of the tutors.

In terms of non-material “policy” constraints, there were very few in place that would have a direct impact on how tutors conducted their sessions. The primary policy constraints that tutors had to work with were time-limits on sessions (approximately 45 minutes), a requirement that tutors fill out a client report form documenting what occurred in the session, and a request that tutors encourage writers to complete a post-session survey. Other constraints involved a prohibition on working with students in back-to-back sessions, but even this was left to the tutor’s discretion presuming they had a free time block with which to continue their work with a student. Other solutions might involve setting up an additional appointment later in the day or week to give writers an opportunity to reflect and revise prior to picking back up with a tutor, or helping the
writer make an appointment with a different tutor entirely if the writer needed more immediate assistance.

In all, the design of the writing center space and its policies offered participants a place that imposed a relatively small number of constraints on how they conducted their everyday work as writing tutors. Although tutors regularly experienced some frustrations with the constraints of the space, such as other students occasionally making a mess while using the space or the challenge of fitting everything they want to work on (or everything a student wants to work on) into a 45 minute window, such issues did not seem to place an undue burden on participants’ abilities to work with student writers.

**Fostering Agency**

By helping tutors develop a robust meta-awareness of their writing and tutoring practices, and in offering them a relatively flexible writing center space, I believe that the UMWC also served to help these tutors develop their sense of agency with regards to space. That is to say, I believe that the UMWC empowered tutors to adapt the space of the writing center to meet their needs as tutors. Two factors were central to empowering tutors in this manner: creating an environment where tutors felt free to explore different approaches to tutoring and encouraging tutors to take ownership of and responsibility for the writing center space.
A primary factor in the development of tutors’ agency is the “space” that the directors and assistant directors gave them to do their work. When asked if she ever felt that our expectations as directors/instructors constrained or restricted how she went about her tutoring, Mary said that “I don't really think, but I don't, I mean I've gotten away with whatever I’ve been doing so, yeah,” and that in the our writing center, “I can talk how I want, be a little bit ghetto, be a little bit real, make it a joking session, you know, and other people in the writing center tend to like that too, they're like ‘it sounds like you're having a great time over there.’ I'm like, I hope we are, so um, you know, that's definitely been totally cool.” And when Joel was asked if he felt the director or assistant directors had any specific expectations for the role tutors should play, he claimed that he had “no idea what you guys [the administrators] would want.” In a follow-up conversation in a later interview, he explained that he felt tutoring had been presented as something that didn’t have a single correct approach; the training course sequence, “presented potential ways of tutoring but I feel like it was like kinda open, like how do you tutor, and hey let’s talk about [that]... I don’t think there was a set tutor coming out of that course.”

Reinforcing this idea, tutors were given considerable latitude in how they managed their sessions. There was little “policing” of tutor practice. Although tutors were required to be observed, these observations were infrequent (approximately once per semester), and their focus was on finding topics for productive conversation that would help the tutor to keep reflecting on his or her practice. With respect to how they approached working with
writers, tutors were largely trusted to make their own decisions provided they avoided shifting into a purely proofreading role. As such, tutors were empowered to implement any strategies they may have developed during the course of their preparation as writing tutors as well as any strategies or practices they may have developed outside of the writing center that they felt might be beneficial to their tutoring work.

A second key factor was that the UMWC encouraged (and expected) tutors to take ownership of and responsibility for the writing center space. This sense of ownership was fostered in several ways. Tutors were expected to be able to successfully set up and break down the UMWC at opening and closing time, and experienced tutors were expected to teach new tutors (or tutors who had not previously worked opening and/or closing shifts) how to complete these tasks. Tutors were also expected to be able to negotiate together issues of noise and distractions within the UMWC space to create a workspace that was productive for everyone. They were also responsible for maintaining the tutors’ lounge: keeping the area relatively neat, maintaining a respectful noise level, negotiating the use of the one computer that was in the room, and (perhaps less successfully) keeping the microwave and refrigerator at acceptable levels of cleanliness. These expectations may seem minor, but I suspect that encouraging tutors to feel a sense of ownership with respect to the writing center may make them more comfortable with making decisions about how that space should be used or what that space should be, thereby increasing their sense of spatial agency.
In encouraging tutors to take ownership of and responsibility for the writing center space, by framing conversations of writing center practices in terms of “potential” and possibility, and by giving tutors the opportunity to explore these possibilities without the fear of being told they were doing something wrong, the UMWC contributed to tutors’ developing sense of agency with respect to writing center space and how it might be used. In contributing to the development of tutors’ investment, meta-awareness and sense of agency, and in providing tutors a relatively flexible space to conduct their work, the UMWC established conditions that support the production of Thirdspace. For the remainder of the chapter, I’ll be turning my attention to those moments during my tutorial observations where tutors engaged in Thirdspace production.

**Emergent Moments of Thirdspace Production**

As described earlier in this chapter, production of Thirdspace involves the application of agency to alter the conditions of a space in ways that cause that space to exceed or go beyond what the agent knows or understands the space to be (or to have been). This process, especially for these participants, was prompted by a gap, dissonance, or tension between their understanding of what a space is supposed to be and what a space needs to be. The concepts of First-, Second-, and Thirdspace suggest that the way one comes to know or understand a space is the result of complex process, as multiple factors contribute to one’s overall sense of place. In what follows, I’ll be
exploring how participants attempted to push back against or revise some problematic elements of what they had come to understand about writing center space. Although Thirdspace production can be accomplished in a variety of ways, I’ll be focusing on a strategy common to all three participants: the introduction of discourses, material practices, and values connected to spaces of writing that participants occupied outside of the writing center as a means to disrupt and exceed problematic elements of participants’ own understandings of writing center space, what that space is supposed to be, and the role they are supposed to play in that space.

The subjective nature of Thirdspace production is important to keep in mind when considering a tutor’s writing center practices. For example, when a tutor pushes back against writing center discourse and the writing center Secondspace they believe this discourse produces, s/he is pushing back against what s/he believes the discourse has to say about what the writing center is supposed to be, irrespective of the “correctness” or even completeness of that interpretation. As we will see, tutors may frequently conduct sessions in ways that appear to conform to “standard operating procedures” or in ways that embody values that are in fact consistent with the discourse of the field, but that are (to them) sincere attempts to resist and address some perceived gap, failing, or limitation of that discourse and the writing center it produces. These efforts still, I want to argue, result in the production of Thirdspace for tutors, as these efforts (if successful) bring the writing center and what it can mean into closer alignment with the kind of writing center
those tutors need to inhabit to accomplish their goals as writers and tutors. Even if these perceived limitations or gaps are a result of a tutor’s misreading or partial understanding of the broader discourse (and I’m not convinced they always are), their ability to work around those limitations is crucial to their ability to fulfill their commitment to serving student writers. Even if the results of the tutors’ efforts do not appear radical to us, those efforts may be radical to them, and it is essential to unpack why these efforts seem radical to them. To not do so is to miss an opportunity to both better understand the true complexity of how tutors engage with their sense of what it a writing center is (and what it should/could be) and what it means to be involved in the work of the writing center, as well as the opportunity to engage those tutors in deeper conversations about these issues and how they navigate them.

**Mary: Acknowledging Affect**

One of the primary ways that tutors come to understand writing center space, particularly at the start of process of becoming a tutor, is through the Secondspace produced by the professional scholarly discourse of the field. This discourse is reflected in the many of the readings (e.g., journal articles and books/book chapter) that are part of the two course tutor-training sequence. For those new to writing center studies, such as prospective writing center tutors, these texts provide important information regarding the issues, values, and practices central to the field, and are tied explicitly to a specific kind
of space that they will soon occupy. Although Mary and Joel found the training classes valuable, they each found something problematic in the type of writing center they felt was being promoted in many of the class readings.

Although Mary found the readings in her writing center courses to be central to her understanding of what it meant to be a tutor, she felt that “the more I worked here, the more I realized, okay, [these readings are] just like lofty academic thinking that doesn't really apply.” Mary’s critique was that with increasing experience, she realized that is simply impossible for writing center discourse to cover anything approximating the full range of experiences that a tutor will need to deal with; as such, she felt the course readings provided diminishing returns as she accumulated tutoring experience:

I feel like a seasoned veteran now. I've seen a lot of things in my day, um, a lot of papers, a lot of different students, um and sometimes you know you see the same assignments and so you kinda know what the professors looking for or what the course is looking for so you just kind of help the student see that, um and that’s experience, like the book can't teach you that, like, in psych lab you're gonna have to write this way, and if you have this TA you're gonna have to do this and this is much more important, so that's the experience and I’m like, okay you have this person, this is what they've given for a rubric, let's work with that, you know, I guess, that’s, I feel
experienced and have more confidence in that than I do in the disconnected academic writing.

On particular area of “disconnection” that Mary bristled at was her sense that the writing center space implied by these readings made no room for the affective dimensions of writing. As an example, she felt that writing center discourse overemphasized non-directive or non-interventionist approaches to tutoring that positioned tutoring work as “collaborative” but where “the student still is the expert in it so you should only ask them questions, and it's their writing and all this stuff.” For Mary, the problem of this model, particularly its emphasis (as she understands it) on a question-based approach is that the real world application of [this approach] where you're in a session and someone is really stressed out, they don't really know what they're talking about, they're so, they feel out of control with their paper. You can't just keep asking them questions because these are the questions they constantly have and this is the reason they can't get any further in their paper, they're just talking in circles, so um, you know if you say, “okay well this is a really good point you have, I think you could relate to this,” and then all of the sudden they have that connection, whether they would have come to that on their own or not, either way, you make the connection and they all of the sudden have all of this information, they're able to have a conversation with you.
The “lofty academic” abstraction of tutoring work fails to account for the very human element that is central to Mary’s experience of being in the writing center. That Mary finds this “lofty academic” thinking problematic should come as no surprise. She described her displeasure with her literature studies in the same way. From Mary’s perspective, one of the reasons why these academic texts are ultimately of only limited use is that they seem to construct a writing center space that has no room to consider the needs a student might have beyond their formal writing concerns. Instead, Mary as a tutor is attentive to the “loneliness” of writing, as well as to the sense of helplessness that student writers (herself included) often feel and that is only exacerbated by what Mary understands to be the dominant pedagogical discourse of writing center studies.

Much of her concern stemmed from her own experience of these feelings. When considering her role as a tutor, Mary responded that she

tr[ies] to be comfortable, and I don’t know, I want to make the student comfortable, I want to be comfortable, I want to alleviate their stress because I feel like, if you’re stressed, you're not really receptive to talking, or changes, or advice. … I try to establish like that you know we can get through this, don't you worry about it, I got yo' back. I've said that like multiple times, and that kind of gives them the idea that, okay, alright, it's okay, I'm bringing my paper here, like, I’m not alone in this.
Mary’s experience of coming from and attending high school in an inner-city neighborhood colored her approach to tutoring:

You can't unplug me during writing center hours … I understand where these kids could have been coming from who don't feel good about their writing … and I don't want them to feel judged, I mean I don’t judge, but I don't want them to feel judged, so by kind of going back to that it’s like you know I, I understand, I understand your pain, your fears about this, and I've also hung out with people who don't speak very academically, like you know, that you don't have to sound [academic or] like really think really hard about what you're saying, just spit it out, just freestyle for me.

It is important for Mary to be able to draw from her experiences of growing up in Worcester when working with students. Those experiences drive her to produce Thirdspaces where students feel a sense of comfort about their writing. Although the idea that the goal of a writing center is to create better writers and not better papers is a common trope within writing center Secondspace(s) (e.g., journals, conference talks, and tutor handbooks), Mary rejects both of these positions in favor of a concern for improving the way the writer feels about his or her writing. This attitude deconstructs the Secondspace focus on developing a better writer, calling into question the parameters by which “better” is assessed. If “better writer,” simply means one who can produce “better writing” then Mary has other goals in mind. Mary’s assessment of the success of her
work hinges on whether the writer feels better about their work (e.g., more confident, less anxious), and if a better writer or better paper emerge as part of that process, all the better.

Mary’s language use is a key strategy for helping to create conditions in a session that will address a student’s affective needs and facilitate a student’s ability to overcome his or her discomfort with writing. She associates these language practices, which often rely heavily on local dialect and slang, with her identity as someone from Worcester. Rather than saying something like, “those ideas might work well together,” Mary might suggest to a student “that’s a balance that could like be happenin’ all up in there,” as she did when working with Gloria, who had brought her senior thesis into the writing center. This session included multiple uses of slang and dialect such as “it’s great and [you] know what’ch you talkin’ about,” “word,” “if you wan’ to girl,” and “Word! How do you feel ‘bout that,” along with occasional use of “crap” and “shit.”

The use of such language practices was more frequent in Mary’s session with Gloria than in others that I observed. It’s possible that this was due to Mary’s familiarity with the student from outside of the writing center. Although they had not interacted frequently during the year leading up to the interview, Mary described her as a friend. They didn’t “see each other often,” but their interactions outside of the writing center often featured commiseration about thesis writing: “on occasion [...] we do get together and you know, be like, ‘Oh my god, our thesis, oh my god, this is terrible,’ um and then
you know we'll both have horror stories for her, I mean, for each other, and we'll share them so then when she comes in here I’m like ‘Oh girl, I understand, I got you, you came to me cause I understand this.” One could argue that this increased frequency of Mary’s “home-dawg” language practices could simply be due to Mary’s increased level of comfort when working with a friend; however, I would argue that the increased use of these language practices reflects a deliberate Thirdspace-producing decision by Mary to counteract the extraordinary stress and anxiety that her friend was experiencing during the thesis writing process, a process that Mary was also going through with similar levels of discomfort. Mary’s use of slang, in this session and the others I observed, should be seen as a deliberate attempt to undermine an academic discourse that Mary felt had little room for her home language practices (and values) and that reinforced dynamics of power that could inhibit her ability to establish an authentic relationship, grounded in empathy, with the students in her sessions.

Although she feels comfortable bringing this part of herself into the space of the UMWC and her encounters with student writers, she also feels that such language use “kind of takes a step back from what I assume these academic sources would want, which is just a sit down, like a peer thing, but not as much of like ‘home-dawg’ thing.” The distinction Mary draws between “a peer thing” and a “home-dawg thing” implies that “peer,” within writing center Secondspace, still maintains an assumption of a hierarchical relationship. And given the connection that Mary makes between her language practices
and Worcester, I find her use of the term “home-dawg” to be particularly telling, as it invokes a sense of a relationship built upon common ground in a more than metaphorical sense.

Again, Mary’s position disrupts her Secondspace understanding of what a writing center is supposed to be, an understanding produced by her exposure to and interpretation of scholarly writing center discourse during her time as a UMWC tutor. From Mary’s perspective, this discourse calls for writing center space with little to no room for the consideration of a student writer’s affective needs. The fact that those with a more robust exposure to writing center scholarship might view such an understanding as misguided or suggest that her approach to tutoring is less radical or subversive than she thinks is irrelevant with respect to Mary’s production of Thirdspace. Mary can only act in response to what she understands the writing center space to be. The version of writing center space that Mary infers from the professional discourse is a space where Mary might, I suspect, feel deeply uncomfortable, as it is a space that is not only defined by “lofty abstractions” (a feature of academia that Mary never felt comfortable with) but also by its exclusion by omission of the affective components of writing (and struggling) in college. It is a version of writing center space that, were she to accept it as given or fixed, Mary might find impossible to inhabit successfully. Her awareness of her own emotional needs as a writer, and the empathy for other writers such awareness produces, prompts Mary to push back against this version of writing center space, rejecting the
cold, “lofty abstractions” of scholarly discourse by injecting the writing center space with a shot of discourse practices tied to her home city of Worcester, discourse practices that eschew abstraction for a keeping-it-realness that sought to acknowledge, validate, and support her writers’ emotional needs. In exercising her agency to bring this discourse into her writing center sessions, Mary produced a writing center Thirdspace that exceeded the limitations of her Secondspace understanding of the writing center as an academic space.

One of Mary’s biggest concerns about writing center discourse was that, in her reading, the writing center implied by these text was one that had no place for the consideration of the affective dimensions of writing. To Mary, the writing process always involves an affective element--the two are inseparable. This view seems to be confirmed only minutes into her session with Gloria, where Gloria concedes despondently that her meetings with her advisor make her want to “quit...and cry” and that she came to the writing center to talk with someone who won’t make her feel like that. Pushing beyond her Secondspace understanding of writing center space, a space in which emotional considerations seem absent and where Mary’s home discourses would not be welcome, enables Mary to not only acknowledge Gloria’s emotional concerns but to engage with them in a meaningful way, sharing that crying is also a major part of her own thesis writing process and developing a “home-dawg” connection that establishes solidarity against the callousness of the academy. As such, Mary’s production opens up new possibilities for herself as a tutor, broadening both the range of issues she can
address and the means by which she can address them. Simultaneously, she is producing a writing center space that offers new possibilities for Gloria, and students like her, to enter into academic spaces where their needs as writers are treated more holistically, with attention paid to both their emotional and academic needs.

**Joel: Building (Re)Humanizing Spaces**

A recurring theme in my conversations with Joel was the importance of creative thinking and problem solving. This theme emerged in his discussions of why the English major held such appeal, was demonstrated in his reconfiguration of both his high school classroom and his car to meet his writing needs, and proved to be central to Joel’s conception of what it meant to a writing center tutor. Joel’s interview responses were peppered with references to “play,” “bouncing ideas,” “risks,” and “experimenting.” For Joel, openness to possibility was a core tutoring value: “I don’t [...] have strategies in my head when they sit down, because what they write [varies], but I’m very, very open to change, you know. That’s, that’s I think the most important thing.” Rather than applying any one practice-based label to tutoring philosophy, Joel was excited that he had reached a level of confidence as a tutor where he felt able to be more flexible in his approach to working with student writers: “I’ve been able to experiment with all different types of, as I was saying, the minimalist, collaborative, directive, I’m more personal now. Like I said, I’m more open to whatever, I don’t know, whatever floats my boat.”
Of the participants studied, Joel was the one most concerned about being labeled or cast in a set role. For Joel, the writing center was a space where he needed the freedom to tease out the individual needs of his writers and then tailor a response to those needs. As such, Joel saw his approach to tutoring as working to counteract two separate but complementary understandings of writing center space: 1) Joel’s Secondspace understanding of writing centers, based on his experience with writing center scholarship, which represented a “fixed” version of the writing center where tutor and writers were present as “robots” and 2) a (Thirdspace) understanding of the writing center produced by the experience of being “fixed” in place by writers’ expectations about the role tutors play or should play.

Given the importance that Joel places on the freedom to experiment with different approaches to tutoring, it is unsurprising that Joel reacted negatively to the sense of “fixedness” that he felt was present in much writing center discourse. According to Joel, “oftentimes, like a lot of the literature about [tutoring], it seems like we’re dealing with robots … We’re not. We’re dealing with people and people have different things they want and they react to different things.” As an example, he referred back to an article on working with ESL students, Carol Severino’s “Avoiding Appropriation.”

I read a bunch of stuff about appropriation, and it was like, it was very black and white, like clear cut, this is bad, this is right, there’s like some literature like, and again I haven’t read the books in a year, but um a lot of it seemed
[like there] wasn’t necessarily an argument for it, “hey it could work in these situations.” It was like this is best in these situations, this is the worst in situations, and again I think the [appropriation] articles and a lot of the articles were really helpful, but there were certain ones that were just like, you know, every ESL student’s not gonna be the same, [...] and again especially, this past year I’ve learned now, cause like the first year it was just like ESL scared me, and this year I’ve noticed that it’s like, a lot of different ESL students coming in, like a lotta different types, a lotta different backgrounds, and that does change the way they act in here and the way they see authority.

Although Joel begins by referring to a specific article, he quickly expands the discussion to the broader Secondspace that writing center discourse produces with respect to ESL students. Joel’s exposure to the professional discourse of the writing center field results in a Secondspace understanding of the writing center that is both limited and limiting. For Joel, the writing center space implied by these texts is limited because it reflects a limited understanding of the both the tutors and students who occupy that space. From Joel’s perspective, this discourse turns both sets of individuals into “robots,” obscuring meaningful differences in background and experience that might shape the nature of the tutor-writer interaction in a session. This isn’t, of course, to say that all writing center discourse paints ESL students in such a broad stroke (and Joel acknowledges as much),
but it is telling that his dominant impression of writing center Secondspace is one that leaves little room for a wide range of ESL students (and their diverse needs) and little room for Joel to adapt to meet those needs.

Similar to his concern about what he saw as a fixed version of writing center space present in the discourse of the field, Joel was also uncomfortable with the writing center space that was produced when student writers came to work with him and--carrying their own understandings of what a writing center is and what writing center tutors should be--positioned Joel as an all-knowing robot (grammarbot? writingbot?). To capitulate to student expectations would make Joel complicit in the production of a writing center space devoid of experimentation, risk, and discovery. It was important to Joel that he not be seen as simply as “knowledge bank” or as someone who had all the answers. Joel found himself frustrated that many students were primarily interested in having him look over their papers and fixing what needed to be fixed and that they were not, at least initially, interested in the kinds of deeper, more exploratory conversations that Joel had begun to see as an important part of the tutoring process.

In order to push back against these limited and limiting understandings of writing center space, Joel draws upon his experience of basement-writing with friends back in high school, evoking both the composing practices and discourses that were central to that space. Without irony, Joel draws upon the language of pop-culture, fantasy, and
science fiction to undermine the image of tutor-as-robot that he sees present in writing
center scholarship and in the minds of many of the students with whom he’s worked.

One of the most beneficial features of Joel’s basement-writing sessions was
ability to have extended conversations about writing projects, a luxury that was at least
partially due to the absence of time constraints as well as the fact that the individuals
present were thoroughly invested in sharing their writing. Citing the difference between
how he informally worked with his friends in high school compared to his work in the
writing center, Joel believed that the former was more amenable to working “off the
paper,” that is, without focusing on the actual document in front of him. During the year
leading up to the interview however, Joel had begun introducing substantive “off the
paper” conversations more frequently into his sessions: “recently I’ve been doing that and
just like, before I even look at the paper, before we get into anything, I just go, tell me
what you’re arguing and how you’re supporting it. I don’t know, I think it’s helpful.” One
of the reasons that Joel finds this strategy useful is precisely because it runs counter to
Joel’s Secondspace understanding of the writing center, as a result of his reading of the
discourse, as a site populated by robots. Recognizing that not everyone has the same
strengths, Joel turns to these extended and less formal conversations because

a lot of times, there’s, writing and speaking are different, and um a lot of
times some people are stronger speakers and saying their ideas rather than
writing them and I don’t know, I kinda just test the waters for that to see
like, cause some people like, I’ll say [‘tell me what you’re arguing’ and] they’ll be super talkative and they’ll just say so much stuff, and I’ll just write it all down and have ideas and then we’ll go to the paper and just they really don’t know where they want to go, and I don’t know, it’s helped more often than not, so I feel, I feel like it, and also just, kinda makes them more comfortable, letting them talk.

In addition to offering students an opportunity to take advantage of different strengths, Joel saw his emphasis on conversation as a way of shaking up what students thought of the writing center and writing center tutors, especially students who had not been there before. Assuming (or in some cases hoping) that a tutorial session will not be a collaborative endeavor, Joel’s focus on conversation as a form of invested collaboration may be “something that [students] don’t expect as much.” In some instances, engaging in conversation opened up space for deeper reflection on a writer’s purpose and rhetorical goals (see my discussion of his work with Erin below), but in other sessions such efforts, though opening a space for writers to own their expertise, seemed to do little to change writer’s understanding of the role tutors should play.

In a session with a Kasey, a student working on a critique of an epidemiological study that needed to written for a lay audience, Joel used conversation and ownership of his ignorance of epidemiological concepts to flip Kasey’s concerns about clarity on their head and reposition Kasey as an authority during much of the session. Although Kasey
came in looking for help with sentence level clarity, Joel assures her that she “writes very well” at the sentence level; however, he also admits that he has “no idea about” the complex scientific concepts that Kasey describes in her paper. Even if the sentences are grammatically sound, Joel is not equipped to comment on their conceptual and contextual clarity without further explanation. As such, he frequently stops Kasey during her reading of the text to ask her to explain the ideas being discussed and to ask follow-up questions.

After reading a section of her paper that raised questions about the validity of a study due to the presence of “systematic differences” in the participants, Joel asked for clarification:

Joel: Um what do you mean by systematically different?
Kasey: “There’s random difference and there’s systematic differences, so the point of epid studies is to have random difference, you want random samples, but then when you have bias things become systematic”
Joel: Yeah, so, I was wondering if that was an area that needed more clarity, but since it’s like a special term, probably not so much?
Kasey: Yeah, she defines, I wouldn’t think so, since she defines it so, like one of the main differences in, I mean definitions of selection bias is, it's no longer, it becomes systematically different as opposed to random, I mean I’ll look into it.
Throughout this session, Joel shifts the focus on clarity from a discussion of sentence level features to Kasey’s ability to clearly articulate the major concepts of her discipline. In the moment of my observations, it seemed as though as Joel’s efforts were enabling Kasey to take ownership of her ability to manage her clarity (an issue she considered a challenge). Despite Joel’s efforts, however, Kasey ended up returning to meet with Joel for another of his observed sessions because she still wanted to have her sentence-level work edited. Even though Joel had reassured her multiple times in the previous session that her writing seemed very “strong” and that she was communicating clearly. In our discussion of this follow-up session Joel said that he didn’t quite understand why Kasey had returned, as the draft looked almost identical to the one they had discussed in the first session: “I thought … it was weird that she came [back], like I was not expecting her to return, and she was just like, ‘oh, I just want to check the grammar again.’ It was pretty much the same paper, it was just like, uh, I really don’t know what you want me to do.”

In a sense, Joel did know what Kasey wanted him to do (i.e., check the grammar), but didn’t know what more she was hoping to get out of the session beyond what they had already discussed. Despite his attempt to use conversation to broaden his writer’s understanding of what the writing center could be (and what her tutor could be), Kasey defaults back to concerns about sentence level issues--a stance Joel has difficulty making sense of.
In addition to (or rather, in conjunction with) his experiments with how conversation could be used in a session, Joel had also been experimenting with what he referred to as “time management.” For Joel, this meant being willing to disrupt what one might call the typical flow of a session if he felt there was a better way to get more out of the time that he had with a student; however, “getting more done in the limited time we have” did not necessarily mean trying to stuff a session with as much content as possible or rushing students through their papers. According to Joel, some of these experiments involved stepping away from the session and giving the student space to work alone: “like you know being, like ‘hey, I’m going to give you 10 minutes to like just free-write.’” Although Joel sees giving a student an opportunity for free-writing as an experiment with time, it is also potentially an experiment with space in general and Firstspace in particular. The physical setup of the UMass writing center is designed to provide each tutor/student pair with one rectangular desk, two chairs, and a dual-monitor computer. Everything about this configuration from a Firstspace perspective (what we learn about a space through its material features) strongly suggests that the work occurring in this space is predicated upon both the tutor and writer working side by side. In providing the student space, literally and figuratively, to engage in independent activities, Joel temporarily disrupts the Firstspace assumptions of the writing center by reconfiguring the location of his body in this space.
I was able to observe a different “experiment” with time management during Joel’s session with Erin, who was working on a final paper for her junior writing course. She was working on an ethnographic study on the “fandom” (i.e., the active online community of fans) of Fringe, a weekly science fiction television series. The first major issue that Joel addressed was the length of the paper. Erin’s text was already pushing twenty pages, though the assignment only called for ten to twelve. Joel calmly informed Erin that they wouldn’t be able to get through her entire paper in one session but guessed that they might be able to get through five or six pages by the end of the session. Shortly into the start of the session, however, Joel realized that even five pages would be ambitious. Instead, he chose to focus the session on the first two pages. In our follow-up interview, I asked Joel about his decision to focus on such a relatively short portion of Erin’s paper. He responded that “you know she really loved this topic and that’s why I was like, maybe we should calm down. It’s the final, it’s a final term paper or something like that, I don’t know, it was a big paper, like, let’s be slow about that, and like I said, I wanted to do five or six [pages], but clearly work needed to be done in a more slower pace.” This slower pace enabled Joel and Erin to spend more time discussing her experiences as part of this fandom, the points she was trying to convey in her paper, and areas where she needed to build bridges between her knowledge and her audience’s unfamiliarity with the show or its fan-base.
Even though Joel was not familiar with *Fringe*, he was no stranger to pop-culture or science fiction. When working through Erin’s ideas, he made use of references to *Star Wars* and *Lost* to find common ground.

She said, she goes, “I think I understand my writing, [but] a lot of people don’t,” so I brought in the *Star Wars*, brought in the *Lost* to understand what her argument was … so I was just like, well I’m pretty nerdy, let’s try to do some parallels here so we can understand and I was just like, well okay if I was in *Star Wars* what would we do, *Lost* what would we do, so I could understand it better since I’ve never watched the show, just to kind of understand what fandom was, like, how she was negotiating that in a bigger field.

Not only was this strategy intended to help Joel understand Erin’s argument; it was also intended to reassure Erin that Joel understood her argument. Joel believed that appealing to his nerdiness and bringing those interests into the writing center, not only in Erin’s session but in others as well, helped students “understand that I understand [them]. Also I think it kind of relaxes them to be more conversational like that.” In introducing this pop-culture discourse, a key component of his basement-writing context, into his sessions Joel is actively producing a writing center space that humanizes its occupants. Bringing this discourse into his session with Erin enables Joel to both deconstruct the notion of tutor as robot (i.e., he’s a real person taking a real interest in Erin’s work) and to
legitimize and validate Erin’s pop-culture proclivities. I suspect that on some level Joel was also drawing from his experiences in another high school writing space, his senior year AP classroom, where his teacher’s sincere interest in his melding of pop-culture and academic interests had a profound effect on Joel’s construction of self-as-writer. Perhaps seeing a version of himself in Erin’s desire to bridge her academic and non-academic interests together, Joel produces the kind of writing center space that he would have benefited from during that period and one that is closely aligned with his own academic values.

Joel believed that students who worked with him realize tutors are “not robots, and I feel like they figure that out real fast, I just want to talk to them.” In emphasizing this point, Joel isn’t merely trying to change students’ understandings of writing center space. That may be one of his goals (the success of which this study was not designed to address), but Joel is also trying to control his Thirdspace understanding of writing center space in the moments of these sessions by reconfiguring the affective dimension of writing center work and resolving the discomfort he feels due to the tension between the writer’s expectation of what this space is (or perhaps should be) and Joel’s vision of what that space could be. Ultimately, Joel is not only acting to disrupt his writers’ long-term understandings of what the writing center space is; he also attempts to effect this change to produce a writing center space that provides the “feeling” necessary for him successfully meet his students’ needs. Even though there isn’t necessarily anything
objectively subversive in Joel’s choice to foreground conversation or challenge a writer’s sense of how time can be spent or how physical space might be used, the decision to implement these practices did seem subversive to him. Likewise, making frequent reference to *Star Wars* or other pop-culture texts may not appear at first glance to be especially noteworthy. For Joel, however, adopting these practices was an important way of pushing back against as what he saw as dehumanizing trends in both the professional discourse and in writers’ perceptions of the writing center and its role. In drawing upon the discourses and practices of his basement-writing sessions, Joel exercises his agency to produce (for himself) a new Thirdspace understanding of what the writing center can be that resists these trends and that is in closer alignment with his values and needs as a tutor.

**Brianna: Revising Her Role in Writing Center Space**

Our prior experiences in one space can affect the way we come to know and make sense of new, but categorically similar, spaces. Tension and dissonance can arise when our experience of a new space does not comport with or challenges one’s previously held understanding of that kind of space. This tension can serve as a catalyst for the production of Thirdspace. For Brianna, a tension existed between the understanding of writing center space that she had developed while working as an apprentice tutor at the University of Richmond, and her emerging sense, grounded in her experiences at the
UMWC, of how writing center space could be different. Her experience at Richmond had left Brianna with an understanding of the writing center as a space that was strongly hierarchical and where tutors were positioned as experts. In turn, this understanding of writing center space had led Brianna to engage in and develop approaches to writing center work that reinforced these hierarchies and divested the writers with whom she worked of their stake in the ownership of their writing. After some time at the UMWC, Brianna began to feel such practices did not mesh with the culture of the UMWC, and that the UMWC might represent a different and more expansive understanding of what writing centers could be. To resolve this tension, Brianna draws from her experiences in creative writing spaces (and the practices and values she developed in those spaces), enabling her to push back against her older, more restrictive sense of writing center space, a sense that limited her approach to tutoring and cast her in a role with which she was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. In doing so, Brianna is able to produce for herself a new Thirdspace understanding of the writing center that exceeds what she came to know about writing centers at Richmond and that was more closely aligned with the kind of writing space that the UMWC aspired to be.

Brianna developed her initial understanding of what a writing center is during her second semester at the University of Richmond, where she took a 4 credit tutor training course. As part of the course, different elements of tutoring were discussed:
We talked about different … writing styles, we talked a lot about
grammar, we talked about, like, situations that come up in tutoring, like
what to do if you fundamentally disagree with the argument that the tutee
is making. We read one article that was about, I forget the name of it, but
it had “redneck” in the title and it was about this guy who came in and
made a really racist argument in his paper, and his tutee was um African-
American and just like how that person dealt with it, and what do you do if
you really disagree with what someone’s saying, do you still have an
obligation to help them write it.

Although these topics appear appropriate for a tutoring course, Brianna did not feel that
these issues, nor other issues related to writing center work, were central to the goals of
the class. Instead, the course “was very focused, well for teacher especially, he loves
computers, so it was very focused on doing everything through the computer and like
designing, like we did a lot of blogging and website design, and I don’t really know how
that related to tutoring but that was sort of the focus of the class.”

Brianna did leave the class with a sense that as a tutor she was supposed to be
“objective” and “focus more on like how the paper is written and not so much trying to
argue with them or trying to guide their points at all or make points for them.” At a
theoretical level, Brianna didn’t see much difference between the mission of the writing
centers, but at the same time she felt that “the biggest difference was that there was more
of a hierarchy at Richmond; it was sort of like we were considered more experts on what
to do and what not to do in papers, so we were sort of treated as mini-professors, and here
it seems much more like peer-focused like we're students, they're students.” Although
this sense of hierarchy was not prevalent in the course Brianna took at Richmond, it was
reinforced by writing center practices that put significant control of the paper in the hands
of the tutor. Rather than have students bring papers to the writing center, “the way it
worked there, you had to send the tutors your paper a day in advance, so I would have to
read it and then be prepared to talk about it in the session. Like, we didn't accept it if they
came in with the paper that day.” This practice proved to be “more homework” for
Brianna, and even though receiving the papers the day before helped her prepare for the
session, she also felt “more like the authority or the professor instead of going through it
with the tutee watching line by line, because the tutee doesn't have an opportunity to
catch their own mistakes as they’re going through the way they do [at UMass].”

Not only did this policy reinforce the role of tutor-as-expert, the physical layout of the
Richmond center effectively required tutors to take on this role, as it precluded
conversation among the staff. When asked to describe the size and location of the
Richmond writing center, Brianna noted that “it was a little smaller than [the UMWC],
also it wasn't a big open room. It was like each room, like you'd go into a room by
yourself with the tutee, so there wouldn't be anyone else like watching or like there to
ask for help.” The physical configuration of the Richmond writing center impeded
Brianna’s ability to draw on the knowledge and experience of her fellow tutors. Isolated
from her tutoring peers, Brianna was left to rely upon her knowledge to meet her
students’ needs, possibly increasing the pressure to perform the role of expert. Moreover,
the individualized spaces where tutoring occurred could be seen as mirroring the
conditions of meeting a professor in his or her office during office hours. In fact, I’d
argue that the Firstspace understanding of the writing center produced by this
configuration reinforced the idea of the writing center as a space occupied not by peer
tutors but, as Brianna puts it, by “mini-professors.” As a result, Brianna came to see her
primary job as “need[ing] to go through, find their mistakes and tell them how to fix [the
paper].”

This understanding of writing center space proved problematic when Brianna
began working at UMass. Through her experience of working with other tutors and from
her time auditing part of the First-semester training course, Brianna realized the focus at
the UMWC was not about just correcting a paper; instead, at the UMWC, Brianna felt
“like the emphasis is much more, like, let’s look at this together and get a second opinion
on the essay.” In fact, she reflected that she “hadn't really thought about good and bad
ways of tutoring before. I think before like in high school or as a frosh in college I
thought you're just supposed to go in and like make [the student’s writing] a better paper,
so definitely the idea that it’s more about making them a better writer than making a
better paper is a big [difference].” Despite understanding this difference in philosophy, Brianna still found herself, at the start of her UMass tenure, being “too directive with tutoring” and needing to “step back with that sometimes.”

Her transition from the experience of the Richmond Writing Center to working at the UMWC necessitated a revision of her understanding of writing center space. Part of the process of producing a new understanding of writing center space, one that would help her resist her tendency to undermine students’ ownership of their work, involved drawing upon her experiences in other writing spaces where ownership and investment in writing were core values and where response was grounded in a true “peer” relationship. In particular, Brianna’s experiences in spaces of creative writing served as a better model for writing center work than those she accumulated as an apprentice tutor in Richmond. The creative writing classrooms that Brianna occupied while a student at UMass represented very different writing spaces than the Richmond writing center. In these classrooms, the importance of responding to grammatical errors or issues of correctness were downplayed in favor of responding to the writer’s ideas: “our professors usually like us to try to say, like, make sure like you address the points that are good and then also talk about stuff that needs work. Grammar is always kinda there, so we kinda ignore it, like everything’s got little grammar mistakes throughout, but it’s more like, is the story interesting? Is it funny? Like, is it engaging? What characters are realistic and which ones are flat? Just like, I guess, just like, did we like it [and] mostly why.” In the space of
these classrooms, the goal of response isn’t to address grammatical and mechanical concerns; instead, the goal is to read for meaning and intent and then provide a response that hopefully helps the writer advance and develop his or her ideas. Moreover, unlike her early writing center experiences, the environment of the creative writing workshop represented a truly peer-to-peer relationship between writer and responder: “in the creative writing class we're definitely peers, we're all kinda like on the same level,” whereas her writing center work positioned Briana as the “authority.”

In addition to being a space of peer-ness, Briana associates spaces of creative writing with levels of commitment that she did not see or experience for herself in other academic writing contexts. Specifically, Brianna was impressed by the level of investment that her classmates had in their own writing as well as in reading each other’s writing. This level of investment, Brianna believes, was very different from the kind of investment she saw in other kinds of more “academic” writing, such as one might do in more traditional classes: “if you’re doing literary analysis, you’re usually doing it to pass a class.” This isn’t to say that one can’t be invested in a passing a class, but this is different from the level of personal investment Brianna sees present in creative writing. Brianna ultimately would carry this value of investment in one’s writing out of her creative writing classrooms and into her work at the UMWC.

In our discussion of her approach, it was clear that Brianna placed significant emphasis on helping students take ownership of their writing. Comparing the creative
writers she worked with to the students she worked with at the writing center, Brianna believed that creative writers are more “attached” to their writing: “people aren't as attached to the writing that they bring here as they are to the creative writing class so they'll just want you to come in and like show them what’s wrong so that they can go back and fix it.” One of the paradoxes that Brianna had to contend with in terms of dealing with levels of student investment or “attachment” to their writing was the way such investment affects the writer’s response to feedback. In a way, a student’s lack of investment in his or her writing might feed into Brianna’s tendency to be overly “directive” or controlling in a session. She felt that when a writer was not attached to the writing, “it’s a lot less personal, so it’s just like sort of, I need to fix this, this, this, and you don't take any of it personally.” In Brianna’s experience, an uninvested writer is more likely to simply agree with the tutor’s corrections, ceding ownership in the process. Such a forfeiture of ownership could potentially exacerbate Brianna’s tendency to fall into the (admittedly) problematic role of expert and reinforce the understanding of writing center space that she developed prior to her work at the UMWC.

To combat this tendency, Brianna invokes the values and practices of her creative writing spaces to produce a Thirdspace understanding of the writing center--grounded in peer-ness, student investment, and meaning-making--that exceed the understanding of writing center space she brought with her from Richmond. As part of this process, and to resist
her tendency to exert undue control in a session, Brianna works to disrupt her own authority by appealing to a student’s superior knowledge of his or her own discipline. Brianna did not see herself as an expert on all things writing; in fact, she held great confidence in students’ abilities to draw from the knowledge of their respective fields in the process of working through their writing. In one of our sessions, Brianna was working with an ESL student, Xiao, who was taking a course dealing with nursing theory. Early in the session, Brianna asked the student to go over her understandings of the teacher’s expectations, offering the student the opportunity to claim ownership of elements of the process where she, not Brianna, was the expert. Likewise, throughout the essay Brianna pushed Xiao to exercise greater specificity in her descriptions of nursing theories or models. In these requests for specificity, Brianna opened up a space for Xiao to explore and test her mastery of the subject matter about which she was writing. In asking for these explanations, Brianna, who is not an expert in nursing theory, builds the student’s confidence by giving Xiao frequent opportunities to prove to herself that she both knows and can articulate what it is that she has to say. A phrase Brianna often repeated in this session and others was “could you say that?” (or variations thereof), which would often follow a student’s response to Brianna’s request for clarification or elaboration. In asking whether the student “could...say that,” Brianna is suggesting to students that they already know how to put their thoughts into words because they just did; not only do they have something to say, they are fully capable of saying it.
Brianna’s process of constructing a writing center Thirdspace grounded in expectations of student ownership carried through her approach to the writing center’s Firstspace. Each of Brianna’s sessions shared a similar physical setup. Brianna consistently positioned herself so that the writer with whom she was working would be seated directly in front of a writing center computer with clear access to the mouse and keyboard. This was unlike many of other tutors at the writing center who often conducted sessions with the computer in between themselves and their students. When asked if this was a deliberate decision, Brianna shared that

usually if we're making changes, even I'm directing the changes, I prefer them to make it because a lot of times, if I'm just sitting there like correcting the student would just zone out and not be participating, but if the student has the keyboard and I like stop at a grammar error and suggest a change then they're the ones who are in control of how it gets changed, so they don't have to take my suggestions word for word, they can do their own thing with it.

In fact, Brianna would often stop at a grammatical error and *not* make a suggestion, leaving a space in the conversation for the student to fill in a correction or make an adjustment, an opportunity that, by end of their sessions, Brianna’s students would often take advantage of. As an extension of this practice, one of Brianna’s sessions was spent primarily giving a student, Leia, time to compose a cover letter for internship
applications. Although Brianna offered suggestions regarding how a cover letter is often structured, Brianna also spent a good portion of the session asking Leia to describe not only the nature of the internships she’d be applying for (thereby affirming Leia’s ownership of knowledge that will be key to crafting a successful cover letter) but also her own interests in the field. Observing Brianna in this session, and in all others, one cannot help but leave with the feeling that she never for a moment doubts that the writer with whom she’s working has something valuable to say and is absolutely capable of find a way to say it.

Brianna’s approach to how bodies are positioned in space at her workstation may lead her to tutoring approaches that are quite in keeping with “best practices,” but I think it is important to recognize that her decision to make sure the writers she works with are positioned to control the mouse and keyboards is significantly more than an example of a tutor just going along with suggestions from a reading or a class discussion; rather, Brianna’s approach to how she wants writers to use the workspace emerges out of her meta-awareness of her own problematic tendencies as a tutor, tendencies grounded in an understanding of writing center space that she was actively working against. Similarly, the idea of a writing center being a space where writers become more invested in their work and where students’ disciplinary knowledge is valued is not, all things considered, a particularly radical approach to writing center work. That said, such an idea does
represent a significant shift in how Brianna thinks about writing center space and the tutor’s role within that space.

Even though an uninvested student writer would have been a better fit for the kind of writing center Brianna occupied in Richmond (not to mention a better fit for the kind of tutor Brianna had become in that space), at UMass she found herself “trying to remember that [students] have their own thing to say in this paper and that I may not be getting it all the time, so it’s sorta like I'm there to point out things that I might see as a mistake or a teacher or general audience might see as a mistake, but ultimately it’s their paper so it’s my job to sort of make, help them do they best job they can do saying what they’re trying to say.” In recognizing the gap between the kind of writing center the UMWC is trying to be and her previous understanding of writing center space, Brianna draws upon the values and practices she cultivated in creative writing spaces to serve as a model to help her produce a new understanding of writing center space. In doing so, Brianna produces a writing center space that helps her both resist slipping into old habits and cultivate new practices that reinforce the values of personal investment and meaningful response that were so important to her own writing practice.

**Conclusion: Bridging Gaps**
All of the participants in this study found themselves at some point struggling to move past and exceed an understanding of writing center space that had the potential to inhibit their ability to meet their goals as tutors. For Mary and Joel, the Secondspace understanding of writing center space produced by their respective interpretations of writing center discourse implied a space limited in some fundamental way. For Mary, the writing center represented by the professional discourse made no room for the exploration of the affective dimensions of writing, placing such concerns out of bounds, so to speak. For Joel, the same discourse suggested a writing center space occupied by indistinct automatons with fixed roles and fixed responses. Brianna, having worked as a tutor at another institution, found herself struggling to break out of an understanding of writing center space that positioned her as the expert at the expense of her writers’ ownership of their work. Despite being situated in a new writing center, Brianna found it difficult to get away from the problematic tutoring practices that this prior understanding of writing center space produced. By drawing upon discourses, values, and practices from non-writing center spaces, and incorporating these elements into their work, participants were able to produce new Thirdspace understandings of the writing center that exceeded the limitations of other, more limiting, understandings. In each case, a tutor worked to supplant an understanding of space that restricted his or her options as a tutor with a space of greater possibility.
The fact that participants’ efforts to overcome problematic understandings of writing center space frequently resulted in practices that were, for the most part, within the bounds of accepted writing center practice does not render those efforts insignificant or any less meaningful. In each instance, the participant made use of a well-developed meta-awareness of his or her strengths, weaknesses, needs, and goals as a tutor in order to assess the degree to which certain understandings of writing center space met those needs or provided conditions that supported those goals. In choosing to bring outside discourses, values, and practices into the UMWC, the participants exercised their agency to produce writing center spaces where they felt able to best serve the needs of the writers with whom they worked. The flexible nature of the UMWC facilitated this process by helping tutors further develop their meta-awareness and agency and by providing tutors a space where they felt free to draw upon these outside experiences without the fear that they would be reprimanded or told that what they were doing was inappropriate or wrong. In helping to establish favorable conditions for the production of Thirdspace, the UMWC empowered tutors to identify and address conceptions of writing center space that worked against their ability to succeed as writers and tutors.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A LARGER SPATIAL IMAGINATION IN WRITING CENTER STUDIES

My research in this project has enabled me to explore in greater detail the impact of tutors’ movement across a variety of sites of writing on their tutoring practice, and how tutors draw upon discourses, material practices, and values developed in these sites in the course of their work with other student writers. In the process, I have examined the role that movement among and between spaces plays in the emergence of a sense of spatial agency with respect to writing, as well as how writers enact this agency in their daily, lived writing practice. To wrap this text, I offer a summary of my research findings, followed by reflections on the value of space as a critical lens for compositions, the implications of this study for writing center scholarship and the broader composition community. I close with a discussion of some of the limitations of this study, as well as opportunities for future research directions.

Findings Summary

In Chapter 3, I explored participants’ experience of writing spaces, particularly academic spaces, before their arrival at UMass. I found that, in keeping with Soja’s concepts of First- and Secondspace as spatial epistemologies, both material and discursive factors contributed to writers’ understandings of what academic spaces are, as well as the role of writing and writers in these spaces. I argued that the emergence of spatial agency is facilitated by a writer coming to understand space as constructed rather than given. More specifically, I suggested that movement between sites of academic
writing, and the dissonance such movement produces, can lead writers to the realization that writing spaces do not have to be as they currently exist, and to see writing spaces as sites of potential change.

In Chapter 4, I considered how writers go about the process of assessing and adapting the various sites of writing they occupy, producing new spaces better equipped to meet their needs and goals as writers. Terming this process as the “production of Thirdspace,” I identified four factors that increased the likelihood of successful spatial adaptation: investment in the writing process, a well-developed meta-awareness of one writing process, a strong sense of spatial agency, and access to flexible space. In our conversations, participants described multiple instances of adapting spaces (and multiple approaches to adapting those spaces) in order to overcome and exceed the felt limitations of those spaces, limitations that would have otherwise (and sometimes did, despite participants’ best efforts) inhibit participants’ abilities to achieve their writing goals, however those goals were defined.

Building from these findings, I turned my attention in Chapter 5 to the UMass Writing Center as a commonly occupied space among participants and established the ways that the UMWC, through its approach to tutor hiring and pedagogical development, as well as its spatial flexibility, established favorable conditions for the production of Thirdspace by tutors. In triangulating the data from surveys, writing journals, interviews and tutorial observations, it becomes evident that the participants of this study frequently drew upon material practices, discourses, and values developed and cultivated in non-writing center spaces in order to overcome problematic understandings of writing center space. In the process, drawing upon these practices enabled Mary, Joel, and Brianna to
produce new understandings of what the writing center is and could be that were more conducive to meeting their respective needs and goals as tutors and the perceived needs and goals of students with whom they worked.

**On Space as a Critical Lens**

The spaces that writers occupy matter, as do the broader spatial contexts that writers are situated in. The range of writing spaces that writers occupy, and the experiences of spaces they have occupied in the past, can have a profound effect upon how those writers make sense of and navigate new spaces. As compositionists and writing center scholars, attending to how individuals navigate among/between/within the various spaces they occupy can offer powerful insights into their writing practices. In particular, I see the power of space as an analytical lens as threefold.

First, seriously attending to space and the spatial practices of writing forces us to look beyond our composition classrooms and writing centers. It pushes us to explore with genuine interest the “hidden lifeworlds” of our writers, the places where writing (oftentimes deeply meaningful writing) occurs but which exist outside the scope of our interactions with student writers and writing center tutors and thus do not factor into our assessment or understanding of these writers and their practices. My conversations with Mary, Joel, and Brianna transported me, figuratively, to places that I otherwise would never have had access to nor would have thought to inquire about--Bartlett classrooms in the late evening hours, the offices of the Collegian, the inside of Joel’s basement. These were spaces that never came up in any conversations I had previously had with these tutors, either in the context of their tutoring courses or in our everyday interactions in the
writing center; however, the practices that the participants engaged in these and other “outside” spaces had deep connections to how they made sense of their work as writing center tutors, how they carried out that work in the context of their interactions with other student writers, and how the writing center fit into their broader writing lifeworlds.

Second, space as a critical lens offers insights into the ways that space and geography intersect with other factors such as race, class, gender, and ableness in the construction of our identities as writers. Where one is from can have a significant impact on how a writer understands who he or she is. This was particularly important for Mary and Brianna, each of whom recognized and reflected upon how where they grew up and the broader spatial context of their educational experiences (Mary’s framed in terms of Worcester, Brianna’s framed more broadly in the political landscape of Massachusetts) informed their values, discourse practices, understandings of academic spaces (and of writing’s role in those space), and their performance as writers, thinkers, and actors in those spaces. No account of the development of their writing and tutoring practices at UMass would be complete without consideration of the role their sense of “coming from a place” played in shaping those practices.

Third, space as a critical lens in general—and Soja’s trialectics more specifically—offers a framework for attending to how writers come to know different kinds of sites of writing, and how, in this coming-to-know, sites become imbued with meaning. Such a framework is particularly important in the context of understanding how writers transition from participating as writers in traditional high school contexts to engaging in writing work in a college context. As discussed in Chapter 3, arriving at college can represent a significant change in one’s conception of academic space. The transition
from high school to college is a challenge for many students. Given the findings of this study, at least part of the that challenge is a product of students’ attempts to reconcile existing understandings of academic space, the role of writing within that space, and their role as writers in that space with new understandings of academic space that emerge through their exposure to the college environment. These findings, then, suggest the potential value of space as a critical lens for inquiry within composition studies more broadly and writing center studies more specifically.

**Implications for Writing Center Scholarship and Administration**

The findings of this study, despite its limited scope, suggest several significant implications for those involved in writing center work. With respect to tutor preparation, it seems clear that a range of factors are involved in the process by which tutors come to know and understand the writing center as both an abstract category of academic space and as a specific site where writing work happens. One of these factors is the exposure to the professional discourse of composition, rhetoric, and writing center studies. In the course of this study, I found myself surprised by Mary and Joel’s respective assessments (largely negative) of writing center discourse. As someone deeply involved in curating their exposure to that discourse (particularly with respect to Mary, as I was more directly involved in her training), I have found myself reflecting on what role I might have played in leading Mary, Joel, and potentially other tutors to feel so alienated by this discourse.

Although Mary and Joel drew a distinction between the courses (open, flexible) and the discourse (closed, limiting), I find this distinction more difficult to parse. At the very least, their responses raise two issues that those involved in writing center work
need to consider. First, they suggest the need to think more critically about the conversations we invite into tutor preparation classrooms, meetings, and workshops. It’s possible that some of the alienation Mary and Joel each felt was due to a failure on the part of myself and those also involved in teaching the tutor training course to sufficiently frame and contextualize the course content. It may be possible that, in failing to account for the wide range of practices tutors have developed, can access, and will draw upon, we underestimated the degree to which tutors such as Mary and Joel might bristle at the perceived prescriptiveness of the texts they encountered class or to which they would be unable to see their literacy and language practices reflected in the images of tutors presented by these text. These findings suggest a need for myself, as well as others involved in tutor preparation and development, to make space for more sustained discussions about tutors’ (writing) lives outside of our writing centers and how those lives might shape their tutorial work. These findings further suggest the need for critical meta-discussions about the assumptions regarding tutors that are present in the texts they will encounter.

Second, although I may not necessarily agree with some of the conclusions about writing center space that Mary and Joel arrived at as a result of their readings, I also think that Mary and Joel’s critiques may be more valid than we might care to admit. Writing center scholarship has not done enough to this point to present tutors ways that fully reflect their creativity, diversity of writing practices, and depth of thought. Neither has our scholarship done enough to acknowledge or welcome in the full range of literacies, languages, and discourse practices that tutors employ in the course of their work. My experience of working with Mary, Joel, and Brianna leaves me convinced that those in
writing center studies, myself included, need to make a more conscious effort to welcome these literacies, languages, and discourse practices into not only the conversations we have with tutors as they begin to invest themselves in our professional and academic spaces, but also into our long-term research agendas. Doing so will enable us to better reflect upon and address the tendency to represent tutors as monolingual, as monocultural, as moniliterate, and (with respect to texts designed specifically for tutor preparation) as individuals we assume (consciously or not) to have few, if any, meaningful experiences of writing from which to draw upon the course of their writing center work.

Moreover, my observations of and conversations with these tutors revealed that they held understandings of writing centers and writing center work that were far more complex, nuanced, and complicated than might be implied by the practices they employed in the course of their work. At a practical level, this suggests the need for those involved in writing center administration to engage tutors in meaningful discussion about their understandings of writing center space and the relation between these understandings and their lived practice. When tutors’ practices appear in sync with our best practices, it can be easy to take for granted the complex motivations that might be shaping those practices or to assume that our tutors have come/are coming to understandings of writing center space similar to our own. These findings make a strong case for the necessity for those involved in writing center work, in both their administrative and scholarly roles, to be more deeply invested in understanding how complex factors, including tutors’ (sometimes unspoken) understandings of writing
center space and the broader lifeworlds these tutors occupy, motivate and shape their practice in unexpected ways and often unrecognized ways.

**Future Directions**

Following this study, there are several possible directions that further inquiry might pursue. One of the central limitations of this study was time. The data collection took over the course of a semester, and because of the nature of the study, reflective interviews were my only window into understanding how participants’ conceptions of the writing center and their role within it changed over time. Although both Mary and Joel reported changes in their attitudes towards the material from the tutorial courses as they gained “lived” experience from working in the writing center, the nature of this study only allowed for a broad discussion of that change in which the conversation was framed by participants in a before/after binary— that was who I was then, this is who I am now—that left little room for a nuanced account of how their understandings of writing center space changed over the multiple years they were involved at the UMWC. As a remedy to this limitation, I can envision an extension of this project that approaches the case studies from a more longitudinal approach. Such an approach would involve identifying a wider range of case-study participants (to compensate for attrition over time), and following their development as tutors from beginning of their work as prospective tutors (perhaps beginning at hiring) until their tenure as tutors had ended.

Such an approach would offer two core advantages to the methodology implemented in this study. First, as already mentioned, a longitudinal approach would allow for greater nuance with respect to how understandings of writing center space shift
over time, and allow the significance of “experience” to be teased out with greater precision. Moreover, it would better reflect the way in which tutor preparation is an ongoing process. Participants tended to focus on the course work in their first years of being involved with the UMWC, even though the coursework was only a part of their formal preparation. Second, a longitudinal approach would be better able to account for how participants’ decisions about which writing spaces to invest in (or divest from, as the case may be) changes over time. In doing so, a longitudinal approach would provide a more robust account of how movement between/among/within a variety of spatial contexts shapes the development of a writer’s practices in any given space.

Another potential limitation of this study that could be addressed in future research was my dual role as researcher and writing center administrator. As discussed in Chapter 2, my deep connection to the UMWC afforded me a level of contextual knowledge about participants’ practices and spatial contexts than would not have been possible had this study been conducted at a site with which I was not affiliated; however, it is certainly possible that participants’ discussions of their tutor training could have been colored (intentionally or otherwise) by a reluctance to critique a curriculum that I was involved in creating due to the power dynamics within the study. Revisiting this study on “neutral ground” would theoretically mitigate this issue. Furthermore, if this line of inquiry was to be continued in a longitudinal context, then choosing a site in which the researcher had no affiliation would be essential, as a prolonged study would likely only magnify the effects of uneven power-dynamics in participants’ responses.

This line of inquiry could also be extended by broadening the spatial context of the case. That is to say, for a deeper understanding of the effects of “outside” practices
on tutorial work, there could be value in expanding the range of sites where participants were observed. Such a move would help mitigate some of the issues that are always present in cases of self-reporting and provide additional data points with which to triangulate other forms of data collection.

Alternatively, future research might reframe the research questions explored in this study for an investigation into how first-year composition students transition into and make sense of the new academic spaces they encounter in a post-secondary context. As I noted in Chapter 3, the geography of college is, generally speaking, fundamentally different than that of pre-college academic spaces. The larger spatial context, combined with fact that students’ time is considerably less structured in college, affords students (in theory) significantly greater control over the spaces they choose to occupy. The methods applied in this study could be adapted to explore how new students’ understandings of academic space and their roles within that space, both in terms of the composition classroom and the broader landscape of college, shift as they transition into this new environment; the catalysts for these shifts; and the impact that such shifts have on their approach to writing in the composition classroom and/or other academic contexts. Such a study could also investigate if/how/when/why students draw from practices developed outside of the composition classroom (either prior to their arrival at college or concurrently with their composition classes), how these outside practices shape their response to the roles and subjectivities they are expected to take on in the composition classroom, and how students negotiate their movement between these spaces and the composition classroom.
Closing Thoughts

A consideration of thirdspace with respect to writing center tutors is important because it opens up room for a sustained consideration of the “why” that underlies tutors’ practices. It enables us to begin to question what kind of writing center space tutors are working towards, why they are working toward that kind of space, and what other understandings of writing center space they might be struggling with. A focus on the “trialectics of space” also encourages us to consider the many ways tutors come to know what the writing center is, especially those ways that go beyond the conversations that take place in training courses and workshops. Moreover, such an approach prompts researchers and writing center administrators to more seriously consider how tutors understand the writing center in the broader context of their lives as writers and how these broader spatial contexts influence tutors’ practices. The findings of this study strongly suggest that tutors frequently draw upon their experiences from outside the writing center to address gaps between their perceptions of what the writing center is and what it can be, and between their of understandings of what their role is supposed to be and what it needs to be. For the tutors in this study, and I suspect for many writing center tutors in general, the writing center operates as one site among many that they occupy in the context of their lives as writers. Their ability to draw from material practices, discourses, and values from a diversity of sites is a powerful pedagogical tool, one that enables tutors to be more responsive to the diversity of writers and writing they encounter in their writing center work. Writing center tutors embody a diverse array of identities, experiences, and language and literacy practices. As writing center scholars and
administrators, it is essential that we remain mindful of this diversity and work to produce writing center spaces where such diversity is both welcome and valued.
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Interested in participating in a research study?

I am looking for tutors currently employed at the University of Massachusetts Writing Center to participate in a study about how the writing that tutors do outside of writing centers influences their tutoring at those writing centers. You would complete an online survey, answering questions about the types of writing you do, where you do your writing, and why you write where you do. You may also be asked to participate in a follow-up study. In this follow-up study, you would keep a week-long journal about your writing, be observed during 3 of your tutoring sessions, and participate in 2-3 hour long interviews about your writing and tutoring practices.

You will be entered into a raffle for a $50.00 Amazon.com gift card as compensation for your time. If you are chosen to participate in the follow-up study, you will be entered into a raffle for an additional $50.00 Amazon.com gift card as compensation for your time.

Your decision about whether or not to participate in this study will have no effect on your standing or status as a tutor as the UMass Writing Center.

If interested, please contact Chris DiBiase at 857-919-9427 or by email at cdibiase@english.umass.edu.
APPENDIX B

TUTOR CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Principal Investigator: Christopher J. DiBiase
Study Title: A Qualitative Analysis of the Role that Sites of Writing Play in Shaping Writing Center Tutors’ Tutoring Practices
Sponsor: Donna LeCourt

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?
This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research study.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?
You are being invited to participate in this study because you are currently employed at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Writing Center. Your decision about whether or not to participate in this study will have no effect on your status or standing as a tutor at the UMass Amherst Writing Center.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
I am conducting this research study to better understand how writing center tutors’ practices are influenced by their writing activities outside of the writing center.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
The first part of this study will be completed online and will take about 30 minutes to complete.

You may be asked to participate in a follow-up study that will involve keeping a journal and participating in tutorial observations and follow-up interviews at UMass Amherst. The number of observations required for this follow-up study is 3 and will take 60 minutes each. The number of interviews required for this follow-up study will be 2-3; these sessions will be scheduled 1 week apart from one another. Each session will take about 60 minutes.
5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be asked to complete an online survey. This survey will ask you questions about the types of writing you do and where you do this writing. You will also be asked to describe some of the places where you do your writing. This survey will take about 30 minutes to complete.

Following your completion of this survey, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up study. The follow-up study is described below.

In the follow-up study, you will be asked to fill out a journal for one week, describing your daily writing activities and where that writing took place. You will also be asked to save and provide samples of writing that you completed during this week-long period.

You will also be observed during 3 tutorial sessions. These sessions will be audio-recorded.

Finally, we will meet for 2-3 weekly interviews to discuss your survey responses, journal entries, writing samples and tutorial sessions, as well as my interpretations of the study data. During these interviews you may be asked questions about your writing process (including drafting and revision strategies), your choice of writing location(s), and your strategies as a writing center tutor.

6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?
I do not know of any way you will personally benefit from participating in this study. However, in participating in this study, you may become more aware of your tutoring strategies and thereby achieve a better sense of who you are as a writing tutor.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?
I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?
The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records and, if applicable, of audio tapes. I will keep all study records (for example, writing samples, journal entries, and any codes to your data) in a secure location (locking file cabinet as an example). Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be destroyed six (6) years after the close of the grant or three (3) years if unfunded. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, I may publish my findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations. If during the audio-recording of your session(s) you
provide any indentifying information (e.g., hometown, class schedule, etc.), this information will be altered to protect your anonymity.

9. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?
Individuals participating in the first part of the study will be entered into a raffle for a $50.00 Amazon.com gift card.
Individuals invited to participate in the follow-up study will be entered into an additional raffle for a $50.00 Amazon.com gift card.

10. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Christopher J. DiBiase (857-919-9427 or cdibiase@english.umass.edu) or Donna LeCourt (413-545-6597 or donnal@english.umass.edu). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

11. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. If you choose to end your participation in the study, I will remove any and all information related to you.

12. WHAT IF I AM INJURED?
The University of Massachusetts does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

13. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in (Please check one.)

___ the survey study described above, but NOT the follow-up study.
___ BOTH the survey study AND, if asked, the follow-up study described above.

The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Signature:</th>
<th>Print Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Person Obtaining Consent</th>
<th>Print Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX C

CLIENT CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Principal Investigator: Christopher J. DiBiase
Study Title: A Qualitative Analysis of the Role that Sites of Writing Play in Shaping Writing Center Tutors’ Tutoring Practices
Sponsor: Donna LeCourt

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?
This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research study.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?
I am inviting you to participate in a research study because of your visit to the UMass Writing Center. The opportunities available to you at the Writing Center will not be affected if you decline to participate in this study.

Please note that you are NOT the focus of this study. The focus of the study is your tutor and the strategies that he/she uses during your session.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
I am conducting this research study to better understand how writing center tutors' practices are influenced by their writing activities outside of the writing center.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
Your completion of this study will take place at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Writing Center and will last about 60 minutes.

5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be observed during 1 tutorial session. This session will be audio-recorded.
6. What are my benefits of being in this study?
I do not know of any way you will personally benefit from participating in this study. However, your participation in this study may aid tutors in developing more effective tutoring strategies, which may benefit student writers in the future.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?
I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?
The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records and audio tapes. I will keep all study records in a secure location (locking file cabinet as an example). Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be destroyed six (6) years after the close of the grant or three (3) years if unfunded. All electronic files (e.g., database, spreadsheet, etc.) containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the members of the research staff will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations. If during the audio-recording of your session you provide any indentifying information (e.g., hometown, class schedule, etc.), this information will be altered to protect your anonymity.

10. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Christopher J. DiBiase (857-919-9427 or cdibiase@english.umass.edu) or Donna LeCourt (413-545-6597 or donnal@english.umass.edu). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

11. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. If you choose to end your participation in this study, I will remove any and all information related to you.

12. WHAT IF I AM INJURED?
The University of Massachusetts does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.
13. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

Participant Signature: __________________________  Print Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: __________________________  Print Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________
APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1-1. Please list all forms of writing you engage in during a typical week.

2-1. For each form of writing listed above, please list the place(s) where you engage in this writing.

3-1. Please choose five (5) places from question 2-1.

   Place 1: __________
   Place 2: __________
   Place 3: __________
   Place 4: __________
   Place 5: __________

On the following pages you will be asked to elaborate on the places listed in question three. On this page you’ll be asked to elaborate on Place 1.

4-1. Name of place:

4-2. Describe the material qualities of the place.

4-3. List the writing resources you make use of in this space (pens, computers, etc.).

   Resource 1: __________
   Resource 2: __________
   Resource 3: __________
   Resource 4: __________
   Resource 5: __________

4-4. For each resource listed above, please identify whether this resource is part of the space or a resource that you brought yourself:

   Resource 1: ____Provided by space  ____Provided Myself
   Resource 2: ____Provided by space  ____Provided Myself
   Resource 3: ____Provided by space  ____Provided Myself
   Resource 4: ____Provided by space  ____Provided Myself
   Resource 5: ____Provided by space  ____Provided Myself
4-5. How frequently do you use this space?
   ___ Monthly
   ___ Once per week
   ___ 2-3 Times per week
   ___ 4-6 Times per week
   ___ Daily

On this page you’ll be asked to elaborate on Place 2.

5-1. Name of place:

5-2. Describe the material qualities of the place.

5-3. List the writing resources you make use of in this space (pens, computers, etc.).
   Resource 1: __________
   Resource 2: __________
   Resource 3: __________
   Resource 4: __________
   Resource 5: __________

5-4. For each resource listed above, please identify whether this resource is part of the space or a resource that you brought yourself.

   Resource 1: ___Provided by space       ___Provided Myself
   Resource 2: ___Provided by space       ___Provided Myself
   Resource 3: ___Provided by space       ___Provided Myself
   Resource 4: ___Provided by space       ___Provided Myself
   Resource 5: ___Provided by space       ___Provided Myself

5-5. How frequently do you use this space?
   ___ Monthly
   ___ Once per week
   ___ 2-3 Times per week
   ___ 4-6 Times per week
   ___ Daily
On this page you’ll be asked to elaborate on Place 3.

6-1. Name of place:

6-2. Describe the material qualities of the place.

6-3. List the writing resources you make use of in this space (pens, computers, etc.).
 Resource 1: __________
 Resource 2: __________
 Resource 3: __________
 Resource 4: __________
 Resource 5: __________

6-4. For each resource listed above, please identify whether this resource is part of the space or a resource that you brought yourself.
 Resource 1: _____Provided by space _____Provided Myself
 Resource 2: _____Provided by space _____Provided Myself
 Resource 3: _____Provided by space _____Provided Myself
 Resource 4: _____Provided by space _____Provided Myself
 Resource 5: _____Provided by space _____Provided Myself

6-5. How frequently do you use this space?
 _____ Monthly
 _____ Once per week
 _____ 2-3 Times per week
 _____ 4-6 Times per week
 _____ Daily
On this page you’ll be asked to elaborate on Place 4.

7-1. Name of place:

7-2. Describe the material qualities of the place.

7-3. List the writing resources you make use of in this space (pens, computers, etc.).
   Resource 1: __________
   Resource 2: __________
   Resource 3: __________
   Resource 4: __________
   Resource 5: __________

7-4. For each resource listed above, please identify whether this resource is part of the space or a resource that you brought yourself.
   Resource 1: ____Provided by space   ____Provided Myself
   Resource 2: ____Provided by space   ____Provided Myself
   Resource 3: ____Provided by space   ____Provided Myself
   Resource 4: ____Provided by space   ____Provided Myself
   Resource 5: ____Provided by space   ____Provided Myself

7-5. How frequently do you use this space?
   ___ Monthly
   ___ Once per week
   ___ 2-3 Times per week
   ___ 4-6 Times per week
   ___ Daily
On this page you’ll be asked to elaborate on Place 5.

8-1. Name of place:

8-2. Describe the material qualities of the place.

8-3. List the writing resources you make use of in this space (pens, computers, etc.).
   Resource 1: __________
   Resource 2: __________
   Resource 3: __________
   Resource 4: __________
   Resource 5: __________

8-4. For each resource listed above, please identify whether this resource is part of the space or a resource that you brought yourself.

   Resource 1:   ___Provided by space          ___Provided Myself
   Resource 2:   ___Provided by space          ___Provided Myself
   Resource 3:   ___Provided by space          ___Provided Myself
   Resource 4:   ___Provided by space          ___Provided Myself
   Resource 5:   ___Provided by space          ___Provided Myself

8-5. How frequently do you use this space?
   ___ Monthly
   ___ Once per week
   ___ 2-3 Times per week
   ___ 4-6 Times per week
   ___ Daily
APPENDIX E

WRITING JOURNAL AND INSTRUCTIONS

Writing Journal Instructions

In this writing activity journal, please use the following grid to record the date, time, location, and writing activity for each piece of writing that you do for the next seven (7) days.

Remember, a writing activity could be anything ranging from a mid-term for a course you are currently taking, to an email sent to a friend, to a piece of creative writing. You do not need to comment on the content of the writing, only the type of writing that you did.

When possible, please keep a copy of your writing. When you return this journal, please include copies of your writing samples. You do not need to submit original copies. Any identifying information on writing samples will be removed.

Below is an example of a filled in entry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Writing Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/25/2010</td>
<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>2nd Draft of Econ Midterm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actual grids can be found on the following pages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Writing Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


