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Creating a Virtual Writing Center to Support Self-Regulated Learning

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional approaches to education and forced educators to adopt and adapt technologies to allow institutions to remain open, offer courses and other services to enable students to continue their education. This rapid shift to online teaching and learning has shone a light on the need for institutions to support students in working out how to maintain autonomy through meaningful interaction in the online world. In this paper we discuss the transition of a face-to-face university writing center to a synchronous online writing center that is hosted in the videoconferencing application *Zoom*. In doing this we explain the rationale that informed our thinking throughout the transition process and how sound pedagogical principles and a focus on the student experience guided our decision-making. Preliminary findings regarding how self-regulated learning was maintained and nurtured in the virtual writing center are presented and discussed.

Keywords: Japanese university, self-regulated learning, writing center, Zoom

For more than 15 years, the Faculty of Liberal Arts' (FLA) writing center at Sophia University located in Tokyo, Japan has provided English writing support in English for its high English-proficiency (average TOEFL score 105) students, who are predominantly Japanese. Since the FLA Writing Center opened in 2004 it has followed the North American university writing center model, which was greatly influenced by the work of North (1984) and Harris (1986) on the non-directive approach to tutoring. This approach considers a writing center a place where tutors help students with their writing through discussion and guide them to make their own decisions about their writing. Although the non-directive approach is a student-centered approach, its emphasis is on what happens in the tutorial and what the tutor does or does not do, rather than on the key self-regulated learning phases such as how students prepare for and reflect on their tutorials.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the entire process of booking and conducting tutorials occurred at the FLA Writing Center. The booking process was quite straightforward and effective; thus, it remained unchanged for many years. Students visited the writing center and wrote their name into an available timeslot on a two-week calendar to book an appointment.

The procedures related to the tutorials were equally streamlined and functional. Before arriving for their scheduled appointment, students completed a paper-based tutorial preparation form (see Appendix A) to give to the tutor on the day of their appointment. In these face-to-face (F2F) tutorials, students brought a hardcopy of their paper to discuss with their tutor and were advised to annotate their paper with notes from the discussion. The tutorial preparation form was designed to aid the tutors in focusing their reading and feedback to students, but it also provided a space for tutors to write a comment to professors about the student. After the tutorial, tutors returned the tutorial preparation form to the students, who wrote reflections about the tutorial in a space at the end of the preparation form. The student then passed the form to their professor in the class following the tutorial.

However, the social distancing and campus restrictions brought about by the pandemic required a decision to either close the writing center or recreate it online. Closing the writing center would have left students without access to out-of-class writing support. Furthermore, given the fact that all FLA courses are taught, administered, and assessed in English, closing the writing center would have been a significant loss of an essential self-access resource for many students. Therefore, as newly appointed co-directors of the FLA Writing Center, we decided to recreate the writing center online. This paper reviews the research that informed our decisions regarding the creation of the online writing center; specifically, (a) the decision to place more emphasis on promoting self-regulated learning before and after writing center tutorials; and, (b) the decisions regarding which technologies would best replicate, and in some instances enhance, the F2F writing center experiences for our students. Finally, pertinent student comments collected from the new online writing center tutorial preparation and post tutorial reflection forms are presented and discussed.

Autonomy and Self-Regulated Learning

One of the earliest definitions of autonomy in the field of language learning was put forth by Holec (1981): “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p. 3). Now, 40 years since Holec’s influential publication, the concept of learner autonomy is widely understood as an essential component of language learning (Benson, 2013b). Although “no single authoritative definition of learner autonomy” (Aoki, 2003, p. 190) exists, it is generally understood that one way learners develop and express their autonomy is through self-regulated learning (Dickinson, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000, 2008, 2011), which can occur by exercising control over social aspects of learning (Benson, 2013b), such as seeking help through asking questions (Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981) and requesting

assistance from experts (Dickinson, 1987). The characteristics and learner perceptions of environmental features also play an important role in learner autonomy and self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1992; Murray, 2014) as learners tailor their learning activities outside the confines of traditional classrooms (Benson, 2011, 2013a) and via alternative modes available through technology (Castellano et al., 2011; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Reinders & White, 2016). Learner autonomy, then, is a manifestation of both the actions and perceptions of the learner to take control of their learning and the affordances of the learning contexts to facilitate those actions.

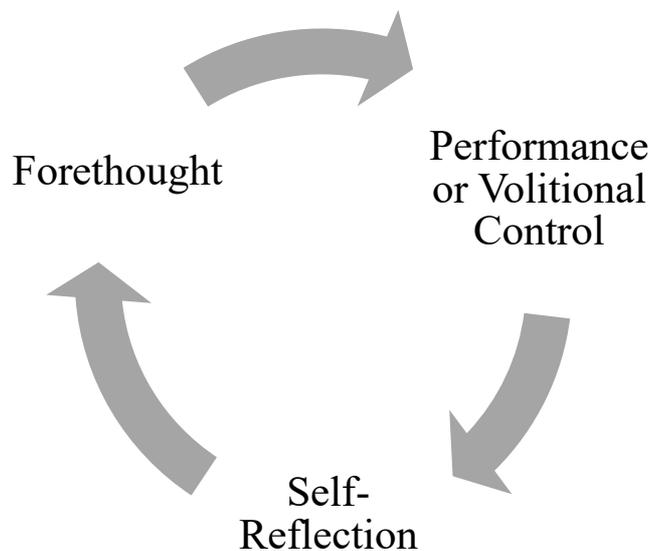
According to Wenden (1998) three important components of autonomy are planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning events and materials. More recently, Little (2007) posited that autonomy consists of three fundamental principles, learner involvement, learner reflection, and target language use. Taken together, these perspectives of autonomy place the responsibility on learners to take initiatives not only to plan their own learning but also to follow their active use of the target language with thoughtful reflection (Benson, 2013b; Thornton, 2013; Wenden, 1998; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1996). A social cognitive perspective of self-regulated learning models these actions into a cycle that requires learners to systematically focus their learning activities to achieve a self-set goal (Zimmerman, 2000, 2011). In the sections that follow, we discuss Zimmerman’s self-regulated learning model, and relevant theories of learning and interaction, that informed and guided our decisions in moving our F2F writing center to a virtual, synchronous, online writing center to support self-regulated learning.

A Model of Self-Regulated Learning

A social cognitive view of self-regulated learning “entails not only behavioral skill in self-managing environmental contingencies, but also the knowledge and the sense of personal agency to enact this skill in relevant contexts” (Zimmerman, 2000, pp. 13-14). This process is visualized as a cycle (Figure 1) consisting of three phases: *forethought*, *performance or volitional control*, and *self-reflection*.

Figure 1

A Social Cognitive Model of a Self-Regulated Learning Cycle



Planning, Goal Setting, and the Forethought Phase

The multivariate nature of planning in learner autonomy was identified by Benson (2001), who listed identifying needs, deciding on and prioritizing aims and objectives, setting targets, choosing learning activities, and selecting strategies for goal achievements, as integral components of planning a learning activity. The idea that planning and goal setting are important to researchers and teachers may seem self-evident to some, but evidence indicating students also value them exists throughout the literature. For example, in Cotterall and Murray's (2009) three-year study involving more than 400 Japanese students of English, they offer several instances of students indicating how important having a plan is to achieving a goal. The following quote is from a student who neatly characterizes both the value of planning to attaining a goal, self-reflection, and the cyclical nature of self-regulated learning.

If I had started with the material without writing any plan, I would have continued working on it, nevertheless it would not have led me my goal. I realized the importance and usefulness of having a clear plan and considering whether it is really effective for me or not again and again. (Cotterall & Murray, 2009, p. 40)

Indeed, goals play a fundamental role in language learning as they can help learners break large tasks into smaller ones, and they can help learners maintain or increase motivation with goal attainment (Thornton, 2013). From a social cognitive perspective, self-

set goals are considered strong incentives that foster learner agency and a sense of autonomy (Usher & Schunk, 2017). However, learning plans for achieving self-set goals require facilitation and support, such as providing learning materials in the classroom (see Appendix D in Thornton, 2013), making planners, timers, and goal worksheets available to learners (Usher & Schunk, 2017), or, as Deci and Ryan (1992) noted, by providing institutional support that creates an environment that promotes opportunities for autonomous behavior rather than controlled behavior (e.g., requirements of a course).

Performance, Self-Monitoring, and Note-Taking

In the performance phase of self-regulated learning the learner engages in active self-reflection while monitoring their learning, which is essential to staying on task and understanding if the learning strategy, the learning task, or both are appropriate and effective for reaching the stated goal (Zimmerman, 2000). This monitoring can produce physical or mental notes that track specific aspects of the learner's own performance (Zimmerman, 2000), the environmental conditions surrounding the learning, and ultimately the results produced from the self-regulated learning activity (Zimmerman, 2000, 2011; Zimmerman & Paulsen, 1995). During the performance stage, questions also play a crucial role as a self-regulated learning strategy (Butler, 1998; Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018). While responses to questions may lead to written or mental notes, questions can lead to oral interactions that develop ideas or redirect interactions. For example, questions can foster dialogue that can focus the attention of the learner, provide an opportunity to clarify or deepen their understanding, or change the direction of their learning engagement. Also important to this stage is that reflections occur soon after the learning event. Subsequent changes in learner behavior and achievement become more likely when the learning process is reviewed soon after the learning event (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1996).

Self-Reflection

The final phase of self-regulated learning entails a meta-reflection on the entire learning activity. This reflection is different from the reflections while monitoring actions in the performance phase. In this stage, the learner assesses their progress or attainment of their stated goal (Benson, 2013b; Zimmerman, 2000, 2011). The reflection includes identifying if a new goal is needed or what work might still be needed to achieve the original goal (Benson, 2013b; Wenden, 1998; Zimmerman, 1986). Similar to the monitoring notes taken in the performance stage, post-activity reflections should occur as soon after the learning event as possible, but with the idea that even these reflections can be altered at a later time and should be used for future planning (Zimmerman, 1986, 2000). Cotterall (2000) concisely summed up

the value of reflection for future planning and action thusly, “without reflection, learners cannot assess their past learning or plans for the future” (p. 116).

From the self-regulated model of learning, several points became clear. In order to provide opportunities for self-regulated learning, moving the writing center online would require more than simply creating a virtual space. It was necessary to re-create the cycle of actions, interactions, and procedures that existed in the F2F writing center, but also to emphasize and better scaffold the forethought and reflection phases of Zimmerman’s self-regulated learning cycle. Guided by our understanding of the self-regulated learning literature we considered that students would need to think about and plan in more detail for their online writing center tutorial. This would enable them to monitor their learning while in a tutorial session more closely, and subsequently to record a more detailed and meaningful reflection about their learning.

The Decision to Create a Synchronous Virtual Writing Center

One integral aspect of our writing center’s ethos is the recognition of the importance of dialogue and social interaction in the learning process (Wells, 1999). We were therefore cognizant of the possible effects of our decision making and wanted to avoid the online writing center becoming an email-based editing service where students send their papers for what amounts to proof-reading (Waldo, 1993). It was important the online writing center remained a context where the onus was on the learner to continue to make appointments and fully participate in the tutorial process.

The plan to set up a virtual writing center began with a decision as to the mode of the interaction with students. Prior to the start of classes, the FLA held an online orientation for new students and used Zoom for synchronous meetings. During the orientation, students shared their thoughts about online learning with an academic advisor. Their comments mostly mentioned a concern for interacting with classmates and professors. From the student feedback, it became clear that if we were to move the writing center online, the students shared our desire to keep the tutorials interactive. Furthermore, since it had been decided that Zoom would be used as one of the primary platforms for online learning in the FLA, and students had already gained familiarity with Zoom through the orientation, we decided to create a virtual writing center through Zoom meetings.

Digitizing Administrative Processes

The university management provided institutional Zoom licenses to all tutors and approved funds to purchase a license for the cloud-based online form-building software

Wufoo. This software enabled us to convert the paper-based tutorial preparation form to a fillable online form. A calendar on the writing center website displayed tutorial dates and times that were available for booking. All bookings were administrated through the online forms and follow up emails were sent by the writing center administrators to confirm booking requests and provide meeting ID and passwords. Telephone bookings were not a viable option because the administrative staff worked from home, and email requests for appointments were not tenable as record keeping for the appointments and tutorial forms posed complex administrative challenges. For ease of access, and to centralize the booking process, the online forms were accessible through hyperlinks on the writing center’s website.

The F2F tutorials required only one form, the tutorial preparation form (Appendix A). This form has a space to write goals and a space for reflecting on the session. Given the importance of setting goals and planning in the self-regulated learning cycle, we decided to create three tutorial forms each requiring students to include a goal or plan for their tutorial. We created a booking form, a tutorial preparation form, and a post-tutorial reflection form. All the online forms contained questions that asked students about their goals for the tutorial session, or what they planned to do with the tutor feedback they received (see Appendix B). Moreover, we recognized that the cyclical process of self-regulated learning does not end after completing a tutorial; rather, the process should be more akin a progressive spiral of actions that build on previous learning experiences (Castellano et al., 2011). To that end, we designed the online forms such that students would receive an email copy of all their forms, so they could keep track of and reflect on their previous goals and experiences, enabling them to track their learning and plan for their future learning. This design feature of the online forms stands in stark contrast to the F2F model in which learners gave their self-set goals and reflections to their professor, completing the learning cycle with their professor as the recipient of their reflections rather than the student.

Socio-Technological Affordances and Constraints of Videoconferencing

A constant theme in the online learning literature is how to provide, nurture, and sustain social presence in online educational contexts. Garrison (2009) defines social presence as “the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (p. 352).

The affordances of videoconferencing technology such as Zoom, especially in a one-to-one tutorial setting, dramatically increase social presence online because people can see each other virtually in real time, and the mode retains many of the important visual cues of

face-to-face communication, hence enabling spontaneous exchanges between interactants (Al-Samarraie, 2019; Chen et al., 2005). This can result in increased student engagement, and improved instructor social presence because conversations can develop more naturally (Fadde & Vu, 2014). Furthermore, synchronous academic support through videoconferencing has been found to be as effective as face-to-face academic support (Rennar-Potacco et al., 2016).

Despite these affordances, several issues have been identified regarding videoconferencing in university contexts. As Gillies (2008) notes, time delays, background noise, and other technical issues may impact learners' interaction, and Shi and Morrow (2006) observed that teacher training and support with conducting synchronous sessions are often neglected by institutions. Nevertheless, as noted by Al-Samarraie (2019), the effectiveness of videoconferencing technology to provide support for students to facilitate communication, social presence, and engagement in collaborative learning contexts is well documented in the literature.

Moving the Writing Center Online

The F2F writing center hosted one-to-one 50-minute tutorials between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. from Monday through Friday. Two part-time administrative staff managed the online calendar, all online forms, and coordinated all student bookings for the available timeslots for the eight part-time writing tutors. In order to maintain staff and tutor working conditions the virtual writing center retained the same number of staff and tutors and the same operating hours and tutorial times as the F2F writing center, which meant the two part-time writing center staff each hosted approximately 17 hours of Zoom meetings every week. Hosting a meeting involved scheduling the Zoom meetings, emailing students and tutors the Zoom meeting links and passwords, and assigning tutors and students to *Breakout rooms*, a Zoom function that allows the meeting host to break the primary meeting group into multiple private subgroups. In Breakout rooms students would be able to discuss their writing in private with tutors and receive oral, face-to-face feedback virtually in a one-to-one setting. Zoom also provides tools that facilitate student engagement, such as the *Screenshare* feature which allows students to share their writing and maintain ownership of it, a virtual whiteboard for providing examples and clarify writing concepts and ideas, and a *Chat* function to allow an avenue for communication if the video or audio became compromised. At the end of each 50-minute tutorial, students would be encouraged to make another appointment and prompted to complete the post-tutorial form. As mentioned earlier, it was thought that using the Zoom technology in this way would provide a familiar virtual destination for students by allowing the students and tutors to use a software application they

had become familiar with in the online orientation camp and through their online classes once the semester started.

Preliminary Findings

In what follows we describe data from the writing center forms. At the time of writing this paper, the virtual writing center was actively accepting appointments, and approximately 230 tutorials had been completed between June 1 and July 15, 2020. This is equivalent to the number of tutorials the F2F writing center usually completes within the same time frame. Therefore, data herein are from a mid-point in an ongoing semester and cannot be interpreted in terms of ratios of a whole nor can they be discussed in a summative manner. Instead, we offer selected data that identify instances in which our planning and reflection forms promoted self-regulation in students using the writing center. Due to the number and variety comments, phrases and quotes are not attributed to specific students.

Forethought and Planning

Usher and Schunk (2017) suggested that goal sheets can promote self-regulated learning. Thus, both the tutorial booking form and tutorial preparation form ask students to write down their goals for the tutorial (see Appendix B). This repetition of questions is designed to prompt learners to think about their writing and identify specific needs (Benson, 2013b) for tutors to focus on and to set their priorities for what they want to cover, including focusing their tutorial on smaller components of a given assignment (Thornton, 2013) and planning for future learning (Cotterall, 2000; Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000).

Furthermore, we thought that the affordances of videoconferencing technology would enable our students (the majority of whom have oral fluency in English) to anticipate and plan for (e.g., preparing questions about the content of their paper, the quality of their argument, or seeking advice and direction) an extended social interaction with the tutor, as the Breakout rooms provided privacy that might facilitate purposeful and trusting communication (Garrison, 2009), an increase in student engagement (Fadde & Vu, 2014), and mid-task monitoring (Thornton, 2013; Zimmerman, 1986, 2000).

Setting Goals

Across the 230 plus tutorial booking forms collected thus far, three themes emerged from the responses to the goal-setting and reflection questions that exemplified self-regulation; specifically, goals based on self-reflection and feedback, goals indicating a prioritization of foci for the tutorial, and goals requesting advice from and a dialogue with the tutor as a means of ameliorating current abilities and experiences. As one may quickly

surmise, not every goal fell into these three categories. However, the focus of this paper is not to construct catch-all categories for every goal given, nor is it to construct idiosyncratic classes of goals that are entirely unique; rather, the purpose of highlighting these three patterns is to note a selection of goal statements that speak to supporting self-regulated learning through the virtual writing center. It is also important to reiterate that these goal statements overlap at times, as it would stand to reason that a student who prioritizes learning may also consider feedback from their professor.

Setting Goals from Self-Reflection and Feedback

While the forethought stage of the self-regulated learning cycle is about planning for learning that is yet to happen, Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes the non-linear nature of the self-regulated learning cycle, as reflection on experience working on previous learning task, and feedback from others can influence the goals students set in their planning stages. Our data showed students, indeed, used prior feedback and experience (or lack thereof) to make their initial goals for the tutorial.

For example, a student concerned with formatting and content revisions stated this goal, “I want to focus on my citation (APA).” This request was followed by a request to check the quality of the student’s revisions in light of prior feedback from their professor, “and to check if my essay is actually improved based on the feedback from the professor.” Other students reflecting on their prior writing experiences identified a need for support with writing genres they were encountering for the first time. These requests were often embedded with evaluations of the students writing skills. For instance, a student offered this goal:

Since this is my first time to write a factual essay, I would like to receive some tips and advices to improve my writing as a whole. I actually struggled with writing a coherent essay, so I would like the tutor to check whether my essay is coherent. Moreover, I'm not good at citing, so I would like the tutor to check my citation as well.

Goals such as these provide insight to two important points. The first point is related to Zimmerman (2000), who identifies the personal agency to seek help in relevant contexts as an essential aspect of self-regulated learning. The goals stated above indicate that students see the virtual writing center as one such context. These goals also imply that students viewed the virtual writing center as a part of the writing process that includes classroom learning and feedback from the professor. Through this perspective, the writing center is a place where students can work on their writing as a process of improvement by sharing feedback from professors with the tutors and by relaying their personal experiences with writing genres.

Setting Priorities

Zimmerman (2000) underscores the importance of learners systematically focusing their learning activities to achieve a self-set goal, and Benson (2001, 2013a) draws attention to the facilitative role of setting priorities for learning for learner autonomy. Across the goals examined, it became apparent that goals that set priorities were often made in the imperative form and many included some indication of the status of the paper. For instance, one composition student wrote, “Read through the essay and check unity and coherence. Check transition words or sentences,” which was followed with note about what will happen if time was left over after the tutor assisted with the first request, “If we have time check another expository essay outline.” Similarly, another composition class student let the tutor know the status of the writing, while also indicating what type of information would help them and what might be done with any remaining time:

I have an outline but still have not written a complete essay. So, I would like tutors [sic] to help my brainstorming as well as give some advice for writing an interesting introduction. Also, if we have time, I would like to know if my body paragraphs are logical and coherent.

Goals such as these indicate the students’ awareness of the amount of information that can be covered in a 50-minute tutorial, but they also imply that the student has prioritized which issues and points needed to be covered, indicating that some issues are more important to their learning goals than others.

Requesting Advice from and an Extended Dialogue with the Tutor

Little (2007) suggested that active participation in the learning process is essential to learner autonomy. Classroom research has shown how learners who are actively engaged with their learning contexts use help seeking strategies as plain as a close-ended question, while other strategies include extended interactions targeting a more complete understanding of an unclear concept (Butler, 1998; Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018). The self-regulated learning framework extends the use of questions and dialogue and operationalizes them as goal-oriented activities that may lead to short replies or to extended interactions of new information and reflective accounts (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). As all tutorials were synchronous and conducted via videoconferencing, several students capitalized on this by requesting a session that indicated they wanted to have detailed discussions with the tutor. Such requests were often made by students who had only just begun their essays, but also by students who had completed their drafts. What became apparent was students usually wanted to talk at length with a tutor to either expand their ideas or focus the paper.

An example from a composition student is, “My essay is still in process of draft. Therefore, I would like to have some advice on how to develop my essay.” Another student offered the opposite perspective by indicating they needed fewer ideas in their process of planning their paper, “Ways on narrowing down an essay topic. I would like to know how to narrow down ideas to the topic I have chosen and make it argumentative.” Other requests came with evaluative statements of the writing, the student’s ability, or both. For example, one composition course student wrote:

I am struggling with factual essay. I wrote half of the essay, but I am not sure if I am on the right track. I would like to know how I can develop this essay from where I am now.

These goals indicate that students used the tutorials to improve the content of their paper by requesting help with composition skills that will enable them to improve their writing. Goals that indicated a desire to have an extended dialogue with tutors are particularly noteworthy as they signal a focus on learning strategies, such as “...how to develop my essay...,” “...ways of narrowing down an essay topic...,” and “How can I develop from here...,” which are contrary to a passive request that might ask tutors to choose the text to be added or removed.

The above goals from the booking and tutorial preparation forms indicate that students made specific plans for their tutorials that were informed by their professor’s feedback and personal experiences and that they were able to prioritize their learning goals for the 50-minute tutorials. Students also indicated a desire to actively participate in dialogue with tutors to learn composition skills relevant to becoming a better writer as opposed to having tutors suggest ways to improve a given essay. In sum, these planned interactions with the tutors enabled students to develop a sense of ownership over the tutorials, stimulated active engagement with experts who supported their learning goals and fostered students self-regulated learning as a result.

Student Reflections on the Tutorial and Their Writing

To gain insights into the performance control of the students, we analyzed approximately 230 post-tutorial reflection forms for comments and language that indicated students were relaxed and comfortable with their tutor and the environmental features of the tutorial. We determined that comments of this kind would indicate social presence in the tutorials, which is important because, as Goda and Yamada (2012) advise, instructors should facilitate social presence prior to shifting the “focus to academic topics to increase the quality of student interactions during the learning activities” (p. 311).

The student responses to the second question on the post-tutorial form (Have you any comments or suggestions for the online writing center?) provide indicators that students were appreciative, relaxed, and engaged in the online environment. Most comments included phrases such as *thank you* or *the tutorial was helpful*, or both, “It was actually a lot of help, thank you very much.” In many instances this appreciation included affective language and comments related to how simple it was to ask questions, a concern voiced by students in the orientation camp. A few examples show this trend, “It was so helpful to go over my writing with tutor because she was so kind;” “She was super nice and it was really easy for me to ask any questions;” “It was so helpful to go over my writing with tutor because she was so kind and she explained me well about what points should I revise.” Students also frequently mentioned how, “clear,” “useful,” and “easy to understand” tutor comments were, as well as how, “detailed,” “specific,” “organized,” and “well explained” their feedback was. Furthermore, in the first few weeks after opening the virtual writing center, a number of students explicitly stated that they would be returning to the online writing center with comments such as, “I will visit here again,” “I would like to use this system again for my next essay,” “I will use this wonderful system again!” Clearly, the post-tutorial reflection comments indicate students were engaged with their tutors, and comfortable discussing their writing in a socially supportive online environment.

The student responses to the first question on the post-tutorial form (Reflect on your tutorial and the advice you were given. How will you integrate your thoughts and the tutor feedback in your writing?) indicate that students were engaged in self-monitoring activities such as note taking. This is evident in the length and details in many of the student comments. For example:

I removed the sentences that “did not add meaning to the paragraph.” Also, I learned from the tutor that I can use the synonym function to look for another way of saying something. These tips will be useful throughout my college life.

While my first topic sentence was clear, the second and third topic sentence wasn't. She [the tutor] said my idea is good, but the problem is that I am not sure how I say with appropriate words. She recommend me to write complete sentence for topic sentence even in a outline to help me write essay easier and make my points clear. In terms of vocabulary usage, she pointed out “children” does not well fit in to my essay this time. Instead, I would use adolescents or children with particular ages. I need further research to develop my idea and improve my conclusion. For introduction, I will try to make it more creative as I write [the] body and conclusion.

These comments also suggest that the students selected key aspects of their writing (i.e., topic sentences, redundancy, academic register, and idea development and support) to focus their attention on (Benson, 2013b) and develop further. This would have enabled those students to track specific aspects of their performance (Zimmerman, 2000) and further direct their own learning (Cotterall, 2000).

Indeed, this level of self-regulated learning is evident in the number of student comments that indicate that they discussed their writing in depth, took notes, and formulated new goals based on their interaction with their writing center tutor. Appendix C is a selection of student quotes from the post-tutorial reflection form in which they state what they *need to do*, *have to do* or *next steps* they plan to take. Together with the student comments above, these comments strongly suggest that students had opportunities to clarify and deepen their understanding of their writing and think about where to redirect their attention and learning in the writing center tutorials. In short, the student interactions in the tutorials enabled them to develop a sense of agency, engage strategically in their learning, and increase their learner autonomy in the process.

Summary and Implications

Providing institutional support has been identified as one way to create an environment and context that promotes opportunities for autonomous behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1992). Our plan to move the F2F writing center online was guided, in principle, by the idea that writing centers provide important institutional support to learners, and by extension are potential sites beyond the traditional classroom (Benson, 2011; Reinders & White, 2016) in which learners can exercise self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2000, 2011). The data presented indicate the writing center acted as a place (Murray, 2014) in which several elements of self-regulated learning and learner autonomy manifested.

Goal setting and Self-Regulated Learning

Setting goals is one of the primary steps that should be taken in the planning phase of self-regulated language learning (Benson, 2001, 2013b; Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Thornton, 2013). Our data identified three ways learners expressed their goals in the pre-tutorial stage, goals based on self-reflection and feedback, goals indicating a prioritization of foci for the tutorial, and goals requesting advice from and a dialogue with the tutor as a means of ameliorating current abilities and experiences. These ways of expressing goals are essential to understanding the value of planning and reflection as thinking forward to what needs to be

done next (Cotterall, 2000; Cotterall & Murray, 2009) and in determining that help of experts may be needed because of inexperience (Dickinson, 1987; Zimmerman, 1986, 2000).

In the reflection stage, the post-tutorial reflection form data suggests that students were comfortable and highly engaged in meaningful interactions in the tutorials and genuinely appreciated the ease in which they could ask questions and receive feedback on their papers. Importantly, the preliminary findings indicate that students continued the reflective process after the tutorials as they formulated goals with specific aspects of their writing to work on. The data also indicates that students valued their online tutorial experience so much that they intended to return to the writing center and continue to monitor and direct their own learning.

Modifying the Forms to Support the Self-Regulated Learning Cycle

As noted earlier, the F2F writing center preparation form (Appendix A) was an important mainstay of the FLA writing center. The form acted as a tool for students to state their goals for a given tutorial and to record their reflections about the tutorial. The form also acted as a resource for tutors to guide their interactions with the student and to allow tutors to relay comments to a student's professor. Creating the virtual writing center, however, led us to the realization that the forms in the F2F contexts were being underutilized, and it caused us to rethink how forms could be used to support students in their use of the writing center. In particular, we realized that the forms could be constructed to create a learning cycle similar to the self-regulated learning cycle in which learners begin with self-set goals (i.e., the booking and tutorial preparation forms) and continue to refine their goals in light of their experiences in tutorials (i.e., monitoring) and through post-tutorial reflections (i.e., post-tutorial reflection form). To support this cycle, we also noted the importance of record keeping. The F2F pre-tutorial preparation form usually ended up in the hands of a professor, ending the learning cycle with the professor. In the online versions, students received a copy of all of their goals and reflections, creating a useful record of information that could be used in future planning and reflection.

While the F2F system of booking and conducting tutorials was neither inefficient nor malfunctioning, another take away from our experiences creating and using the cycle of online forms emphasizing goals, reflection, and next-step actions has provided positive evidence that we can, and very likely should, change our forms and procedures in meaningful ways that support learners' self-regulation when the F2F writing center returns.

Conclusion

Although preliminary, these findings have brought about a shift in our thinking of how to provide FLA students with writing support beyond the classroom. It is now difficult to envisage the writing center returning to a solely F2F self-access space with a single tutorial form that ends up in the hands of the professor. Indeed, it is likely that online tutorials, planning and reflection forms, as well as options for booking through online means will be offered in conjunction with F2F tutorials when the campus reopens. The efficiency, utility, and convenience of Zoom tutorials clearly provide a meaningful writing center experience for students. Furthermore, due to the campus closure, the online writing center has become a virtual destination, and for many students an invaluable location in which they can access academic support and direct their own learning. This is because the virtual writing center is also a destination where students have opportunities to socially interact with staff and tutors and engage in conversations about their learning processes and plans. It is in this synchronous human interaction that students found it “easy” to ask questions to kind tutors and regained a sense of purpose and control over their learning and their university lives at a time when the world appeared to be spiraling out of control.

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Appendix A

The F2F Writing Center Preparation Form

The Writing Center Preparation Form

Student: _____ Date: _____
Class: _____ Professor: _____
Assignment and /or area of focus [must be detailed]:

Student pre-session checklist: [You MUST check these before your conference!]

I have the most **up-to-date draft** of my paper, with comments or feedback from my professor [if available].

I have the **necessary readings and notes** to help facilitate the discussion.

★NOTE: Tutors can NOT help you with course content. Such questions should be asked to your professor.

I have **re-read my paper** before bringing it to the center, and have the following points I want to discuss with my tutor:

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

★NOTE: Tutors will NOT correct your grammar.

I have made my appointment at least a **few days before** the assignment due date.
Assignment due date: _____

★NOTE: The tutorial affects the whole writing process. You may require MAJOR revisions that will take time. Your conference is not an editing session for minor mistakes.

TUTOR PRINT NAME _____
COMMENTS _____

STUDENT evaluation of tutorial [please be specific and detailed, and return to your professor.]

Appendix B

Online Tutorial Booking Form, Preparation Form, and Post-Tutorial Reflection Form Questions and Guidelines

In addition to administrative details about the student's name, ID number, course information, and date of appointment, the following questions were asked.

Tutorial Booking Form
<i>What are the points you are worried about in your assignment?</i> <i>What would you like the tutor to cover in the tutorial?</i>

Tutorial Preparation Form
<i>What is your assignment?</i> <i>What would you like the tutor to focus on?</i> <i>Please provide a few points you would like your tutor to cover. *</i>
Student pre-tutorial checklist: [You MUST check these before your appointment!] <i>I have the most up-to-date draft of my paper, with comments of feedback from my professor (if available).</i> <i>I have the necessary readings and notes to help facilitate the discussion.</i> <i>I will re-read my paper prior to the tutorial session.</i>
★ NOTE: (1) Tutors can NOT help you with course content. Such questions should be asked to your professor. (2) The tutorial will try to cover your writing needs and focus on major issues such as structure and thesis. Please be reminded that your appointment is not an editing session for minor mistakes.

Post-tutorial Reflection Form
<i>Reflect on your tutorial and the advice you were given.</i> <i>How will you integrate your thoughts and your tutor feedback into your writing?</i>

Appendix C

Post Tutorial Form Student Comments Connected with Goal Setting

Need to...

I mainly **need to** further develop my conclusion by summarizing the points I had made in the essay.

My tutor advised me today, that I should also think about in which context and in what form the women-only carriage are used. For example, **I need to** look at why the women-only carriage are implemented in Japan and compare it with the background of other countries that I'm referring to.

I need to read the reference materials carefully once again so that I can apply knowledge to analyzing visual information. Lastly, I need to come up with a nice conclusion and I will give general thoughts about the ads in the paragraph.

I have to...

I have to have a clear distinctive body paragraphs.

I had some overlapped sentence so **I have to** be sure to check it again so I am not saying the same thing again and again.

In specific, most of my topic sentences did not connect with my thesis statement. **I have to** work on my essay to have more unity and coherence.

It was really helpful and he gave me useful advice. Although **I have to** rewrite my essay from the beginning, it was good to know that I did not get [understand] the [essay] instructions correctly. Thank you.

My next step...

My next step is to get rid of redundancy... in my writing.

My next step would be creating an outline based on the advice I received.

My next step is to revise and think about what I could add and take out unnecessary parts.

My next step is to pay more attention when I use some specific transition words, especially writing an academic essay. Also, I would like to improve my logical thinking so that each paragraph could be more persuasive.