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Behind the Curtain: A Critical View of Theory and Practice of Tutoring International English Language Learners at University Writing Centers

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BEHIND THE CURTAIN: A CRITICAL VIEW OF THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
TUTORING INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
AT UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Behind the Curtain: A Critical View of Theory and Practice of Tutoring International English Language Learners at University Writing Centers

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This critical study focuses on writing center (WC) development in terms of tutoring international English language learners (ELLs) at the university level. I posit that there is a common framework upholding the theories and practices of tutoring at WCs, which I call WC ideology. By introducing WC ideology in ten tenets, I attempt to find out whether it is as effective in assisting the needs and affordances of ELLs as in meeting the needs of native English-speaking writers.

Within a critical theoretical framework, the study was conducted at two public comprehensive universities located in the states of Pennsylvania and Ohio through two research questions: (1) To what extent and how is WC ideology involved in the pedagogical tutoring practices of WC tutors with ELLs, and how do ELLs respond to them? (2) What are tutors' and ELLs' perceptions of the standard pedagogical tutoring practices employed in L2 tutorials? Qualitative methods, including observation, interview, and document analysis were used for data collection, and a political analysis model was employed for data analysis. The study revealed some mismatches between WC theories and tutoring practices as well as between tutors' and ELLs' perceptions of WC ideology in terms of tutoring ELLs. Inadequacy of the pedagogical tutoring practices was analyzed from the second language acquisition (SLA) and second

language (L2) writing perspectives.

This study challenges some traditional tutoring conventions and calls for more realistic and suitable tutoring practices for ELLs. It also merges with some trends in the fields of applied linguistics, composition, and WC research, touching upon some critical issues, such as multilingual tutoring vs. English-only tutoring and biliteracy development. This dissertation advocates that we develop WCs to be multilingual and multicultural learning facilities, empowering ELLs by meeting their academic needs and offering them with equal access to quality higher education.

Founded on theory and empirical evidence, this study brings student perspectives on the tutoring experience in WCs, a rarity in the current literature. In addition, the study offers the first full-length discussion of WC ideology as well as treatment of tutoring ELLs in university WCs from a critical point of view, which is on the cutting edge of SLA and L2 literacy. This study will benefit not only WC tutors working with ELLs but also administrators and scholars who work with multilingual writers.