Building an Emotionally Intelligent Writing Center through Mindfulness Training for Tutors

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Introduction

Emotions impact all aspects of tutoring work, including sessions with clients, tutor responsibilities, and tutoring philosophies. Even though emotions can make tutoring feel difficult, **mindfulness strategies** can be taught to tutors so they feel equipped to manage clients' and their own emotions. While plenty of research on mindfulness theories exist, few studies integrate mindfulness into **tutor training** and examine the impact of mindfulness on tutoring.

I sought to integrate emotional mindfulness practices into the UNC Charlotte Writing Resources Center (WRC) as both a **guide** for **other writing centers** to integrate this kind of training and to provide **resources** to my fellow **tutors** in the writing center.

Research Questions

I investigated two research questions:

- What **mindfulness strategies** can be practically **integrated** into the writing center in order to teach and support the **emotional labor** of writing center work?
- How can integrating mindfulness strategies build **emotionally intelligent** tutors over time?

To explore these questions, I first created a **training presentation** to teach my fellow tutors about emotional mindfulness strategies. Then, I tracked the progress and usage of this training through **journal responses**.

Training Presentation

During the Fall 2023 semester, I facilitated my training presentation for new and returning tutors primarily using an article on mindfulness practices written by Dana Lynn Driscoll and Jennifer Wells. In my presentation, I taught tutors about different emotions, such as **generative** (seemingly positive), **disruptive** (seemingly negative), and **circumstantial** (constantly changing) emotions and introduced **metacognitive strategies** such as **metacognitive monitoring** (labeling emotions), **metacognitive control** (handling the emotion or situation), and **metacognitive evaluation** (reflection) to navigate emotional situations. I also introduced mindfulness strategies for tutors, such as **breathing techniques**, **mindfulness stances**, and **grounding techniques**.

Data Collection

Journal Entries

After administering the training, I gathered a total of **six** tutor participants to complete three journal entries over the course of the Spring 2024 semester. The journal entries were completed at the **beginning**, **middle**, and **end** of the semester, where tutors responded to these questions:

1. Have you had a session (or sessions) where a **client** has expressed any particular kind of emotion?
2. Have you had a session (or sessions) where you as a **tutor** have felt any particular kind of emotion?
3. Do you recall any time during this time period in any of your sessions where you have used any of the **emotional mindfulness training**?
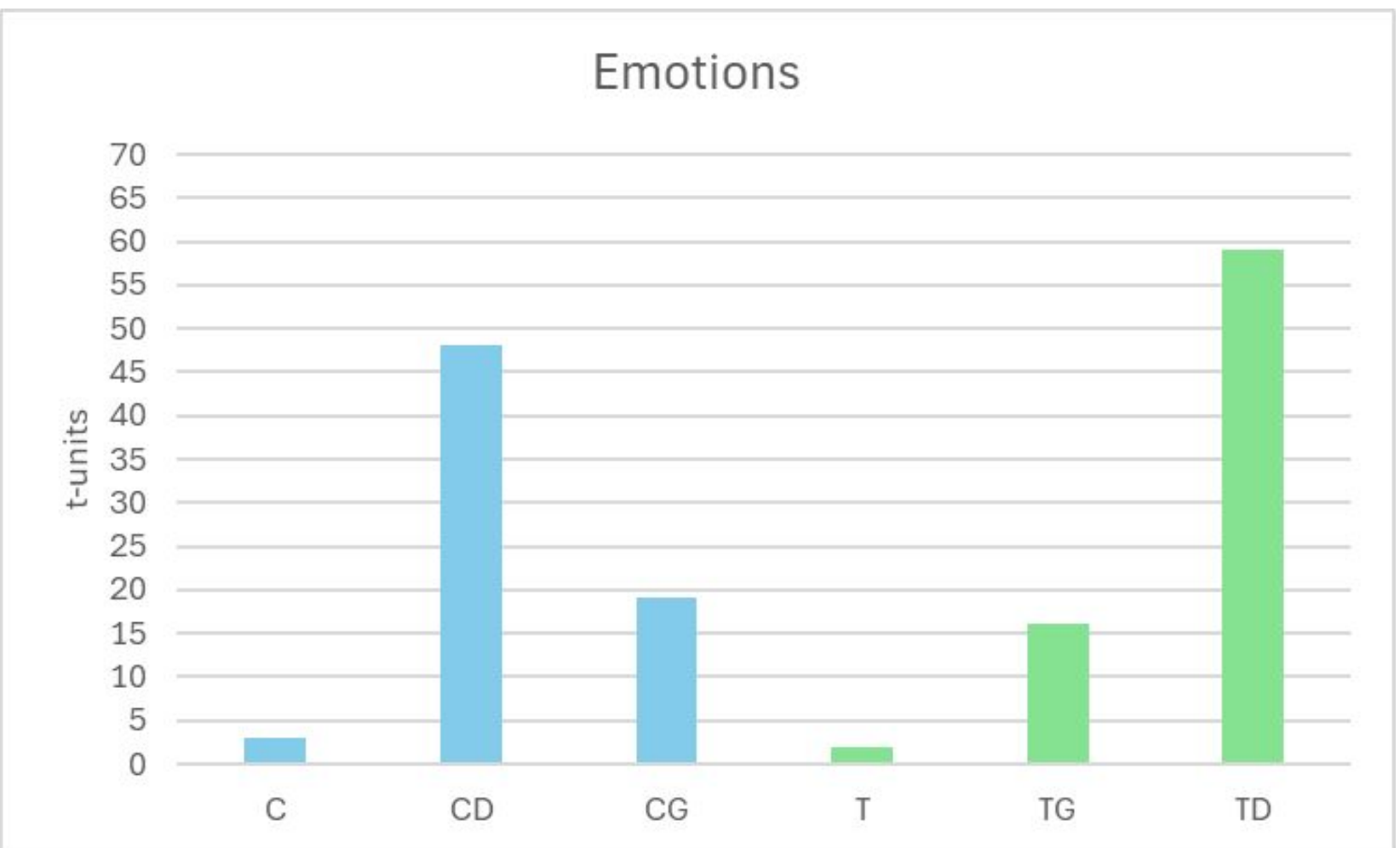
Results

I used Cheryl Geisler and Jason Swarts' methods outlined in *Coding Streams of Language* to segment, code, and analyze my data.

Emotions

The majority of the emotion data consisted of tutor **disruptive** emotions (40%) such as **nervousness**, **frustration**, and **anxiety**. However, out of these emotions, 76% of them were **resolved** by either **metacognitive evaluation** or **metacognitive control** followed by a **generative** emotion.

Mindfulness Strategies

The majority of the mindfulness strategies data consisted of **metacognitive control** (47%). Most of the metacognitive control strategies (60%) consisted of tutors **integrating** their existing **practices** with **mindfulness**, while the other 40% were tutors using **mindfulness** strategies from the training.

Emotions Results

Mindfulness Strategies Results
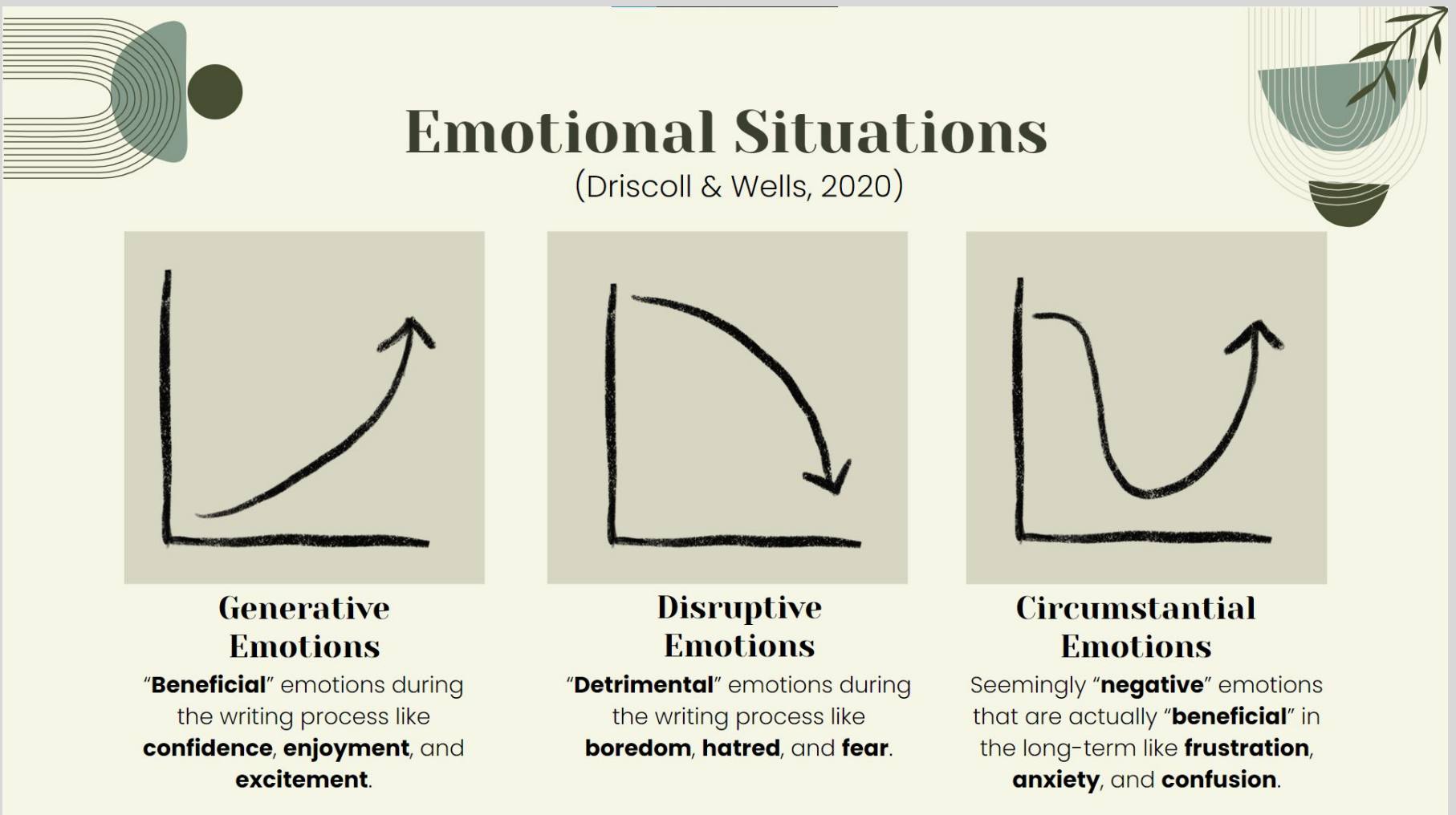
Screenshot from Emotional Mindfulness Tutor Training

Conclusions

With the large amount of resolved emotions (54% for clients and 76% for tutors), the mindfulness training proved **effective** and **useful** for tutors. Additionally, tutors seem to be naturally **using** mindfulness strategies **without consciously** realizing it. For example, with metacognitive monitoring, 56% of the time tutors were **subconsciously labeling** their emotions by simply "realizing" or "noticing" what they felt.

Tutors also seem to have an increased usage of **metacognitive evaluation** towards their **tutoring practices** (84%) rather than towards sessions (16%). Regarding tutoring practices, tutors seem to be **combining** their existing **practices** with **mindfulness** strategies, such as breaking down tasks, pulling themselves out of mental loops, or taking a moment to focus on emotions rather than the task.

References

Driscoll, D. L., & Wells, J. (2020). Tutoring the Whole Person: Supporting Emotional Development in Writers and Tutors. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 17 (3). 16-28.

Geisler, C., & Swarts, J. (2019). *Coding Streams of Language*. University Press of Colorado.