

Book Review: *Writing Centers and Racial Justice: A Guidebook for Critical Praxis*

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Haltwanger Morrison, T., & Evans Garriott, A (Eds.) (2023). *Writing Centers and Racial Justice: A Guidebook for Critical Praxis* . Utah State University Press.

Writing Centers and Racial Justice: A Guidebook for Critical Praxis serves as an exigent resource for writing center directors and writing center tutors to re-examine their current endeavors against the ongoing racist practices in our institutions. Comprised of five interconnected parts, this anthology provides theoretical, methodological, and application-based interventions that can hasten writing center scholarship further towards the racial justice.

Part I overviews the current anti-racist writing center scholarship and considers possible interventions and methodologies that can be conducive to realizing equity projects. Built on Indigenous perspectives, Martin argues that a writing center space can become a critical venue to enact the dismantling of white English rules, as Indigenous peoples have owned their ways of writing and expressing for centuries. Recognizing how the writing center work at a Tribal college is principally “a political act” (p.17) used to confront white academic English, Martin centralizes the potential of indigenous work to decolonize not only indigenous linguistic practices but also indigenous minds and identities, eventually leading to a form of rhetorical sovereignty. Using a critical autoethnography in Chapter 2, Latta discusses how the grand narrative of inevitable positive changes, often leveraged by the higher education infrastructure, does not always advance anti-oppression, particularly when

such work of decolonization is often subjugated “in a system designed to mask the centrality and ubiquity of white supremacy and settler colonialism” (p.32). Latta challenges those privileged in a stabilized white institutional structure to disengage from a magical thinking that incremental reformation would surely generate a “wholesale structural change” (p.40).

Part II turns the reader’s attention to applicable anti-racist endeavors in writing center tutors’ recruitment, hiring, and retention process. Using cross-institutional survey data, Herzl-Betz, in Chapter 3, quantitatively examines how writing center tutors’ motivations for a writing center position correlate with their self-identities and how differently positioned tutors respond to the socioracial culture embedded in the writing center context. Herzl-Betz discovers that tutors of different races respond divergently to racial ideologies implicitly coded in application calls. In Chapter 4, Bondar, Aikens, and Deery focus on writing center hiring practices that perpetuate the marginalization of BIPOC tutor recruitment through a white-centered racial framing that emphasizes complicit and reproductive “ideologies of meritocracy and individualism” (p.68). Using a semi-temporal approach to analyze the process of hiring, training, and evaluation of tutors, they identify and codify practical strategies to recognize existing racist hiring practices in recruitment practices and materials (e.g., implicit biases in job descriptions) (p.68).

Part III offers pragmatic ways and actionable items to incorporate racial justice into tutor professional development. Leveraging womanist ethics that upholds marginalized women’s robust resistance against white supremacy and forefronting diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in the writing center context, Jordan, in Chapter 5, proposes reclaiming the self through authentic, loving personhood; recovering black culture through a (re)telling of Black experiences; and redeeming black futures through relentless rejection of white supremacy. In Chapter 6, Sabatino provides practical approaches to achieving diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives in tutor-training courses and ongoing practicum. Certain key components of the training include active-listening, interpersonal communication, and critical reflection. Adopting a grassroots collaboration (p.111) with campus units, Sabatino indicates that DEIA endeavors can be realized not just in the WC space but also across the campus. Shifting gears slightly, Shapiro and Del Russo, in Chapter 7, turn to translingual tutoring to counter raciolinguistic ideologies and to undo the harm occasioned by the structure of linguistic violence. Five recommended translingual strategies are to identify students’

intention regarding linguistic differences; situate the politicalness of Standard English; challenge the imagined monolingually-minded audience prototype, or in Shapiro and Del Russo's framing, "an audience of red-pen-toting, old English professor-types" (p.130); counter internalized monolingualist ideologies; and promote linguistic diversities and differences across campus. Bell, in Chapter 8, considers how most of the writing center practices, both in-person and online, pre-establish niches of tutors and tutees, with tutors ascribed to a more knowledgeable role, while tutees a less capable peer in a tutorial. Feasible practices to execute an anti-racist paradigm in the writing center space includes highlighting students' experiences with online tutoring (p.148) as well as students' preference of writing center consultation modalities and ownership of their linguistic choices (p.145). In Chapter 9, Morrison concludes by discussing how to tackle difficult sessions where tutors find themselves needing to exit a tutorial without risking their employment and safety (p.160). Morrison recommends building in trainings regarding race *early* into writing center professional development. Training activities include reflection to interrogate one's privilege and positionality and the use of literacy narratives to document tutors' feelings in a difficult writing center situation.

Part IV continues the discussion of writing center outreach efforts. In Chapter 10, Johnson, Johnson, and Caswell detail the process of drafting a campus-wide faculty letter where they interrogate the white mainstream English ideology and practice. Despite some initial apprehensions among the consultants, the UWC administrative team invited several faculty members for initial peer-reviewed feedback on the draft, and once the letter was released campus-wide, it received an overwhelming positive reception along with constructive criticism (p.189). Garriott in Chapter 11 argues that writing center can collaborate with other well-established academic units to make anti-racist pedagogies more visible and prominent. Garriott discusses the Masterclass Series sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence, in which they implemented anti-racist paradigms to dismantle the standard written English convention. One added benefit of such partnership is an attainment of mutual trust and of enhanced credibility. In Chapter 12, Emmelhainz, Ballou, and Greger discuss ways that a university writing center can be a locus to not only cultivate campus writing culture but also establish community connections. They share a community writing center project that targets at various local communities (e.g., local high school students) with different foci (e.g., the education of tutors' implicit bias). Bostick, in Chapter 13, argues that a writing

center should equip our students with skills that could help them tackle real-world writing tasks, especially when it comes to civic engagement alliance. Such writing center administrative work can lead to transformation of students' work and eventual social justice objectives.

The last two chapters concentrate on how professional writing center organizations, such as that of International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA), have undertaken social justice work, as well as what concurrent areas in their commitment to such work can be further improved. Atkinson discusses how to ensure that diversity representatives on the SWCA committee have adequate access to mentorship opportunities, outreach networks, and material and technological resources is indispensable to the dismantling of racism. Giaimo, Caswell, Brooks-Gillies, Dixon, and Faison, in Chapter 15, advocate for the necessity of revamping the IWCA's current anti-racism endeavors and structure. They point out IWCA's institutional amnesia with its outdated bibliography on scholarship, low representation of scholars of colors on Board, and an apolitical mission statement. The contributors provide a few structural revisions that IWCA could implement to keep itself truly accountable for the mission of social justice as the chapter's concluding remark.

Writing Centers and Racial Justice is an anthology that provides writing center administrators and tutors with practical tools and theoretical entry points to interrogate racially-inflected WC practices. This collection offers a wide array of writing center institutional contexts (e.g., liberal colleges, HBCU, etc.) and practices (e.g., hiring, tutor professional development, etc.) to argue how dismantling systemic racism in writing center can be a multi-layered work in almost, if not all, aspects of everyday writing center functioning. The edited collection provides varied viewpoints of how stakeholders of different positionalities (e.g., writing center tutors and administrators and non-tenured faculty) undertake the racial justice task. The anthology also provides a balanced viewpoint. Certain chapters leverage qualitative lenses to argue anecdotally and narratively frustrations, vulnerabilities, and achievements of wrestling with anti-racism; meanwhile, others consider the quantitative analyses to empirically establish the ongoing prevalence of racial injustice witnessed in our program administration. These essays collectively demonstrate that social-justice-based writing center scholarship demands a much needed synergy between both writing center and non-writing-center staff, administrators, scholars, students, and faculty. Writing centers alone

cannot, and should not, be envisioned, wishfully, as the sole magical space where racial justice is accomplished (see also Latta in chapter 2)

One area that might warrant more discussion and scholarship is to see how different academic units respond to the anti-racist endeavors put forward by the writing center. As elegantly advanced by Garriott and Sabatino in their respective chapters, collaboration between academic units—especially those well-funded and well-founded ones—can helpfully expedite, if not necessitate, social justice, since these units typically have more access to resources and financial supports. Thus, this collection could solidify further its thesis by inviting some non-writing center affiliates to share their sides of the picture to discuss how achieving social justice through cross-units collaboration can be indeed a pragmatic strategy. The anthology might also benefit from examining how race—as one of the central organizing identity categories—interacts with other identity matrices (e.g., gender, disability, or class). Scholarship that researches identities has been taking on an intersectional lens to examine mutually constituting effects of identity experiences. For example, Sabatino uses an intersectionality framework to ground the improvement of the ongoing tutor-training practicum. Writing center scholarship that emphasizes racial justice could expand its theoretical capacity and practical application repertoire by extending its racial-justice optics beyond *just* race and racism.

That said, I profoundly appreciate the eclectic collection of approaches and narratives regarding ongoing and anticipated challenges and rewards that those involved in the writing center anti-racism work might encounter. The selected essays engage with well-defined racism and anti-racist practices in distinct, yet relatable, everyday writing center operations, prompting an urgent call for sustained anti-racist efforts, as concluded in the afterword by Kendra Mitchell (p.267). As a long-term writing center tutor myself, I am particularly struck by how much more social-justice work still needs to be done in the field, particularly in this time of political unrest and identity crises. If the underpinning philosophy of writing center is to inspire students, we genuinely need to make the social justice mission not as an add-on but as our central kernel and grounded landscape.

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