

## Chapter 10

# Writing Centers' Praxis Is Not Neutral but Raced: Collaborative Ethnography

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter begins by questioning the existing practices of writing centre tutoring. Based on the first author's writing centre tutoring experience and some artifacts, such as consultation notes, consultation forms, and feedback on student essays, the authors question whether the writing centre is truly a safe and neutral space for post-secondary writers and whether writing tutoring feedback contains some Eurocentric racial discourses that are complicit and coded in a way that sounds so called objective. Drawing on Lemke's principle of intertextuality, the authors highlight how standardized academic writing expectations have been unconsciously normalized and naturalized in writing centre tutoring discussions, thereby reinforcing the tutor's authority. In the end, we are in the position to look for an alternative, transformative change in the writing centre tutoring practice and a structural shift that can go beyond "remedial writing service provider."*

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## INTRODUCTION

We want to mention that this chapter is written creatively because we tried to move away from the conventional Eurocentric presentation of research and scholarship. Here is the reason.

In the journey of decolonization, we have been thinking about transformation when we discussed critical scholarship. An important lesson that AL (the third author) taught her students is always, “Okay, now we know, you need to move on and make a change.” This was Daniel’s (the first author, hereafter referred to as DC) first impression when working with AL (Angel, the third author). So, when DC wrote this chapter, DC thought that maybe he must disrupt the way he writes and think about different ways of presenting the ideas.

As scholars, educators, and researchers deeply rooted in the Eurocentric tradition, we had been told that certain writing is highly preferred, and we needed to write things objectively. We have been educated in a way that we should write in a certain style. We should use the third person pronouns whenever we present research findings. We should use a certain tense structure when we present research ideas. We should not have questions in the opening paragraph. We should have a topic sentence. We should have a thesis statement. We should have an in-text citation; otherwise, the claims are unsupported. Writing has a purpose, and we should know what genre we are writing. A one-sentence paragraph is a big *no-no*.

We know that writing has always been the goal for postsecondary education, and writing centers are the places where writers can go to polish their writing skills with respect to the above-mentioned standards. Writing centers contain a group of writing specialists who can review structures, provide comments, or train writers to conform to the above-mentioned standards. Writing centers have been portrayed as neutral spaces that can hone a student writer’s skill. Yes, we agree. But maybe this is a good time to revisit some of the writing center practices and maybe disrupt our knowledge and even the functions of the writing center. Is it true that the writing center is a neutral space? Are there any racial discourses embedded within writing center specialists’ discourses? To guide our examination and reformulation of the role of writing center support services in the Canadian context, we turn to the first author’s experience within a writing center, as well as several artifacts shared by the first author, DC. Borrowing insights from the perspectives of writing center practices, anti-racism, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and linguistic justice, we hope to present a transformative paradigm that questions the current role of institutional writing centers. This new approach offers enhanced possibilities for writers from marginalized racial backgrounds to actively participate in their writing processes and authentically contest the dominant paradigm of White-standard writing practices. In a nutshell, we hope to present a compelling argument that it may be time to reimagine and reposition the role of writing centers within the Canadian educational framework.

### Context

#### Positionality of the First Author – Daniel (DC)

After being invited to collaborate on this chapter with the other two authors, DC was excited, but at the same time, DC was hesitant and felt unsettled. DC had doubts about the impact of this proposed chapter because DC was worried about how these ideas would splash in this era that seemed to value diversity and inclusion on the surface. However, in fact, a lot of hidden systemic racist practices and policies still lurked behind society’s loud voice to be diverse or to be decolonized.

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