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Boston to Beirut: Understanding an International Writing Center Collaboratory through Post-Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract: This chapter takes up one of the collection's central questions: "What constitutes research?" Walzer and Abboud Habre critique some of the more traditional quantitative and qualitative methodologies often used in writing studies. Instead of demonstrating how their international writing center partnership across U.S. and Lebanese contexts resulted in quantifiable outcomes and data generalizations, the authors conclude that the value of their research is the ongoing, sustained relationship they built over the years. Utilizing post-qualitative research, which they explain in depth, they theorize their international collaboration—what they call a "collaboratory"—as the deliverable itself. They demonstrate how the collaboratory provided the kind of intellectually and personally supportive and generative "third" space where they could problem solve, share resources, and partner in writing center practice to support genuine transnational insights for themselves, their pedagogy, their writing centers, and their changing multicultural and multilingual institutional contexts. In sum, they make the case that establishing (and studying) these long term inter- and transnational partnerships on a meta-critical level is crucial, even if it is often an invisible aspect of international writing studies, and they argue that their own collaboratory is a clear instance of the value of the larger extended dialogic network of the IRC.

Reflection

This chapter is a byproduct of several years of research, collaboration, friendship, and solidarity between the authors.¹ It reflects a kairotic moment in which international politics, our respective institutions' goals, and our personal histories and intellectual identities aligned. The year 2016 was a fraught political time in the US, but it was still relatively stable in Lebanon. Both of our institutions had strategic plans to globalize and were funding international projects and collaborations. Northeastern was opening sister schools in cities and countries across the world and offered grants for global opportunities. Belinda Walzer was interested in globally networked pedagogy and was actively looking for international partnership opportunities. As a brand-new writing center director in a multilingual context, she sought a mentor with experience in multi/translingual writing centers. Simultaneously, Lebanese American University had just purchased a satellite campus space in New York City and sought relationships with U.S. institutions. Although Paula Habre had significant experience in writing center work and was already working with the U.S. Embassy to establish writing centers in secondary schools throughout the MENA region, Paula's Chair and Dean were keen for her to utilize the relationship to benchmark her relatively young writing center against a well-established, internationally recognized writing center.

Additionally, both Belinda and Paula each had personal and academic histories that gave rise to the project. While working toward her MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the American University of Beirut, Paula received a scholarship to study in Boston when regional conflict interrupted her studies. While in Boston, Paula worked in a nascent writing center at Boston University; thus, she was familiar with writing center pedagogy in a multilingual U.S. context. Conversely, Belinda was a research associate at American University of Beirut while writing her dissertation on international human rights rhetoric and pedagogy and so had familiarity with the Lebanese context.

Belinda and Paula were connected by a mutual friend in Lebanon and met in Beirut in the spring of 2016. We hit it off immediately. We began developing our project through virtual exchanges and the next time we met (the only other time we have gathered in person) was at the 2017 International Research Consortium. The IRC gave us an invaluable opportunity: it modeled for us what rigorous international research looked like, it exposed us to scholars talking about the region, and it helped us recognize the value

1 Please read the opening statement for this collection, "Editing in US-Based International Publications: A Position Statement," before reading this chapter.

of our project and need for research in this area. In short, the IRC helped us realize not only how unique our situation was, but also that our work was part of a much larger existing conversation and network of international research partnerships. We believe that each partnership is born out of unique circumstances and creates its own internal culture—no two collaborations are the same and they are constantly changing. What was once an institutionally-driven research “collaboratory” has become a friendship that continues despite the fact that neither directs a writing center any longer. In the next iteration of our partnership, we plan to globally network our writing courses. Our experience is illustrative in that it demonstrates the ways in which these partnerships are so much more than their deliverables. They not only provide professional development, but also enduring personal connection.

Institutional Descriptions

Northeastern University Institutional Context at the Time of the Collaboratory (2016–2018):

Northeastern University is a private, urban, residential, R1 institution in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, known for experiential learning. In 2017, it enrolled upwards of 20,000 students, with approximately 17,500 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students. The student body was diverse with 18 percent international students and over 75 percent of students with financial support.

Northeastern is unique in its focus on experiential learning. Undergraduates participate in a co-op program built into their academic study by interning or working in the industries in which they are majoring. Over 60 percent of students participated in co-op in 134 different countries in 2017. Northeastern’s mission statement at the time was “a global, experiential, research university built on a tradition of engagement with the world, creating a distinctive approach to education.” The globalization of higher education was a specific presidential priority at the time of the study.

The Writing Center at Northeastern University serves the entire student population. At the time of the study, it was staffed by peer tutors at the undergraduate level from all different disciplines, Masters-level students from multiple disciplines, and English PhD students. Over 50 percent of consultations from 2014–2018 served students who self-identified as international or whose first language was not English. Additionally, the writing center filled a significant need for international graduate writer support. Over 40 percent of the sessions were with graduate students and of those, 85 percent were with self-reported multilingual students.

Lebanese American University Institutional Context at the Time of the Collaboratory (2016–2018):

The Lebanese American University is a leading, nonsectarian, private higher education institution in Lebanon. It operates under a charter from the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. It is composed of two campuses, Beirut and Byblos, and offers programs leading to degrees in Arts, Sciences, Architecture, Engineering, Pharmacy, Business, Nursing, and Medicine. In the fall 2016 semester, LAU had more than 8,400 students enrolled with 4,551 in Beirut and 3,942 in Byblos. Almost one-fifth of its students at the time were international and more than 50 percent were women. There were 310 full-time and 510 part-time faculty members.

LAU's mission statement states that the university is "committed to academic excellence, student-centeredness, the advancement of scholarship, the education of the whole person, and the formation of students as future leaders in a diverse world." A big number of its graduates travel to Europe or the States for graduate studies and/or work abroad, so a lot of effort is invested in preparing them for new settings.

The Writing Center was established in 2010 in Beirut and in 2012 in Byblos. Even though the Writing Center supports students from the different schools at the graduate and undergraduate levels, it belonged to the English department at the time of the study. The Writing Center tutors are part-time English faculty who have undergone training. The Writing Center serves a majority of undergraduate students with almost 51 percent of the clients at the sophomore level and 13 percent of clients at the graduate level. It is also worthy of mention that 83 percent of the students who visit the Center use Arabic as their self-identified first or home language, 77 percent of the clients use English as their second language, and 14 percent use French as their second language.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, there has been growing enthusiasm for the value of globalizing higher education—particularly in the US—not least as a means of providing university students with access to educational opportunities that are not geographically bound. As Wendy Olson (2015) posits, "college composition is necessarily a transnational enterprise." (p. 303). This global turn in higher education is paralleled in writing studies as the field continues to counteract the Americentrism of its conversations and conventions

(see research by Arnold, 2016; Bou Ayash, 2014; Donahue, 2009; Martins, 2015; Starke-Meyerring, 2015; Starke-Meyerring & Wilson 2008; Tardy, 2015; Trimbur, 2016). The International Researchers Consortium (hereafter IRC) has done much to facilitate this work by fostering international research and partnerships across institutions and geographies. This chapter tells the story of one such transnational partnership facilitated by the IRC between two writing centers—one in Boston and one in Beirut—and the lessons we learned over the course of several years of our “collaboratory” about international writing center practices and tutor training within the globalization of higher education.

Our partnership set out to conduct qualitative research that could examine how the demand for globalizing higher education within neoliberal universities was manifesting in writing centers. Across the multiple years of collaboration beginning in 2016, there were several points of interaction among the authors (who were the writing center directors at the time), the tutors, and the tutors in training. Between 2016 and 2018, the authors also made numerous attempts to collect robust qualitative data. However, during this time we came to learn that the most valuable aspects of our partnership emerged out of our friendship and included sustained and supportive interactions, surprising similarities, and solidarity across differences in our writing centers. In other words, despite our failure to be able to conduct the data-driven research initially proposed to the IRC, what emerged as the primary takeaway from this experience was the value of sharing the mutual concerns that gave rise to our initial research questions in the first place.

In order to understand this phenomenon better, in this chapter we turn to post-qualitative inquiry as a way to approach what we came to call the “collaboratory” itself as data, and thus come to terms with how the conditions under which our collaboration thrived actually disallowed the kind of research we set out to do. Instead, it fostered other kinds of equally productive and collective knowledge. Ultimately, post-qualitative inquiry helps us understand the value of what we achieved: a sustained and mutually enabling space that allowed us to partner in practice, and move beyond the performance and products of research.

By making a portmanteau of the words “laboratory” and “collaboration” to describe our partnership, we borrow from the sciences and offer the term “collaboratory” as an example of a shared mutual space of engagement, facilitated by digital means, that centers the object of our research on the partnership itself. This “third space” of the collaboratory also provided us both a way to conceptualize the identity of our centers beyond our individual and geographically bound institutional settings. In so doing, we drew

on the robust discussion of the transnationalizing of composition and writing studies that seeks to decenter U.S. methodologies and epistemologies while simultaneously attending to the nuances of context and the complexities of power structures across international partnerships and difference (see research including: Arnold et al., 2017a; Donahue, 2009; Kiedaisch & Dinitz, 2007; Martins, 2015; Severino, 2009; and more). For example, in her 2009 article, “Internationalization and Composition Studies: Reorienting the Discourse,” Christiane Donahue cautions U.S. researchers to resist the “us-them” paradigm that the current discourse on internationalizing higher education advances by instead “thinking where our work fits in the world rather than where the world’s work fits into ours” (p. 214). In fact, this collaboratory enabled us to conceptualize our partnership as its own entity outside of this hierarchized dichotomy of cultural difference and find value in these kinds of sustained international partnerships for personal and institutional survival.

By sharing our story here, we offer that, in addition to producing empirical research that could be transposed to other institutional contexts in replicable ways, another valuable aspect of international partnerships is to model a shared space. This shared space enables participants to examine with new eyes the unique contexts of each individual’s experience and support one another in navigating individual and shared challenges across different contexts. When viewed through post-qualitative inquiry, what is exportable about our experience, then, is the “collaboratory” model itself of sustained and supportive international partnership that the IRC offers on a large scale and that our collaboratory demonstrates on a more intimate scale.

Institutional and Collaboratory Context

Writing centers are born out of and conform to their localized contexts, whether in institutional positionality, funding, staffing structures, leadership conditions, and/or student needs and demographics—all of which condition a writing center’s praxis. As such, any universalizing research about writing centers must be mediated through local circumstances and conclusions adapted to individual contexts. We offer a detailed overview below of each institution in the partnership and the contours of the partnership not only as a way to demonstrate the unique specifics of what shaped our collaboratory for readers interested in facilitating their own but also as a way to provide context for the collective identity that emerged out of our individual contexts in the third space of the collaboratory. Additionally, this context helps to demonstrate why the empirical nature of our research ultimately failed and instead gave rise to another perhaps more generative process of inquiry.

Lebanese American University (LAU) is a leading, nonsectarian, private, university in Lebanon, situated in Beirut and Byblos. It is chartered through the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. LAU's mission statement shows that the university is "committed to academic excellence, student-centeredness, the advancement of scholarship, the education of the whole person, and the formation of students as future leaders in a diverse world." The primary language of instruction is English and most students are multi or translingual with English, French, and Arabic as primary languages. At the time of this study, LAU had more than 8,400 students across both its campuses. And almost 20 percent of its students were international (Lebanese American University Fact Book, 2016–17).

The Lebanese American University Writing Center (hereafter LAUWC) was established in 2010 at the Beirut campus and in 2012 at the satellite campus in Byblos. The LAUWC supports all students but serves a majority of undergraduate students. Because LAU's curriculum is all conducted in English, the writing center serves an almost entirely multilingual population with Arabic as the first or home language of a majority of the tutees. At the time of the study, all of the tutors were multilingual in languages including Arabic, French, English, Armenian, and more. English and French were the most common second languages of the tutees with English as the second language of 77.69 percent of the tutees and French as the second language of 14 percent of the tutees.

During the time of the study, the LAUWC was situated within the English department and was staffed by professional tutors, many of whom were also part-time English faculty with Master's degrees and specialized training in writing center pedagogy. Because the center was staffed by professional tutors, there was very little turnover. At the LAUWC, tutors who were not trained at previous writing centers were required to undergo training that consisted of required readings, discussions, observations, as well as mentoring by a veteran tutor who submitted an evaluation report on the novice tutor to the director. Moreover, during the study (and partly because of the collaboratory) the LAUWC also began employing peer tutors for the first time.

Northeastern University is a private, urban, residential, research institution with its flagship campus in the city of Boston, Massachusetts and additional campuses and partnerships across the US, Canada, and England. It also has significant online enrollment. Academic work at Northeastern is primarily conducted in English. At the time of the study, it enrolled upwards of 35,000 students. According to data gathered by Northeastern in 2017, the student body was diverse with over 135 countries represented, 18 percent international

students, and over 75 percent students with financial support. Northeastern's mission statement in 2017 was "a global, experiential, research university built on a tradition of engagement with the world, creating a distinctive approach to education." It sought to "make the world its classroom." Undergraduates participate in a co-op program built into their academic study by interning or working in the industries they are studying. In 2017 over 60 percent of students participated in co-ops in 134 different countries.

The Northeastern University Writing Center (hereby referred to as NUWC) was established several decades ago. Although the NUWC is situated within the Department of English, it serves all students even those abroad or at satellite campuses. Although there was also an additional writing center that served only international students through the professional college, over 50 percent of consultations at the NUWC (between 2013–2017) served students who self-identified as multilingual. The NUWC also filled a significant need for international and multilingual graduate writer support as 40 percent of sessions were with graduate students and, of those, 85 percent were with multilingual graduate students.

During the collaboratory, the NUWC was directed by a full-time faculty member, and staffed by peer tutors at the undergraduate and Master's level from different disciplines and English PhD students. Towards the end of the partnership, the NUWC hired a multilingual writing specialist who was, at the time, the only professional tutor. Tutor training occurred at the start each term through workshops and observations and all tutors participated in required ongoing training sessions throughout their tenure. Significantly, there was huge turnover in tutors across semesters at the NUWC, particularly at the undergraduate level (the largest staffing demographic), because many tutors went on co-op. All training was completed as part of tutors' paid hours, which contributed to the challenges surrounding implementing the data-driven aspects of the collaboration: there were labor concerns in asking NUWC tutors to spend too much time beyond their tutoring on research projects.

The partnership began in late spring 2016 with a site visit to Beirut, Lebanon by Belinda, director of the NUWC, to meet Paula, director of the LAUWC. Belinda was interested in facilitating the relationship because she was a new director at a university with an increasing multilingual population and had experience and connections in Lebanon already (see chapter reflection). She was grappling with the challenges that many writing centers face of resisting linguistic colonialism within a multilingual context while simultaneously meeting the needs of tutees who seek the center precisely for help conforming to the high-stakes demands to perform Standard Academic

English (for example, see work by Arnold, 2016; Bou Ayash 2014; Canagarah, 2016; and Trimbur, 2016). Belinda sought a partner from whom to learn the intricacies of running a multilingual center and someone who could mentor her in the process.

Paula, who was part of founding the LAUWC only five years prior, welcomed the collaboration not only because it aligned with her institution's recent mission of globalizing, but also because she saw an opportunity to enable tutors to compare styles, needs, and demands, and help her relatively new writing center benchmark their growth, goals, approaches, and philosophies with an established writing center in the US (Paula also had experience in Boston; see chapter reflection). In other words, the partnership paired an inexperienced director at the helm of a robust and institutionally secure center with an experienced director still building institutional support to grow her relatively new center. At the time of this study, both directors were full-time teaching faculty who taught upwards of three courses at a time in addition to their directorship responsibilities. This contextual information becomes particularly important not only from a labor standpoint but also because the directors came to the partnership with similar institutional positionalities. This began a dynamic that allowed each partner to bring shared experience as well as both expertise and humility to the shared digital space.

We continued our collaboratory for two years, from 2016–2018 (until Belinda moved institutions), through multiple synchronous and asynchronous modes. During each of the five terms that constituted the active part of the collaboratory, we had multiple forms and modalities of contact between the sister centers: (1) several synchronous joint web conference trainings, (2) paired collaboration and mentorship between multiple tutors and tutors-in-training across centers, (3) several different asynchronous blog discussions, (4) virtual introductory videos shared between the centers, and (5) many synchronous web conference discussions between the directors. As previously mentioned, to facilitate the relationship's start, Paula hosted Belinda in Beirut for a few days in May 2016. Despite chatting over video conference nearly every month to plan and coordinate the various points of engagement, the only other time the directors met in person was at the IRC at the 2017 CCCCs in Portland, Oregon. The NUWC also hosted two LAU tutors in Boston for an afternoon in Summer 2017. At the end of the active portion of the collaboratory, the tutors were asked to respond to reflective surveys on what they learned throughout the collaboratory; these reflections inform and provide insight for what follows.

When we began our partnership, scholarship on globally networked learning as well as our experiences in the International Research Consortium

provided us language and models for how to frame our collaboratory to avoid problematic pitfalls of many cross-institutional transnational collaborations. For example, the article by Connie Kendall Theado et al. (2017) describes a partnership between the University of Cincinnati in the US and the Salahaddin University-Hawler in Iraqi Kurdistan that provided a model for our own study. Theado et al.'s collaboration focused on curriculum reform, and the "benefits accruing to cross-institutional collaborations between U.S. and Kurdish university faculty while challenging the U.S.-centric perspective" (p. 152). It questioned the "presumed portability of western knowledges and pedagogies into Kurdish institutions of higher education," and a persistent and ideological bias, where western is regarded as interchangeable with global (Theado et al., 2017, p. 153). The authors describe a process of collaboration defined by productive resistance that makes space for "periodic and recursive instances of silence, contact, and negotiation" in order to value the pluralistic co-construction of knowledge across vastly different cultural contexts (Theado et al., 2017, p. 159). The authors also offer a model of narrative interpretations of "critical junctures" in the partnership that contributed to their larger understanding of the role of productive resistance in collaboration.

Transnational partnerships in and across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were also instrumental to our understanding of our collaboratory. The MENA region is quickly emerging as a critical center for writing studies interested in super diversity, and a hub for transnational partnerships, largely due to organizing by the Middle East-North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA). For example, Lisa R. Arnold et al.'s transnational partnership between students writing literacy narratives at the American University of Beirut and at the University of Michigan, Dearborn describes a partnership that facilitated a dynamic interaction among voice, identity, and context that enabled students to "unother" the other (2017a). This helped us to recognize the ways in which international partnerships provide opportunities for increased self-reflection that yield deeper intra-cultural understanding (the recognition of internal diversity of the home community) and a much deeper understanding of global knowledge production (also see Moore & Simon, 2015; Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008).

Although this kind of globally networked learning is generally conducted at the student level in a classroom setting to facilitate transnational empathy (Arnold et al., 2017a) or at the faculty level between departments in different institutions (Theado et al., 2017), our collaboratory moves globally networked learning into the dynamic co-learning setting of the writing center. In this way, our partnership responds more directly to the IWCA 2018 keynote speech by Amy Hodges, Lynne Ronesi, and Amy Zenger, three writing center

directors from American universities in the MENA region (Qatar, UAE, and Lebanon, respectively), who call for writing professionals to learn “from” the Middle East and North Africa rather than conducting research “on” the MENA region since it represents the most complex forms of multilingualism and super diversity. Hodges et al. (2019) assert that by understanding the many traditions of researching writing and the teaching of writing, directors and tutors everywhere can make their centers more globalized. Although our collaboratory began a few years before their address and subsequent article, it resonates with our goals, which sought to move away from a consultancy model and instead toward an exchange between equal partners, defying the trope that knowledge flows from West to East. By learning from and, perhaps even more importantly, *with* each other, we respond directly to their call for equal access, opportunity, and support for populations of writers in their own context.

Theorizing Research Outside of Methodology: Post-Qualitative Inquiry

When we began the partnership, we set out to develop a replicable, aggregable, data-driven (RAD) research project using qualitative and ethnographic research methodologies to study multilingualism and labor in writing centers in two globally-oriented universities in differing geographical and cultural locations. The partnership also began with the assumption that a collaboration between international writing centers could facilitate deeper global knowledge production and help students and tutors better recognize the demands of writing for global audiences. We hoped it would continue to dismantle the Americentrism of writing center studies by exposing assumed universalities of Academic English, tutoring strategies, student needs in writing centers, and writing situations that might not be shared across different writing center cultures.

During the first year of the partnership, we attended the 2017 IRC in Portland, Oregon in order to workshop our research design and methodologies and learn from other international collaborations and research projects. This also provided us an opportunity to meet in person for the second time. During the IRC we workshopped research methodologies to examine guiding conceptual questions including: What is the impact of an international partnership on tutor training? As pressures for globalizing curriculum increase in higher education, how do they manifest in local tutor sessions? What is the impact of an international partnership on the historical centrality and assumed universality of U.S. writing center epistemologies and pedagogies?

How might a cross-cultural and cross-institutional partnership help us better interrogate and operate ethically within our own local institutional pressures for globalization that stem from neoliberal forces?

These guiding conceptual questions emerged from concerns around the labor underlying the globalized nature of higher education and the role of the writing center in equipping students to participate in an increasingly globalized workforce with adaptable communication skills, while simultaneously critiquing the linguistic coloniality, habits of white language supremacy, and neoliberal foundations of this demand. These questions about labor within the intersections of the neoliberal university and its global mission seemed particularly relevant given that, as Starke-Meyerring argues, “neoliberal global policies ... have rendered higher education a privatized commodity to be traded in global markets.” (2015, p. 309). We planned to collect qualitative data from tutors in each location through a series of reflections on filmed sessions. Essentially, we hoped this data would help students and tutors better understand their own positionality within institutional pressures for Standard Academic English.

However, one of the factors our collaboratory clearly helped us understand was the labor creep at the director level that is part and parcel of the neoliberal globalization of higher education. Although the IRC offered us a valuable and supportive space to meet with each other (one of only two in person meetings we had across the entire collaboratory) and bond in solidarity together and with other international writing practitioners and scholars who were also grappling with many of the same challenges that we were, once we each returned home from the IRC, we struggled to find the time to launch the empirical aspects of our research. As contingent teaching faculty with full teaching loads as well as our directing responsibilities, the robust nature of transferable empirical research across borders challenged our temporal means at that time. Additionally, the turnover in tutors at the NUWC made it difficult to get buy-in to participate in the labor-intensive qualitative data collection method we had planned.

Instead, we found ourselves focusing on the more daily and supportive aspects of the collaboration and relationship that helped to facilitate mentoring, training, and collaboration. In fact, the turnover in peer tutors at the NUWC ended up becoming one of the reasons the collaboratory thrived: because it functioned as part of the training and reflective practices for the NUWC and drew on the existing mentoring experience of the LAUWC professional tutors. In other words, while we did not gather evidence as proposed in the IRC, we argue that the daily practice of our collaboration has value to the larger conversation on RAD research when viewed through the lens

of post-qualitative inquiry. The analytic process of post-qualitative inquiry enables research to come “differently into focus” (Levy et al., 2015) than traditional methods of qualitative and quantitative research.

Post-qualitative inquiry is just emerging in writing studies but has been circulating in social science discourse and education research since the 1990s. Post-qualitative inquiry refuses methodological repetition. It draws on the poststructuralists Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, and Derrida, and is, as Elizabeth St. Pierre (who is largely credited with its origin) argues, “deliberately anti-method” (2019, p. 2). It is “composed of specific components, which change when the concept is taken from its specificity on the plane on which it appears, so those concepts don’t travel,” but instead are applied to “lived human experience ... for re-orienting thought” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 2). It refuses the “representationalist logic” that “assumes there is the real out there and then a representation of the real in a different ontological order” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 4). In other words, post-qualitative inquiry can add to more traditional qualitative inquiry by suggesting not only that data cannot speak for itself, but also that “research does not simply describe, it is performative” (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 391). Aligned more with the practices of literary study, rhetorical study, and philosophy, post-qualitative inquiry recognizes that naming creates, and thus rejects more essentialist approaches wherein uncovering reveals, enabling a deeper engagement with the power structures and issues of representation embedded in any inquiry.

We offer that post-qualitative inquiry allows us to examine not only our collaboratory itself as data, but also encourages a power critique of that data, including the process of collection. If autoethnographic research enables one to become the object of their own research lens and to connect one’s experience to larger cultural, political, and social forces, then post-qualitative inquiry decenters the “I” in the autoethnographic experience, throwing into circulation the subject and object as the agentic forces that produce the ethnographer’s authority and even the ethnographer as a researcher. What post-qualitative inquiry enables us to see are the ontological links between our position as researchers and the object of research, which in this case includes ourselves, our institutional contexts, and our geographical relationality and subjectivity. This expands the tool-box for researchers fostering transnational communities of practice because it enables a refocusing of the critical lens beyond the performance of empirical research toward deeply sustained collaborations (like our collaboratory and like the IRC itself) that can be valued alongside objective RAD work.

Power is embedded in how knowledge is produced through research and manifests particularly in the “rigid and unproblematized mobilizations of

subject-object positions within the knowledge created by research” since, as Foucault reminds us, these very same conditions that produce the subject also “discipline, surveil, and produce the forms of conduct for the subjection” (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 385). In other words, post-qualitative inquiry helps to “reject the presumptive centering of the human subject” and thus the “constitution of data.” (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 385). However, Jessica Gerrard et al. critique post-qualitative inquiry as purporting to do that which it denies. By working in opposition to humanism, post-qualitative inquiry can end up creating a false dichotomy and essentializing humanism and thus qualitative research. By critiquing the ostensible universalizing gestures of qualitative research and its teleology of generalizing, abstracting, and categorizing, post-qualitative inquiry actually risks universalizing qualitative research itself, and, ironically, thus defining itself through this opposition despite its objections to definitive practices.

Therefore, we seek to avoid this essentializing move by valuing the work that qualitative (and quantitative) research can do within the field and particularly in international research—not least because it has enabled the field of writing studies and writing center studies to define itself and carve out an institutional reputation. We also seek to add to the research repertoire in writing studies and writing center studies a post-qualitative inquiry that engages directly with the values of transnational and decolonial research by centering the power relations that form and underscore all writing situations, writing programs, writing centers, and international exchanges in writing studies. Thus, post-qualitative inquiry supplements replicable research because it privileges invention over discovery and iteration as remaking rather than repetition so as to think questions that are out of the ordinary. When we set out on our project, we quickly realized our original questions about the pressures of neoliberalism on the global academy and how that manifests in localized tutoring sessions were too broad to study robustly using existing qualitative or mixed methodologies. So, instead of narrowing our questions to ones that were able to be studied, we turned the lens on ourselves to consider the ways in which those pressures emerged in the impetus for our partnership in the first place and in the various points of engagement we facilitated across the contours of a writing center. We examine those moments below within their various contextual forces as a way to offer evidence to our claim that the partnership operated as a microcosm of the IRC in facilitating a sustained international partnership. This method enables us to privilege the values of the IRC in so far as we offer that our collaboration itself is simultaneously the object of inquiry, the data, and the outcome. By centering the phenomenon of collaboration, we study the third space of the collaboratory not as a fixed entity that is replicable, aggregable and universal or exportable, but instead

as a continually emergent network that assumes an identity outside of the individual subjectivities of the participant-researchers.

The Collaboratory:

In his book, *Beyond Conversation* (2020) William Duffy articulates a theory of collaborative writing grounded in new materialist theory, interactionist theory, and post-qualitative inquiry. He coins the useful phrase “minor literatures of collaboration” to describe “scholarship that performs the complexities of authorship it theorizes or otherwise takes as its subject” (Duffy, 2020, p. 139). Building on Duffy’s phrase as he translates it from world literature conversations to writing studies, we offer that the value of our collaboratory to international research lies in its valuing of these “minor literatures of collaboration.” Where Duffy is talking about the excesses of invention and production that occur in the collaborative writing process, we offer that the minor literatures of collaboration in our collaboratory occur in the excesses of our partnership: the quiet moments of mentorship, solidarity across difference, and friendship during the hours of Skype, Zoom, and WhatsApp calls between the directors and the intangible, difficult-to-measure moments of exposure, growth, and self-reflexivity across difference among tutors on both sides of the collaboration.

These minor literatures of collaboration, often defined by their surfeit to the economies of production and the “actual” research at hand, “provoke—to degrees that can only be anticipated but not predicted, and in ways that resonate differently from one location to the next—perturbations that can frustrate these economies” (Duffy, 2020, p. 139). As Duffy offers it, post-qualitative inquiry can supplement the more procedural methods of social science and writing studies research with a more “speculative” approach, akin to Ann Berthoff’s call to study the “concrete particulars’ of experience” (Duffy, 2020, pp. 142–143).

Evidence of these minor literatures of collaboration are difficult to pin down and make tangible, but they are surely present in the four synchronous joint virtual workshop trainings that comprised the most significant engagement among tutors from both centers. To facilitate these sessions, the directors partnered lead tutors to help plan and conduct the trainings. Across all four sessions, the minor literatures of collaboration emerged in the conversations prompted by tutor questions and responses and the exposed anxieties around authority, disciplinary knowledge, writing center praxis, multilingualism, and the challenges of negotiating pressures for Standard Academic English (SAE) in both contexts. The conversations that ensued throughout these training workshops challenged previously held assumptions on both sides grounded in cultural, linguistic, and contextual differences, as well as assumptions about the

role of writing centers and tutor authority in antiracist and translingual work. The workshops resembled support groups and acted as an outlet for tutors and directors to vent frustrations and challenges as they exposed similarities and differences. For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on the final workshop that asked tutors to discuss the collaboratory itself and the reflective blogs we asked tutors to complete throughout the active partnership.

The fourth and final virtual training session occurred in the final semester of our collaboratory. We wanted to take a closer look at the localized contexts in order to reveal some similarities and differences across the collaboratory so we gathered together a group of tutors around each web camera in Boston and Beirut and engaged in a discussion that reflected the themes that arose frequently during the previous two years of touchpoints during the collaboratory. For example, we asked tutors to jot down how they understood their role as tutors and compare that to their center's philosophy, and we asked them to reflect on what they assumed about student expectations for each center. The discussion that ensued demonstrated the value of the inter/intra-cultural reflection on tutor roles, writing center institutional positionality, tutor authority, and multilingual writing. We discussed the challenges of tutoring in ways that valued multilingualism, translingualism, and rhetorical choice given the pressures for SAE and we discussed the benefits and importance of linguistic diversity and multilingual tutors in each writing center context. Once again, each side of the partnership was surprised by just how many similarities we share in these institutional pressures that manifest in high stakes ways for tutees and writing centers as we seek to help students who are both the goal and the outcome of globalizing higher education.

The reflective blogs we asked tutors to complete confirmed this realization that there were more similarities than differences across the partnership and that the interactions garnered solidarity as each center turned to the other, despite their different contexts, for help negotiating and navigating similar contextual challenges around authority, knowledge, training, and access. One Beirut tutor's reflection encapsulates the minor literatures of collaboration and the ways in which they enable solidarity across difference as a source of self-reflection:

At this critical juncture in our history ... Now more than ever is the time to be building bridges ... between people and cultures everywhere; initiatives like this collaboration ... will go a long way in establishing cross-cultural collaboration and understanding. For me, fostering civil discourse is extremely important as a skill that is fast eroding from public life. In

our context, we Lebanese have a hard time speaking to one another in a civil manner, especially when discussing religion and/or politics (these topics are pretty much banned on campus, for good reason!). I think this puts on us teachers/tutors an added responsibility ... to teach the skill of respectful dialogue and debate—writing center tutorials are ideal for this.

This tutor situates the writing center at the forefront of civil discourse and democratic life, not only as a site to teach this kind of discourse to students, but also as a site to practice it with other tutors across difference, be it local, cross-cultural, translingual, or transatlantic. Another tutor responded, “I have basically learned that maintaining an open communication between writing centers across regions can actually be beneficial since it allows us, as tutors, to reassess where we stand, to learn and get informed about new ideas to explore, and to share experiences that could be of benefit to other fellow tutors.” These responses are clear examples of the self-reflexive work so important to inter and intra-cultural understanding and the ways in which the transatlantic partnership asked tutors to recognize the diversity of their home communities as well as differences across the transatlantic contexts. However, we want to resist quantifying these responses as a data point in a RAD framework or outcome-based model of research. Instead, we encourage these reflections to be read as one node in the ecology of the collaboratory.

We began the collaboration and research process anticipating that our conclusions would lead to top-down adjustment of our practices based on our evidence. Instead, the process of our collaboratory changed our way of thinking and our practices more organically. It enabled each side to reexamine or rejustify long-held assumptions and policy decisions. For example, the NUWC began hiring more multilingual tutors and conducting explicit training around rhetorical and multilingual grammar tutoring, and the LAUWC hired their first peer tutor. Finally, little did we know that our relationship would transcend the functionality of the collaboration to a genuine friendship and support network for the directors. We found ourselves sharing experiences, not only for the sake of comparison, but also as a means to solve problems and share successes related to our common experiences as contingent faculty members directing writing centers similarly positioned institutionally, albeit in vastly different contexts.

What we offer through the example of this collaboratory is a model of international writing center research that is not necessarily product-driven, replicable, or aggregable, but rather process-oriented and valued for its minor literatures of collaboration. In other words, our model allows for the research

process to be generatively enacted such that the writing center itself is valued for the production of and as the product of ongoing, constantly shifting, research-in-action through methods such as the collaboratory. This model is akin to the kinds of arguments some writing program administrators and writing center directors make in tenure and promotion documents that administrative work in writing studies is itself the product and production of continued reflexive research and might be valued institutionally the same as other tangible and quantifiable products like publications, only with even more applicable and fluid context, exigence, and outcomes. In fact, we argue that the collaboratory's sustained partnership-in-practice had a much more significant impact on our practices than any publication based on our "failed" RAD research might have had since it impacted every tutor and tutee at each institution in meaningful and non-fungible ways as well as enabled a sustaining friendship between the directors that persists today.

Glossary

Collaboratory: a portmanteau of the words "laboratory" and "collaboration" that centers the object of research on the partnership itself.

Globalization of higher education: the desire in the 2010s, generated largely by U.S. institutions, to increase their international student body, facilitate international study, and globalize their curriculum. Often predicated on neo-liberal impulses and outcomes.

Globally networked learning/pedagogy: shared curriculum across international contexts that facilitates and develops inter and intra-cultural knowledge and knowledge production.

MENA: Abbreviation for Middle East and North Africa: A diverse region that includes approximately 19 countries in which its students are primarily Arabic speakers who often study English or French as a second or foreign language.

Multilingual and Translingualism: Multilingualism is the use of two or more languages while translingualism is the phenomenon of inhabiting multiple languages.

Neoliberal university: the late capital shift in higher education to neoliberal and capitalist values of economic growth as the structure and function of the university rather than a primary mission of education. This relates to the globalization of higher education because it means higher education becomes "a privatized commodity to be traded in global markets." Starke-Meyerring (2015, p. 309).

Post qualitative inquiry: a process of research inquiry that emerges out of

poststructuralism and that approaches data not as a sovereign entity waiting to be uncovered but as a co-constructed process. This enables an approach to research that centers the power relations of researcher and researched and privileges invention over discovery.

RAD research: an acronym for replicable, aggregable, data-driven research often collected through quantitative and qualitative empirical means.

SAE or Standard Academic English: The genre and dialect of English used in research, study, teaching, writing, and universities. It refers to the primarily written language proficiency in academic programs. Current antiracist scholarship defines SAE as steeped in white language supremacy.

Transnational writing studies and writing center studies: research that seeks to decenter the “Americentrism” of writing studies and writing center studies while accounting for the complexities of power structures and difference across transnational contexts.

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