

REVIEW

*Centers for Learning: Writing Centers
and Libraries in Collaboration*

DANIELLE CORDARO, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Ed. James K. Elmborg and Sheril Hook.

Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration.

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FOR DECADES, WRITING CENTERS and academic libraries have provided a haven for students needing assistance, information, or simply a quiet “friendly” place to focus on learning and literacy. Recently, these two entities have begun to consider formal partnerships. Why? Because, as writing center directors, WAC professionals, and librarians are well aware, the academic environment is rapidly changing on all fronts. Administrators are more concerned than ever with writing proficiency, information literacy and student retention. And students, though more tech savvy, often seem to be unprepared to judge the credibility and usefulness of sources of information and unskilled at incorporating such material into their writing. In response to these developments, librarians and writing center professionals have recently begun to examine one another’s discourse and have discovered some remarkable and productive affinities in their evolving theory and practice. For example, as Colleen Boff and Barbara Toth note, there is a growing consensus among theorists in both fields that “research and writing are complementary parts of a recursive process of inquiry”

(148). As faculty continue to demand library research as an integral part of assigned writing, students look to the writing center and the library to help guide them in these complex tasks.

Centers for Learning is a practical introduction to collaboration between libraries and writing centers. Editors James K. Elmborg and Sheril Hook provide a synopsis of the political and theoretical intersections of these two campus entities and present case studies based on different manifestations of library/writing center partnership. Most chapters are co-written by writing center professionals and librarians; they document the successes and failures of collaboration at diverse types of institutions ranging from large research universities to small private colleges. The resulting collection is useful to both writing center directors and librarians considering the establishment of such partnerships at their own institutions; the theory, practice, and research elements also provide a solid foundation for grant proposals aimed at administration or government bodies.

Chapters in *Centers for Learning* cover diverse topics in writing center/library collaboration. Some, like “Roots Entwined” by Lea Currie and Michele Eodice, and “Yours, Mine, and Ours” by Sarah Leady and Becky Reed Rosenberg, focus on describing the institutional conditions necessary to support sustainable partnerships. These chapters emphasize that sustainable library/writing center collaborations depend on an already-existent campus culture that supports inquiry, student assistance, and cross-disciplinarity. Eodice and Currie, in particular, insist that partnerships not be “people-based” initiatives founded on ephemeral ties between particular individuals; rather, they should be long-term projects with established sources of institutional support and plans for continuing assessment. Along these lines of institutional sustainability is a chapter entitled “It Might Come in Handy: Composing a Writing Archive at the University of New Hampshire” by former WAC/WC director Cinthia Gannett, assistant director Kate Tirabassi, assistant WAC director Amy Zenger, archivist Elizabeth Slomba, and historian John C. Brereton. This chapter reflects the rising recognition in composition studies of the importance of archiving to the long-term sustainability of projects and programs; it details the establishment and maintenance of an archive for the purpose of recording the particulars of collaboration between the library, WAC program, and writing center at the University of New Hampshire. Other chapters illustrate tutor training and day-to-day operation of libraries and writing centers committed to collaboration. “From Cross-Referencing to Co-Construction” by Casey Reid and “Better-Connected Student Learning” by Boff and Toth both suggest ways in which peer tutors might be “cross-trained” in writing center pedagogy

and the basics of information literacy. Boff and Toth report on research and writing project clinics held in the library and facilitated by specially trained peer tutors, and Reid provides insight into overcoming the disciplinary and bureaucratic hurdles that can stand in the way of tutor cross-training.

Though each chapter provides a unique view of writing center/library collaboration, there are commonalities among them. The contributing authors ground their collaborations in a common mission to facilitate information literacy and responsible use of source material in writing. The authors also see affinities in the political and institutional position of libraries and writing centers. For instance, Elmborg asserts that both libraries and writing centers inhabit spaces that are traditionally outside the academic power structure buttressed by tenure, funded research, and conventional classroom practice, placing both entities in the often precarious position of being “service fields” in a scholarly institution. Beyond these foundations in theory and politics, the authors also agree on some practical necessities to productive and lasting collaborations. For example, all seem to concur that the most productive collaborations begin with libraries physically housing writing centers or writing center satellites. They argue that this is the most pragmatic situation for both parties for obvious reasons; if a writing center tutee needs to speak to someone with expertise in research, a tutor can walk him or her to the reference librarian on duty. Likewise, if a librarian is faced with a question more firmly in the realm of composition rather than research, a writing tutor is conveniently on hand.

Centers for Learning has a pragmatic flavor that moves each chapter quickly from theory to practice and assessment, making it ideal for those seeking defined models for their own collaborative work. The authors of each chapter come from a diversity of backgrounds; some are WAC professionals, writing center directors, or writing program administrators, others are archivists, research, reference or systems librarians, or library instructors. The breadth of experience and the generalizable knowledge these specialists create in *Centers for Learning* demonstrate the possibilities inherent in institutionalized cooperation between the disciplines of library science and composition studies.