

Review

Pemberton, Michael A. and Joyce Kinkead, eds. *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives in Writing Center Scholarship*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP: 2003. 225 pages. \$21.95 (paper).

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In the introduction to *The Center Will Hold*, editors Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead attribute to this collection a dual intent; it is to serve as “both an overview of Muriel Harris’ continuing legacy and as a general framework for the writing center research that is yet to come” (2). As such, this volume acquaints the reader new to the field with Harris’ many contributions to writing center studies even as it suggests some of the ways in which specialists continue to build upon her work. Such a two-fold goal not only seems highly appropriate to a collection dedicated to Muriel Harris—someone who has come to personify the commitment to welcoming inclusiveness and methodological plurality fundamental to this field—but also to the diverse audience of writing center tutors, scholars and administrators who will read this book with pleasure. Indeed, our own reactions as reviewers suggest the ways in which this volume will appeal to a broad readership; both Melissa—a writing center researcher and administrator—and Dana—a graduate student writing instructor and former writing tutor—found the essays in this volume accessible and enlightening.

The first three essays in the collection evidence the plurality of methods that is a hallmark of writing center studies. In Chapter One, for example, Michael Pemberton uses archival analysis to build an argument about the increasing professionalization of *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (WLN). He constructs the initial role of the WLN as a community-building *kaffeklatsch* (a descriptor borrowed from Robert Connors) by tracing the waxing and waning of such readily-identified WLN features as informal letters to the editor, new subscriber mailing lists, and conference summaries. As the *Newsletter*—and the field it represents—has developed, however, this casual, communal tone has been replaced by a growing sense of professionalism

in writing center studies. Thus, Pemberton notes, conference reports and mailing lists are replaced with more abstract concerns, such as meta-critical reflections on the role of research in writing center administration and methodological arguments concerning the possible modes of disciplinary inquiry. Dovetailing nicely with those early calls for research cited in Pemberton's essay, Chapters Two and Three respectively argue for the value of qualitative and quantitative research. In "In the Spirit of Service: Making Writing Center Research a 'Featured Character,'" Nancy M. Grimm calls for context-based studies, claiming that such research allows us to take advantage of "the unique level of access writing centers have to students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (43). Using the framework of New Literacy Studies, she forwards an ideological model of literacy which goes beyond "the words on the page" to include "not only the text, but also the conceptions, attitudes, and belief systems of the individuals involved in the literate activity" (46). While Grimm thus argues for the importance of qualitative research, Neal Lerner, in his "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the Proof of Our Effectiveness," focuses on the intersection of writing center scholarship and statistical analysis that lies in assessment studies. First pointing out shortcomings in extant quantitative writing center studies, Lerner then goes on to propose an alternate model of statistical analysis. Rather than merely tallying students who walk through our doors, he contends, we need to broaden our assessment to include surveying such elements as student need, student satisfaction, and campus environment. Ultimately, then, both Lerner and Grimm argue for broadening the context of writing center research, albeit with differing methodological emphases.

While these opening contributors reassess past, present and future methods of writing center research, the following three essays offer new perspectives into current disciplinary perceptions and practices of tutoring. Harvey Kail reads tutor training manuals as an "initiation story, a *bildungsroman* of sorts [. . .] that can tell us, like all good stories do, a bit more about who we are and what we care most about" (75), for example, while Peter Carino examines the long-standing problematic relationship between authority and authoritarianism in collaborative tutoring. Offering a counterpoint to Carino's compelling argument for accepting the power of expertise as an inescapable component of tutoring is Michelle Eodice's lyrical and moving "Breathing Lessons or Collaboration Is . . ." Partially an epideictic meditation on the creative powers of collaboration and partially a critique of the collaborative paradox at the heart of writing center work, this essay is one of the high points of the collection. Eodice examines the collaboration between tutors and writers, writing program directors and other campus administrators

and, in fact, between the essay's reader and Eodice herself. Taken together Carino and Eodice invite us to reconsider our individual assumptions about the role of collaboration in the writing center.

The next two chapters in Pemberton and Kinkead's collection focus on the work of writing program administrators and their preparation for that work. Josephine A. Koster interrogates our rhetorical role, arguing that just as we encourage our tutors to learn to work with writers from across the curriculum so too must we work to communicate with campus factions whose agendas and discourse practices differ from our own. Rebecca Jackson, Joe Law and Carrie Leverenz focus on our preparation for this task, combining a survey with case studies to examine the ways in which the increasing professionalization of writing center directors is reflected in the coursework intended to ready graduate students for this position.

The final two essays in the collection examine the spaces of the writing center. Leslie Hadfield et al focus on the former by using architectural philosophy and design principles to develop an imaginary writing center free of such real-world concerns as the availability of space and money. In the process of developing an ideal writing center, the authors both imagine what a writing center might one day become and suggest how principles from interior design might be applied more immediately in extant writing centers. James Inman and Donna Sewell also consider the present and potential spaces of the writing center community, but in "Mentoring and Electronic Spaces: Using Resources to Sustain Relationships" they primarily focus on virtual space, examining the manner in which WCenter has served as forum for mentoring relationships in the writing center community.

As might be suggested by this review, *The Center Will Hold* is characterized by such a variety of topics and approaches that it is difficult to identify a tightly unifying theme throughout the volume. Accordingly, when attempting to describe the contents in the introduction Pemberton and Kinkead use five subtopics to categorize the ten essays, indicating perhaps the editorial struggle to articulate the distinctive focus of the collection. We note the multiplicity of this volume less as a critique, however, than as a testimony to the range of Muriel Harris's research, which is woven throughout all the essays in this collection. Like Harris's contribution to writing studies, then, the appeal of *The Center Will Hold* lies in the heterogeneity of its multifaceted contribution to the field and it will surely become a standard resource for writing center professionals.



Announcements

The Council of Writing Program Administrators invites you to three exciting events during July 11-18, 2004, at the University of Delaware: The Summer Workshop for new WPAs on July 11-15, 2004; the Assessment Institute on July 15th; and the Annual WPA Summer Conference July 15-18th.

Workshop for Writing Program Administrators (Limited to 25 participants). This year's workshop will take place at the beach community of Lewes, Delaware, at the University of Delaware's Virden Center on the Hugh Sharp Campus for marine studies.

- Workshop Leaders: Kathleen Blake Yancey and Irwin (Bud) Weiser
- Fee of \$795 until June 21; \$845 after June 21. Fee includes all materials; housing July 11-14; and all but one meal, from dinner July 11 through lunch July 15.
- Early registration is strongly encouraged.

Assessment Institute (Limited to 25 participants). This one-day Assessment Institute will take place at Clayton Hall on the main campus of the University of Delaware in Newark, DE, just prior to the opening of the 2004 annual conference. (Please note: The Institute overlaps with the WPA Workshop, scheduled from July 11-15, 2004).

- Institute Leaders: Susanmarie Harrington, Marlene Miner, and Dan Royer
- Fee of \$140 until June 21; \$165 after June 21. Fee includes all materials as well as lunch and an afternoon snack.
- Early registration is encouraged.

Summer Conference for Writing Program Administrators. This year's conference will take place at Clayton Hall on the main campus of the University of Delaware. Fee of \$195 until June 21; \$235 after June 21; special graduate student fee is \$165. Fee includes breakfast July 16, 17, and 18; lunch July 16 and 17; banquet dinner July 17; receptions July 15, 16, and 17; morning and afternoon breaks on July 16 and 17. Lodging is separate. (Please note: Residence hall apartments at affordable prices will be available. See complete information on conference Web Site.) Visit the Conference Web site at www.english.udel.edu/wpa2004

The 4th Symposium on Second Language Writing, "Second Language Writing Instruction in Context(s): The Effects of Institutional Policies and Politics," will take place from September 30 to October 2, 2004, at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA. Invited speakers will include: