Review

Geller, Anne Ellen, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll and Elizabeth H. Boquet. *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice.* Utah State UP: 2007. 114 pages.

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In the first chapter of their groundbreaking text, *The Everyday Writing Center,* the authors position the figure of the trickster as a viable administrative position, asking the reader:

> How much room do we leave, in our day-to-day existence, to be surprised, to try out different eyes, as Coyote, a common Trickster, figure does? In one tale, Coyote tosses his eyes up into the trees one too many times; now he can no longer enjoy the long view or retrieve his eyes. His blandishments bring him a mouse eye and a buffalo eye as replacements—but what he sees is definitely not the same. A new worldview, brought on by this uncomfortable fit.… (16)

Inspired by this example, this review attempts to bring a new perspective to *The Everyday Writing Center* itself, reading this work not for its import to writing center studies, a case for which Carol Peterson Haviland has recently argued well in *The Writing Center Journal*. Instead, I assess the text's value for the audience of *WPA*, examining not just its importance for a writing center readership, but also its usefulness for those directors of composition, WAC and other writing programs who are looking for new ways to understand, evaluate and react to the everyday events of program administration.

At first glance, it may seem unjust to evaluate this text for an audience beyond that clearly claimed in the volume's title, but *Everyday* seems an apt candidate for such an expansive reading because of the inclusionary nature of the authors' theoretical stance. As might be suggested by the invocation of the trickster figure, this conceptual framework draws from a remarkably broad range of interdisciplinary paradigms, including Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World* and *The Gift*, Donald Schön's *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, and John Tagg's *The*

Learning Paradigm College. Given the breadth of intellectual grounding this range represents, I was impressed with the level to which the authors engage with all these works in a meaningful and useful manner, revealing interdisciplinary overlap and ferreting out practical administrative implications of seemingly esoteric theory. Rarely have I encountered work with a conceptual frame so wide ranging yet so finely drawn and, ultimately, so practically functional; the authors are, in the best sense, the *bricoleurs* they describe.

Prominent in the intellectual scaffolding of *Everyday* is a focus on Etienne Wegner's notion of "communities of practice," a concept that illuminates all varieties of writing program work particularly well, I think. Wegner claims that, "[w]e all have our own theories and ways of understanding the world, and our communities of practice are places where we develop, negotiate, and share them;" [in such communities there exists no] "dichotomy between the practical and the theoretical, ideals and reality, or talking and doing" (qtd. 6). These sites are further defined by "designing for learning." (qtd. 7) Such design, Wegner explains, "cannot be based on a division of labor between learners and nonlearners, between those who organize learning and those who realize it, or between those who create meaning and those who execute it" (qtd. 7). *Everyday* then applies Wegner's principles in new and provocative ways to such defining issues in writing center studies as tensions surrounding writing centers' marginality/insularity and the fetishization/reification of long-held ideologies and well-worn practices. Even as I saw the aptness of this critique for a writing center audience, I was struck by the applicability of the analytic to all writing programs. Surely WPA-L is a strong example of a Wegnerian community of practice, a place where "people . . . share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wegner)? So too, his theory resonates strongly with the primary characteristic of writing program research, namely its syntheses of the "practical and theoretical, ideals and reality." Finally, Wegner's emphatic assertion that in communities of practice all participants are learners, applies equally to curricular-based writing programs as to the writing center, for in both spaces we are continually learning from staff and students, as well as our own experiences as teachers and writers. *Everyday*'s theoretical grounding, then, seems to embrace all sites of writing instruction.

Like the conceptual framework that unites the text, individual chapter foci lend insight to a variety of writing programs. For instance, "Origami, Anyone? Tutors as Learners," examines the possibilities for creating and sustaining a learning culture, drawing the reader's attention to the ways in which this environment enables creative and ongoing knowledge building for all community members, including administrators, tutors and teachers.

By adapting Martha Conner's "Learning Culture Audit" for use in a writing center, for example, *Everyday* models concrete strategies for creating an enriched learning environment, strategies that can easily be adapted to writing programs as well as writing centers. Through a list of twenty-two "Pro-Learning Culture/Anti-Learning Culture" trait pairs, the authors suggest ways to assess and improve current writing center practice (52). As seen in the examples below, many are readily identifiable with best practices in the writing program:

Pro-Learning Culture	Anti-Learning Culture
[P]olicy is always discussed/negotiated with staff.	[P]olicy is made by the director and then announced at staff meetings..
Hiring practice and decisions are a shared responsibility.	Director does the hiring.
Annual reports get to the real work of [the program] and are designed to be useful to current and future [teachers].	Annual reports are primarily quantitative in nature and written exclusively for an external audience.
Everyone is comfortable sharing stories of success and failure.	[Teachers] usually keep to themselves if they believe a session has gone badly. The Director only shares success stories among colleagues.
Issues regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and/or religion are addressed both personally and in staff meetings in ways that explore values assumptions, beliefs and expectations.	Because issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and/or religion are touchy, they are rarely, if ever, discussed personally or in staff meetings.

Working through this heuristic, I found myself thinking equally of my writing center and writing program as I nodded in agreement, jotted down new ideas and reflected upon viewpoints and goals different from my own. Similarly, in the following chapter "Straighten Up and Fly Right," the reader is reminded that our tutors are also writers and can renew their tutoring practice through their writing lives. Here again, I was inspired by new ways to help writing instructors reconnect with their own identities as writers.

While WPAs will find most of the material in *Everyday* useful, I predict they will find particularly provocative the chapter "Everyday Racism," where the authors push the reader to consider the ways in which the writing center and the institution replicate racial stereotypes. I was notably struck by the authors' analysis of a complaint often shared among WPAs:

> [W]e would not be surprised to hear, "I'm so busy talking with faculty, working on curriculum … and negotiating with administrators. I don't have time to be an anti-racist too."

> Here's a hard truth: Laments about lack of time are never simply about a lack of time. They are statements about priorities. They are expressions of fear. They mask concerns about exposing inadequacies. (91)

Everyday then goes on to reconcile the material realities of administrative work with the authors' high prioritization of anti-racist work in their own centers. Even as with the chapters on staff development, "Everyday Racism" is marked by an expansive theoretical ground that is manifested in concrete suggestions. The authors' revision of Peggy McIntosh's inventory of white privilege, for example, seems well suited as a tool for inspiring productive discussions in both pedagogy classes and faculty training workshops.

As suggested by its title, the final chapter of the book—"Everyday Administration, or Are We Having Fun Yet?"—lends itself most readily to the varieties of writing program administration. Here, the authors discuss the differences between mere management and true leadership. Borrowing a metaphor from John Tagg, they suggest that leaders need to maintain a conceptual boundary between educational ends and means, for "to suggest the chief mission of a writing center is to deliver tutoring in writing is akin to suggesting that the chief mission of General Motors is to produce assembly lines" (14). Such a distinction serves curricular-based writing programs particularly well; the scale and structure of a first-year writing program, for example, seems even more inclined to Fordist ideals than does the individualized instruction offered in the writing center.

In sum, then, *The Everyday Writing Center* could easily be named *The Everyday Writing Program*, for its insights apply equally well to first-year writing or writing-across-the-curriculum programs. It is both penetrating in its analysis and wide-ranging in practical and productive applications. My only quibble with this text is a minor one: I noticed a few small errors in the References section, including missing references and inaccurate or omitted page numbers. I wished that citation had been attended to a bit more closely at some point in the editorial process. Dwelling overlong on such minor lapses, however, seems unworthy of the generosity of the authors or the inclusionary goals of their text. (Indeed, as a reviewer, I should note that I was the recipient of such inclusions, for I was flattered to see myself included in the acknowledgements, no doubt for my small contribution to the book via a WCENTER listserv posting.) Ultimately, *The Everyday Writing Center* is the most important book in writing center studies in recent years and belongs on the shelves of all WPAs looking to improve their programs and renew their practice in innovative ways.

Work Cited

Wegner, Etienne. "Communities of Practice." Etienne Wegner Home Page. 13 October 2007. <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm>.