

REVIEW OF *MULTILINGUAL WRITERS AND WRITING CENTERS*

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Ben Rafoth's *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* is a timely call for directors and tutors to become better prepared to work with multilingual writers. Pursuing this avenue of training is more important than ever, as enrollment by international students who speak and write in multiple languages continues to grow in universities in America and around the globe.

The slim volume makes no claim to offer its audience a specific method for training tutors to meet these needs. Rather, the book is an "informed invitation for writing center directors and their tutors, especially advanced tutors, to make greater use of theory and research from the field of second-language acquisition" when preparing to work with multilingual students (3). As such it acts as a resource that offers a glimpse at the variety of needs found in increasingly diverse writing centers, and signals where directors and tutors can find further resources for training.

Each chapter of *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* presents a different aspect of a tutoring session where Rafoth sees room for improvement. The book draws upon Rafoth's own experience, published literature on second language acquisition (SLA), and interviews and observations he has conducted in order to offer suggestions to address issues that might arise, from practicalities like staffing to individual strategies a tutor might implement in a one-on-one session.

The first chapter, "The Changing Faces of Writing Centers," offers context for Rafoth's call to action by examining the growing diversity of writing centers. Rafoth presents a series of "snapshots" of writing centers from around the globe to illustrate the ways that writing centers have grown and adapted to accommodate the increasing enrollment of international and multilingual students at their institutions. He also illustrates the challenges that can arise when trying to label or group these students, such as privileging of English over other languages (ESL, ELL), or mislabeling that can occur when assumptions are made about the motivations behind their language acquisition (are they elective bilinguals or circumstantial bilinguals?). Rafoth wraps up this contextualizing chapter by pointing out that, while American writing centers of the past seemed to uphold a monolingual culture, they are increasingly "places where multilingual writers see language less as

an end in itself and more as a means to achieving what they want *to do*" (39, emphasis in original). The rest of the book then offers suggestions for how writing centers can assist multilingual writers in meeting these goals.

Chapter two, "Learning from Interaction," reveals ways in which conversations during a tutoring session can be more instructive. One of the most illuminating discussions for tutors in this section may be the explanation of native-speaker privilege and how this can account "for why some international students—and some native English-speaking students—avoid tutors who are not native English speakers" (45). The second chapter also provides numerous terms and concepts that tutors should familiarize themselves with, not necessarily to use in a consultation, but to create a vocabulary they can use to begin developing insight into the complicated relationship between tutors and multilingual writers. By providing tutors with examples of when interaction with multilingual writers is successful and unsuccessful, this chapter provides a starting point for further research into the literature on language acquisition that can enable them to have successful tutoring sessions.

The chapter on "Academic Writing" focuses on the challenges this specific genre raises for NNES students. As Rafoth points out, the conventions and expectations of academic writing are often difficult to fulfill even for native English speaking students, particularly when it comes to the challenge of vocabulary (76). For NNES students, these challenges are exacerbated by the increasing demand for advanced degrees (and therefore pressure to publish) in applied fields, a growing prominence of English-medium journals around the world, and receiving unhelpful or disrespectful instructor feedback. To address these concerns, Rafoth highlights the tutor's role in helping writers understand and prioritize academic writing conventions, in addition to providing a space for learning that is respectful and caring. He also touches on the need for feedback and support for instructors, offering the example of a faculty workshop on designing writing assignments that will result in work that actually meets the instructor's expectations. Writing centers with the available resources can therefore assist the multilingual student

writers at their institutions both through one-on-one interaction and outreach to the campus community.

Chapter four looks at corrective feedback and the notion of “error.” Current interest in student error, Rafoth explains, is less “for reasons of purity and punishment than for the recognition that error is a natural part of learning to speak and write” (105). The chapter contains strategies for approaching tutoring sessions in consideration of errors and how to provide corrective feedback rather than simply correct or edit a writer’s work. For example, the strategy of recasting is “one of the most useful tools in a tutor’s belt” (114), as it involves getting a writer to notice an error by restating it in a correct form. However, there can be downfalls to using recasting with NNES writers that lead this strategy to simply become editing, for example “when the writer’s intended meaning is clear but words and phrases aren’t quite ‘right’ sounding” (118) to the tutor. Rafoth demonstrates how this and other strategies may need to be adapted, offering warnings and cautions so the tutor can develop an approach to corrective feedback when working with multilingual writers.

The final chapter appears primarily aimed at writing center directors, as Rafoth notes that the process of preparing and educating tutors to work with multilingual writers begins with the director (122). However, “Preparing Ourselves and Our Tutors,” would also be of interest to tutors, especially if they have an interest in writing center administration. This chapter highlights some of the practical decisions and plans that need to be made in terms of staffing and training a diverse writing center. As in the previous chapters, Rafoth provides examples from his interviews and previous experience to show how directors and tutors can find ways to address the issues that might face their particular center. Both director and tutor need to be able to adapt and know which tools are useful in a given situation and which are not; the pages of *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* “suggest where to look for some of these tools and the reasons they might be effective, but they don’t provide a cupboard of strategies to open for tomorrow morning’s tutoring session” (129).

While Rafoth offers many suggestions for directors and tutors, some may be impractical for implementing in all writing centers, depending on the resources available and the goals they seek to achieve. For example, he imagines a writing center where criteria for employment might include knowing a second language or minoring in linguistics, or where

sessions might last two hours rather than thirty to fifty minutes (56). Rafoth acknowledges that these models might not fit every center. Instead of providing a quick fix or model for operations, his book provides a useful access point for writing center directors as they develop goals and train staff, and tutors who are interested in cultivating their abilities to work with multilingual students.

Perhaps one of the primary benefits of this resource is that it will surely be accessible to both the directors and the tutors it is aimed at. Tutors unfamiliar with the published literature will find the glossary of terms provided at the end of the text, as well as the references list particularly helpful. Overall, *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers* provides a useful overview of the issues that a writing center might already be facing or face in the future as student populations continue to grow and change and centers continue to adapt to meet their needs.

Works Cited

- Rafoth, Ben. *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2015. Print.

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