

Book Review

Babcock, Rebecca Day, and Daniels, Sharifa. *Writing Centers and Disability*. Fountainhead Press, 2017.

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Writing centers continually revisit practices and approaches to tutoring work with aims to build safe, inclusive, and accommodating workspaces and tutoring sessions. Babcock and Daniels address this imperative in *Writing Centers and Disability*, attempting to magnify the field's understanding of where disability and writing centers intersect. In naming a disconnect between disability awareness and policy implementation, *Writing Centers and Disability* renews existing discussions and calls for actionable reconsideration of how universities and writing centers respond to disability, with aims to "introduce innovative and practical ideas to improve" writing centers (2). The collection is the groundwork for writing centers to make a philosophical shift away from well-intended, "often-generic mission statements," towards deliberate and thoughtful policy changes and reinvented approaches (3). Babcock and Daniels do not simply encourage this new discourse; rather, the collected essays map out these foundational reconfigurations of writing center practice that both insist upon and make practical the shift away from a disability/diversity agenda toward practice informed by "disability as insight" (3).

Babcock and Daniels intervene in Writing Center Studies long-held utilization of "student-centered pedagogies," an approach that

understands writing center consultations as “unique and idiosyncratic” (6). The collection emerges from this entrenched practice, questioning the limits of existing visions of what flexible tutoring looks like in practice. The chapters consider flexible tutoring alongside interrogations of what tools a flexible tutor employs: from what privilege those tools are formed; from what positionality are they employed; for whom are they targeted? Babcock and Daniels argue that a writing center informed by disability would understand that if tutoring practices overall were informed by a disability framework, then all students—of various backgrounds and abilities—could benefit from the flexibility model.

The professional work of Babcock and Daniels, respectively, represents their suitability as pioneers in this discussion. Rebecca Day Babcock’s research emphasizes tutoring and deafness (“Tell Me How It Reads”: Tutoring Deaf and Hearing Students); Sharifa Daniels, Head (Afrikaans) of the Writing Lab at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, has experience as an executive board member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), and has additionally served on the IWCA disability and diversity sub-committees. Her scholarly commitment to topics surrounding identity, disability, and writing centers is reflected in her numerous conference presentations and in her contributions to this collection (namely, “How Inclusive Is the Writing Lab to Students with Disabilities? Reflections from One South African University”). The editor’s scholarly experiences are suggestive of their commitment towards impactful disability-inclusion; the text is a testament to the power of their commitment to altering the field’s understanding of their own work and its impact upon the writing center space.

Writing Center and Disability is divided into three parts: “Narratives: Descriptions of Experience, Advice, and Suggestions,” “Research on the Intersection of Disability and Tutoring Writing,” and “Policies, Practices, and Programs for Students with Disability in the Writing Center.” Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 variously demonstrate the weight and impact of growing discussions about disability and writing centers and personalize the collection’s argument overall. Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9, using case-specific studies, interrogate tutoring practices and the limited scope of existing writing center approaches through a disability studies lens and research alternative, disability informed practices. Despite their specificity, the chapters additionally offer methodological models for future research into topics concerning disability that the collection does

not address. Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 imagine writing center futures and effectively chart the process of enacting Babcock and Daniels's expressed aim to grow beyond platitudes into practice. Chapter 14 punctuates the text with a contribution from Rebecca Day Babcock, wherein the editor reviews existing research and asserts the potential for continued consideration (and reconsideration) of writing centers informed by disability in practice.

Among the collected 14 essays, *Writing Centers and Disability* showcases both research and policy guides along with narrative accounts of varied experiences involving disability in writing centers. These chapters are accompanied by prompts for the reader to interrogate and respond to each chapter's call for action as it pertains to their own writing centers. This chapter organization enables the chapter's authors to control how the text resonates; additionally, it grants the power of reception and message to the authors, many of whom are historically marginalized and/or ignored in policy-making discourses. The text impressively engages varied voices—staff, students, directors—that represent voices personally and/or professionally connected to the intersection of writing centers and disability. Collectively, the chapters attempt to meet and unpack many of the realized and unrealized challenges of imagining an inclusive writing center that embraces the multiplicity of tutoring.

Of the many potent, essential chapters in this collection, “Her Brain Works” by Carol Ellis, stands out as an essential read specifically for administrators unfamiliar with the dangers of institutional neglect of disability in an academic context. Ellis, a former writing center administrator who lost her job due to perceptions about her disability, details her experience with deep-seated academic exclusionary practices. Her candid, unapologetic testimony is harrowing but vital, and the sound of her call for action is loud and reverberates throughout the collection's chapters. When she concludes her essay at a loss—“I don't know what can be done”—readers are empowered to adopt a sense of duty towards the collection's mission. Its placement in the collection reassigns responsibility for organizing structural change; it is not just the duty of disabled people but instead of the writing center community overall.

Inasmuch as the narratives found in Chapters 2 through 5 embody the poignancy of disabled experiences in writing centers, the essays included

in Parts II and III follow through with accessible, workable insights and processes for the text's reader to absorb and put into practice. For example, the twin messages of Sarah A. Mucek's and Rebecca Day Babcock's respective chapters are essential, specifically for centers motivated to develop and implement new, reinvigorated, disability informed practices. The chapters, together, interrogate existing tutoring practices to reveal their ability to silence tutees with disabilities, and outline processes for redesigning practices to meet the specific needs of those seeking tutoring help. Mucek's chapter grows from ongoing conversations about authority dynamics in peer-tutoring contexts; however, she posits that through a disability lens, we might better understand the importance of identity formation for people with disabilities. She asks: how might a writing center be a place for a writer with a disability to redefine what it means to be disabled in an academic context? And, how can that process be encouraged within writing center tutorials? Babcock's chapter similarly revisits long-standing tutoring practices and pedagogies to unsettle their exclusionary dependence upon "hearing, seeing, speaking, and using the hands to write" (185). Through observing deaf writers working with hearing tutors, Babcock sketches a new tutor orientation that is better prepared to understand and work within student needs. The insights of chapters like these shine a light on practical gaps that administrators can feasibly begin to close.

The benefits of *Writing Centers and Disability* cannot be overstated, as the text unpacks wide-reaching topics that in their variety fundamentally concern all writing centers. For administrators, tutors, and even tutees, Babcock and Daniels continuously point readers towards acting on systemic reconfiguration through beckoning readers to (re)consider their own relationship with and action regarding these topics, asking pointed questions about if/how/where individual centers are enacting practices that cogitate (rather than gesture towards and/or exclude) disability. Notably, the text prepares, rather than snubs or criticizes, its readers to enact the change required to better serve the diverse populations that enter writing centers.

Writing Centers and Disability is an essential resource for any writing center, as it addresses ever-present gaps in training materials historically employed in writing centers. The rhetorical and educational power of this text is unmatched and should undoubtedly become a companion to popular tutoring manuals. *Writing Centers and Disability* emerges from

Fountainhead Press X Series for Professional Development, which intends to focus on the continued professional growth of both new and experienced teachers, including writing program administrators and writing center personnel. Its ability to live up to the stated aims of the series cannot be understated and its publication, I argue, marks a turning point in writing center development.