



## Call for Proposals

### Special Issue: Writing Centers and Relationality: Constellating Stories

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One of the most effective, but often under theorized, ways of understanding the relationships we build in writing center spaces is through the use of story. We tell stories about who we are, how we connect with clients, administrators, and other consultants. These stories are often representative of the relationships themselves and, as such, cannot be separated from them. As Cherokee author Thomas King writes, “The truth about stories, is that’s all we are” (2). He adds a warning about stories, though:

For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told. (10)

We should heed this warning: grand narratives about writing centers abound, lauding our safe, comfortable, one-on-one tutoring and lamenting our marginalized positions and basement workspaces. Such narratives leave little space for examining the multiple and complex nuances of fluid conditions and relationships that form the reality of many centers. We take up calls from Rebecca L. Jackson, Beth Boquet, and Jackie Grutsch McKinney to examine the many unofficial narratives that form our everyday realities.

A continuing examination of narratives grand and hidden is so important because writing centers are often loci of writing on a campus and, thus, a central location for individuals and groups interested in conversations surrounding writing. Therefore, there are numerous relationships at play that influence the ways a particular center functions within the broader university. Writing center directors and consultants must effectively navigate these myriad relationships in order to maintain their best practices. From the role of the director to cultivate a relationship with a department chair, college dean, or provost in order to fund the center, to a consultant who has a one-off session with a freshman student; from experienced consultants training new hires, to agreements with English and writing departments to share TAs for graduate students—the relationships that are forged and maintained directly impact the success of a center. Whether a center is very small and typically serves undergraduate students or very large and influences the writing culture of an entire university, it is important to understand writing centers as relational spaces.

To this end, we seek to understand how a Cultural Rhetorics methodology can inform the stories we tell and the stories we hear. As a methodology, Cultural Rhetorics foregrounds storytelling and relationships as part and parcel. We build relationships and, through this process, we shape stories to understand them. These stories then become an access point for building further relationships.

This process of telling and hearing stories is directly connected to relationality. A working definition of relationality comes from Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony*: “relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality” (7). Thus, writing center relationships form the realities of the centers themselves, so we cannot fully theorize, research, or understand the realities of our centers without theorizing, researching, and understanding the many constellated relationships involved. Then, from the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (at Michigan State University), we see that relationality, as a framework, “gives us a way to do something besides objectify. This framework provides another option to emphasize meaning as made within and among multiple contexts, histories, and knowledge systems” (Powell, et. al., Act II, Scene 3). Rather than just telling stories about relationships, we ask that relationships be considered through these complex lenses.

What we are seeking for this special edition of *TPR* are your stories. Stories about the relationships you have built, cultivated, and maintained through a scholarly sense of what writing centers do and practice. These relational stories provide a place for scholars to theorize their own interactions within a larger community and to draw connections across writing center scholarship. Stories take different forms, and as such, how you approach these stories is up to you. This is intended to be a space where the various capacities of writing center scholarship can be shared and storied. We want to see stories told through empirical data and through experiences; stories told *with* and not just *about* the people involved in the relationships; we want to rethink old stories by telling new stories. We want to see constellated relationships, which, according to Powell et. al:

... gives us a visual metaphor for those relationships that honor all possible realities.... A constellation...allows for all the meaning-making practices and their relationships to matter. It allows for multiple-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive. (Powell, et. al., Act I, Scene 2).

This is, ultimately, what we are hoping our special issue becomes: a constellated set of stories about writing center relationships.

### **Guiding Questions**

In line with our goals, here are some ways of questioning the relationships inherent to writing center work, questions your stories might engage with:

- What relationships do writing center consultants/tutors have with writing when they come into the center?
- What relationships do student writers have with writing when they come into the center?

- In what ways do the relationships that consultants and students have with writing intersect, interact, and conflict?
- What relationships do student writers and consultants have with the space and place of the writing center?
- How does working as writing center consultants influence consultants' relationships with writing?
- How does the writing center influence the relationships students have with writing?
- What relationships exist between writing center consultants and writing center administration, and how do they influence the work of writing centers?
- What relationships exist between writing center administration and university administration, and how do they influence the work of writing centers?
- How do writing center relationships impact how you choose to tell your stories?
- What are the different ways you tell writing center stories, and what do these approaches say about the important relationships of your center?
- How do you change the stories you tell about your center based on the relationships you need to develop and maintain?
- What voices and perspectives tend to be hidden in your writing center, and how can/do you use stories as methodology to reveal them?
- What does a constellated story of your writing center look like?

Please email your proposals to [TPR.Stories@gmail.com](mailto:TPR.Stories@gmail.com)

### **Tentative Timeline**

May 1, 2017: Initial Proposals due  
 June 15, 2017: Acceptances Distributed  
 August 15, 2017: Full Drafts due  
 October 1, 2017: Reply for revisions  
 December 1, 2017: Feedback to authors  
 January 15, 2018: Publication

### **References**

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