

The Writing Center and the Nexus of *-trans* Zones

The current moment in writing center history is evidently marked by the proliferation of writing center practices across the world. A recent special issue of *The Writing Center Journal* (2021) was dedicated to transatlantic writing centers and included a comprehensive timeline of the emergence of non-US writing centers. Operating within diverse local environments and across national borders while serving growing populations of international, multicultural, and multilingual students, the writing center has become visibly transnational. Two helpful definitions of transnationalism emerge from two US-based scholars whose work focuses on teaching and learning writing across borders. In his edited collection *Transnational Writing Program Administration* (2015), David Martin applies the term transnational to “programs, activities, and institutions that involve students and faculty from two or more countries working together.” A more theoretical definition comes from Xiaoye You in his introduction to his edited collection *Transnational writing education: Theory, history, and practice* (2018) where he sees transnationalism as a “notion that both highlights and works to build connections, crossings, and spaces between the existing national, ethnic, racial, and linguistic boundaries.”

Conceived in these ways, transnational writing centers are liminal spaces, not only because they are situated between student and academic affairs, but also because they offer students and staff opportunities to move between cultures, languages, levels of belonging, identity categories, and the axes of power; to move not only within but also between what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) called “contact zones” or places “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” and “safe houses” where “groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogenous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression.” This aspect of liminality can be understood as *transculturalism* or the act of “going beyond categories and boundaries” and prioritizing process over product (Lee and Canagarajah 2018).

My talk will illustrate that when cultivated, a transcultural disposition of a transnational writing center can facilitate pedagogical approaches to language, technology, and territorial boundaries in ways that would enrich collaboration, negotiation, perspective shifting, and empathy while interrogating traditional power dynamics and helping writing center community members to engage in critical reflection on their cultural, personal, and professional values and modes of behavior. To this end, I will draw on my experience of setting up a bilingual writing center in Russia, designing and implementing a cross-country virtual training module for peer tutors, and supporting the development of English composition course modules for international virtual exchanges. I will discuss specific translanguaging approaches to tutoring and transcultural elements in tutor training programs and writing courses that can help achieve the above goals regardless of whether a writing center prioritizes the writing process, genre conventions, or language learning.