



# A Radical and Sustainable Vision for Linguistic Inclusivity: *Internationalizing the Writing Center: A Guide for Developing a Multilingual Writing Center* (2020)

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With travel still restricted in much of the world, internationalizing our writing centers may seem low on the priority list. And yet if the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that the world is a globalized network, and we are deeply interdependent. For those of us on college campuses that were completely remote last year, our writing centers absorbed many of the pressures of our current moment, excluding those without access to resources while also creating space for others to experience the lost intimacies of college life. Amidst it all, we were reminded of the precariousness and value of deep and responsive listening—a resource our centers are, under the right circumstances, uniquely positioned to provide.



Noreen Groover Lape, director of the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center at Dickinson College, has written a prescient book that invites us to rethink our centers at a juncture when we're most open to hearing its call—as interdisciplinary invitation, inclusive collaboration, and perhaps even survival mechanism. In *Internationalizing the Writing Center: A Guide for Developing a Multilingual Writing Center*, she offers theoretical vision and practical blueprints for establishing what she calls a multilingual writing center (MWC), a space that offers “consistent and ongoing writing tutoring in multiple languages” and peer tutor education grounded in theories from foreign language (FL) acquisition research and writing studies (16). Such centers facilitate the tutoring of writing in English and a wide variety of other languages—in Dickinson's case, English, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish (16). In doing so, MWCs contribute to internationalization efforts in higher education that see competence in languages other than English as key to cultivating mobility, intercultural understanding, and creative thinking (22-23). MWCs also advance the internationalization of writing centers that has long been underway, including cultivating awareness of the linguistic diversity embedded in Global Englishes, the perils of English-centric academic publishing cultures, and the limitations of the mono-

lingualism that dominates writing studies as a field (e.g., Horner et al.). By offering tutoring in multiple languages, and not just multiple Englishes, the MWC embodies a more ambitious vision of linguistic inclusivity in our centers.

But what might it mean to open the doors of our centers “so widely that the centers themselves—and not just the writers who inhabit them—are multilingual,” as Lape puts it (15)? Throughout the book, Lape argues that, as writing center administrators (WCAs), we have much to learn from the FL research that informs how and why FL faculty teach writing in their courses. An understanding of this praxis has heretofore been missing from writing center—and writing studies—scholarship. At the same time, FL faculty involved in MWC collaborations have an opportunity to learn about writing pedagogies, including writing processes and genres, that are absent from their field’s scholarship and graduate training. In sum, the interdisciplinary collaborations fostered by MWCs allow experts in both domains to enhance learning about writing on their campuses.

And yet why might a writing center choose to commit to such a radical re-envisioning *now*? Lape acknowledges such feelings of overwhelm, even before the pandemic, when she muses that launching an MWC might seem like an “overly ambitious undertaking” for centers navigating budget cuts, mergers with learning support services, and, in the worst case, closure (122). Such threats loom larger still—for institutions and not just centers—amidst doomsday predictions that 20% of colleges and universities now warrant a “D” ranking in *Forbes’* review of higher education financials (LeClair). Wouldn’t an MWC cost more money, contributing to rising administrative costs at a time when organizations are looking for efficiencies? Wouldn’t this mean more tutors who speak languages, more space for those tutors, more time for the WCA to train them, more generation of reports to convince others to fund such services, and more outreach to FL faculty to build partnerships, at a time when the pandemic-induced transformations have tapped our reserves?

Perhaps yes, but Lape is so convincing because she gives WCAs a new way of aligning their centers with institutional mission and strategic priorities. And she offers them ways of starting small. Collaborations with language departments may ultimately make our writing centers more sustainable—and dynamic. For one, MWCs can consolidate academic support at institutions with a strong commitment to internationalization (123)—currently half of all colleges and universities. They also respond to larger conversations in higher education about the value of integrative learning and breaking down silos around student support (123), topics of renewed urgency in the pandemic’s aftermath (Camp et al.). The mission of my

own college, for example, states that we produce “engaged, socially responsible citizens of the world through an academically rigorous, interdisciplinary liberal arts education emphasizing social justice, intercultural understanding and environmental sensitivity.” After reading Lape’s book, I could envision an MWC as a vibrant contribution to this goal through the bridging of language and writing tutoring, which currently happens in separate units without shared conversation. For those who feel linguistically unqualified to create an MWC, Lape, who is not bilingual, assures them they don’t need to speak other languages to be successful. They just need to apply the writing center values of responsive collaboration and teamwork (x).

Lape’s superpower is her ability to translate an immense amount of theory into actionable steps that include sample assessment questions, tutor training activities, and strategic planning exercises from her award-winning MWC. In the first 100 pages Lape outlines the purpose and pedagogy of MWCs through the cultivation of what she calls “holistic tutoring practices,” a flexible approach to tutoring in which global and sentence-level concerns are seen as interrelated (6). In the book’s second half Lape tackles the nuts and bolts of administering such a center, including how to do a needs assessment, how to develop a strategy for asking for resources, and how to collaborate effectively with different stakeholders, including FL faculty. The final section consists of nine appendices that provide sample program materials like session transcripts and scenarios, definitions of key concepts and discussion prompts, and a sample orientation schedule for tutors.

My goal in the remainder of this review is to convince you this is a book you need to have—if for no other reason than to offer a visionary model for how to create a mission-driven and linguistically inclusive writing center.

Why is an MWC necessary? If you still aren’t persuaded (or think others may not be), you’ll find a comprehensive rationale in the first chapter. In her survey of the history of writing centers in the U.S. and abroad, Lape demonstrates that English-centric writing centers have become the norm only because monolingual language politics have systemically favored English (15). Not only could she not find a single article on FL writing tutoring published in English (3), she discovered that only 4% of writing centers in countries in which English is not an official language are multilingual (17). Most were either English-only (59%), bilingual (English and official language; 17%), or monolingual (official language-only, 20%). Dickinson’s MWC, founded in 2010, is the first of its kind in North America. MWCs that tutor in English and other languages help disrupt this monolingual hegemony, while putting into practice the best of FL and translingual pedagogies (15).

FL classrooms are also rich in peer review and writing, making them excellent, untapped sites for collaboration.

Lape claims that to make good on this potential, tutors need to be trained in holistic tutoring practices, the subject of the next three chapters. How can tutors call attention to the ways in which language choices impact meaning in the FL context? Lape extracts practices from FL acquisition research to develop her concept of holistic tutoring. She defines holistic tutoring as an approach of “informed flexibility” that helps writers navigate the “writing process, global writing concerns, and sentence level issues” (37). Holistic tutors see global and sentence-level issues as interconnected. They help writers enhance their writing processes by moving them to see writing as not just a two-step process (writing then revising) or a three-step process (composing in the original language, translating into the target language, and revising). Holistic tutors prompt students to see that they can compose by focusing on meaning—as opposed to literal translation—which in turn helps writers address questions about purpose and organization.

To foster holistic tutoring, Lape introduces key concepts from FL acquisition research, including *noticing*, *hypothesis testing*, *metalinguistic reflection*, *negotiated interaction*, and the strategic use of *translation* (59). Such concepts position tutors to engage learners in metacognition about linguistic difference and to manage cognitive overload (39). Noticing is the concept that learners must recognize the “gap between actual and intended meaning” (40). Hypothesis testing is the notion that learners must “use trial and error to test how the language works.” Metalinguistic awareness is an awareness of form, including its relationship to meaning (40). In her own MWC, Lape trains tutors in these three concepts to help them toggle between lower and higher order concerns. “What does this paragraph say?” her tutor Veronica asks a student writing in French, for example. “What is the message? How do we move to the next message? What is the transition?” (41). This kind of “deep-problem solving” is at the heart of language learning and FL tutors are uniquely positioned to nurture it (42).

Additional strategies adapted from FL research include the concepts *negotiated interaction* and *translation*. *Negotiated interaction* is the process of noticing that the writer and the tutor have different understandings of what the language means; they then engage in a process of negotiation to arrive at a shared understanding of what is intended (42). To return to the case of Veronica in Lape’s MWC, a tutor might ask “Do you really want to use the word *creer*, to create? Do you think that’s the best word to use?” (43) to find words that better reflect the writer’s goals. In terms of *translation*, tutors

can identify directly translated texts or words and invite writers to think not in terms of literal translation but meaning (46). How might the writer say something in language already available to them? Such conversations make writers aware of the ways online translators can hinder the writing process.

Chapter Three zooms out to show how WCAs can train tutors to foster the kind of positive environment that facilitates learning acquisition. While crucial in every learning setting, the literature on FL pedagogy stresses that anxiety and stress create performance anxieties that reduce motivation and risk-taking (62). The learning conditions that maximize linguistic growth are those also cultivated in writing centers, providing additional grounds for interdisciplinary synergy, Lape argues. Research on classroom rapport offers similarly compatible guidance on ways to help students develop through “uncommonly attentive behavior” (remembering a student and their needs in an enthusiastic way), “connecting behavior” (connecting with students by acting casual, friendly, approachable, etc.), “information sharing” (offering advice and feedback in a positive way), “courteous behavior” (being flexible, inclusive, and willing to listen), and “common grounding” (speaking eye-to-eye and finding similarities with students) (67).

Lape concludes the chapter by drawing on FL theory on *managing error correction* to train tutors to help students see that linguistic errors don’t necessarily obstruct communication (67). FL research suggests that focusing too much on errors makes students feel self-conscious, micromanaged, and overloaded. Helping students *understand the language* learning process as a slow one of which error is an essential part is also important for helping students “internalize tutor encouragement and engage in positive self-talk” (68). The very last section of the chapter ties this all together by including tutoring scenarios and conversation starters for the different FL concepts, which can be adopted in a peer tutor education program.

In another innovative move, Lape dedicates an entire chapter to theorizing intercultural competence in the MWC. How can tutors be trained to engage with the cultural aspects of writing? Lape reminds us that FL writers are likely to encounter what she calls “writing culture shock,” especially when traveling abroad, where they are often asked to write in new genres (78). FL tutors will need to be prepared to help students “demystify intercultural encounters” and embrace a “mindset of cultural relativism” instead of an “ethnocentric mindset” that uses US conventions to define good writing (79). She does this by adopting frameworks from intercultural competence theory to help her tutors identify what the field calls a “critical event” prompting culture shock, gather information about the culture to

contextualize it, and ultimately formulate a new interpretation of the event that encapsulates a more holistic understanding (93-4). Such training prepares FL writing tutors to navigate their multiple roles as they help students negotiate culturally specific genres and rhetorics. The goal is to resolve culture shock with more informed and nuanced perspectives (99).

After laying the pedagogical foundation for an MWC, Lape shifts her focus to how to work with stakeholders to develop and administer an MWC. How can WCAs plan strategically for an MWC by securing funding and collaborating effectively with FL faculty? She recommends resisting the urge of seeing WCs as siloed, recounting how she engaged in an “ethnographic tour” of her home institution upon her arrival. In addition to asking faculty how they integrated the writing requirement into their major, where writing was taught in their curricula, how they taught majors to write in the discipline, and how they taught the writing process, she asked FL faculty if they taught students “to write US academic discourse in the target language” or if they taught them the “rhetoric of the target culture” (104). Through these conversations she discovered an interest in support for FL writing. Her next step was to form a planning and advisory committee comprised of stakeholders like WCAs, FL faculty, multilingual writing specialists, and international education staff (105), which she describes as crucial for buy-in.

And finally, she addresses how to frame persuasive arguments to administrators to fund pilot programs like this one. WCAs can make value-added *cultural appeals*, using qualitative evidence, and *quantitative appeals*, using statistics, to support requests for increased resources (105). The value-added appeal shows how the writing center adds value to students’ experiences as learners. This can be done by appealing to the institution’s mission, strategic plan, core values, or current organizational values like efficiency (106-7). Quantitative appeals can be made by showing usage data and correlating usage with high-stakes issues like retention (108-9). For each type of appeal, Lape shows how she pulled from her institution’s documents and data to frame the value of an MWC within local missions and priorities. She then walks readers through the process of collaborating with FL faculty and other stakeholders to identify the mission, values, and learning outcomes of an MWC tailored to their institution. To help WCAs avoid reinventing the wheel, she includes the list of outcomes developed by the advisory committee on her campus (112). She wraps things up by sharing how she partners with FL faculty to identify tutoring needs in the different languages and recruit promising and qualified tutors. The last chapter and an appendix also offer a schedule of the training provided to her staff.

Lape makes a tremendous contribution to the field through her many rich and actionable models for MWC work. She also takes care to help WCAs develop a sustainable vision and plan. For example, she recommends that WCAs start small—possibly with just one language, like Spanish, if they teach at a larger institution, and assess along the way to improve the collaboration (124). She also emphasizes the importance of understanding the values and practices of FL faculty, the topic of the book’s last chapter. She deftly lays out the framework used nationally by FL faculty—from the “communicative approach” to teaching languages to the criteria used by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages to assess listening, speaking, reading, and writing (125-7). FL instructors, for example, often consider writing as a means of acquiring a language—not necessarily as a means of writing for a particular audience and purpose. WCAs must be able to build bridges with this pedagogy.

As a WCA trained as a comparatist and housed in a modern languages department, I appreciated Lape’s perspective. She sketches in the landscape of FL learning with nuance, building bridges with the teaching, tutoring, and administration of writing. As a WCA at a small liberal arts college, I also couldn’t help but think her proposal doubles to speak to the vitality of writing centers at small colleges, where collaborations happen more naturally given our size. She shows how such environments can be incubators for innovation that larger institutions can then adapt and grow, particularly since our lean administrative structures necessitate sustainable thinking about program development. But perhaps most significantly, Lape carves out a path that is among the most interdisciplinary and linguistically inclusive to have emerged in the field in the last decade. In doing so, she offers us a pathway into the post-pandemic future, where travel and internationalization may be among our most cherished priorities.

## WORKS CITED

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