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Synthetic Review of Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-To-One Mentoring by Harry C. Denny, Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change, and I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric by Frankie Condon

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Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring

by Harry C. Denny. Logan: Utah State UP, 2010. Print.

Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change

edited by Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan. Logan: Utah State UP, 2011. Print.

I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric

by Frankie Condon. Logan: Utah State UP, 2012. Print.

This trio of books focused on identity, writing center studies, and rhetoric can be summarized by the edited collection's subtitle: "A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change." For directors and consultants/tutors at writing centers at two-year and four-year colleges, *Facing the Center* and *Writing Centers and the New Racism* represent core texts to question current practices and imagine how writing centers can more effectively serve *all* student writers. While not pertaining exclusively to writing centers, *I Hope I Join the Band* connects to writing centers and our classrooms, where we work with students with diverse backgrounds and identities. Taken together, the three texts serve as extensions of important ideas presented in earlier works such as Nancy Maloney Grimm's *Good Intentions* (1999), Elizabeth H. Boquet's *Noise from the Writing Center* (2002), and Anne Ellen Geller et

al.'s *The Everyday Writing Center* (2007). For readers who work in writing centers or for instructors who want insight into how student writers contend with their identities as they produce academic discourse, these books are essential reading. While they have different approaches, all will make readers reflect on current academic practices and consider important changes.

Harry C. Denny's *Facing the Center* focuses on how students and writing center professionals approach writing tasks in light of how identity "raises questions about who we are and how



we come to know and present identity as a phenomenon that's unified, coherent, and captured in a singular essence, or as something more multi-faceted and dynamic" (2). La-

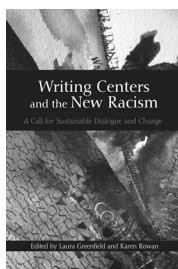
menting the fact that many writing centers are staffed by people of privilege who often work with diverse writers, Denny argues that writing centers are exemplars of the "importance of attending to identity politics and the tangible effects of political, economic, social, and cultural forces at play in and often confounding education wherever it's practiced" (7). Pulling from his own activism and background while also synthesizing a host of sources (notably Yoshino, Kynard, Althusser, Foucault, and Bourdieu), he works through the

multiple identities that affect writing center work and writing instruction: race and ethnicity (chapter 2), class (chapter 3), sex and gender (chapter 4), and nationality (chapter 5).

One of the energizing aspects of *Facing the Center* is the use of five “interchapters” that present a response to each major chapter. In these sections, which might be the strongest aspect of the book, Denny has writing consultants, many of whom have worked with him, respond to his ideas so they “might push what I’m arguing or invite further dialogue with readers” (29). Though typically short, the dialogues resemble a detailed conversation on a blog—a Burkean parlor in print. Some readers might not like how Denny chose to have his words end each interchapter (having the last word), but the sections often stimulate thinking toward the more practical—what it all means when you’re working as a tutor or a teacher. In fact, Jennifer Fontanez’s section in the “Interchapter 2” provides one of the many high points of the book because her dialogue with Denny presents the assimilationist, accommodationist, and separatist stances (Matsuda and Cox 45) in writing center work: “I am in no way, shape, or form advocating for assimilation or for people to deny their roots; having a general understanding of expectations can give people the ability to move fluidly between two different worlds. For me, it has allowed me to connect with people from all identities, thus making me more accessible” (60). Although the race and gender chapters are the most developed in the text, chapter 3, “Facing Class in the Writing Center,” represents a section many readers might have anticipated

for a long time, and this reader hopes further scholarship from Denny and others more comprehensively addresses his point that “what we’re presumed to do in the writing centers is to cleanse working-class students of their identities, to enable them to start reading and sounding like right-proper middle-class folks” (72).

Published a year after Denny’s *Facing the Center*, the edited collection of *Writing Centers and the New Racism* extends the conversation begun in



Denny’s fine chapter 2, “Facing Race and Ethnicity in the Writing Center,” and previous works (Boquet; Geller et al.; Grimm), though as the editors note in the introduction, the

book was initiated by Victor Villanueva’s address at the 2005 International Writing Centers Association Conference. The text has four sections: (1) “Foundational Theories on Racism, Rhetoric, Language, and Pedagogy”; (2) “Toward an Antiracist Praxis for Writing Centers”; (3) “Research, Critical Case Studies, and the Messiness of Practice”; and (4) “Stories of Lived Experience.” Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan hope that the book “and the conversation it represents and provokes will be challenging, even for those in our field who have long been committed to and active in antiracism work” (13). Their hope is realized because this book asks the right questions.

While all four sections feature articles worthy of any writing center professional’s time, four articles in the “Foundational Theories” and the “Re-

search” sections distinguish themselves. Laura Greenfield’s “The ‘Standard English’ Fairy Tale” makes readers think about how “[o]ur assumptions about language are guided more often by a rhetoric that feeds on our unconscious racism than they are by our intellectual understanding of linguistic fact” (34). Though her article might have been more powerful if she examined the intersections of race and class, she makes readers question the idea of academic discourse as the language of power and how “Standard English” might be more justly described as “standardized English.” In the same section, Vershawn Ashanti Young decimates cultural critic Stanley Fish’s pronouncements and diatribes about college writing instruction. In his “Should Writers Use They Own English?” Young examines the “hegemony” of “what good writin is and how good writin can look at work, at home, and at school” (65) and then argues for “code meshing” (67) to complicate or upend how scholars advocate for code “switching.”

In the “Research” section of the book, Nancy Effinger Wilson presents a relevant case study from her own writing center and reflections as a researcher in “Bias in the Writing Center: Tutor Perceptions of African American English.” That article is smartly followed by Kathryn Valentine and Monica F. Torres’s “Diversity as Topography: The Benefits and Challenges of Cross Racial Interaction in the Writing Center.” While Effinger Wilson’s article details how tutors have a “clear bias against AAL [African American Language]” (178) and they are more charitable toward nonnative (ELL) students, Valentine and Torres’s chapter harkens

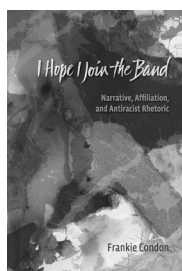
to Kenneth Bruffee’s important work on collaborative learning by detailing how cross-racial interaction and collaboration leads to productive learning outcomes and can create “the cultural skills and attitudes necessary to participate and lead in a diverse democracy” (198). The three articles in the final section of the book, “Stories of Lived Experience,” provide narratives of teaching and learning that are a mixture of inspiration (Ann E. Green’s “‘The Quality of Light’: Using Narrative in a Peer Tutoring Class”), turmoil and controversy (Barbara Gordon’s “Caught in a Firestorm: A Harsh Lesson Learned Teaching AAVE”), and consciousness raising (Jason B. Esters’s “On the Edges: Black Maleness, Degrees of Racism, and Community on the Boundaries of the Writing Center”).

Although this book is one of the strongest collections of writing center-focused articles to come out in some time, some might question that the collection mainly reflects a black (African American) and white (Anglo-American) approach to race. Especially in light of the burgeoning demographic of Latinos in the United States, more comprehensive coverage of the Latino American experience and the linguistic challenges for that racial identity is warranted. In addition, although students who don’t speak English in their home communities but who have been in the United States for some time are often categorized as ESL writers, examining our work with those students is relevant to the “new racism.” However, there is only so much one edited collection can cover, and there is not a weak article in *Writing Centers and the New Racism*.

As Denny’s *Facing the Center* chal-

lenges the traditional book project on an organizational level with its experience- and theory-based reflections coupled with interchapters and while Greenfield and Rowan's *Writing Centers* provides a traditional collection of articles, Frankie Condon's *I Hope I Join the Band* offers an amalgam of memoir, theoretical meditation, and call to action. Written mainly for white academics, her book "digs into ways of conceiving, thinking, speaking, and acting performatively in antiracist struggles for whites" (12). As Condon says, the book is "for those who wonder how, why, and to what extent our lives as actors, as rhetors, are shaped by ideologies of race, and for those who hear the call to act: to organize and facilitate, to study, write, and teach with both will and readiness for hopeful resistance" (26).

In *I Hope I Join the Band*, Condon presents ways to productively examine and complicate our racial selves.



Condon's text performs in a similar manner as a literacy narrative because she leads readers through significant personal experiences and effectively connects them to concepts

relevant to antiracist activism. Her multiple readings of personal experiences are the highlights of the work along with her trenchant analysis of the differences between shame and guilt (113–14). While she details the concepts of "critical ideation" (38) and "decentering" (63), for practically minded readers, the precept of "whiteness" (34) and the idea of "nuancing" (86) offer the most promise for instructors and writ-

ing center professionals. They seem the most usable concepts because tutors can use them to explore cultural "norms," the varieties of academic discourse, and their experiences working with diverse writers. Condon argues that "whiteness impedes the ability of white folks to change, to be changed in and through our relationships with peoples of color and by the analyses they offer to us of the materiality of racism in all of our lives" (34). As Condon notes, nuancing is a practice that "engages us in critical inquiry, but it is also a reflective practice in which we examine individual and collective memory to discern the impact of an idea, concept, or belief on our lived experience of the world and on the stories we tell about that lived experience" (87).

Chapter 4, "Angels before Thee," is one of the strongest chapters in the book because it details thoughtful ideas about both concepts and ways to enact the process of nuancing. The author provides a sample of her own nuancing in this chapter, and for that matter the whole book, through her experiences with her adopted brother, Rick. Condon argues that sharing stories is where to start when nuancing and problem solving for the "wicked problem" of racism (138). For instructors whose classrooms are racially diverse and for directors of writing centers who are committed to diversity and a fuller representation of the writing we should experience, this chapter is a must read. If there are two contentions to take away from this book, they are the following: (1) we need to reinforce and value the personal in academic writing, and (2) we need to challenge the idea that Edited American English should

be *the* power discourse. Both will likely provoke serious reflection and debate.

The book concludes in a similar manner to Denny's interchapters in *Facing the Center*, but chapter 6, "After the Fire, a Still Small Voice," represents a more comprehensive conversation between peers through a published exchange of letters between Condon (a white woman) and Vershawn A. Young (an African American male) about antiracist activism. Young and Condon's exchanges provide closure to her project, and Young succinctly presents what Condon's book interrogates and promotes: "You urge whites to take personal responsibility for racism and white privilege, showing how well-meaning, even antiracist, whites must do this, must critique their whiteness, which is not the same thing as racism, but does often have the same results" (182). *I Hope I Join the Band* ends on a hopeful note, and the conversation in the final chapter models discussions that instructors and writing center professionals should have.

Though Condon's book does not focus squarely on writing centers, her status and work in writing center scholarship certainly will get this text noticed among that readership. However, her book belongs in the conversation, one that is preceded by Denny's exciting work and Greenfield and Rowan's trenchant *Writing Centers*. All three books represent excellent resources for anyone teaching in diverse, multicultural classrooms, not just those of us who work in writing centers. However, for a more comprehensive examination of identities and how they influence the work of teachers and writing center

directors, Denny's *Facing the Center* is the place to start.

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A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966,
new ed.

by Joseph Harris. Logan: Utah State UP,
2010. 208 pp. Print.

The title *A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966* suggests a chronological presentation of significant scholarly perspectives since 1966, and to a certain extent, the book fulfills this expectation. Yet the experience of reading feels more like sitting in a coffee shop with