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8 Embracing Difficult Conversations: Making

Antiracist and Decolonial Writing Center

Programming Visible

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‘I was told not to go to the Writing Center, that the Writing Center wasn’t *for me*’.

These words came from an undergraduate student on the first day of class in my writing center education course, required for students interested in becoming writing consultantsⁱ at the center I direct. His words took me by surprise. The student – a Blackⁱⁱ man who was a returning student, raised in Ghana, and a long-time US resident – continued, ‘One of my Africana Studies professors said, “The Writing Center isn’t for you”, to my class’. He indicated that it was understood that the University Writing Center (UWC) saw language difference as a deficit, not an asset. The perception he shared indicated that the UWC was not designed to support Black students or international students, that the UWC did not support language rights. He was taking the class because he wanted to change the Center; he said, ‘It’s better to change something from the inside’.

The event I’ve recounted happened in autumn 2015 during my first semester as the director of the UWC. I was in my first month and trying hard to listen to my staff and observe my surroundings. I had just moved across the country with my husband and 2-month-old son; I was navigating change in every part of my life. As a White, non-disabled, monolingual,

cisgender, heterosexual women, I was seeing – from the very beginning of my time here – the ways I needed to do more to be an advocate, ally and accomplice to people whose identities have been marginalized. My work is grounded in cultural rhetorics, which requires ‘an orientation and embodied storying of the maker in relation to what is being made’ (Bratta & Powell, 2016) and recognizes that ‘all cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based on the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief. In other words, people make things (texts, baskets, performances), people make relationships, people make culture’ (The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, 2014: 1.2). As the UWC’s new director, I wanted to learn about the embodied stories that came from it – the lived experiences of consultants and writers within the space, and the stories consultants, writers and university stakeholders told about it – to learn more about the culture of the Center and the university. The story my student shared that first semester was not one I wanted to hear, but I needed to hear it.

The UWC is situated within a large, urban university in the Midwest. The University, while a predominantly White institution, is recognized as diverse. Twenty-nine percent of students are people of color (POC), 7% are international students, 144 countries are represented across the student population and 29% of faculty are POC (IUPUI, n.d.). Since becoming the UWC director, my priorities have been to articulate the UWC’s mission, stabilize its administrative structure and enhance professional development and scholarly opportunities for a staff of 30–40 undergraduate and graduate consultants to enable the building of sustainable programming. Often the stories we tell about our center are contradicted by actions taken within our center. Much of my early attention was focused on addressing day-to-day practices that inadvertently sent mixed messages about our values and orientation to writers. For instance, at that time consultants wrote reports summarizing each session and sent them to students’ professors, which communicated that consultants were

authorities on the writers' experiences and undermined writer agency by speaking for writers. Working with returning consultants and consultants-in-training to review our practices takes a lot of energy, as we often do not see the ways that these small practices can have wider implications.

As that first semester progressed, I learned that there were many ways in which my Center was engaged in an orientation to supporting writers that embraced assimilation over supporting language rights. Consultants would proudly designate themselves 'helpers' and talk about how writers need to 'learn the rules before they break the rules' and discuss how 'Standard English is necessary to get by'. These positions came from a place of kindness and care, but I saw them as patronizing and dangerous. As Faison and Trevino (2017) point out, 'Having good intentions or meaning well does not make up for untheorized, uncritical pedagogies; having good intentions or meaning well does not excuse the reproduction of racist, classist, sexist or other oppressive ideologies. There is no substitute for informed, reflexive teaching.' Grimm (2011) notes that she and her own staff wondered why so few Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) visited their writing center and realized the need to 'look more closely at ourselves ... to examine the extent to which *our* writing center was based on assumptions about language, literacy, and learning that privileged White mainstream students' (p. 76, emphasis original). I found myself in the same circumstance in my new Center; I needed to find a way to shift the orientation of our Center to one that saw multiple language resources and identity positions as assets in order to become explicitly antiracist and decolonial in our mission and approach. Welcoming and engaging with stories like the one my student shared required and continues to require difficult conversations within our UWC and campus communities. Cultivating relationships that create openings for sharing stories and having difficult conversations is essential to shifting perspectives and making our UWC a site of language justice.

Writing center scholars have long noted that ‘the discourse framing writing center theory and practice’ is ‘a discourse so at odds with itself’ (Boquet, 1999: 464). Writing center scholars frequently highlight the post-colonial (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999), counter-hegemonic (Boquet, 1999) and decolonial (Garcia, 2017) potential of writing centers, but we also acknowledge ‘a reading of writing centers as producing and sustaining hegemonic institutional discourses’ (Boquet, 1999: 466). These contradictions are common across decades of writing center scholarship owing to two very different orientations to the purpose and mission of writing centers, which can be seen as focused on supporting institutional change around the ways multiple forms of English and ways of communicating are valued but are often hampered by a focused on ‘helping’ individual student writers ‘improve’, thus reinforcing mainstream, hegemonic understandings of literacy.

Writing centers have traditionally been positioned as ‘focused on changing students rather than changing teachers or academic practices. Writing problems are located in individuals rather than in assumptions embedded in academic discourse. Students perceive writing centers as places that help them get by rather than places where they can figure out how to change or challenge the system’ (Grimm, 1996: 13). In this sense, writing centers, wittingly or unwittingly, have supported the hegemonic practice of supporting individual writers assimilate to dominant writing systems and their attendant values. Greenfield (2019) contends that ‘the compulsion to define the aims of our work at the level of the individual writer – rather than at the level of larger systems in which we operate – serves to deny the culpability of those systems and perpetuates a myth that through mere grit alone a single student can somehow transcend oppression’ (p. 86). When writing centers embrace an orientation in service to assimilating into mainstream discourse, they diminish the validity of multiple Englishes and the accomplishments and abilities of writers across our campuses. Calls to make change through ‘retheorizing’ (Grimm, 2011) and ‘a new ethos’ (Blazer, 2015)

are abundant, but ‘the dominant discourse and practices of the field remain largely unchanged’ (Greenfield, 2019: 6). Although Writing Center administrators (WCAs) are sharing stories about inequities and the violence of claiming neutrality in our work, these are not the dominant stories about writing centers that circulate across our campuses. Stories from inside our centers and from specialized conversations of writing center scholars do not get recognized across our campuses where faculty, staff and students continue to impose hegemonic understandings onto us and our programming. We need to tell the stories that we’ve been telling each other to campus and public audiences – through our mission statements, writing center education with our consultants, one-to-one consulting, workshops and other programming.

In this chapter, I share details of my UWC’s journey in working toward a ‘fundamentally different paradigm’ (Greenfield, 2019: 7) and enacting ‘a multidimensional pedagogy for radical justice’ (Diab *et al.*, 2012) that makes visible our commitment to language justice and cultural diversity, which I argue requires the anchoring of all programming to a mission and writing center education that is asset-driven, antiracist and decolonial. After that, I share details of our Difficult Conversations Series program as an example of the kind of programming we need to create to make our commitments to linguistic justice visible to campus, despite its challenges and limitations. The Difficult Conversations Series is created and facilitated by student consultants and requires the UWC staff to have difficult conversations *about* difficult conversations as we work to build antiracist and decolonial programming and engage in ongoing learning together. In addition, such programming invites participants from across campus to dialogue across difference and engage in difficult conversations together. Throughout the chapter, I posit that regular engagement in difficult conversations with our Centers and across our campuses are part of how we change the story of writing centers.

Building a Foundation for Antiracist, Decolonial Writing Center Programming

One of the most significant challenges of building sustainable antiracist and decolonial writing center programming centered around difficult conversations is the persistent newcomer culture of our writing center community, which is staffed by student employees who typically work in the UWC for only 1–3 years. The very idea of writing centers may be new to incoming consultants who may see literacy as a neutral skill and the UWC as merely a space to ‘help writers’, not realizing that writing centers are intellectual sites with theoretically informed programming. Writing center education can support consultants in learning about the field of writing centers and how to engage in student-centered pedagogies, but directors must be ready for consultants to have different levels of care and commitment to the work. Because most consultants spend just a few years in our space, it is essential that they are introduced to the UWC’s antiracist and decolonial orientation as soon as possible. To create real, material change in our programming, we needed to make structural changes in how our programming is enacted, which starts with a mission and writing center education program that place equity at the center.

Writing center mission

The IUPUI UWC’s mission statement acts as a foundation upon which all of our programming is built. It acts as a public commitment to the university community that we work toward not just diversity, equity and inclusion but also solidarity and justice. When I started directing the UWC, our mission statement was ‘to collaborate with both experienced and inexperienced writers, to serve as practice audiences, and to work with students to develop strategies for improving their writing process. Our consultants support writers in building confidence to achieve their educational goals in a positive, intellectually-stimulating environment’. The consultants and I revised our mission statement to make the values that guide our everyday practice more evident to writers, consultants and other stakeholders. Our

revised mission statement, which we regularly revisit, more fully conveys our pedagogical approach and theoretical grounding. It emphasizes ‘valuing unique cultural and personal histories, knowledge, and language practices’ and explicitly states that we work to be ‘advocates’ of writers. We state that we value ‘multiple literacies and language diversity’ and that we promote ‘a broad understanding of writing, language, and literacy’. We also indicate that part of our labor includes ‘conducting and disseminating research related to writing centers, writing pedagogies, and rhetoric and writing that strengthens our programming and commitment to writers’. The mission statement can be shared with stakeholders to begin conversations about how and why the UWC operates the way it does. It grounds our programming – including writing center education, one-to-one consulting and workshops – as well as day-to-day policies for student-centered consulting strategies within sessions, making appointments, supplying proof of appointments, and so on.

By making space for ‘unique cultural and personal histories, knowledge, and language practices’, we recognize that writing is just one type of meaning making that students participate in and to support them as writers we need to consider the systems that we all participate in and how their histories as people have had an impact on them as writers. When consultants ask, ‘What does this have to do with writing?’, we have a mission statement that points to how writing is connected to how we live our lives broadly. By indicating that we value diverse ways of being and knowing, we are saying that forms of speaking and writing beyond White Mainstream Englishⁱⁱⁱ are valid and productive. To back up the claims we make in our mission statement, we need a strong and ongoing writing center education program.

Writing center education

Our mission statement, which positions the Center as a place that sees difference as an asset, lays the groundwork for creating antiracist and decolonial writing center education. Blazer

(2015) calls for a reframing of writing center work including ‘an orientation to English as Englishes [which] would focus our attention on the reality *and* practical value of linguistic diversity in our centers; [and an] attunement to increasingly diverse discourses and modes of representation [which] would better position us to support literacy development relevant to our times’ (p. 18, emphasis original). These orientations recognize and value multiple ways of being in the world and work toward creating an ‘environment centered on learning’ (Geller *et al.*, 2007: 111). Writing center education must address how various forms of communicating are attached to different people, bodies and cultures and support conversations about how different Englishes, different bodies and different abilities have not been and are not valued equally within mainstream educational models.

To become a writing consultant at the UWC, undergraduate and graduate students take a writing center theory and practice course, which emphasizes student-centered pedagogies, and asks consultants-in-training to consider their various identity positions in relation to the identities and experiences of writers who visit the UWC. Early in the semester, students are asked to reflect upon their own writing histories and consider the ways they have been encouraged and supported as writers. In sharing these stories with each other, they see how different cultural backgrounds – including but not limited to race, gender, class, geographic location and language – have significant impacts on individuals’ ways of expressing and understanding themselves. From there students are encouraged to delve deeper into how literacy operates in their own lives in relation to an ongoing topic of interest in writing centers. For instance, one student wrote about their own experiences with being told that their writing is ‘too ethnic’ and then discussed that in relation to sessions they’ve observed with Black writers at the UWC. Another student wrote about her experiences as an international student sharing examples of microaggressions – such as having her English complimented, even though it is one of her home languages, and how other international

students sometimes prefer not to work with her at the UWC since she speaks accented English and has a foreign-sounding name – and difficulties in feeling a sense of belonging. In these essays, students bring together their own experiences inside and outside the UWC, writing center observations and published writing center scholarship. The project asks students to interrogate the ways they have valued various literacy practices within their own lives and how they have seen those practices valued by others.

In the second major project of the semester, students work in teams to create a workshop for student writers or consultants. Students have created workshops on a wide variety of topics including ‘addressing challenging sessions’, ‘making the writing center more inclusive’, ‘supporting writers with executive dysfunction’ and “‘non-Standard’ Englishes in the writing center’. The intention behind this project is to continue secondary research in writing centers, potentially engage in primary research within the UWC and create a collaborative learning environment. The third major project asks students to write a consulting philosophy with an emphasis on a particular value they bring to consulting and how that value is put into practice during sessions. The students then remix the written philosophy into a new form, one they see as enacting the value they hope to showcase. For instance, a student who sees supporting writers gain a sense of belonging on campus as a major part of writing center work cross-stitched the phrases ‘listen, listen, listen’, ‘be kind to yourself’ and ‘writing is personal’.

In addition to these projects, students engage in two hours of observations and co-consultations within the UWC each week, putting their growing knowledge into practice and bringing UWC experiences into the classroom. Students engage in readings about embracing and engaging with difference in terms of various social identities and positionalities (e.g. language background, home country, gender expression, (dis)ability) as well as writing center history and institutional relationships (see Brooks-Gillies, 2018). In her exit survey, former

consultant Balaji shares that the course ‘prompted me to think deeply about social issues (oppression, equity, power) and created space to unlearn and relearn many of the narratives I had unconsciously internalized. More importantly, the course allowed me to learn about and embrace my sociocultural identities and transformed the way I value and look at human relationships’. A course objective is ‘cultivating a *mindfulness of difference*’ (Garcia, 2017: 33, emphasis original), and consultants work to develop strategies for discussing options that writers can choose from instead of imposing a false standard upon them. Throughout the semester, we discuss observations, co-consultations and the readings with the central idea of recognizing that our main function is to support other people, and we cannot support writers without first recognizing and valuing their humanity. Conversations in the course are often difficult, as students are asked to interrogate deep seated assumptions about language and identity.

Students begin working as UWC consultants the following semester and engage in ongoing professional development through biweekly staff meetings – often facilitated by groups of consultants – focused on a range of topics such as addressing microaggressions, conflict management, addressing challenging sessions, supporting multilingual writers and strategies for online consulting. In addition to facilitating sessions with writers and workshops across campus, consultants build and maintain UWC programming through committee projects. Each consultant spends 10–20% of their hours supporting projects and programs linked to a writing center committee. Our center’s committees include: digital community; language and cultural diversity across campus; online and communication resources; and research and assessment. Projects and programs associated with our committees include research projects, workshop development for continued staff education and campus delivery, observations of consultations, sustaining a social media presence and more. Ongoing committee projects within the UWC include creating a social media protocol

for adding image descriptions for posts to improve accessibility, creating an IRB-approved study focused on student motivations for visiting the UWC, analyzing data from an IRB-approved study on online consulting practices and developing a workshops series for graduate writers.

While consultants are usually highly engaged in the work of the UWC and motivated to make it more socially just, many student consultants are new to engaging in antiracist and decolonial pedagogies, which comes with some defensiveness and difficulties. This is especially true for White consultants who must acknowledge and address their own privilege to successfully engage in work that promotes linguistic justice. For instance, a student in the writing center education course a few semesters ago indicated that the benefits of White Mainstream English should be promoted more in the course, as they see it as the most ‘correct’ form of English. Since the UWC’s mission is grounded in antiracist and decolonial values, it is imperative that consultants and administrators continually interrogate their privilege. This kind of self-work is central to antiracist work, but it is difficult and often feels bad. It can be hard to talk with consultants about how doing good work can feel bad and about how engaging in antiracist and decolonial work involves making a lot of mistakes. For instance, consultants who engage in unintentional microaggressions sometimes have a hard time when their missteps are pointed out. Students interested in working at the UWC are often overachievers who have been rewarded for excelling at the very structures they are now being asked to question such as speaking and writing using White Mainstream English, which they have been taught to see as ‘proper’, and supporting their friends and family by marking up their writing with red pens to ‘correct’ their grammar. It is hard to learn that the situation is more complicated, and that investment in White Mainstream English, so-called ‘Standard’ English, perpetuates a racist, unattainable ideal since ‘Standard’ English is not a language variety but ‘the conglomeration of all privileged white speech’ (Greenfield, 2011: 57).

Many students realize that language practices they have been taught to cultivate are problematic, and the job they are training for is not focused on becoming benevolent ‘helpers’ who provide the keys to communicating in a ‘neutral’, ‘standard’ or ‘correct’ form of English to others but on ‘examin[ing] the ways people create discourses around identity and power that fail to bring to light the complexity of actual lived experiences and the systemic, rather than exclusively individualistic, ways oppression operates’ (Greenfield, 2019: 67). This realization has them wondering what language practices to support and how to provide meaningful guidance to writers, which leaves some of them feeling stuck between the expectations of faculty who promote White Mainstream English and the difficulties of students who write in different varieties but also want to get good grades. Writing center education, then, becomes a deeper project than the typical mainstays of building rapport with writers, focusing on higher-order concerns, and avoiding directive feedback. Writing center education becomes about interrogating our existing beliefs and understandings about literacy to engage across difference. Writing center sessions are conversations about choices. As a former consultant Fleck (2018) writes, ‘I know we’re not teachers but we’re people with knowledge or, at least, with words and people listen to our words. So we must be careful with how we use them and how we impose them on others’.

For multilingual and BIPOC consultants, working at the UWC can be exhausting and difficult, even if they believe that their coworkers value and support them. While processing their dawning recognition of all the ways in which they are complicit in systemic racism, White consultants and consultants-in-training may turn to multilingual and BIPOC consultants for answers without recognizing that constantly educating other people about racism is exhausting. In our Center, an international student consultant who is outspoken about decolonial work was labeled as ‘intense’, which made it hard for her to engage with the community since other consultants were often worried about making mistakes in front of her

and being judged. In addition, White consultants may continue to perpetuate microaggressions since committing to antiracism and decolonality is a life-long process, and one isn't immediately cured of problematic behaviors. These behaviors will further frustrate multilingual and BIPOC consultants, especially since all consultants have been consistently participating in ongoing education on interrogating privilege and addressing microaggressions and 'should know better'. In addition, multilingual and BIPOC consultants are much more likely to have writers question their abilities – as non-native speakers – to support them.

Consultants with privileged identities must learn to support coworkers in a way that isn't merely sympathetic but also empathetic by engaging in self reflexivity and being open to critique. We all need to move past good intentions and recognize our impact but also practice calling one another in as we work toward linguistic justice. In the next section, I share an example of UWC programming that emerges from the foundation of an antiracist and decolonial writing center mission and writing center education program, bringing these foundational values into public-facing programming.

Making an Antiracist, Decolonial Writing Center Orientation Visible: The Difficult Conversations Series

While all of the UWC's programming connects to our larger mission of advocating for and with writers, most of our programming that explicitly addresses language rights is supported by the language and cultural diversity across campus (LCD) committee. The committee leads ongoing writing center education efforts on cultivating a mindfulness of difference, which means creating more inclusive practices that support all writers. More specifically, the committee creates and facilitates workshops for consultants on supporting multilingual writers, writers with disabilities and neurodiverse writers, serves as resources to other consultants for additional reading in areas of interest, suggests guest speakers from the

Multicultural Center, LGBTQ+ Center, Adaptive Educational Services and other units on campus, and works with other units on campus to create collaborative events or programming in these areas. In addition, the LCD committee conducts research projects on supporting diversity, equity and inclusion in writing center settings and through writing pedagogies. Current projects include a journal article in development about decolonial mentoring paradigms, a journal article on power structures within the UWC and the development of an IRB-approved study about student motivations in visiting the UWC.

The LCD committee also created and facilitates our Difficult Conversation Series, which is focused on social justice topics. The UWC typically hosts three to four Difficult Conversation Series events per semester, often organized around a uniting theme (e.g. mental health, multilingual writers, access and equity). The topic choice is influenced by the interests of the current committee members, recent UWC events and larger sociopolitical events. For instance, in academic year 2020–2021 the emphasis of Difficult Conversations was on Black language, which was, in part, a response to the Black Lives Matter movement. To develop each Difficult Conversation event, LCD committee members begin by conducting secondary research on the theme for the semester by reading scholarly texts from rhetoric and writing/writing studies, writing centers, education, linguistics and disability studies. From the research collected, the consultants working on each event select a few academic articles and/or book chapters to frame discussion, creating a guide with key terminology and relevant quotations to share during the event. To promote the events to all campus community members, the committee develops posters and flyers, which are shared in printed form at both UWC locations as well as through our social media and our college's digital display. Each event lasts approximately one hour, typically in the late afternoon or evening in the main writing center location. Members of the discussion group sit in a circle, and the leaders facilitate a guided conversation. For instance, in a Difficult Conversation themed around

‘Disclosing Mental Illness’, consultants drew from Kershbaum’s (2014) *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference* and Babcock and Daniel’s (2017) *Writing Centers and Disability* as references, which were cited on the handout as further reading. The facilitators shared general information about what disclosure is and then provided some guiding questions: how can we develop positive, healthy habits that would enable us to ‘unload’ in a productive way? Do you take part in disclosure writing (i.e. through a journal or internet blog)? What benefits have you experienced in doing so? Have you ever self-disclosed to a professor, consultant or tutor through your writing? What response did you receive? If not, what has stopped you from self-disclosing? What response would you hope to receive or might be most helpful? In another Difficult Conversation guided by Greenfield’s ‘The ‘Standard’ English Fairytale’ (2011), conversation was guided based on the quotation: ‘Many educators who reject the idea of the superiority of “Standard English” instead celebrate what they interpret to be the antiracist alternative: respect students’ home languages while teaching “Standard English” in the classroom or writing center, not as a superior language but as a ticket for survival and success in American society’ (p. 39). Participants were asked to share their own experiences, and facilitators also shared the tensions that arise during sessions in the UWC because this way of thinking about White Mainstream English is something many of us carry and have difficulty disrupting.

Programming like the Difficult Conversations Series, although not groundbreaking, is important because it is a student-consultant led program that requires continued learning and growth from UWC consultants and because it opens space to talk with a broader campus audience about language, communication and identity in ways that may be unexpected since many students and faculty may assume that members of the UWC community will ‘correct’ their grammar and champion White Mainstream English. At the events, participants from across campus (which have included writing program faculty, technical communication

faculty, students across majors and students participating in our campus's Multicultural Center's Social Justice Scholars program) see in action the UWC's mission of 'peer-to-peer mentoring by undergraduate and graduate writing consultants' through 'an interactive and collaborative learning environment' that promotes 'a broad understanding of writing, language, and literacy', which disseminates 'research related to writing centers, writing pedagogies, and rhetoric and writing that strengthens our programming and commitment to writers'. Programming like our Difficult Conversation Series can make our mission and approach to writing more visible to campus stakeholders and invite them to participate as part of our community. Unlike one-to-one consulting, which can be framed as a way for individual students be 'remediated' by well-intentioned but misinformed community members, programming like the Difficult Conversation Series questions practices and policies that frame social issues as individual failures and opens dialogue around these issues for the campus community to participate in. In addition, the visibility of the events and topics discussed can create opportunities for sharing with and listening to stakeholders, which can lead to collaborative programming and other opportunities. Programming like the Difficult Conversations Series is only possible because the work of our Center is already grounded in pedagogies that are guided by an antiracist and decolonial mission.

At the center of our programming is a commitment to relationships, which requires listening to one another and having difficult conversations among the staff as well as designing the Difficult Conversations Series for campus. WCAs must constantly engage in self-work and be available to consultants who will want and need to process their understandings of the links between systemic oppression and linguistic and embodied difference. I try to be as transparent as possible about my own missteps as I work to become a better advocate, ally and accomplice. It is crucial that I'm available to listen to the experiences of consultants, and I have learned how important it is to check in with

consultants and thank them when they point out problematic behavior or writing center policies. For instance, in autumn 2019 a student brought up the notion that an attendance policy was ableist. This was not something I had considered before, and I engaged the class on the topic and ended up removing the policy. It's also important to be as transparent as possible about our administrative duties and decisions and the limits of our authority. One consultant indicated that I should make sure no one does anything racist, sexist or ableist in the UWC, but we're all learning, so when possible I want to call folks in not out. This work is an opportunity to continue extending the work of difficult conversations into meaningful change in our writing center communities.

The purpose of UWC programming is to make the power structures surrounding and informing the ways we communicate more transparent. To do this, we must listen to one another and practice what former UWC consultant Gramlich (2019) calls 'critical embrace', which 'rejects the notion that conflict is always negative, that critique is always angry, and that there is a dichotomy between welcoming and discomfort. In our critical embrace we accept the existence of each other's privileges and ignorances; more importantly, we accept them loudly'. We must listen to stories of embodied experiences and work across our differences as we restructure what it means to do writing center work together.

Writing consultants are involved in the development and facilitation of most UWC programming, which requires them to see themselves as continuous learners, and their perspectives and insights strengthen our programming. As Malencyzk *et al.* (2018) point out, 'students [are] at the very center of the formation of Writing Studies, not just as recipients of knowledge created by faculty or administrators but as producers of knowledge that continues to guide how we structure our classrooms and programs' (p. 81). Student consultants are at the center of UWC programming, and they are learning about the relationships among power, language and identity from all of their work at the UWC.

More than one consultant has said that working at the UWC has changed their life. For instance, former UWC consultant Fleck (2018) writes that since beginning to consider and research relationships among language, identity and power in the UWC, she has realized that ‘this research *is my life*. I don’t mean that to say that this is all I do or all that I am, but rather that all of it is intricately woven into me’ (emphasis original). By consistently engaging in antiracist and decolonial work, consultants like Fleck develop practice engaging in difficult conversations in and outside the UWC.

A crucial strength of the UWC’s Difficult Conversations Series is its visibility, which garners attention from campus stakeholders who otherwise may not pay close attention to the UWC, especially if they typically see it as a place to ‘send students’. Ideally this attention leads to continued interaction and even collaborations. For instance, revising our mission statement and promoting programming like the Difficult Conversations Series prompted a writing program colleague to invite me to participate in a working group focused on writing a language statement for the writing program. In addition, when I expressed interest in having the writing center education course added to a new minor in diversity and inclusion, I could show material ways in which the UWC was contributing to diversity and inclusion efforts to colleagues who might have otherwise not seen the relevance of writing center work. I now participate in a faculty community of practice focused on diversity and inclusion, where we learn from each other to build meaningful courses, programming and experiences with and for our students. Through these interactions, I build relationships that help me learn more about inclusive practices as well as share information about the UWC’s antiracist and decolonial mission.

The Difficult Conversations Series is just one example of the kind of programming that a writing center can engage in to make more visible its commitments to antiracist and decolonial pedagogies. Such programming cannot be an add-on but must emerge from

intention and care to building a community focused on linguistic and cultural justice. In other words, all UWC programming is focused around cultivating relationships through potentially difficult conversations. Programs like the Difficult Conversations Series make our commitments to linguistic justice and cultural diversity more visible to the campus community and invite them to participate in difficult conversations with us instead of referring ‘problem’ students who ‘can’t write’ to be ‘remediated’ by our ‘services’.

Concluding thoughts

To responsibly engage in antiracist and decolonial pedagogies, writing centers must anchor every piece of programming to that orientation. A writing center cannot advocate for neutrality on the one hand and then provide ‘diversity’ programming on the other. No matter our own orientations to our work as WCAs and writing consultants, some campus stakeholders may see our centers as sites that ‘uphold standards’ or ‘remediate writers’, some may expect this labor from us and celebrate it, some may be concerned by it and steer clear of our centers. At the UWC, we must continue to develop writing center education and professional development activities with the well-being of multilingual and BIPOC writers in mind, and we must continue to commit to antiracist and decolonial writing center pedagogies and make this orientation visible to campus and community stakeholders. As we change from the inside, we can move that change outward into our campus communities. Garcia (2017) writes, ‘As a site of practice, meaning, and knowledge-making, the writing center is about interactions and encounters, co-existing histories and trajectories, and is always in the process of being made. Imagine, then, if we included other groups into conversations on race and power’ (p. 48). If we want to call ourselves change agents, if we want to call ourselves *decolonial* agents, then we have to change ourselves. We have to do the work to be a discipline that is responsive to difference through difficult conversations and reflexive work. We need to *live* different stories.

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ⁱ While “tutor” as a term to indicate an employee at a writing center remains the preferred label, I purposefully choose the term “consultant.” The word tutor implies a tutee and reinforces an expert-novice hierarchy, while consultant provides a connotation of experience without the same authority. For instance, ask yourself if you’d prefer to hire a wedding tutor or a wedding consultant. Which choice would make you feel better about yourself and your ability to arrange a large, meaningful event of personal importance?

ⁱⁱ I am choosing to capitalize the words Black and White when they refer to race in agreement with statement from the Center for the Study of Social Policy: “Black refers to not just a color but signifies a history and the racial identity of Black Americans” and “to not name ‘White’ as a race is, in fact, an anti-Black act which frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard” (Nguyen & Pendleton, 2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ Throughout the chapter, I will use the term White Mainstream English in place of Standard English or Dominant American English. I am compelled to make this change by Baker-Bell (2020) who argues that descriptors like “standard” and “dominant” maintain White linguistic dominance (2).