

Transformative Inclusivity: Social Justice and Writing Centres

[A] culture of access is a culture of participation and redesign.
--Elizabeth Brewer, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Melanie Yergeau

For our 2021 conference, the Canadian Writing Centres Association/ L'Association canadienne des centres de rédaction welcomes proposals on any writing centre-related subject, but particularly proposals that consider and/or critique frameworks of inclusion, access, and accessibility. These themes may be related to anti-racist work and Indigenization at writing centres, to our recent experiences arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to theory, pedagogy, praxis, programming, administration, research, physical and online environments, advocacy, or activism.

Writing centres have committed to making their spaces and services accessible, inclusive and democratic, not least to students and tutors from marginalized backgrounds (Geller et al., 2007; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Hitt, 2012; Lang, 2017; Martini & Webster, 2017). Even as COVID-19 has inflected, sharpened, and foregrounded systemic inequities, the Black Lives Matter movement, Indigenous movements for social justice such as 1492 Land Back Lane and Idle No More, and the Disability Rights Movement have called upon us, with greater urgency than ever before, to expand the definition and the scope of access, and revitalize writing centres as social justice projects.

We invite the writing centre community to extend the discussion we have been having on how exclusion and injustice affect all those who occupy our physical, virtual, and scholarly spaces, and on how we can address the impacts of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia, and transphobia to most effectively counter systemic injustices. Taking our cue from Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau (2014), who note that “there is a profound difference between consumptive access and transformative access... [between] allowing people to enter a space [and]... re-think[ing] the very construct of allowing,” we ask: how can writing centres play a more proactive role in ensuring access to learning that goes beyond mere consumption of existing programs, for all students, but especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds? How can we transform *access to our spaces* into *access to power to transform our spaces* and the world beyond?

Some of the questions under consideration for the 2021 conference include – ***but are not limited to*** – the following:

- In what ways has the COVID19 pandemic foregrounded the changes needed to make writing centres more inclusive?
- What current gaps in theory limit access to writing centres, and how might a framework for transformative inclusion counteract normative or individualist/competitive values that may be part of our current culture? What concrete strategies can address stigma and increase full participation from marginalized community members?

- In what ways can writing centre theory renew itself in response to the idea that writing and tutoring are embodied acts, and that writers and tutors may both inhabit identities that are sometimes visible and at other times not?
- How can writing centres incorporate accessibility, inclusion, and universal design considerations into every aspect of their practice, from the arrangement or lighting of physical space to the design of websites, handouts, or multimodal tools, from the hiring and preparation of tutors to the conscious articulation of their theory or philosophy?
- How can building relationships, collaborating with disciplinary instructors, and advocacy on behalf of students contribute to the project of transforming the academy? How can we support instructors from disadvantaged backgrounds as they navigate the requirements for success in post-secondary teaching careers? How can we play a role in making scholarly work and activity more available to the wider public?
- What other questions can we address, and how can we listen attentively to tutors and writers, so as to tie our everyday practices, our administrative work, our ways of thinking and communicating, our research, and our policies to the advancement of social justice?

This year's conference will be jointly hosted in an online format by **Huron University College** (home of the Centre for Global Studies) and **King's University College** (home of the Disability Studies and Social Justice and Peace Studies programs) in London, Ontario. Affiliates of Western University, we are situated on the lands of the Anishinaabe, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, and Leni-Lunaape Peoples. Even as we move towards social justice and increased access and accessibility, we acknowledge that relationships between Western and its affiliates and Indigenous communities are entangled with the history of the residential school system and the settler colonial state in Canada, including the ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples. We are committed to doing the work of removing barriers for BIPoC (Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour), LGBTQIA2S+ folks, and people with disabilities.

Session Types

As a virtual space, the conference cannot provide the opportunities for connection that typically occur during coffee breaks, in lunch lines, and in shared spaces. The sessions will become the places where these connections begin. So for every session type, please consider how you might engage the audience in your research and presentation. You could use technology to support audience participation, such as Padlet, Mentimeter, Stormz, or Google Docs, or actively facilitate audience discussion instead of allowing for a traditional Q&A by posing questions to the audience, asking for audience members to share their experiences, etc.

Research Panel Presentations

Panelists will present for no more than 15 minutes on a theoretical question, a pedagogical practice, or a research study. Submissions must showcase systematic

research based on any approach: quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, action-based, reflective or theoretical. Presentations will be grouped into panels of 2 or 3 presenters. Once sessions are confirmed, we will share information about your co-presenters, so that you can coordinate how best to involve the audience in your session. Note that shorter presentations will increase the time available to engage the audience in discussion. Presenters are also welcome to propose their own panel of grouped presentations.

Roundtable Discussions

Roundtable sessions are ideal for works-in-progress, pedagogical innovations, or taking up an issue of current debate in our field. Roundtable facilitators will lead a 45-minute discussion that encourages active participation and contribution from attendees. Proposals should indicate the topic of your discussion, why it would be of interest to writing centre colleagues, and how you plan to engage participants and facilitate a dynamic discussion.

Interactive Workshops

Workshops are an opportunity to model an innovative practice, strategy or innovation for your colleagues through collaborative hands-on activities. The materials, activities, and presentation should be as accessible as possible. Proposals should clearly describe the practice you intend to feature, the overall structure of the session, and how you will actively engage the audience.

Poster Presentations

Posters will detail a research project. Proposals for this session should clearly describe what you intend to showcase. Posters will be electronic, and exact specifications for the format of poster presentations will be provided at a later date.

Writing Centre Sandbox

New this year, the Sandbox is a one-hour session at the start of the first day of the conference. Participants are invited to electronically and virtually share ideas and materials that will stimulate creative play, reflect experimentation, build community, initiate conversations, and facilitate knowledge sharing. The shorter proposal (150 words) should describe the topic or materials—an exciting new program, a clever new handout or resource, a cool new writing app—you will share at the session.

Submission Guidelines

Submission proposals should be no more than 500 words unless otherwise noted. References should not be included in your proposal word count.

References

Brewer, E., Selfe, C.L., and Yergeau, M. (2014). Creating a culture of access in composition studies. *Composition Studies*, 42(2), 151-54.

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Greenfield, L., & Rowan, K., eds. (2011). *Writing centers and the new racism: A call for sustainable dialogue and change*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.

Hitt, A. (2012). Access for all: The role of dis/ability in multiliteracy centers. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 9(2), pp. 1–7.

Lang, H. (2017). *Understanding, Perception, and Accommodation of Disability in Writing Centers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database. (10260029)

Martini, R.H. & Webster, T. (2017). Writing Centers as brave/r spaces: a special issue introduction. *The Peer Review*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/braver-spaces/writing-centers-as-braver-spaces-a-special-issue-introduction/>