

Introduction

The internationalisation and associated massification of higher education implies the need for universities to accommodate the diverse learning needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student cohort (Briguglio and Watson 2014; Klapwijk and Van der Walt 2016). In catering for the diverse needs of this heterogeneous student body, the ‘international university’ (de Wit, Hunter, Howard and Egon-Polak 2015) must offer effective support for students’ language and writing development. As writing centre practitioners, we are well aware of these issues for they are at the core of what drives our writing centre agenda. Despite the contentious role of language and literacy development in the current context, writing centres in South Africa have and continue to make great strides in the ongoing support of our students, having established themselves as fundamental to the development and success of our students. This despite our largely marginalised, understaffed and underfunded status. Through this collection, however, we hope, as writing centre practitioners in the South African context, to move beyond the lamentations of our daily struggles and to instead foreground the resilience, flexibility and commitment of present-day writing centre work.

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This work is timely, following on only two previous edited collections. The first, published in 2011, is an edited collection by Arlene Archer and Rose Richards and is entitled *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education*. As the first published book on writing centres in South Africa, it has, for the past ten years, served as an important resource outlining the development and transformation of South African writing centres. The second volume, edited by Sherran Clarence and Laura Dison and published in 2017, is *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working in and Across the Disciplines* and as indicated in the title, speaks to the predominant thread of discipline-specific writing development. These two volumes touch on the important and current topics of writing centres as safe, transformative and democratic (socially just) spaces; and the affordances of multimodality and multilingualism. The views and research addressed in these volumes are a testament to the pursuit of writing centre practitioners’ endeavours to respond to the on-going transformation and evolution of the higher education context and to address the needs of its ever-changing student body. These works illustrate how an understanding of the history of writing centres in the country and the theories underpinning their practices are essential to developing the work of writing centres going forward. The aim of this proposed volume is to further conversations and research on the notion of the internationalisation of writing centres and the necessity to focus on the key issues of social justice and transformation, discipline-based writing, the implications

of Covid-19 and specialised consultant/tutor training. And to extend and combine philosophical and theoretical debates with practical strategies, advice and examples that can be applied in the everyday work of the writing centre practitioner. This is where the real value of the book should lie.

More than thirty years after the establishment of the first writing centre in the country, the field of writing centre research in the South African context is firmly cemented and while writing centre practitioners will continue to embrace writing centre literature from the Global North – and other places – the time is ripe for us to as writing centre practitioners in the South African context to continue writing our own writing centre narrative, to grapple with context-specific issues and questions and to provide context-specific answers and solutions that speak to the lived realities of our students. The transformation and evolution of the writing centre are, no doubt, inevitable and necessary. The support we provide, the training we offer and the conversations we encourage, within and outside the confines of our writing centres, must align with this transformation and evolution. Our responsibility in writing centre work has shifted too, from a focus on academic success only, to a focus on the development of and respect for, the uniqueness that each student brings to our space.

This book then is a celebration of these practices; for such reimagined, sustainable practices open up the possibility of embracing diversity and embodies the writing centre as a global village (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). It paves the way for discussions that acknowledge alternate and multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge production, a space welcoming a widely diverse and international student body, the proverbial melting pot – a colourful tapestry of tongues, histories and nationalities (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). As we take the first small steps in our journey to transforming our writing centre, we carry with us the burden of the past and the future of our students. For what is a writing centre, if not a place crafted from the mistakes of yesterday and the dreams of tomorrow?