

*Book Review*

**Nordstrom, G. (2021). *A Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration: Pedagogy, Practice, and Research*. Routledge. (140 pp., hardback \$59.95; ebook \$ 20.65)**

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Georganne Nordstrom's *A Writing Center Practitioner's Inquiry into Collaboration: Pedagogy, Practice, and Research* (AWCPIC) offers a practical demonstration of Practitioner Inquiry (PI) that validates PI as a model of academic research. Nordstrom's guide combines theory- and practice-driven PI with case studies that offer rationale for and reflection on the research process, effectively demonstrating that PI "can attend to the rigors of empirical research" (p. 26) despite being oft-labeled as a more "informal mode of inquiry" (p. 33). PI transforms writing centers (WCs) and communication centers into locations that actively examine "consultant training practices, consultant-writer/consultant-consultant/consultant-director interactions" (p. 95), allowing researchers to improve services that support student learning and query center assumptions about their practices.

AWCPIC offers readers a glimpse of research in action. Nordstrom presents projects from start to finish while illuminating decision-making processes, ethical considerations, sociocultural variables, and theoretical frameworks that shape practice and establish WC values. The book also responds to calls for WCs to provide service to marginalized and disenfranchised students through discussions of language bias, western normative privilege, and power

dynamics inherent in the traditions of academia. In this vital guide to replicable, aggregable, data-supported (RAD) WC research (Haswell, 2005), Nordstrom cements her role as an important voice in WC research, scholarship, and practice by building on the work of Driscoll and Purdue (2012; 2014), Johanek (2000), Lerner (2003), and Mackiewicz and Babcock (2020).

Since the early 2000s, WC research has focused on scientific empiricism, as opposed to anecdotal evidence, to legitimize WC research and WC work as a whole (Haswell, 2005). AWCPIC responds to Gillespie et. al (2002) and others who have championed PI as a method of creating RAD research. The critical introduction begins with Nordstrom's mantra "writing centers are pedagogical sites that support writing and research" (p. 13). This statement sets the tone for the volume. Nordstrom's introduction deliberately defines terminology and clarifies "the relationship between methodology, method, research model, and research design" as well as the role of collaboration "as a foundational tenet that encompasses values and ethical concerns of practitioners" (pp. 14-15).

In the prologue, Nordstrom provides an overview of dominant theories of collaboration from Kenneth Bruffee, John Trimbur, Lunsford and Ede, Kirsch and Richie, Cochran-Smith and Lytle and others. Following this

overview, Chapter one establishes her stance in connection with Indigenous approaches to collaboration rooted in the Kanaka Maoli community. For Nordstrom, Kanaka Maoli concepts of collaboration serve as an ethical guide to PI that keeps practitioners “aware of their position amongst others in a larger social context” (p. 68). Nordstrom asserts that collaboration, for PIs, must become “more than a set of practices,” and instead “an attitude, habit of mind” and a “critical element of a practitioner’s stance” (p. 69) involving dialog among administrators, consultants, faculty, students and community members. To these ends, she offers a set of tenets for a “Practitioner’s Collaborative Stance” to guide practitioners towards critical reflection throughout the research process. Collaboration in PI, for Nordstrom, enhances the research process by insisting on multivocality and accountability, empowerment of research participants, and community-building.

Chapter two of *AWCPIC* offers readers a background into the benefits of PI as a methodology that “privileges the voices and concerns of research participants” (p. 88) and allows researchers to test assumptions through data and reflection. Throughout this chapter, Nordstrom emphasizes the importance of establishing an explicit method and methodology for PI that interrogates extant practices and research motivations (p. 26).

Chapters three and four present Nordstrom’s own PI research projects as “story and study.” Research discussions are interspersed with rationale and reflection, offering a detailed guide which is equal parts “how to” and “why done.” In chapter three, Nordstrom outlines a mixed-methods study investigating

collaboration’s effects on consultant professionalization. The reflective discussion of the study, whose research focuses on consultant experience in WCs related to agency, investment, and acquisition of professional writing skills, reveals the value of a PI model as one that can “facilitate meeting the demands of research—like calls for empirical investigations—while still enacting a hands-on approach” that allows for “collaboration, the social construction of knowledge, and the corresponding interrogation of hierarchical knowledge structures” that inform WC work (p. 101). Chapter four presents Nordstrom’s investigation into the “disconnect between supporting translingual literacy practices” and “teaching/promoting academic discourse” (p. 36) at two locales: University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, and the National University of Ireland at Galway. Nordstrom begins Chapter four by establishing a clear practitioner’s stance informed by scholarship on translingual writing and translanguaging practices that “[unmask] the history of disenfranchisement experienced by marginalized language speakers” (p. 138) and support “multiple linguistic repertoires” (p. 139).

In the book’s epilogue, entitled “A Practitioner’s Final Thoughts,” Nordstrom provides readers with an inspiring conclusion to the work as a whole. The epilogue champions PI as a means to validate and further reveal the values in of WC work as student- and community-centered, praxis-based spaces of academic support and invites readers to consider how PI might be used in the context of their own centers.

The greatest strength of this volume is Nordstrom’s examples of PI in action. While leading readers through the inquiry process, Nordstrom

elucidates decisions and provides reflective questions to assist readers with their own research. Although Nordstrom patiently reveals her process, more insight into why she *did not* opt for alternate choices and/or the examination of additional research projects could offer additional guidance, particularly for those new to PI models of research. That said, what is presented is extensively annotated in terms of the whys and hows of PI.

Ultimately, Nordstrom's guide provides a critical tool for WCs and communication centers to investigate and improve practices and pedagogy. For these centers, PI has the power to reveal areas of effectiveness and areas which may need further improvement in student services, to identify obstacles to student and center success, to critically evaluate the effects of research-based changes to policy and/or practice on center function and outcomes, to provide evidence of student success related to center interactions/interventions, and to share both findings and methodology among the larger center communities. As Nordstrom writes in her introduction, she hopes that the guide makes "evident objectives (transparency, collaborating, disruption of hierarchical structures, service, ethics)...in such a way that researchers, whether new to the game or experienced hands, can easily see ways this model can work in and for their contexts" (p. 37). The guide is extraordinarily successful in meeting Nordstrom's expectations for the work.

### References

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