Theories are entrenched in the literary tradition and do not show us how the connection between theory and practice can be secured. Finally, I have reservations about the size of Rubin's study. Although she begins her research with responses from thirty-one teachers, she formulates her conclusions from the responses of two teachers, Peter and Joanne, whose training is in literature rather than composition studies/rhetoric. One wonders if a sample of composition specialists may have shown different results. Not only do the limitations of her study preclude any definitive conclusions, Rubin never really addresses if such consciousness of gender (as well as race and class) in teachers will actually help improve students' writing. Although hers is an interesting intellectual endeavor, the study tells me what I as a teacher already know. It would have been more helpful if Rubin had addressed how all this knowledge, if applied to my teaching, could help my students write better.

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Writing Centers in Context is a long-awaited book, one that went through an extremely slow publication process from its inception at the 1987 NCTE convention in Los Angeles to its 1993 publication by NCTE. Because news of the book has been on the writing center community grapevine for so long, with references continually made to the collection at meetings in the intervening years, its release has been looked to with great expectation. A common reply to questions of writing center establishment or administration has been, "That's an issue dealt with in the forthcoming Kinkead and Harris collection, so I'd prefer to pass on answering the question." As someone working on the history of writing centers and the development of writing center theory and practice, I've wanted to get my hands on the book for the past several years. Now that I have the book, however, I must admit I am somewhat disappointed. And yet, forces other than the length of production and the word-of-mouth endorsement for the book may have helped create my disappointment. Like looking toward Christmas in August, the actual event rarely compares to the predetermined vision.

Admittedly, because they are static entities, all books are dated upon issuance. Some books manage to provide such important service to
their intended audience that their inherent limits are ignored; the questions asked in the text are insightful and the answers provided brilliant. Or, as in the case with edited collections, the perspectives brought to bear upon a central issue illuminate it from many possible angles. Writing Centers in Context, unfortunately, is not a collection that falls into this category. This book is dated, and the issues raised, while interesting in and of themselves, are so site-specific and bounded that, given the limited background/thick-contextual information each essay provides, little specific knowledge or strategy can be gleaned that translates outside the realities in which the eleven highlighted writing centers exist. The result is a rearward and side-to-side vision of development and maintenance of existing programs with little-to-no sustained discussion of next moves; writing centers continue to be portrayed as more reactive than proactive.

The twelve case studies that form the majority of the book offer what the editors describe as "snapshots" of the writing centers highlighted (xix). Each of the initial twelve chapters focuses on the history, physical description, daily patterns, services, clientele, and administration of the writing centers at schools as diverse as Johnson County Community College, Medgar Evers College, and the University of Southern California. Following these case studies are an epilogue, which provides further information about contacting the writing center directors who participated in the project, and an essay, which discusses the state of research and issues central to writing centers and offers a selected bibliography of writing center scholarship. This bibliography, however, is a puzzle; no criteria are given for what is included, and so I was left wondering why many important articles are missing from this list.

I read the chapters with interest, and I must commend the editors for encouraging each chapter's author(s) to maintain a similar structure in their essays. Cross-referencing the text is a breeze because of this consideration of the book's audience and the demands readers might make of the text. I could easily find answers to my questions of "How did these centers do X differently?" Likewise, the index is greatly appreciated; in edited collections, indexes are often noticeably nonexistent.

Quickly apparent in this book is the conscious effort the authors made to focus on the diversity that exists across the writing center community. That diversity is not approached in this collection naively, however. Instead of describing each center as an acontextual entity, the authors worked diligently to historicize and contextualize their descriptions of each center as well as they could given the space considerations within which they worked. Each center is presented as a site-specific creation, a center created to meet the unique needs of a particular educational community across an historical continuum. Unlike many writing center based-articles, these essays go beyond a narrow
this-is-what-I-do-in-my-writing-center focus to explain why the center exists and operates in its present form.

Joan Mullin and Luann Momenee’s chapter, “The Writing Centers at the University of Toledo: An Experiment in Collaboration,” is exciting. Mullin and Momenee describe their efforts to share services, clientele, and expertise across two campuses. This truly collaborative spirit, a sentiment given much support in the writing center community, but rarely demonstrated as convincingly as Mullin and Momenee’s programs in Toledo have succeed in doing, points to other types of proactive collaborations among writing centers in pre-secondary, secondary, and post-secondary educational settings. While theirs is a collaboration between post-secondary schools, nothing in their experience suggests that similar collaborations cannot succeed even in the face of nay sayers who strive to maintain the artificial barriers between, in their case, the university and community and technical college.

Other high points in this collection are the chapters that focus on the centers at the University of Washington and Lehigh University. Gail Okawa’s essay, “Redefining Authority: Multicultural Students and Tutors at the Educational Opportunity Program Writing Center at the University of Washington,” offers a glimpse into a particularly unique writing center situation. While the prototypical writing center serves an entire school’s population, this program serves a specific segment of the student body, the minority population that comprises approximately ten percent of the school’s 33,000 students. While I returned to Okawa’s essay as a catalyst for my thinking about the role(s) available for writing centers in helping meet the cultural, linguistic, and academic needs of minority and non-traditional students, I returned to Ed Lotto’s essay, “The Lehigh University Writing Center: Creating a Community of Writers,” just to hear the words flow. Lotto infuses his essay with a lyricism rare in academic texts. Placed in the middle of the book, Lotto’s essay presents a nice place to rest as one works through the essays.

Although the attention given to the site-specificity of each center is this collection’s greatest strength, it is also the very element of the collection that focuses attention on its greatest weakness. Each of these centers deserves a more complete ethnography than can be provided in chapters the length of those in this book. There is a marked difference between being presented an overview of an educational program as complex as a writing center and being offered enough information about these programs to be able to understand the program and the complexities that intersect to create it. I admire the ethnographic urge demonstrated by Kinkead and Harris; I wish, however, they had provided opportunity for thicker descriptions of the programs highlighted. One possible solution would have been to reduce the number of programs
discussed to allow for more text space. As it now stands, the book is more of a reference text or coffee table parade of writing centers than a book to use for planning and revisioning writing centers.

Looking back on *Writing Centers in Context*, I am struck by what I perceive as several major omissions. First, I can’t help wondering why high school writing centers are not represented in this collection. No explanation of this absence is presented, which is strange given the attention during the past decade to the subject of secondary level writing centers and articulation efforts between them and post-secondary centers. Instead of one dozen case studies, a baker's dozen could have allowed for this increasingly important segment of the writing center community to be represented in a collection whose purpose is to provide an overview of the variety of writing centers that exist within American education. The issue of diversity of programs brings me to what I see is the second major omission in this text. All the programs discussed have as their sole or primary audience undergraduate student populations. While undergraduates are the predominant clientele for the majority of writing centers in post-secondary institutions, this focus fails to recognize the increasing portion of writing center activity dedicated to serving the needs of students in professional schools and graduate schools. Writing centers exist in law schools, colleges of pharmacy, schools of engineering, etc; plans are also in effect to establish a new writing center in a medical college within the year. Meeting the needs of more specialized communities of writers is the next major area of growth for writing centers.

This is primarily a book for writing center administrators and historians. Its articles provide a wealth of information that needed to be compiled: writing center histories, administrative strategies and allegiances, institutional options, problem-solving tools, etc. Kinkead and Harris have provided an admirable service to the writing center community by organizing the energies of so many members of the community to create this archive. Recognizing the limits to which the information contained in this book can viably be pushed, *Writing Centers in Context* is worth reading.

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