

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Tutoring Second Language Writers by Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth

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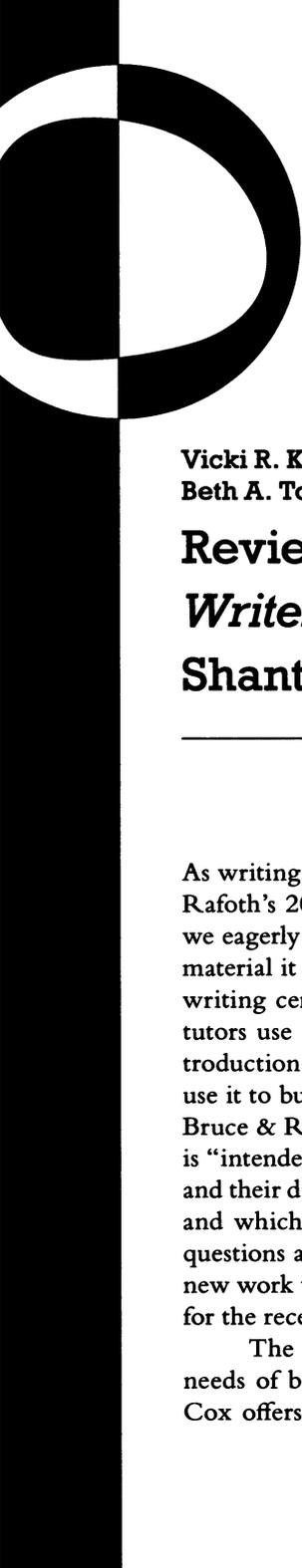
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Review: *Tutoring Second Language Writers*
Shanti Bruce & Ben Rafoth (Eds.)

As writing center staff who make extensive use of Shanti Bruce & Ben Rafoth's 2009 volume, *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, we eagerly anticipated the arrival of its "complete update" and the new material it would offer. In our large, Midwestern, research university's writing center, where over 70% of writers are international students, tutors use *ESL Writers* on a daily basis. New tutors read it for an introduction to second language (L2) tutoring, and experienced tutors use it to build on existing skills. We hoped for something similar from Bruce & Rafoth's new volume, *Tutoring Second Language Writers*, which is "intended to advance the conversations tutors have with one another and their directors about tutoring second language writers and writing" and which has chapters that can "serve as references to help answer questions about theoretical and practical issues" (p. 3). Juxtaposing the new work with the 2009 volume, however, raises questions of audience for the recently-published book.

The volume includes some excellent chapters that address the needs of both novice and experienced tutors. For instance, Michelle Cox offers an overview of the unique identity issues encountered in

L2 consultations, and she provides enough background to allow new tutors an entrance to the conversation. Other contributing authors share thoughts about transferring topics between varying writing center contexts (Kevin Dvorak), provide a solid introduction to research design (Rebecca Day Babcock), offer a fascinating look at how cultural inside information can change the dynamics of an L2 tutorial (Jocelyn Amevuvor), or explore the troublesome yet common challenges of working on disciplinary writing with L2 writers (Jennifer Craig). Chapters such as these bridge the gap between novice tutors' practical needs and current theoretical scholarship.

Unfortunately, the book overall, while often interesting, does not fulfill its own mission of balancing practice and theory for multiple tutoring audiences. It reads very much as a work about linguistic identity and social justice, rather than a comprehensive look at L2 tutoring issues. These topics certainly deserve attention, given recent scholarship in the field of L2 writing. The *Journal of Second Language Writing*, for example, includes both work on the role of heritage in student voice construction (Canagarajah, 2015) and also research demonstrating that L2 writers may view writing as skill development or relationship rather than identity negotiation (Morton, Storch, & Thompson, 2015). Narrowing the writing center conversation to such issues, however, risks excluding material useful to new tutors (e.g., Linville's chapter on error correction in the 2009 volume) and, at the same time, skips over practical aspects of social justice that tutors may face every day. For instance, how should tutors balance a social justice goal of accepting linguistic diversity with a writer's clearly-stated and legitimate need for a high-stakes document to be as perfect as possible? Bruce & Rafoth's volume deals admirably with "what should be," but tutors must work on a daily basis with "what is."

Rather than the broad acceptance of difference emphasized here, tutors would benefit from a discussion of how to determine whether difference is by choice (i.e., part of a person's linguistic identity and thus in need of protection) or from lack of knowledge or skills (in which case writers may be depending on tutors to help them learn new material). For instance, while the use of English may pose identity problems for students from Puerto Rico (as the book explains in great detail), the same does not automatically hold true for visa students from China or India or Colombia. Discussions about how identity politics work globally are notably absent. With very few exceptions—Craig, for instance, points out some of the potential difficulties of diversity (p. 215)—the volume seems to prioritize linguistic identity at all costs, without considering the importance to the writers themselves of that goal, and thus it limits rather than expands the conversation. As a result,

it does not always address the practical needs of tutors who are not only new to their writing centers but also quite possibly new to the entire fields of second language studies, linguistics, or composition theory. *Tutoring Second Language Writers* is a solid, useful book for administrators or writing center scholars; however, there is less focus on research that would help the new tutors who may be part of its audience.

Overall, Bruce & Rafoth's newest volume admirably illustrates, as Carol Severino points out in the Foreword, "how far writing center scholarship on second language writers has come in the last twenty-five years" (p. vii), yet it loses sight of the fact that writing center directors must converse simultaneously with that legacy and with new tutors where they are on day one in the writing center. Bruce & Rafoth and their contributors engage with issues that are important to current composition studies and to the writing center and L2 writing fields. Experienced tutors will find in this book new frameworks for familiar situations; however, the limits of the theoretical approach create the possibility of excluding new tutors, particularly those who are unfamiliar with writing center-related fields. Perhaps we are naïve to want a single volume to bridge completely the gap between theory and practice, yet our positive experience with the 2009 *ESL Writers* fueled that desire. Rather than seeing this new book as an update of their earlier work, perhaps we should think of Bruce & Rafoth's latest volume as a companion to the 2009 *ESL Writers*. Paired with that more foundational and pragmatic text, *Tutoring Second Language Writers* can truly serve its purpose of furthering conversations among all writing center stakeholders.

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About the Authors

Vicki R. Kennell, Ph.D., is the ESL Specialist in the Purdue University Writing Lab. She spends a significant portion of her time helping tutors develop expertise in second language writing. Her recent conference presentations have shared methodology for training tutors to work with L2 writers and have offered information about developing in-house training programs relevant to the local context. Other recent research projects have examined disconnects between tutoring practices, writer requests, and document needs with respect to grammar and have looked at the efficacy of writing groups for graduate writers.

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