CHAPTER 2

A Critical Rereading of the History of Writing Centers in the UAE

Aymen Elsheikh and Jessica Mascaro

Introduction

Since their inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s, writing centers (WCs) have been growing both in quantity and in quality. This growth is not only manifested in the establishment of thousands of WCs across different educational settings, but also evident in the establishment of professional bodies, such as the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). Although WCs enjoy a relatively long history in Western contexts, it is not until fairly recently that the Gulf Council Cooperation (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) have started to adopt the idea. In addition, while there is some research on the functionality of WCs in the GCC countries (Murshidi & Abd, *Higher Education Studies*, 4(3): 58–63, 2014), our knowledge about their evolution in this region is still lacking. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to trace and critically

A. Elsheikh (✉)
Abu Dhabi University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

J. Mascaro
EtonHouse International School, Broadrick Road, Singapore, Singapore

O.Z. Barnawi (ed.), *Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape of the Arabian Gulf*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-55366-5_2

examine the short history of WCs in one of the GCC countries, namely the UAE.

The development of education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is due much in part to the discovery of oil. This led to a focus on developing the country, which in turn resulted in greater attention on education (Education in the UAE, 2016). The founding father of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, "considered education among the priorities of progress" and "was overly generous when it came to education related projects that aspired for the gradual improvement of education in order to prepare a new generation capable of contributing to the progress of the Nation" (Education in the UAE, 2016). Therefore, since the beginning of the country's history, education has been acknowledged as an essential stepping stone to the successful future of the UAE.

However, even though education was accepted as being of great importance, there was still substantial room for development. At the country's inception in 1971, the educational infrastructure, with a mere 74 schools, was still nascent (Mahani & Molki, 2011). Many cities and villages did not have access to it at all. In fact, fewer than 28,000 youths were enrolled in school at that time (Education in the UAE, 2016). In the beginning, public education was set up in order to allow free schooling to students at the following levels: Kindergarten (4–5 years old), Elementary (6–11 years old), Intermediate (12–14 years old), and Secondary (15–17 years old). Private schools eventually came onto the educational market and would ultimately account for nearly 40% of student enrolment (Education in the UAE, 2016).

It was not until 1977, with the establishment of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), that the UAE had a domestic university (Mahani & Molki, 2011). Before this time, many students had to leave the UAE to attend universities abroad (Education in the UAE, 2016). Today, the UAE Commission for Academic Achievement overseas has 73 higher education options for students; however, this number does not take into account those higher education institutions that reside in the Free Zones. These institutions are instead overseen by the Dubai Knowledge and Human Development Authority. About two-thirds of these universities in the UAE have been established since 2005, resulting in what some have called an "educational gold rush" (Mahani & Molki, 2011, p. 3). The government has encouraged this growth as a means to the country becoming an educational epicenter in the region. Indeed, today, the UAE is a "higher education hub" (Wilkins, 2010, p. 390) and

a particularly interesting example, both because of how quickly the international campuses were established and because it is the largest hub of this kind in the world (Wilkins, 2010).

Higher education in the UAE fulfills three purposes—instruction, research, and community service. Regardless of the university's status as a local university or one accredited by a foreign body, all universities in the UAE seek to maintain and enforce quality education (Soomro & Ahmad, 2012). Many writing centers (WCs) are established as a means to "add value" to a university or institution (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 6). It is therefore fitting that a number of universities in the UAE, in their efforts to provide quality services, have established WCs.

A basic Internet search has revealed six major WCs situated in six different universities. Two of these universities are local ones (one private and one public). The other four are private American universities (branch campuses). The universities are located in five different emirates (Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, and Sharjah). While it is not clear when the centers have been established, judging by the history of the universities, we anticipate that the centers have been in business for about 7–12 years. There are also some WCs which are located outside of the discourse of higher education and examining them is beyond the scope of this chapter. A major purpose of the establishment of WCs at these universities is to help students in the development of their English writing skills because the medium of instruction is English.

At least partially in response to low English literacy rates, the UAE deemed English the mode of instruction in Science, Information Technology (IT), Health and Physical Education, and Mathematics throughout many of the primary and secondary grades. In fact, 500 native English-speaking teachers were hired to replace local teachers throughout these years (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014).

While using English as a medium in classrooms was based on reliable English-language teaching methodologies—mainly Communicative Language Teaching and Content and Language Integrated Learning—many worry that this stress placed on learning the English language is actually putting local students at a disadvantage. Since students' English-language skills may be limited, their ability to understand and participate in coursework gets adversely affected (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014). This becomes a particular issue when students reach higher education and the subject knowledge and language required to talk about the topics become more and more complex. Indeed, "much has been written about the

struggles of emergent scholars faced with the double burden of remaining at the forefront of research in their own fields while trying to elevate the level of their English composition skills" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 9). This thus leads to university faculty often feeling that their students are grossly underprepared for the challenges and rigors of higher education (Belhiah & Elhami, 2014).

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to trace and critically examine the short history of WCs in one of the GCC countries, namely the UAE. The goal of the study is to understand the process and evolution of WCs in the UAE. In particular, this chapter attempts to uncover not only when WCs came into existence in the UAE but also the purposes they serve in the higher education system. The data for this study consists of written information from websites and manuals about the five major universities in the UAE that were found to house well-established WCs: one public, one private, and three American universities. In order to develop a rich understanding, elicit meaning, and create empirical knowledge about these WCs, the study employs document analysis as its guiding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It also uses precepts from postcolonial theory (Said, 1978) in order to uncover and question ideologies and discourses embedded in the work and establishment of WCs.

After delineating the theoretical framework guiding this study (postcolonial theory), we review relevant literature on WCs. We provide a brief overview of WCs in general and this gives us a framework for situating the WCs we report on in this study. In order to establish a context for a historical analysis of WCs in the UAE, our literature review includes a discussion of the challenges faced by WCs, WCs and English-language learners (ELLs), research on WCs, and research on WCs in the Middle East and the UAE. We then examine the four WCs, which are the focus of the study, by analyzing their processes and modes of operation. The chapter then ends with a conclusion and implications for WCs' pedagogy and organizational structure.

Postcolonial Theory

On its face, the term "postcolonial" may be understood to refer to the period after the departure of the colonizers—the British Empire and other colonial powers. It is, however, a theory that has been popularized by Edward Said (1978) to refer to and study the influences of colonization and imperialism on cultures and societies. Central to the theory are the

processes of *otherness* and *resistance*, among others. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007), "othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. It is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects" (p. 156). The term "resistance" describes how the colonized rejects the othering of the colonizer by developing different strategies for refuting and not accepting the categories and representations they are forced to fit into. In the context of the current study, othering can be seen in the way WCs in the UAE have been established following guidelines developed in the West, a process which can be viewed as producing subjects through socialization into a hegemonic discourse of higher education. Resistance will be seen in the various ways in which students rejected the normalizing discourses which do not fit their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Literature Review

Writing Centers: Some Background

While WCs (earlier called Writing Labs) have existed in the United States throughout the twentieth century, the idea originally surfaced as a *method*, as opposed to an actual physical *space*. Instructors would organize class in a way that transferred power, and responsibility, to students by having them complete their writing under teacher supervision. This was a significant departure from the previous method, where students listened to lectures about writing and then completed the writing outside of class, where errors could not immediately be addressed, and hence risked becoming internalized (Boquet, 1999).

In the 1950s, WCs began to occupy their own space (Boquet, 1999); however, it was not until the 1970s that WCs really started proliferating throughout the country (Harris, 2016). This was at least partially due to the literacy crisis and open admissions policies of the time. Many universities were "underprepared and underfunded" to accept and address the needs "of the nation's most diverse group ever of rising adults" (Carino, 1996, p. 32), who were "literally knocking down the doors to get in" (Carino, 1996, p. 33). WCs were often created to fix problems that were not always easily pinpointed, let alone addressed—"things like increasing enrollment, larger minority populations and declining … literacy skills" (Boquet, 1999, p. 472).

While there has been, and continues to be, some discrepancy between the mission of WCs and the perception of the public, WCs have continued to grow since their early days. Today, the number of WCs is expanding, not just in North America, but around the globe. WCs exist in a variety of settings and contexts. In general, they are usually aimed at secondary or university students and are often part of a learning center or larger program (Harris, 2016). While each center is unique, they all abide by the same key principles, as discussed below.

The most poignant feature of WCs is the one-to-one tutoring session. The type and qualification of the tutor may vary from center to center—it may be a peer tutor, a professional, a graduate student, or an instructor from the university or school (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This emphasis on one-to-one tutoring has an impact on virtually all other features of WCs. Indeed, it is the backbone of WCs (LaClare & Franz, 2013).

These tutoring sessions are usually done through appointments—15 minutes to 1 hour in length. Many centers also allow students to come in on a walk-in basis and be seen if there are no other conflicting appointments (Harris, 2016).

The tutorship offered in these centers is important in order to ensure that tutors can give ample focus and attention to individual needs (Tobin, 2010). Since all students (and, indeed, faculty) have their own personal struggles with writing, it makes sense that the most direct way to aid a writer is through individualized attention. Keeping the WC functioning on a tutor format can ensure that each visitor gets personalized help.

Another main feature of WCs is that they are non-evaluative (Harris, 2016). Tutors aim to coach and empower rather than evaluate and instruct. As Harris (2016) states, it is not the tutor's job "to lecture at them [writers] or repeat information available from the teacher or textbook. Instead, tutors collaborate with writers in ways that facilitate the process of writers finding their own answers". Therefore, one can see the strong emphasis that WCs wish to place on collaborative work, as opposed to teacher-directed learning.

Not only do tutors at WCs wish to collaborate and work together with visitors, but there is also a prominence placed on experimentation. It is meant to be a place where it is not only acceptable, but expected to attempt and fail and try again (Harris, 2016). In fact, this value is often represented in the various names that WCs use. "Names of various facilities, such as writing center, writing lab, writing place, or writing room, are

meant to encourage this view of the writing center as an informal, experimental, active place" (Harris, 2016).

WCs are also open. This may mean being open to the entire school—including students, faculty, and staff—as well as to the wider community (Tobin, 2010). It further means being open to writers of all proficiency levels (Harris, 2016). WCs seek to aid both those who consider themselves proficient and lower-level students. This openness also includes being open to ELLs.

Because tutors are freed from the strain of evaluation, they can use their time with the student to focus on the process of writing. This deliberately shifts the focus from the final writing product to the process that it involves (Tobin, 2010). WCs further acknowledge and encourage the view that writing is a social experience and writers are guided through any/all steps of the writing journey—planning, brainstorming, writing, adding, deleting, proofreading, and redrafting (Harris, 2016).

Finally, one characteristic that is largely beneficial in ensuring a WC's usefulness is its flexibility. WCs may change course from year to year or in response to new challenges and problems as they arise (Harris, 2016). This flexibility allows WCs to change with the needs of the students and with the needs of the time. This is partially evident in many WCs incorporating new technologies into their services, such as Online Writing Labs (Tobin, 2010).

Ultimately, WCs are places where anyone of any writing level can go and work collaboratively with a tutor in order to become a better writer. WCs seek to increase writer autonomy so that the writers can apply what they learn to their later writing processes. Indeed, one of the cardinal rules for WCs is that "the pen remain in the hand of the writer" (Harris, 2016).

Challenges WCs Face

Perhaps the biggest challenge that has followed WCs from their inception is their struggle to maintain a place within the university or academic sphere. When looking at the history of WCs and the general attitudes toward them, there seems to be a gap that emerges between their popularity and their perceived value. WCs continue to surface because there is such a high demand from students, and yet they remain quite firmly on the periphery of the educational framework, often surrounded by professors, students, and even the administration, which does not have a firm grasp of

what the center is truly for (Harris, 2016). Furthermore, because WCs are often situated in these outskirts, some scholars question how well they are able to prepare students for academic writing (McKay & Simpson, 2013).

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between how the faculty or staff on campus view a WC and how well that WC attracts students (McHarg, 2013). Therefore, it seems evident that those WCs that struggle to capture the support of the professors and staff at the university may struggle in their efforts to help the students on campus.

Perhaps because of their positions, WCs are also quite vulnerable during budget cuts (McHarg, 2013). It would seem reasonable that programs that are viewed as being in the outskirts of the main campus would be the first to have their budget or funding suspended. This further illustrates WCs' often-unsupported positions in the educational sphere.

Writing Centers and English-Language Learners

It may not be surprising that a large number of visitors to WCs are students who are learning English as an additional language, and WCs are often extremely beneficial to these students (McHarg, 2014). However, there are some concerns about ELLs' experiences with WCs and the challenges and needs these students have that may be different from those of native speakers. These issues are pertinent to the situation in the UAE because many students at the universities are ELLs or speak English as an additional language.

Moussu (2013) argues that one main challenge has its roots in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, where the focus of writing is most often grammar and form, as opposed to global issues. In these ESL classrooms, "the emphasis remains on accuracy, with little attention given to broader structural issues" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 12). This may program ESL students to equate grammar and form with good writing. Therefore, they may expect this type of feedback from a WC. However, as discussed, instead of focusing on the mechanics of language, WCs often concentrate on the content and organization of writing. They generally do not see themselves as a remedial venue there to simply fix the final product. With these two conflicting views, there is certainly room for misunderstanding and confusion when ELLs attend sessions at WCs.

To further complicate the issue, there may be a "cultural" gap at work, too (Moussu, 2013, p. 58). Many ELLs come from cultures where it is assumed that the teacher takes the reins by teaching and offering feedback

in an authoritative way. Therefore, the collaborative nature of WCs may not only be uncomfortable for students, but they may get confused by the tutor's roles and could view the tutor as avoiding their educational responsibilities (Moussu, 2013). Although the UAE is diverse, there are many students who come from cultural backgrounds that place a heightened importance on rote memorization and the authority of the teacher.

Additionally, there is an ongoing debate about which tutoring style is most appropriate for ELLs (McHarg, 2013). Typically, WCs tend to focus on "a very indirect, Socratic method of tutorial teaching" (McHarg, 2013, p. 24). However, it is important to note that this methodology has been developed around the native English speaker; therefore, it is understandable that there is an "ongoing conflict between ESL students' expectations and writing centers' theoretical foundations and current practices" (Moussu, 2013, p. 56).

Peer tutoring is another concept that may have unintended consequences in universities which have a high number of ELLs (McHarg, 2014). The use of peer tutors in these contexts often results in ELLs tutoring other ELLs. This has the potential to impact how the faculty view the helpfulness of WCs. Professors may be hesitant to recommend students to the WC because they are likely to be coached by peers who are also developing their English-language skills (McHarg, 2014). Far from being a hindrance, however, peer tutoring might be just the thing that ELLs need, as it would provide them with a tutor who is marginally better at English than they are. In these situations, the peer tutor may be seen as considerably more "approachable" and "more likely to inspire than intimidate" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 10).

Despite the challenges present when it comes to ELLs and WCs, one must remember the inherent flexibility and adaptability of WCs. This allows them to respond to new challenges as they arise. Indeed, the recent changes that WCs have made with regard to ELLs are promising steps, but there is ample room to grow when it comes to fully addressing ELLs' needs in WCs (Moussu, 2013).

As WCs in non-native English-speaking countries may eventually, and perhaps already, outnumber those in native English-speaking countries, "it is time to take a fresh look at writing centers and the work that they do" (LaClare & Franz, 2013, p. 14). It may be time to reconsider the definition and mission of WCs, especially in these contexts, in order to better align them with the actual situation of how they are being used and the needs of the users (LaClare & Franz, 2013).

Overall, it is clear that "writing center professionals need to use appropriate instructional strategies that reflect their context" (McHarg, 2013, p. 24). One way of doing this is ensuring that WC staff be better prepared to deal with the grammar concerns of students (Moussu, 2013). This way, even though it is not their ideal focus, tutors are able to acknowledge and respond to students' expectations.

Writing Centers in the Middle East and UAE

Founded in 2007, the Middle East–North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA) is the regional affiliate of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), which includes the UAE (menawca.org). Even though the context of WCs in the Arabian Gulf states "warrants an in-depth analysis of how writing centers are situated in this unique environment of language learners and dynamic social and cultural changes" (McHarg, 2013, p. 17), there have been relatively few historical studies conducted in the region, and virtually none that focuses on WCs in the UAE specifically.

A few studies in the region focus on Qatar. While Qatar and the UAE are their own unique countries with their own challenges and contexts, there are several significant similarities between the two. Not only do both countries reside in the Arabian Peninsula, but both have diverse populations of locals and expatriate foreign workers. Both have seen a rapid influx of Western higher education centers developing in their countries, and both have used English as a medium of instruction. With this last point comes the challenge of having university students who seem ill-prepared for their education because of their lack of English-language skills. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that many pertinent findings in one country with regard to WCs may also be relevant to the other.

One study done by McHarg (2013) looked at the perceptions that the faculty at the American Design University–Qatar had about the WC on their campus. After conducting interviews, the researcher concluded that while there seemed to be relatively positive views of the WC, there did exist some indication that the relationship between the English faculty and the WC was lacking in both understanding and collaboration (McHarg, 2013). For example, some faculty members believed that the WC should do more to address grammar and other language mistakes, even though this directly contradicts the WC's goal of focusing on "higher order concerns" (McHarg, 2013, p. 38).

Another paper by McHarg (2014), focusing on Qatar, explored the lack of motivation of students in Qatar to visit WCs. It also discussed the issue of underprepared Qatari students entering universities because of set requirements by the state. Quite unlike many situations in North America, where university and WC faculty are overworked and struggle with acquiring resources, universities and WCs in Qatar have robust support, and, in comparison, teachers are generously paid, "perhaps the biggest challenge, then, is how to get these students into the writing center" (McHarg, 2014, p. 81). According to McHarg (2014), both students and faculty can become frustrated because the faculty are confronted with writing they deem unworthy of admittance to the university. Because of this, they often send their students to WCs in order to bring their writing up to par. The students, however, may have received high grades throughout high school for their work and become baffled as to why they are being sent to the center (McHarg, 2014). This situation may become further complicated if WC staff do not see themselves as remedial tutors, but instead as writing coaches, as discussed above.

In light of these challenges, McHarg (2014) strongly encourages true individualized tutoring sessions and consideration for each person's background. Because of the diversity present in the Gulf states, students often have a diverse range of first languages. This may lead to a different type of session than a tutor may have with a monolingual student. Ultimately, McHarg (2014) states that to rectify these challenges, *work* is required:

> Professors and tutors must work toward getting to know students. They must work toward getting to know and understand the English language in all of its complexity. They must work toward developing the skills of each student through motivational techniques that will accommodate that student's needs. Faculty must understand the role of the writing center as staff who support and guide writers—not as proofreaders, editors, and language repairmen. (McHarg, 2014, p. 83)

This paper (McHarg, 2014) serves as a salient reminder of the importance of individualized attention during the tutoring sessions. It also casts light on the immense importance of WCs and the potential they have to help bridge a gap between underprepared students and their future academic selves.

While these previously mentioned studies look at Qatar, we are able to locate one study that has been done on the UAE. This study focused on

the UAEU. The WC at UAEU, which was founded in 2004, mainly aims to help foundation students become better academic writers (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). Its aim was to gauge students' awareness of the services offered by the center.

After analyzing the findings of 50 questionnaires given to students, Murshidi and Abd (2014) found that most students (nearly two-thirds) visit the center at a friend's recommendation. About one-third (32%) do so at their instructor's recommendation or insistence. This could be evidence of instructors at the university also not being fully aware of the services offered, or the seemingly omnipresent challenge of WCs being viewed as on the periphery of the campus.

Another interesting find was that even though the director claimed that "the main goal of the writing center is to help students learn and improve their writing skills, not helping them in editing or writing their assignments" (Murshidi & Abd, 2014, p. 61), nearly 70% of students said they go to the center for either grammar (48%) or spelling (20%) help. While more than 70% of students acknowledged that the purpose of the WC was not to have the paper written for them, about the same percentage (76%) felt that the purpose was to have papers edited (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This, again, contradicts the supervisor's view of the WC.

When it came to the resources, 92% of students did not realize that the WC had online resources to help in addition to its tutoring services (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). This shows that students tend to view the WC as a face-to-face, hands-on type of experience. This seems well in line with the general aim of WCs to be seen as an *active* experience, but it also shows that students are not well-educated about other opportunities they may have for differentiated help.

Overall, this study shows a clear gap between the perception of the supervisor of the WC and how the students view the center. It seems to imply that this WC struggles with some of the main issues facing WCs—being on the periphery of the educational sphere, a lack of knowledge or understanding from university faculty, and the expectation that it is a center for editing and proofreading. However, with that said, all students rated the tutoring services as either "excellent" or "good" (Murshidi & Abd, 2014, p. 61). This, combined with the fact that most students attend the center at the recommendation of their friends, shows that students are highly satisfied with the tutoring experience. Therefore, despite the above-mentioned issues, this WC is still able to address students' needs and expectations.

Method

The purpose of this study is to trace the historical development of WCs in the UAE. It also aims at critically examining this history through analyzing the processes and modes of operation of the WCs using precepts from postcolonial theory. In order to develop a rich understanding, elicit meaning, and create empirical knowledge about these WCs, the study employs document analysis as its guiding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Five WCs in universities across the UAE have been identified: New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), the American University of Sharjah, the American University of Ras al-Khaimah, UAEU, and Abu Dhabi University. The data for this study comes from the websites of the universities in addition to a leaflet from the NYUAD WC, shared with us by the Director of the center.

As discussed previously, there are eight key characteristics that should be present in any given WC. These characteristics include the use of tutors; focus on individual needs; appointments that range from 15 minutes to 1 hour; a non-evaluative coaching approach; flexibility; an experimental, active, informal environment; openness; and a focus on the process of writing. This chapter will look at four universities located in the UAE and establish how well these characteristics are met. Among the six WCs we have located in the UAE, the four centers listed below are the only ones that have some relevant information on their websites.

Findings

New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD)

This university's WC offers 45-minute appointments held as one-to-one tutoring sessions. These sessions are led by "seventeen professionally trained Global Academic Fellows" (NYUAD WC leaflet), who tailor the sessions "towards your writing, science writing and capstone projects, as well as your public and oral presentations". Not only does this show that the tutoring sessions focus on individual needs, but this also shows the flexibility and experimental nature of the center by incorporating oral and written communication in its services.

This flexible and adaptive nature is also illustrated by the fact that the WC employs a TESOL (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages) specialist for ELLs. This may be an effort to reconcile the dif-

ferent expectations that ELLs may have with regard to WCs and which types of mistakes are important to them.

According to the university's website, the WC is open to helping with any style of writing from any undergraduate student on the campus. The language of the NYUAD WC leaflet implies a coaching style of interaction between the student and the tutor by using words such as "engage", "support", and "help".

The focus on process is also clearly depicted through the NYUAD WC outreach literature by explicitly stating that "writing is an ongoing and recursive process" (NYUAD WC leaflet), and the WC encourages students to come at any phase of this process, whether it be "brainstorming or fine-tuning" (NYUAD website). In addition, it is clear that the WC abides by one of Harris' (2016) cardinal rules for WCs, that "the pen remains in the hand of the writer", by explicitly stating that students "be prepared to write. Bring something to write with and something to write on" (NYUAD WC leaflet).

After looking at the key characteristics of WCs and the information about the NYUAD's WC, it is clear that there has been substantial thought put into following these key characteristics. While it is not open to faculty or graduate students, the center is open to all undergraduate students; therefore, it has a selected, targeted audience, and it is open to students regardless of the curriculum of choice.

American University of Ras Al Khaimah

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah "offers inspiration, instruction, workshops and resources for students and faculty to improve their writing" (AURAK, 2016). The use of the word "inspiration" here implies that the center is process oriented and acknowledges that help may be needed from the very beginning of the process. In addition to these services, the WC also offers workshops or in-class presentations to students. This shows the flexibility of the center. This center is open to faculty and students, helping with a variety of different types of writing.

However, there are many unanswered questions judging by the information available on the website. It is not entirely clear who the tutors are or what the length of the appointments is. One can also not be sure about the methodology used during those sessions and whether they are non-evaluative or experimental, or address individual needs. Since the website states that the center offers "instruction", students may come expecting

more of a teacher-led experience rather than a coaching one. Therefore, more information is needed regarding this WC in order to determine whether or not it is fully in line with the key characteristics of WCs.

American University of Sharjah

The WC at the American University of Sharjah uses peer tutors and promises "individual instruction" in order to help "you to become a better, more independent writer". The WC states that it offers appointments that are 30 minutes long and students have the opportunity to book two back to back if they feel that more time is needed.

Furthermore, the center proves its collaborative, non-evaluative nature by stating that visitors and tutors strive to "work together". Not only this, but it offers "helpful handouts, writing resources on our website, and writing workshops", thereby proving its flexible nature and its relevance to the current needs of the visitors.

The university's website clearly states that the WC is open to all students. Not only is the center open to a variety of students, but it offers students the opportunity to seek help on virtually any type of writing, from academic writing to creative writing to personal documents.

This WC offers help throughout the writing process, including "thesis development, organization, outlining, paragraphing, sentence structure, wording, vocabulary and mechanics". However, by highlighting that students can "review grammar, punctuation and mechanics in the context of their writing" or can "work on a draft", it is slightly questionable how experimental and active the sessions are. Are tutors simply describing the language features? Are they encouraging students to try and fail and try again with the language that comes up? Perhaps these areas have attracted attention in the WC because of its population of ELLs. In that case, this could be another example of the center's flexibility and its willingness to adapt to the students' needs. With these features in mind, it is clear that this university's WC abides by most, if not all, of the key characteristics of WCs.

United Arab Emirates University

Established in 2004, the UAEU WC's mission is to help foundation students become better academic writers (Murshidi & Abd, 2014). The WC is open to both faculty and foundation students. The sessions are run by

tutors who are teachers from Arabic, English, or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) department. Sessions could also be run by students across a variety of disciplines (Murshidi & Abd, 2014).

In addition to the services offered by the tutors, the center also offers writing workshops, practice materials for all foundation courses, and practice materials for the IELTS writing exam. This shows the flexible nature of the center in that it is able to adapt and respond to the students' needs that are specific to the university. An even clearer example of the center's flexibility, though, is evident in the fact that tutoring sessions can be held in English or Arabic. This addresses the issue of students being left behind in other areas (like writing) because of their English level.

While we can be fairly certain that this WC is open, flexible, and run by tutors, there are many questions not addressed on the website. Does the center focus on the process of writing? Is there special attention placed on individual needs? Are appointments necessary? If so, how long do the sessions run? Do they encourage active experimentation from the visitors? And is the process of writing put before the final product?

Abu Dhabi University

Abu Dhabi University has a WC which is staffed by two full-time tutors and other part-time mentors. This makes it apparent that the center adheres to the tutoring framework, and the use of words like "help" and "provide support" reveals the emphasis on collaboration during these sessions. However, it is not clear what the difference between a tutor and a mentor is. Is it their qualifications? Or perhaps it is the roles that they play in the writing process? Similarly, the WC's website clearly states that visitors can walk in or make appointments, but a reader is unsure of how long these appointments are.

When it comes to addressing individual needs, the information on the website does not explicitly state this focus. However, one of the center's aims is to help "all abilities". Furthermore, it strives to have students "explore" the process of writing and make "appropriate choices". It is reasonable to assume that the journey to reaching those aims results in highly individualized tutoring sessions.

The flexibility of this center is evident in it offering help in both English and Arabic, as well as additional English-language resources for those wanting to improve their language skills. The center also provides a variety of workshops on "different aspects of language learning". Moreover, the

WC is also open, aiming to be seen as "a resource for writers of all abilities" which offers help with both academic and creative writing. However, it is not clear if the center is open to faculty, in addition to students.

Since the primary aim is "to help students to become better writers by offering help in every stage of the writing process", the center obviously values the process of writing over the product. It states, "we will not proof read or edit papers, but we will help the students learn how to find and correct errors in punctuation, usage and grammar". This is again an example of how WCs in the UAE de-emphasize the proofreading stage, yet make adjustments in order to fulfill the needs of their visitors.

Finally, the center proves to be experimental and active by stating that it strives to "help students in making appropriate choices". This shows that the tutors and mentors avoid teacher-driven sessions and instead are facilitating an active approach to the process, where visitors are encouraged to make their own decisions. Additionally, they want students to "explore the writing process", making evident the experimental, hands-on approach that they take.

Overall, this WC shows a strong commitment to the main principles of WCs and seems to actively consider the needs of its visitors based on the information provided on the university's website.

Conclusion

This chapter presented data from four different WCs in the UAE. The most salient finding of the study is the nascent nature of WCs due to the relatively short history of higher education in the country. Although the UAE is an Arab country, it is found that the WCs under study adhered to and followed guidelines established by the IWCA, which in turn are based on a Western model of education. While this model might be successful in the case of students and faculty from Western cultures, it seems to have the potential of disenfranchising, or *Othering*, to use Said's (1978) term, those from Arab and other eastern cultural backgrounds.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a historical review, but this history cannot be fully examined without considering the practical implications of WCs on the ground. It is anticipated that WCs in their current form will suffer the consequences of *resistance* from those who do not see their *linguacultural* backgrounds and modes of learning represented and fully integrated in the centers. The dearth of studies conducted on WCs in the Gulf region also points to this conclusion. McHarg's (2014) study

shows the reluctance of students to join WCs and their view of them centered around providing quick fixes to their writing problems. This probably stems from students' preferred modes of learning as well as their lack of motivation to invest time and effort in writing in a language that they might view as being imposed on them.

Overall, the history of WCs in the UAE is not a very long one. In order for WCs to be more beneficial, the sociocultural, historical, and linguistic backgrounds of those involved should be taken into consideration. This will not only ensure the smooth running of the centers but also help in maintaining them for future generations. Another programmatic consideration is to provide services for faculty members, especially those who are not specialized in writing or language teaching.

References

Academic Support Services. (2016). American University of Ras Al Khaimah. Retrieved October 22, 2016, from http://aurak.ac.ae/en/student/academic-support-services/center-teaching-learning-instructional-technology/

Ashcroff, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts.* New York: Routledge.

Belhiah, H., & Elhami, M. (2014, August 20). English as a medium of instruction in the Gulf: When students and teachers speak. *Language Policy, 14*(1), 3–23.

Boquet, E. (1999). "Our little secret": A history of writing centers, pre- to post-open admissions. *College Composition and Communication, 50*(3), 463–482. doi:10.2307/358861

Carino, P. (1996). Open admissions and the construction of writing center history: A tale of three moels. *The Writing Center Journal, 17*(1), 30–48. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43442014

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Thousand Oak, CA: Sage.

Education in the UAE. (2016). Retrieved October 20, 2016, from http://www.moe.gov.ae/English/Pages/UAE/UaeEdu.aspx

Harris, M. (2016). Writing Center Concept. International Association of Writing Centers. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from http://writingcenters.org/resources/starting-a-writing-cente/writing-center-concept/

LaClare, E., & Franz, T. (2013). Writing Centers: Who are they for? What are they for? *Studies In Self-Access Learning Journal, 4*(1), 5–16.

Mahani, S., & Molki, A. (2011). Internationalization of higher education: A reflection on success and failures among foreign universities in the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of International Education Research, 7*(3), 1.

McHarg, M. (2013). A sociocultural exploration of English faculty perceptions of the writing center in the Qatari context. *Arab World English Journal, 4*(4), 17–44.

McHarg, M. (2014). Reconceptualizing the writing center in the wake of local admissions: Redefining writing centers in Qatar. *Arab World English Journal, 5*(3), 77–85.

Mckay, T. M., & Simpson, Z. (2013). The space between: Pedagogic collaboration between a writing centre and an academic department. *Perspectives in Education, 31*(4), 27–42.

Moussu, L. (2013). Let's talk! ESL students' needs and writing centre philosophy. *TESL Canada Journal/ REVUE TESL DU CANADA, 30*(2), 55–68.

Murshidi, G. A., & Abd, K. A. (2014, May 28). UAE university students' awareness of using the writing center. *Higher Education Studies, 4*(3), 58–63.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Soomro, T. R., & Ahmad, R. (2012). Quality in higher education: United Arab Emirates perspective. *Higher Education Studies, 2*(4), 148.

Tobin, T. (2010). The writing center as a key actor in secondary school preparation. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 83*(6), 230–234.

Wilkins, S. (2010). Higher education in the United Arab Emirates: An analysis of the out comes of significant increases in supply and competition. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management, 32*(4), 389–400.

Aymen Elsheikh holds a Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education from Indiana University and an M.S. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Southern New Hampshire University. He is an adjunct faculty at Abu Dhabi University and the University of Missouri.

Jessica Mascaro received her Master of Education in Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum, with an emphasis in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (M.Ed.) from the University of Missouri. She lives in Singapore and works as an Intensive English as an Additional Language teacher at EtonHouse International School, Broadrick Road.