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Review: Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers edited by Shannon Madden, Michele Eodice, Kirsten T. Edwards, and Alexandria Lockett

Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers takes us from narratives to research. I was interested in and looked forward to reading this book, as, over the summer, some graduate students and I read *Degrees of Difference: Reflections of Women of Color on Graduate School* (McKee & Delgado, 2020), and I wanted to see how the books complemented each other. While *Degrees of Difference* was more personal, more narrative-based, and more interdisciplinary, both books stressed the importance of mentoring. But I am especially excited to bring some of the ideas from *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* to my Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) campus. Our graduate population at The University of Texas Permian Basin is growing, and we need to offer it more support.

The book is divided into three parts with a total of 14 chapters, plus an introduction and an afterword. Part 1: Voices, considers graduate student experiences in five chapters; Part 2: Bridges and Borders consists of two chapters;

and Part 3: Approaches, offers seven chapters of suggestions and empirical research on specific, proven practices for working with graduate student writers.

In the introduction to the book, titled, “Introduction: Valuing Lived Experiences and Community Mentorship,” Shannon Madden explains one of the goals/aims of the collection: “Graduate communication experts need to learn *from students* how to support them in accomplishing their own goals they set for themselves that reflect their identities and communities” (p. 11). In other words, in our work, we must ask graduate students *what they think*, not just assume we know. Madden also discusses the challenges faced by members of historically marginalized groups navigating the academy. I would add that we should not just assume that White graduate students are okay. I know I was not! In the introduction, Madden tackles an issue that is interesting to me: How do we encourage writers to use their own voices and to push against boundaries when (most) readers expect Standard Academic English and conventional forms? To address this issue Madden suggests co-mentoring, which is one of the suggestions for best practices in the “Report of the MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education” (Brazier, Cassuto, Chin, Fuchs, Gikandi, Ramirez Mendoza, & Xue, 2021). According to Madden, writing centers can participate in co-mentoring by offering space “to produce teams of better writers, communities of better writers...” (p. 17), and we can do this if we recognize

the sites at which institutions of higher learning are systematically excluding and oppressing students from underrepresented groups and create conditions that will enable all students to do the work that they care about and that is needed for the future. (p. 18)

Also, Madden claims, “Helping students develop their own intellectual and writerly identities, rather than forcing them to fit existing or traditional beliefs about who they should be or recreating students in our own image, should be our mission” (p. 19).

In Chapter 1, Beth Godbee discusses “epistemic injustice” (p. 35) and how it affects graduate students who differ from the “mythical norm” (p. 38). Through her interviews and observations, Godbee shows how writers can support each other in one-on-one contexts such as writing centers where “another person [can] validat[e], appreciate[e], and encourag[e] one’s writing, especially when it is likely to be met with resistance” (p. 44). What I take away from Godbee’s chapter is the role of writing centers in facilitating “feminist co-mentoring” relationships for graduate students, whether intentional or accidental, especially when a graduate student tutor is placed with a graduate student writer or “writing groups/conferences [are] led by and for graduate writers of color” (p. 48). Yet one aspect that this collection throughout does not seem to stress enough is the place of sexism in the academy and the fact that the dominant discourse is male.

In Chapter 2, Kirsten T. Edwards discusses her experiences as an academic advisor. As a White cisgender woman, I find myself identifying as a woman but struggling with the extent of my identification because my position is not as complex as Edwards's. She writes of being in an "in-between space" as both colonizer and colonized (p. 56). In this chapter, she presents the stories (narratives) of three "academic in-betweeners" (p. 63): Professor Martin, a Black man and professor; Jane, a White woman and graduate student; and Li, a Chinese woman and graduate student. The takeaway from this chapter for writing center professionals is that "we all as members of the academic community have a responsibility to attack inequity within the institution" (p. 70).

Chapter 3 is a reflection by Richard Sévère & Maurice Wilson on their experiences as Black men and as graduate students. In their words, "... a deliberate effort must be made in order to address the lived experiences of underrepresented graduate students" (p. 74). After writing of his background and experiences, Wilson notes,

In retrospect, however, it would have benefitted me (particularly in my graduate course pursuits) to seek out individuals with whom I could feel safe in sharing my weaknesses and form a community within which I could learn to engage in appropriate discourse. (p. 76)

This sounds like a job for a writing center to me. In his reflection, Wilson remembers getting the following comment on his writing: "It's as if you have no idea what graduate writing is" (p. 77). I am ashamed to say I gave such a comment once: I told a first-year undergraduate student his paper was like a high school paper. Upon reflection after reading about Wilson's experience, I wondered, as it was my student's first college paper, how he was to know any different? For Wilson, his professor passed on the opportunity to mentor him. So did I. We cannot mentor by using threatening and passive aggressive techniques. Now, I try to capture these moments to mentor, and writing center professionals and peer tutors can do the same. As I hope readers see, this is one of my favorite chapters from the collection. I appreciate Wilson's narrative, and it will inform my work and interactions with students. Also in this chapter, Sévère writes about the writing center, "I needed an atmosphere where my unfamiliarity with academic discourse, my sense of cluelessness, would not be perceived as inadequacies of my race but as an opportunity to grow as a scholar" (p. 85). Unlike Wilson, who served in the military before attending grad school, Sévère entered directly into a PhD program from undergrad. Sévère discusses that forming "a writing community of peers not only proved essential for my success in completing the dissertation, but also provided a sense of integration into the academic world that in turn built my confidence throughout the entire program" (p. 86). More and more, I am becoming convinced of the utility, if not necessity, of writing groups and writing communities for graduate students.

I was pleased to see that Chapter 4, by Wonderful Faison & Anna K. (Willow) Treviño, discusses HSIs, as I have worked at two of them. To Faison & Treviño, I say, I understand your critique of the middle class and White nature of the décor and ethos of the writing center space. The next step is to consider what sorts of design ideas should be offered instead.

Chapter 5 by Karen Keaton Jackson, Hope Jackson, Kendra L. Mitchell, Pamela Strong Simmons, Cecilia D. Shelton, & LaKela Atkinson is on the subject of mentoring, and the authors discuss the differences between Black and White mentors. I am not sure if the takeaway is that scholars of color (in this case, Black scholars), should have both Black and White mentors, or that White mentors should strive to be more personal in their mentoring. Perhaps both.

In Chapter 6, Alexandria Lockett ties together the threads of Part 1 and Part 3 of the collection. I wish more volumes had such a chapter in their middles, as Part 1 did not address the actual *writing* of graduate students as much as I would have liked. I am glad to say Part 3 does address actual graduate student writing, including by addressing the writing done in writing groups, especially because, as Lockett writes, “writing groups should serve as intellectual spaces where the challenging work of idea development happens” and “access to support for graduate writers depends on locating the places where graduate writing is learned and how graduate students identify themselves *as writers*” (p. 127). I am increasingly convinced of the need for graduate student writers to interact with each other in task-focused writing groups, whether self-sponsored or sponsored by writing centers.

Chapter 7 is another bridge chapter as the book moves from more narrative approaches to more research-based ones. How I wish more books had chapters like these! Amanda E. Cuellar discusses the importance of finding “academic kinship” in groups of like-minded scholars who can support each other (p. 133). My takeaway from this chapter is that we need to support each other and that writing groups can do this work.

In the research reported in Chapter 8, Jasmine Kar Tang & Noro Andriamanalina conducted focus groups with 32 doctoral students. These were BIPOC doctoral students, some of whom were citizens of the United States and some of whom were permanent residents, but unfortunately, by masking gender, the authors disable the possibility of gendered critique—for instance, that women’s ways of knowing are devalued. The authors also did not mention class status. What the authors note is that writers of color inhabit a space where they simultaneously are shamed for bringing in the personal and are encouraged to study topics related to their identities. Writing center tutors can watch themselves for discourses of shame and praise and for acting out the “host” role. Instead, tutors can act as equals, as “co-mentors” with the writers they see.

I find Daniel V. Bommarito's research frame in Chapter 9 interesting, as I would have never thought of co-writing an article as being a way of giving feedback, unless the entire exercise/process was framed as some sort of learning activity. Perhaps it was, but whether it was or not, in this chapter, Bommarito writes of a professor giving feedback to two graduate students on their drafts of an article's Results section as part of the process of coauthoring. The chapter explores the challenges graduate students face in writing for the discipline, specifically in "inventing and advancing claims" (p. 159), "aligning claims with data" (p. 162), "translating and integrating cross-language data" (p. 164), and "providing appropriate contextual information" (p. 166).

Chapter 10 is about procrastination and personal conflicts with advisors. Based on their extensive experience working with dissertation writers, the authors, Lisa Russell-Pinson & Haadi Jafarian, discuss two vignettes, "composite[s] of several doctoral writers" (p. 178): one dissertation writer with "maladaptive perfectionism" causing procrastination (p. 180) and one with "interpersonal conflict" with their advisor (p. 184). The authors offer questions that writing center personnel could use to guide their interactions with dissertation writers. For instance, "Could you tell me a bit about yourself as a writer in your doctoral program?" (p. 187). The authors also suggest that graduate writers can seek assistance from the university counseling center and/or start their own writing groups.

In Chapter 11, Rachael Cayley discusses dissertation boot camps and the value of both self-efficacy and writing community. All writers in the groups she studied valued the focused writing time and were appreciative of how much they accomplished in uninterrupted writing time. The boot camps also included writing instruction and discussion, which most participants also valued.

Chapter 12, by Anne Zanzucchi & Amy Fenstermaker, is about a non-credit writing workshop series on giving peer review. This workshop series morphed into a full-credit course on graduate academic writing. Chapter 13, by Rochelle Rodrigo & Julia Romberger, is about learning through writing groups about how and why to use theory. The writing groups they describe are, like the one described in Chapter 12, similar to a structured course that provides a lot more guidance and assignments than would most writing groups.

Jennifer Friend, Jennifer Salvo, Michelle M. Paquette, & Elizabeth Brown's Chapter 14 discusses a partnership among a library, a writing studies department, and a graduate studies department to determine the needs of graduate student writers. The authors surveyed and conducted focus groups with graduate students and graduate faculty to determine these needs. Using these results, the authors hired a graduate writing specialist and developed activities, including writing groups and full-day write-ins.

Finally, Kirsten T. Edwards's "An After(Word) on the Future of Higher Education" left me with a mixture of pessimism and hope.

Overall, this book was an interesting, quick, and enjoyable read. I recommend it for directors of graduate programs, librarians, writing center professionals of all kinds, graduate faculty members, and graduate students, as its insights into graduate student experiences are urgently needed to inform academia's work more broadly. Thanks and kudos to all the editors and authors of this volume for the work of putting it together. Readers' time will be well-spent with this volume.

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