

Thank you for coming to our talk, “Amplifying Global Writing Praxis: initiating an open-access MENA Scholarly Journal.” We, Halle Neiderman and Dorota Fleszar, are writing faculty at the American University of Beirut, and we founded a writing studies journal for the Middle East and North Africa to connect and troubleshoot writing and institutional practices among the region.

We are going to begin with a sampling of revise and resubmit suggestions we have received from leading western journals in writing studies. We will then discuss how this feedback stunts scholarly writing outside of the United States (in our discipline anyway), initiating the need for our own journal. We then define and unpack reciprocal mentorship, and how that facilitates dynamic exchanges to amplify more voices from our region, ultimately increasing the scholarly output of writing scholars in the region.

Because writing studies is widely regarded as a United States field, as scholarly authors, we consistently publish for United States outlets. This means we have to help our audiences (journal editors and reviewers first) make sense of our classroom, institutional, and community contexts as we present our felt difficulties, methods, and findings. Regardless of how well we think we have imagined the background they need, reviewer feedback still reveals the disconnect between our worlds and practices. Just to begin, we would like to start with some feedback reviewers have offered us (and a bit about why it misses the mark).

Add reviews

"these three—the working retreats, the reading groups, and the Writing Center and WID exchange—seem particularly unique and, thus, will likely prove enlightening and valuable to readers"

This fragment of a review I received refers to an article in which I described a full spectrum of mentoring initiatives to show that – in absence of rhetoric and composition programs in the region and with writing faculty with background in language, literature, or TESOL—benefit not just from individual initiatives but from seeing how all of them work together to professionalize their work. However, the editorial revise and resubmit misses that defining characteristic of the local space and asks instead that only three mentoring initiatives be described and only those which, according to editors’ judgment, are directly applicable to the context of the rhet/comp center, the US. Instead of seeing it for what it is – work that adds to the collective understanding of writing program administration, editors ask to reduce the article to a few attractive, ready-to-use mentoring initiatives that they see as unique to their own contexts.

"Finally, go through and eliminate all of your passive voice."

While passive voice may lend itself to unclear actors, when writing about systemic division and community pedagogy, using active voice places blame where we either cannot blame a single person or placing blame is dangerous.

“Many of the interviewees also have ties to one part of the MENA region (Lebanon), and if they have similar backgrounds (linguistically, culturally, educationally), this needs to be accounted for in the analysis.”

This is a comment I received on a manuscript involving participants working across the region. The answers response to this comment involves a history on the mobility, class, and silencing of nationalities and races in the region, which is tricky politically to discuss while limited by word count.

We are not pointing these out to poke fun of our reviewers (unless they were indeed reviewer 2), but rather, to note the disconnect between our context and the outlets with which we need to publish in to advance in our jobs. At best, this contextualization takes away space that could be better spent on findings and analysis for *our* peer institutions and, at worst, reviewers and editors have asked us to reframe content in ways that simply do not apply, or are in conflict, with how they are utilized. We do not see the reviewers as malicious in this commentary – we recognize that, in many ways, journal reviewers and editors speak for their audience and discipline, and it is our job as scholars to fit into the United States’ audience and disciplinary desires. With this in mind, we set out to provide scholarly space to speak to our own local and peer audiences with the intention to scaffold scholarship and speak to one another. Prior to 2024 and the *MENA Writing Studies Journal*, there were no regional journals to produce, or provide a catalyst to produce, local writing research.

Writing is locally constructed and writing studies is a locally constructed discipline. Therefore, when western writers discuss research that includes navigating issues such as first-generation students, contingent faculty, and heritage languages, the theories and practices are not immediately applicable or transferrable for those outside of the United States. Our realities involve navigating systemic division, hopelessness, and language standardization. Our realities involve teaching locally to students who mostly look toward working internationally.

As such, lacking our publication space prevents writing studies theories and practices from being locally imagined, researched, and developed.

The lack of space also dilutes the work of the discipline within our local realities. We are not only translating these local realities for an outside audience, but we are also somehow manufacturing our local realities to their imagined assumptions, risking fetishizing or romanticizing our professional worlds. Within those expectations, as reviewer comments, noted from earlier in the talk, our revisions ask us to focus on complexities such as language or geopolitics. While those issues undoubtedly intersect with the teaching of writing and disciplinary theorization, having to give space to language and geopolitics or other reviewer desires, takes away from theorizing writing and language for our own populations. This is similar to the way in which composition and rhetoric research is often supposed to be anchored by pedagogy, though the study may have nothing to do with writing in the classroom.

The lack of space also increases the sentiment of invalidity and isolation that transnational writing studies scholars and faculty feel in their respective institutions. Because writing studies is a discipline that correlates significantly to local contexts, when the vast majority of scholarly publications are situated in the United States, writing faculty in other regions maintain a lack of belonging within the discipline and continue to operate outside of that center. There are larger implications, then, of this invalidity and isolation, which results in continued marginalization of writing programs, a lack of local research, and a lack of upper administration recognizing the intellectual labor of writing faculty and administration.

In acknowledging each of these areas that a lack of regional publications contribute to, we can also recognize that scholarly publication outlets, at least in writing studies, contribute to far more than the output of research, but also to the praxis and material conditions of our classrooms.

But creating space/place doesn't just automatically rectify these internalized issues. And reaching out and announcing our presence across listservs and personal networks doesn't give teacher-scholars the confidence that they belong in a scholarly space. As regional and diaspora scholars interacted with the MWSJ board across various casual and professional pathways to inquire about processes, we found that we were learning more about the backgrounds and practices of the region while also learning more about what sustainable publishing and scholarly professionalizing necessitates. As a result, we recognized our journal was surviving on a term Dorota called "reciprocal mentorship."

We define reciprocal mentorship as an ongoing, intentional, reflexive, and adaptive process in which we offer and accept knowledge, expertise, and tangible support in the community's coming into existence as sustainable, self-motivated, confident, and rewarding way of professional life.

Reciprocity is a term we adapt from Bandura (1986, 2001), who explains human functioning through his social cognitive theory of learning as a function of reciprocal influence between an individual, their environment, and behavior. In Bandura's view, people are whole ecologies of reciprocal influence between separate but mutually influencing systems. We see the interplay and mutual influence useful in theorizing of our work. In adapting the individual, psychological lens to the workings of a group, we reach for Lave and Wenger's understanding of communities of practice (1991). Combined, the two theories help us visualize our MENA writing studies community as made up of concentric circles with novices making their way from the outer most circle towards the middle circle of expertise, while continuously adapting to, existing, but also making space for new disciplinary practices, so learning from but also teaching fellow members of the community, including us as journal editors, what it takes to make this specific community develop professionally.

This collective work supports theorizing and conceptualizing researchers' identities which, we assume, cannot happen *in opposition* to existing identities, but must *support their growth* to include know-how, attitude, as well as confidence in and access to support structures. What happens through conversations, e-mail or via Zoom, is then not just authors' but our own – the editors' -- learning about what those existing identities, know-how, attitudes, felt difficulties, and pressures are and adapting our editorial practices to better support future authors in their scholarly endeavors and writing.

We imagine our work to be activities informing and informed by each other, much like these concentric circles illustrate. The inner circle is empty because we see the region building and defining the discipline, but it is unfinished and contributors are navigating into that eventually. Hopefully. The green circle are the disciplines that inform our work, but are tangential to our context. The blue circle includes those of us contributing to the journal's output: editors, reviewers, and authors. We are both informed by and informing the circles that surround us. And this outer-most circle includes our contributors, readership, and university administrations.

Journal editors are typically assumed to be experts occupying the inner most circle, gatekeeping, and regulating access. Our approach modifies that understanding; it relaxes the confines of expertise of the inner circle by taking on reciprocity. As editors and colleagues, we recognize that people sometimes get stuck before they reach the center. We accept those moments of difficulty, confusion, and frustration as part of the journey and keep learning what kind of support it demands from us as editors of a writing studies journal located in a transnational space to get unstuck. Hence, we talk of our editorial work as *reciprocal mentorship* or an ongoing, goal-oriented, intentional, adaptive, reflexive, and “slow process of learning from regional colleagues and students.” One that “enables local, place-based processes and values to emerge and intertwine with disciplinary and professional epistemologies. Reciprocal mentorship is a practice meant to invite more people and more “ways of doing” into the institution, which ultimately allows us to consider research questions and methods we would not have otherwise considered” (Neiderman, 2026).

Within this definition, we recognize that the publishing process mediates disciplinarity and belonging and rooting a new outlet regionally re-mediates activity, but local publishing literacies and belonging still need cultivated. Reciprocal mentorship “not only mediate[s] activity, but – as the first step – serve[s] as a space to recognize, mediate, and reciprocally learn from what we believe is a flurry of activity that takes place locally, while also nurturing awareness of conversations in other localities and other contexts through robust citations practices.” (Zenger et al.). We recognize that just because we are the editing board, we do not have the knowledge of the best ways to approach all practices and submissions. Biases may also reside in our beliefs of publication ideals. Therefore, at times, before we respond to our authors, we will seek the expertise of global scholars to direct a local theorizing of language and pedagogy.

As an example, we called on a translingual, transnational writing scholar to help us build a reviewer tool for our translingual literacy narrative submissions. From this collaboration, the editorial board engaged with language, ethnography, and scholarship in ways that directed submissions to move beyond flat narratives, but to interact with identity, location, and production in ways meaningful for regional scholars and teachers. In this way, recognizing that we are still learning, mediates how we approach our tasks to “continually balance contextualizing a global(ized) discipline with local approaches to writing, while on the other [hand] invite local authors to articulate their work in ways accessible to global audiences. In this sense, we conceive of the *MWSJ* as a space crucial to mediating local pedagogical, scholarly, and administrative activity” (Zenger et al.)

At this point, we would like to highlight three ways we amplify praxis while maintaining reciprocal mentorship. The first is through simply highlighting names on our reviewer board. For our reviewers, this provides clear documentation of their continued professional service for their respective university rehire and promotion. The reviewer list also shows prospective contributors who stakeholders in the region’s writing studies are and their university affiliation.

A more high-stakes way of forging networks is to team up with regional conferences to publish conference proceedings. In this process, we work with the conference team to elect a guest editor and walk them through the process of requesting and collecting reviews, contacting authors, copyediting, and going to press. In this way, the conference is documented, the guest editor earns leadership experience, and the authors engage a process that may have previously been daunting and foreign. Each of these organizations, people, and their research is then highlighted on website and in return, the editorial board gains insights on additional organizations and stakeholders and their preferred practices.

Finally, in a collaborative approach to amplification, we conceived of a map, still in its early stages, meant to indicate the region’s writing programs and individuals’ research projects. The map highlights where writing happens in the region, who is working with MENA writers, and what research projects we can collaborate on.

Reciprocity is also at play within the editorial board itself – whose members bring their individual interests, competencies, or years of professional experience – and in our interactions with reviewers and authors. In preparing for this talk, we recalled moments of working side-by-side with authors to reconsider design of tables and the arguments they were trying to achieve, jumping on zoom videos to clarify feedback and show how their writing extends to a global readership, and our own a-ha moments through writing reviews and editorial blurbs. To make amplification work, the journal practices have to include communication beyond submission, review, and acceptance or we risk merely recreating the same sterile, obtuse publication practices for our own community. It also extends beyond our immediate community of practice and into spaces like this conference, published scholarship, and informal exchanges with people occupying similar positions of auxiliary administration elsewhere.

As a final note, it takes intentionality to think of manuscript authors and their reviewers as constitutive parts of shared environment whom we influence through our behaviors and whom we allow to influence us with theirs. It takes intentionality to see beyond gatekeeping of disciplinarity even at that one gate, one regional journal. When imagining this environment, we evoke the universe with all its celestial bodies exerting forces on one another, pushing and pulling each other. But the metaphor is, of course, an imperfect one as we are (or aspire to be) agents within our communities of practice, and as agents, we can choose the type of force we apply to others and the type of force we respond to. And this intentionality translates into not just offering but also accepting knowledge offered to us and working to understand pushback, all of which ultimately helps shape our work as we adapt to each new situation.