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The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward

Herausgebende
Franziska Liebetanz, Leonardo Dalessandro, Nicole Mackus, Özlem Alagöz-Bakan

Gastherausgebende
Lawrence Cleary, Franziska Liebetanz, Anja Poloubotko

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Inhalt

The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward

Lawrence Cleary, Franziska Liebetanz, Anja Poloubotko

In June of 2024, the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland, hosted the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) bi-annual conference on the theme: "The Future of Writing Centers". Looking back, we recall that in 2010 one of our guest editors, Anja Poloubotko presented the results of her bachelor thesis, titled "Problems of Writing Center Work in Europe and Beyond: An Analysis Based on a European Survey in Relation to Writing Center Literature" to her first EWCA conference audience in Paris. The survey showed that at that time, writing centers in Europe were already facing similar challenges to writing centers in the US (e. g. financial limitations, lack of acknowledgement, etc.). Additional problems such as misconception and undervaluation, which were also prominent in the writing center literature in the United States (e. g. North 1984) at the time, could have been linked to a broader issue, an image problem (as proofreading facility) of writing centers. Today, in 2025, in this new transformative phase in the age of AI, we have the chance to shape our image and to reinvent ourselves by strengthening what a new writing center generation is about, starting in the 1970s in the US and in the 1990s and 2000s in Europe: the writer and all the skills that are being acquired by going through the cognitively and emotionally complex (multilingual) writing process.

Concurring with the 40th anniversary of Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" (1984), the 2024 EWCA conference invited participants to take stock of regional and transnational directions in writing center research or practice and reimagine writing centers moving forward. A re-assessment of our idea of a writing center is inspired by a recognition that the US model, its pedagogical theories and practices, so profoundly influenced by Murray (1972) and North (1982, 1984) might not so easily apply beyond Anglo-American academic cultures. In 2009, Tracy Santa (2009), co-founder of the EWCA, reflected on his experience as a writing center administrator at the American University of Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, as he struggled to reconcile the advice of US tutor training manuals with the local institutional and cultural contexts in Europe. A year earlier, Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner (2008) examined the outsized influence of Stephen North's (1984) "The Idea of a Writing Center," which no longer aligned with writing center research and practice. Five years later, Jackie Grutch McKinney (2013) extended this debate, criticizing the "writing center grand narrative," namely that writing centers are "cozy homes," "iconoclastic," and places that tutor "all students" (pp. 3–4), asking us to examine who these "ideas" of a writing center include and what practices or reimaginings they exclude. Recent studies of first-generation students, speakers of English as second or foreign language, and working-class students, for example,

show that common writing center practices do not necessarily serve all students equally well (e. g., Bond, 2019; Denny, Nordlof & Salem, 2018; Eckstein, 2019; Salazar 2021; Salem 2016).

Presenters at the 2024 EWCA Conference were asked to consider how local practices or narratives were accommodated when establishing their 'Ideas' of a writing center. Attendees were invited to speak on a number of topics, to consider whether the traditional narrative about what writing centers are and what they do still coheres with our current contexts. How, for instance, writing centers are impacted by neoliberal policies, including globalization–multiculturalism in the writing center, multilingualism, neo-colonial university expansion, neoliberal pedagogical values that are inconsistent with traditional writing center values, austerity, marginalization of writing center staff and scholarship, the nature of work and wellness in the writing center, and the impact of new technologies on writing center work.

Three months after the 2024 EWCA Conference, Franziska Liebetanz worked with the editors of *Journal für Schreibwissenschaft* (*Journal of Writing Studies*) to organize this English-language edition, titled "The Future of Writing Centers in Europe – looking back and forward" that celebrates and extends the conversations initiated at the 2024 conference in Limerick.

Today, *JoSch*, the *Journal for Writing Studies* (*Journal für Schreibwissenschaft*) is delighted to announce the publication of its second edition in English. *JoSch* has been a significant journal for writing research and didactics in Germany for over 10 years. Each year, *JoSch* releases two issues, with more than 600 copies sold annually. In our commitment to accessibility, the journal is transitioning to complete open access, allowing a wider audience to engage with *JoSch* and its content. This shift not only fosters a broader discourse on writing research and didactics but also emphasizes the importance of publishing in English. By doing so, *JoSch* editors aim to include participants from across Europe and showcase the diversity present within the continent to English-speaking countries.

Our goal is to encourage writing center scholars everywhere to share their work in English, enhancing the visibility of Writing Center initiatives throughout Europe. This initiative seeks to bridge the gap between the US and Europe, ultimately reaching a larger audience. The future of writing centers is not merely a German concern; it is a European, if not global, issue. By publishing in English, we facilitate a more accessible and enriching dialogue for a diverse readership. It is the hope of all those involved in the production of this special issue of JoSch that the contributions published here (see abstracts below) will reach a far wider audience through its presentation in English.

Christin Campbell, Tara Keenan-Thomson, Theresa Lindo and Nicoletta Romano will give us an insight into how the demographics of higher education are changing their University in Rome. The John Cabot University is adapting to the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on writing and research, with its Writing Center facing unique challenges due to the diverse skills of its student body and Italian labor laws that restrict staffing to faculty tutors. To address these challenges, the Writing Center collaborates with the Library and Center for Teaching and Learning to offer workshops on information and AI literacy and

has published a Strengthening Guide, positioning itself to effectively integrate AI into the writing process.

AI-supported writing comes with several advantages but may also be a cause for deskilling cognitive abilities. In their survey among university students, Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt (2024) found a connection between strong writing skills and a more reflected AI use. Based on these findings, the article from **Helena Grünbaum** "AI and the Brain. Reflections on Writing Skills in the Light of AI" article will answer the question of how participants in the survey address fears of deskilling cognitive abilities and in what way these fears relate to a strong fondness for writing in their own words. A mixed methods approach shows that students who express fears of deskilling tend to have a higher writing proficiency and fondness of their own style. The discussion addresses the potential role of writing centers in preventing deskilling.

Lena Leimgruber explores in her article "From Pencil to Prompt: Navigating AI in the Future of Writing Centres" how writing centres can adapt to the growing influence of AI tools like ChatGPT, following discussions from the 2024 EWCA conference. The aim is to contextualise these insights within the context of the Chalmers Writing Centre (CWC) at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg (Sweden) to explore how they can inform future development of writing centres. The report highlights the importance of writing centres evolving as hubs for AI literacy and future skills (Kotsiou et al. 2022). Drawing on discussions about AI at the Peer Tutor Day and conference presentations about AI, the article reflects on the future of European writing centres in an age of digital transformation. The structure covers keynote insights, relevant conference presentations and actionable takeaways for improving practices at CWC and beyond.

While the first comprehensive survey of German writing centers conducted in 2023 revealed that 71 % of the respondents were at least partially funded permanently, answers to the final open-ended question, which asked respondents to assess the current status of their writing center, revealed a less positive assessment of the establishment of writing centers. The article from **Fridrun Freise** and **Nora Hoffmann** analyzes these statements and contextualizes them with the corresponding quantitative findings, covering the thematic categories of institutional placement, resources, offerings, demands and statements on issues relevant to writing centers. The result is an ambivalent picture of positive and negative aspects of the current status of German writing centers.

Academic Writing Instructor **Eunhee Buettner** and Writing Center Coordinator **Helen Lepp Friesen** at the University of Winnipeg, Canada, along with four of their undergraduate peer tutors, **Breanna Markiewicz, Alvena Ali Wasim, Jia Custodio, Wenjia Bao** respond to the changing demographics of the student population, assessing the impact of the dominant Western notions about how people learn to write and the practices best suited to achieving that goal on multilingual tutors' writing center practices and multilingual student writers' identities. In **Writing Reimagined: Decolonizing Academic Writing in a Writing Center** the authors suggest that decolonizing academic writing pedagogy is essen-

tial if future writing centers are to accommodate an inevitably more diverse demographic of student clientele and potential tutors, i. e., if they are to communicate equity and inclusivity.

Writing centers can play a key role in developing universities as multilingual organizations, enhancing access to languages and multilingualism. They support multilingual writing and language skills. Sandra **Drumm's paper** "Multilingualism in the Writing Center Work" explores multilingualism, particularly the impact of language switching on working memory during writing. It also reviews data from writing centers in Germany that adopt a multilingual approach. The findings suggest that enabling individuals to strategically choose from their language repertoire is essential. Additionally, using all languages can boost self-confidence and reduce cognitive strain in the writing process.

Andrea Scott draws with her own interdisciplinary theories of care to offer writing professionals a new way of theorizing academic writing and its support in German-speaking countries. The concept of care is a powerful lens for reframing writing as a social practice based on relational values like interdependence, connection, and curiosity. At the same time, the concept of care points upward to structures of inequality shaping academic labor in our field. Such a perspective on writing and writing care work invites renewed reflection on questions of growing importance post-pandemic: what structures enable or disable care for academic writers? And how can we build or strengthen infrastructure that helps writers and writing professionals thrive?

The book review from **Stefanie Everke Buchanan** examines *Booksprints in der Hochschullehre: Schreiben lernen im Team* (2024), a volume that explores the use of booksprints as an innovative didactic format in higher education. The book presents booksprints as structured, collaborative writing processes that foster both academic writing skills and transferable competencies relevant to professional fields. While emphasizing writing as a means of learning, the authors also address the challenges of integrating booksprints into university curricula, including assessment regulations and group dynamics. The volume balances theoretical insights with practical guidance, offering materials for implementation. Despite some complexities in terminology and structure, the book effectively demonstrates the benefits of booksprints, particularly in enhancing student engagement, collaboration, and social integration. Ultimately, the review highlights the book's value for educators seeking to implement innovative and student-centered writing pedagogies.

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Guesteditors

Lawrence Cleary co-directed the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland from 2007 to 2019 and has been sole Director since. He was an At-Large Board Member in the IWCA from 2022–2022. Lawrence served on the EWCA Executive Board from 2016–2024, serving as Chair from 2022–2024 and hosting the 2024 EWCA Conference in Limerick. He has published in Ireland, the U. K., and in the U. S. He is currently working on a volume of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*'s *Digital Edited Collections* to be published by the WAC Clearinghouse in 2026.

Franziska Liebetanz is Co-director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Writing Center at the European University Viadrina in Germany. She served on the EWCA Executive Board from 2014–2024, serving as Chair from 2016–2022. Franziska also served the board of

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Anja Poloubotko, M. A. has been the coordinator of *Team InterWRITE* at the Leibniz Language Centre at Leibniz University Hannover since 2015. She first joined the board of the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) as a peer tutor in 2014 and has been a member since 2022. She has been involved in writing center work and research since 2010. Her bachelor thesis focused on the challenges of writing centers in Europe and beyond. In her master's thesis, she analyzed the contribution of peer writing tutors to the sustainable development of writing centers in Germany. Other research interests include multilingual writing and tutoring and the role of AI.

The Future of Writing Instruction at John Cabot University: A Three-body Solution

Christin Campbell, Tara Keenan-Thomson, Theresa Lindo, Nicoletta Romano

Abstract

John Cabot University (JCU), like many other institutions, has been adapting to the changes in writing and research brought on by the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in academia. However, JCU's Writing Center also presents an interesting case study, as it grapples with additional hurdles in heterogeneous writing, language, reading and information literacy skills based on its diverse student body and with Italian labor laws that have led it to be solely run by faculty tutors. Through its collaborations with the JCU Frohring Library and Center for Teaching and Learning in the form of information and AI literacy workshops and a recently published Strengthening Guide, the Writing Center is ready for the future of harnessing AI in the writing process.

Introduction

University faculty around the world have been struggling to respond to the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Many increasingly desperate instructors are adopting a "hair of the dog" solution: use AI to find AI. Others say that students should be at university to discuss big ideas, not engage in a game of cat and mouse with robots; instructors should simply ignore AI. Both positions are folly. The ethical use of AI can offer students and faculty a unique opportunity to develop critical analysis in reading and writing. Dexterity and agility with AI will also be crucial for new graduates seeking to enter the job market, as companies are increasingly favouring new hires with these skills (Hollenbeck 2024). John Cabot University (JCU) provides an interesting case study on how universities with significant populations of linguistic and skills-related variations can leverage programs and pedagogy to prioritize a more skills- and literacies-based approach to student assessment that is less focused on the product and more focused on the process. This entails the use of AI tools in the prewriting, drafting and research stages of the writing process, complemented by an applied critical reading approach in assessment. Current research demonstrates that when employed thoughtfully to guide students, AI tools can offer fertile ground for the development of critical analysis in reading and writing among students (Ward et al. 2024) and even have a levelling effect for non-native English-speaking students (Usdan et al. 2024). The three instructional bodies at JCU most suited to lead the effort to address diverse linguistic

and skills abilities using AI tools are the Writing Center, the Frohring Library, and the Elisabetta Morani Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL).

JCU, an independent, four-year American university in the heart of Rome, Italy, catering to both degree-seeking and study abroad students (57 % and 43 %, respectively), is facing this challenge while continuing to offer strong liberal arts-focused international undergraduate and graduate degrees. As of Fall 2024, the total enrolment stood at 1,830 students, with approximately 47 % of the undergraduates hailing from Italy, 28 % from the United States of America (USA), and the remaining 25 % from 73 other countries. Faculty attempting to educate this international student body with its linguistic and cultural diversity have much to overcome as unchecked use of generative AI-based large language models (LLMs) increasingly requires a re-examination of tried-and-true methods of academic engagement and assessment. Far from being a doomsday scenario though, this moment presents an opportunity for faculty to embrace a process-oriented approach to help students from all backgrounds and at all levels develop a critical voice rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the material.

Major challenges to writing instruction and use of AI tools

Writing Center Staffing

JCU's Writing Center maintains a staff of 8–10 tutors under a composition coordinator and offers individual and group writing tutorials and workshops. Unlike many writing centres, the JCU Writing Center is staffed solely by composition faculty (lecturers and assistant professors) instead of a mix of students and faculty or, as is the case at some universities, all students. The 2014 Jobs Act in Italy increased the costs and bureaucracy associated with employing student workers at JCU (Cirillo/Fana/Guarascio 2016: 85), and by 2017, it was no longer sustainable to employ students. The change in the legislation carried unfortunate results, as student tutors were a formidable strength to the Writing Center; they were able to connect with student visitors as peers and empathized with their writing concerns in a way faculty members sometimes could not. Student tutors can also be more agile with new digital technologies than their professors, so their absence from the ranks of the tutorial staff is particularly felt by the rest of the tutors.

Heterogeneous ability level on reading, writing, language and information literacies

JCU's composition faculty report significant discrepancies in the reading and writing levels of students. Italian students appear to have stronger knowledge of literature and cultural topics, while US students have better reading scores (U. S. Department of Education 2020) and read more (Anderson 2024) than their Italian and international counterparts. All dem-

onstrate weaknesses in their level of preparedness for critical reading and writing, a trend that is reflective of prevailing research on the topic (Center for Reinventing Public Education 2023: 15). In addition, non-native English-speaking students can find themselves perplexed at the English-language argumentative writing style, with its emphasis on brevity, tightly woven arguments, up-front theses and Modern Language Association formatting (Bennett/Muresan 2016). Hastening the decline in critical thinking and analytical reasoning and widening the gaps in the student population is student overreliance on generative AI tools too early on in their academic careers, before they have acquired the skills to produce the work on their own (Zhai/Wibowo/Li 2024), which would allow them to be more critical of AI-generated results. Premature or indiscriminate use of LLMs can interrupt progress in addressing uneven academic preparedness among this heterogeneous cohort of students at JCU.

To mitigate the effects of uneven and often inadequate literacy preparation in pre-university schooling, JCU first- and second-year composition faculty emphasize the importance of critical reading of academic texts, but over the past decade, JCU faculty have noticed that most students have been struggling to complete and comprehend the material, an observation that is broadly reflective of international trends (Myers 2023). Simply put, students the world over are not clocking as much deep reading time as they once did. The findings are grim: only 20–30 % of university students do the reading (Deale/Lee 2021: 52; St Clair-Thompson/Graham/Marsham 2017). In a composition class of 12, that means as few as three students have prepared for any given session. Those students who do the reading report significant challenges to staying focused (King's College London News Centre 2022). Now that LLMs can approximate doing the reading for the students and provide seemingly accurate summaries in seconds, instructors find themselves at a loss.

Student use of AI without guidance on ethics and responsibilities

Widespread student use of LLMs confirms faculty cannot pretend these tools do not exist. A Tyton Partners report from October 2023 makes the point that while 75 % of US students surveyed indicated that they use LLMs to complete their assignments, even when such use is banned in the assignment instructions, only 22 % of faculty surveyed are exploring AI in their pedagogical approach (Shaw et al. 2023: 4). Most students recognize this contradiction, predict that their use of LLMs will only increase over the next few years, and feel university work is not adequately preparing them to efficiently and effectively use the AI tools they will be expected to know in the job market.

Lack of training on AI is one reason faculty and university administrators have been sluggish in integrating the technology into coursework despite faculty's belief that familiarity with AI-related tools and ethical concerns will be vital to their students' future employment prospects (McGrath et al. 2023: 7 f.). The mismatch seems most acute in English-speaking universities, where concerns about plagiarism, security and ethics have led to a

more pronounced lag in administrative support of planning curricula around AI (Anthology Inc. 2023: 3).

University writing centres and composition programs are uniquely affected by this imbalance between technological advancement and slow uptake rates among faculty. While this misalignment of priorities makes for stilted and patchy top-down planning at the university level, we must make it an opportunity to adopt initiatives that could lead to a blossoming of innovation in our pedagogy.

How JCU has begun to reposition writing instruction: A Liberal Arts Strengthening Guide

In 2024, JCU's Writing and Pedagogy Working Group in partnership with Parami University, received a grant from the Open Society University Network to fund a teaching strengthening guide. This guide prompted a revision of our curricular approaches to teaching academic writing and tutoring in the Writing Center, while holding onto our Liberal Arts approach even as LLMs necessitate a change in writing instruction the world over. The strengthening guide, A Liberal Arts Guide to Academic Writing in the Age of AI: Crafting Meaning, Empowering Students (Campbell et al. 2024), sets forth an ambitious program of integrating AI into our advanced composition courses.

The Guide includes modular lesson plans that focus on the teaching of critical reading and writing as well as information literacy. It provides practical lessons that address AI and its interactions with liberal arts approaches to teaching and learning, LLMs to use and suggestions about when to use them in class, and assignments and assessment rubrics. The Guide argues that the appropriate response to advancements in these technologies lies in the foregrounding of the liberal arts approach and the direct use and exploration of these new tools to enhance that perspective. The Guide was presented at the European Writing Center Association's Conference in June 2024.

Applied critical reading and research initiatives

Another solution for JCU is to reimagine its composition program as the home of a mandatory one-credit strategic reading course for students. Another is to form a joint, ongoing Writing Center/Center for Teaching and Learning workshop series to help faculty develop their skills in teaching reading strategies to students and in developing assessment tools for their courses.

While these curriculum revisions would represent a welcome large-scale approach, there are more modest pedagogical choices faculty can make to start a move toward "making academic reading matter" as Gorzycki et al. (2020) urge. First, instructors throughout the university should be teaching students how to effectively read a text in their discipline.

Courses should be shifting from product (the research paper) to process (the building blocks and skills necessary to write a research paper). The product-oriented focus invites students to generate papers using LLMs, and research shows that despite what instructors believe about their capacity to spot a fake, most cannot, and indeed they award higher marks on average to the fully AI-generated papers (Scarfe et al. 2024). In case there were any doubt that a temptation as great as this could be resisted or redirected with an academic honesty statement in a syllabus, a global study of university students shows that most students are using Gen AI in their studies and approximately half use it weekly (Digital Education Council 2024).

Faculty university-wide should adopt a mixed approach using online tools like Perusall for textbook reading that employs social annotation and pen and paper annotation for in-class graded assignments. Explicitly teaching article annotation techniques, requiring annotations along with in-class assessment, providing graded feedback on those annotations, and discussing them in class, would go a long way to ensuring that students are actively engaging with what they see as increasingly challenging assigned readings. Adding chatbot tools such as Riffbot, which prompts students with dynamic, personalized questions that lead them to reflect on the processes they use to complete their work, and LLMs like Llama or Perplexity, which excel in research on specialized topics, is another opportunity for instructors to help students learn key critical thinking and research skills in a more efficient and autonomous way.

The three body solution to complement these initiatives

The Frohring Library

Teaching information literacy also falls to the Composition program, as it is the main course sequence all degree seekers must attend. Consequently, the JCU Composition Program and the Writing Center collaborate closely with the university's library to address this need.

The Frohring Library at John Cabot University is considered one of Italy's largest English-language academic collections. Three reference and instruction librarians focus on user services with a dedicated emphasis on instruction—both formally in class and informally via the answers provided to all patrons.

The two aspects of reference and instruction library work that most intersect with the Composition Program and the Writing Center are the instruction sessions and the research interactions. Librarians meet with students for help either by appointment or as walk-ins, regarding citation and formatting as well as source retrieval, including its use in shaping the students' research topics.

For instruction, the librarians are often contacted to teach research tools and strategies, source evaluation, approaching the annotated bibliography and the literature review, learning citation rules and software such as Zotero, all grounded within meta literacy as it pertains to information, data, media, visual, and other related literacies. Recently, the library

has added or augmented sessions on information and AI literacy, including sections on defining, prompting, and citing AI. From 1 July 2023, through 30 June 2024, the Frohring Library registered a total of 128 in-class sessions of which 51 requests came from the English Department across diverse levels, mostly concentrated around the composition sequence. While this statistic reflects an impressive collaboration between the two university programs, there is still room for improvement as requests are not uniformly distributed among all instructors; a more systematic integration of library instruction in the classroom is currently being written into Composition course learning outcomes.

The Elisabetta Morani Center for Teaching and Learning

As a complement to the instruction provided by the Frohring Library, the CTL offers a website of resources, and in 2024/25, it offered a series of roundtables and workshops – all aimed at familiarizing faculty with the various AI tools available to them and their students. The CTL AI-related events are helping instructors learn to ethically navigate, interact with, and incorporate LLMs into their classroom activities and assessments, as well as provide faculty with a space to compare notes, strategies, and opinions on existing and emerging LLMs, especially in the absence of official guidelines from the university.

The Writing Center

As composition courses change, so must the support the Writing Center provides to students. Similar to the "process over product" approach in coursework, Writing Center tutors must emphasize research, reading and annotation skills alongside the writing and revision work they have always undertaken. So, JCU's Writing Center will be expanding its repertoire to tutor students in critical reading and annotation skills, how to make use of AI reflection tools like Riffbot for brainstorming, and how to use other AI-based tools to create grammar or writing-based self quizzes. They will also be showing students ways to use LLMs to sort vast quantities of research. This new direction has already required further training and will continue to do so. Yet, nearly all tutors agree that we cannot shrink from this challenge.

Training in an AI-enabled world

John Cabot University can only benefit from repositioning its CTL as a pivotal resource centre in a brave new AI-enabled world. Therefore, it would be of substantial benefit for JCU to invest more resources into this program. The Writing Center and CTL could offer faculty strategic workshops on integrating LLMs into writing-intensive courses each semester. The objective should be sparking discussions on how JCU faculty could ethically adapt all writing assignments and assessments in an AI-enabled world, positioning the Writing Center, the Frohring Library, and the CTL as a coordinated, solution-oriented hub for pedagogical innovation at the university.

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AI and the Brain: Reflections on Writing Skills in the Light of AI

Helena Grünebaum

Abstract

AI-supported writing comes with several advantages but may also be a cause for deskilling cognitive abilities. In their survey among university students, Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt (2024) found a connection between strong writing skills and a more reflected AI use. Based on these findings, this article will answer the question of how participants in the survey address fears of deskilling cognitive abilities and in what way these fears relate to a strong fondness for writing in their own words. A mixed methods approach shows that students who express fears of deskilling tend to have a higher writing proficiency and fondness of their own style. The discussion addresses the potential role of writing centers in preventing deskilling.

Introduction

During the relatively short time that Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT have been on the market and available to a broad public now (roughly 2 years), the quality of their output has increased vastly. University students have been using the tools as support for their academic writing tasks since the beginning, as studies show (Unterpertinger 2024). The use cases range from brushing up grammar and spelling to having whole chapters written by AI. While in the past, LLMs were still facing some hard-to-miss problems like frequent hallucinations, inadequate sources, or linguistic inconsistency (Bender et al. 2021), today, roughly two years after their appearance, many of these issues have been addressed, which makes it increasingly harder to detect AI-generated text.

It seems that AI's writing skills are improving while our own competences are facing potential deterioration with increasing AI use. Rafner et al. (2021: 26) call this process *deskilling*: "generally, it describes the loss of professional skills due to technological or work practice changes". Deskilling is by no means a solely AI-related issue; throughout history, it has occurred at many points of industrial or technological progress. Unlike earlier occurrences, though, Rafner et al. (2021: 27) believe that deskilling through AI might be a special case since it will most likely affect every occupation to some extent in the near future.

In their article, Rafner et al. (2021) choose examples from economic and medical fields to demonstrate how professionals might be affected by deskilling. In their *Statement on Challenges Posed by Artificial Intelligence*, the German Ethics Council also refers to the dan-

gers of deskilling in various occupations (Deutscher Ethikrat 2023). Although it includes advice for the educational sector, the Ethics Council does not specifically address higher education, which Reinmann (2023) criticizes in her article. She argues that universities are especially threatened by deskilling because even though AI was originally supposed to aid in executing less demanding activities and allowing humans to focus on more complex tasks, the tools now interfere in those complex tasks, too.

> *"KI [kann] nun auch in Domänen eingesetzt werden [...], die bislang dem Menschen vorbehalten schienen: kreative, auf Wissensgenerierung abzielende Tätigkeiten wie zum Beispiel das Sammeln von Ideen, die Entwicklung von Problemlösungen, die Konzeption von Forschungsdesigns, die Erarbeitung von Erhebungsinstrumenten oder das Schreiben wissenschaftlicher Texte." (Reinmann 2023: 7).*

Particularly students who are still learning all these skills can be intimidated by a tool that can (for the moment) execute such tasks (seemingly) better than they can. Consequently, they might overly rely on the tools (Rafner et al. 2021: 27) in order to meet the high expectations that they are facing.

To counteract the heavy reliance on AI-generated knowledge, Rafner et al. (2021: 30) suggest three approaches: education, strengthening self-reliance, and encouraging collaboration with AI rather than competition. The last approach in particular requires a great amount of skill, which humans have to learn in often long and hard processes. This is where AI tools bring up another problem: Even if they only executed less cognitively demanding tasks (e. g. formulating sentences in a certain style), these tasks might be important steps within the learning process, necessary to reach higher levels of proficiency. So, if students outsourced these necessary steps in their writing process, would they still be able to reach a skill level that allows them to critically question AI-generated outputs in a collaborative setting?

As a matter of fact, many students use AI tools as support for various tasks in their academic writing processes. This does not mean, however, that they use the tools in a completely unreflected way (Hoffmann/Grünebaum/Schmidt 2024). In my article, I will continue from Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt's analysis of a survey among German students on their use of AI writing tools in academic writing processes. Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt found a positive correlation between a more reflected use of AI tools and higher writing proficiency. One question that remained unanswered in their article is why a strong fondness of being able to write in your own words seems to be the strongest indicator for reflected AI use. Following up on this question, I will analyze freeform answers collected in Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt's survey that contain topics of deskilling of writing-related skills. I will evaluate whether these critical comments match a high writing proficiency and a strong fondness of using your own words in writing and take a closer look at the fears that the students express.

Writing-Based Competences

Writing is not one self-contained competence but requires many different skills. Especially academic writing combines a number of cognitive processes that students (ideally) develop throughout the process of learning to write, among them critical reflection, generating knowledge through writing, understanding creative aspects of writing, and developing their own style or voice in writing.

The ability to critically reflect on the information we read in texts, no matter who (or what) wrote them, is an essential skill, especially when collaborating with AI tools. In order to create a *human in the loop* constellation, where humans are the final instance in a decision process (Rafner et al. 2021: 27 f), humans need to be able to assess the quality of the information given in an AI-generated text. While some people assign AI universal and unbiased knowledge (Bender et al. 2021), one of AI's greatest issues is bias. Even though the colossal amount of data that is being used to train LLMs might give the impression that all kinds of topics and perspectives are being represented equally, the statistical calculations reproduce what is most represented on the internet. And since certain websites that are highly represented in the data pool feature certain stereotypes, these stereotypes are frequently being reproduced by AI, which leads to distorted perspectives, underrepresentation of minorities, and avoidance of sensitive topics instead of objective discussions (Bender et al. 2021: 617). Critical reflection is therefore essential when writing with AI tools.

Writing itself may present a valuable tool in learning the skill of critical reflection. Writing has the potential to be more than a medium for documentation and passing on knowledge; it can be a tool for generating new knowledge (see Ortner 2000; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). Some researchers consider this form of epistemic-heuristic writing the highest art of writing that can be achieved (Ortner 2000). Others already see forms of knowledge generation in student writing (Buck/Limburg 2024). Writing a text like a term paper is a way for students to not only learn how to write but also to learn the information they process in the text. The knowledge they generate may not (yet) be innovative to the world, but it is new to them and instead of just reading about a topic, they learn to draw connections through writing. Thinking through writing is an essential skill in strengthening one's knowledge.

While creativity might not be considered a skill per se, it is an aspect of writing that becomes more prominent with practice. Students often have a hard time finding aspects of creativity in academic writing because of the constraints in form and content that they need to stick to. It requires a lot of creativity, however, to find a precise topic and compose a complex text from a vast amount of sources, opinions, and positions within a discourse. Further, creativity can also be seen when writers develop a personal style. Elbow (1998: 281–291) describes this style as a writer's voice. He argues that words that fit the writer have much more power than words that only fit the reader. When someone writes in their own voice, the text comes alive and represents the writer's true intentions. Even though AI tools are able to imitate certain writing styles, they may never be able to induce the emotions behind a text. Being able to express yourself through text and being proud of what you created in your own

texts could potentially strengthen people's confidence in working with and criticizing AI-generated text, as Rafner et al. (2021: 30) suggest.

As Reinmann (2023) states, deskilling can be understood as both the loss of skills due to a lack of practice, and the loss of a skill within a society when people are no longer required to build up the skill in the first place. The above-mentioned skills could all potentially get lost or replaced if AI takes over the writing process completely or in parts. Some students, however, are aware of this threat, as the data from Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt's (2024) survey show. In the next chapter I will summarize the original study and their results and pick up some questions they put up for discussion. Afterwards I will analyze the participants' comments under aspects of deskilling and the loss of abilities through AI use.

Previous Research

In August and September 2023, the Writing Center at Goethe-University Frankfurt (Germany), conducted a Germany-wide survey on the use of AI writing tools amongst university students[1]. The survey produced 3,997 valid questionnaires contributing to the analysis. Their aim was to gain insights into frequency, purposes, and reasons for using tools like ChatGPT, as well as the students' personal attitudes toward such tools. One major focus in their analysis was the correlation between writing skills and AI use. Their hypothesis was that students who already possess strong writing skills use AI assistance in a more reflected, focused, and restricted manner than students who have not (yet) gained that level of competence.

In order to assess the participants' writing skills, they used Golombek et al.'s (2018) questionnaire for assessing self-efficacy for self-regulation in academic writing and reduced it to ten items that still represented the three categories: planning, including task analysis and self-motivation; execution, including self-control and self-reflection; and reflection, including self-assessment and self-reaction (Hoffmann/Grünebaum/Schmidt 2024). Additionally, they created two items to ask for the participants' attitude towards their own writing: *I feel like I have my own style in academic writing* and *It is important to me to write texts in my own words.* Answers were given on a six-point Likert scale ranging from *completely applies (6) to does not apply at all (1).*

The results show that a higher level of writing competence indeed suggests a more reflected and deliberate use of AI tools among the participants. Surprisingly, the two added items for style and writing in their own words showed the strongest correlation with the students' reasons and purposes for AI use, indicating that students' identification with their writing has an influence on their use of AI tools. Based on these findings, Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt pose the question why the two items stand out so much compared to the

1 Here and in the following, all references to the Frankfurt survey are based on Hoffmann/Grünebaum/Schmidt (2024).

collection of items for self-regulation of the writing process, and suggest looking for an answer in the four freeform questions given in the survey.

For my analysis, I will modify the question and ask: How do participants in the survey address fears of deskilling cognitive abilities and in what way do these fears relate to a strong fondness for writing in their own words? The basis for my analysis will be the last question in the survey, which left room for the participants to comment on topics of their own choice: *Is there anything else you would like to say about AI writing tools?*

The Topic of Deskilling in Students' Comments

In order to approach the question stated above, I filtered the data received from the survey by two factors: Firstly, I selected only the participants who had answered the last question in the questionnaire (*Is there anything else you would like to say about AI writing tools?*). This reduced the dataset to 715 participants. Secondly, I used Kuckartz's (2022) method of inductive coding to categorize the comments that remained. Among the categories, a pattern including comments on fears and worries in connection with AI use and the loss of cognitive abilities emerged. This factor brought me down to a number of 87 participants which I used (1) for a quantitative analysis to compare them to the results from the complete dataset and (2) to analyze them further using Kuckartz's (2022) qualitative content analysis.

Quantitative Analysis:

In general, the selected group rates their writing skills slightly higher than the whole dataset. On the scale from 1 to 6, they score a median of 4.72 in self-regulation of the writing process compared to 4.37 for the total. Also, their assessments of the items for style and formulating in their own words rank significantly higher than the total, with a score of 4.64 in the selected group compared to 4.31 in the total dataset for style and a score of 5.50 for the selected group compared to 4.83 in the total dataset for formulating.

Among the 87 selected participants, 21 indicate that they have used ChatGPT before, which is a significantly smaller proportion in this group with 24.1% compared to 66% among the complete dataset. Initially, I intended to run the same analyses that Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt did with the complete set before, but since the number of people in this group who have used ChatGPT before is so small, looking at reasons and purposes of AI use among this group would not produce useful data. Instead, I looked at reasons for not using AI, which at least offers me a number of 66 participants. The most selected reason for not using AI is not seeing the need for it (73.8%). This position is directly followed by concerns about using AI (63.1%). Participants were being offered the option to explain these concerns in one of the following freeform questions: What do you find particularly difficult about using AI writing tools for university writing? Their answers cover the issue of quality because their expectations have not been met. Additionally, they explain that using AI tools did not feel right to them.

In a last step, as suggested in Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt (2024), I looked at some demographic data collected in the survey to find reasons for their critical attitude towards AI. My first approach was to compare the distribution of gender among the selected group and the whole dataset, which does not differ significantly (complete data: 38.9 % m, 58.7 % f, 2.4 % d; filtered group: 35.6 % m, 62.1 % f, 2.3 % d). Another option was to assume that the selected group consisted of more people who have worked in a writing center environment before and would therefore be familiar with theories on the value of writing. But again, with only 5 participants (5.7 %) with a writing center background among the selected group, the percentage does not differ significantly from the whole set with 3.8 %.

The last item that appeared useful in this analysis was the participants' study program. Within the whole dataset, 37.7 % of participants study in the social sciences, 34 % in the natural sciences and 30 % in the humanities (Hoffmann/Grünebaum/Schmidt 2024: 241). Among the selected group of people who express concern about deskilling, only 34.5 % study in the social sciences, 32.2 % in the natural sciences, and 44.8 % study in the humanities. Humanities clearly being the most represented field among the selected group might indicate that the participants who worry about deskilling tend to study in rather writing intensive and potentially text-focused programs. This might lead to stronger writing skills due to more experience. This supports the assumption that stronger writing skills and cherishing the ability to make choices of your own in writing results in a more critical view on AI use and seeing the potential dangers that come with it.

Qualitative Analysis:

After a quantitative check-up of the narrowed group of participants who mentioned some form of fear of losing cognitive abilities, I divided the comments into further sub-categories. Again, these were based on inductive topics found in the data. The number in parentheses is the number of codings for this category (mind that one comment can include multiple categories):

- Loss of thinking for yourself (35)
- Loss of learning (13)
  - Unlearn to write/not learn to write (14)
- Loss of your own style (15)
  - Loss of your writing-voice (1)
- Loss of writing for yourself (12)
- Loss of independence (15)
- Loss of creativity (8)

In order to understand what exactly the participants worry about when thinking about using AI, I will present selected examples from each category and discuss how the participants describe their thoughts on deskilling connected with AI use[2].

Loss of thinking for yourself

Within the selected samples, the aspect of thinking for yourself and the fear of losing it when using AI too much is most prominent. The following example shows that this participant is aware of the connection between thinking and writing. They describe how crucial the connection is but at the same time, how that does not mean a complete abstinence from AI:

> *"Writing is thinking. It is perhaps the most critical part of thinking. Taking writing away is likely going to cause a deficit in critical-thinking skills over time. I am very against AI tools as writing assistants for LEARNING and SCIENTIFIC purposes. For more repetitive and standard processes, I am okay with AI writing tools, e. g. for standard news writing, voicing your opinions, contacting people officially, etc. Once you know how to write for a certain purpose that is external, AI tools are going to offer a huge productivity boost. [...]. However, if the purpose of writing is to refine your thoughts and communicate something only you know inside your head, then we are doing ourselves a disservice over time by using AI tools to replace our thinking. [...]"*

With their statement *writing is thinking,* the respondent describes an effect that can be compared to Ortner's epistemic-heuristic writing, which he defines as finding clearance through writing, both for oneself and for others (Ortner 2000: 11). The respondent sees a connection between being able to write well and being able to think critically, which matches with Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt's previous findings. Then, the respondent describes different scenarios for where they could accept AI support. They describe news writing, voicing your opinion, and contacting people officially as *standard processes*, which is a questionable classification. On the opposite end, they see refining your thoughts and communicating your own ideas as essential tasks that should not be done by AI. While their idea of essential writing tasks should be revised, they generally understand the importance of writing as a way of developing cognitive abilities.

Another respondent emphasizes the importance of being taught how to write and think critically. Thinking through writing is not a skill that comes naturally but that needs practice and instruction (Ortner 2000). Additionally, they mention that we need those skills in order to critically reflect on AI texts:

2 Comments marked with a T were translated from German by the author. Communicative intentions were kept with respect to English grammar. The original comments are attached in the appendix.

> *T: "Writing and understanding texts by yourself should absolutely continue to be taught and practiced, or we will not be able to assess the quality of the AI outputs. So, no either or, but both are important: AI and writing and thinking for yourself."*

This participant understands that AI will be part of our daily lives, but that we still need to build a set of skills on our own. A *human-in-the-loop* model would probably match their idea of working with AI tools. Both examples show that the participants see a need for developing cognitive abilities while also learning to use AI tools.

Loss of learning

Closely connected to thinking through writing is learning through writing (Buck/Limburg 2023: 78 f). Participants describe that they learn more through writing tasks than through multiple-choice exams. In the following example, the participant reflects on their own experiences with term papers and exams. In this comment, the reader can watch the participant think actively while writing:

> *T: "I think term papers are a great way to learn. I have written plenty of term papers and of course, also exams. I only remember little from what I learned for my exams. 90 % of what I learned during research for my term papers is still in my head. I think that it's good that so far, AI is only capable of writing texts but not, as far as I know, generating a useful bibliography.*
>
> *Thereby, only writing is omitted but not research. On the other hand, it's essentially writing that makes me remember what I've learned. Difficult..."*

While the person starts out with an understanding of writing term papers equals better learning, they switch to the aspect of research. They assume that the learning process is not yet endangered as long as AI is not capable of creating bibliographies (i. e. doing the research for you). Then, by the end of the comment, they realize that they maybe underestimated the dangers coming from AI since they remember that writing might be the crucial aspect of learning through writing term papers. The expression "Difficult..." at the end of the comment emphasizes their inner conflict and their thinking process. Despite their own insecurity, this participant seems to understand that both doing research and writing are processes that enhance learning.

Unlearn to write/not learn to write

The next example describes the effects of deskilling well. The respondent is afraid of losing abilities that they have already learned if they stop practicing them:

> *T: "I don't even want to start using those tools because I'm afraid that I will unlearn how to write. And I really have no interest whatsoever in outsourcing my hard-*

earned cognitive abilities to some tool that I don't even own, and become dependent on it."

As Reinmann (2023: 4) explains, deskilling can happen both on a societal and on a personal level. This might imply what the respondent above describes as unlearning their skills. An important aspect mentioned here is the dependency on AI tools. While occasional support from a tool may not cause the loss of a skill, full dependency on it could promote deskilling. An essential question, especially for writing centers and everyone who teaches writing, is how much AI use is too much. Which skills do we absolutely need to learn for ourselves and which can be outsourced? And if AI does not take over our tasks, can it maybe support us in learning them ourselves?

Loss of your own style/Loss of your writing voice

In the next comment, the respondent addresses the topic of writing in your own style. While they use AI for non-writing tasks, they rely on their own strengths and their own style when it comes to writing:

T: "I think AI writing tools can totally be useful when it comes to collecting information, for example, but when I have to write a cohesive text for university, I would never use them, because I trust myself and my ability to write in my own words more. I don't know if I would ever admit to having AI write complete texts for me because it doesn't feel authentic."

An interesting aspect this person mentions is authenticity. Even though it is possible to command AI tools like ChatGPT or DeepL to assume a certain style, they may never use the exact words a real person would have chosen. While objectively, AI might master a scientific style better than a novice student, perfection is not always the goal of a writing task. A personal – if not by definition perfect – style can make a text more interesting than a generic style (Elbow 1998). The author of the following comment adds to that assumption:

T: " [...] Yes: for people who are struggling with expressing themselves, it can be useful. But wouldn't it be better to support these people in finding their own voice and their own style? [...]"

Even though they see why people turn to AI for support in formulating a cohesive text, this participant understands the importance of learning it for yourself. By mentioning people's own voice, they demonstrate an understanding of the importance of authenticity and personal expression in writing.

Loss of writing for yourself

The next comment includes two relevant points: the writing process as a valuable goal and control in writing:

> *T: "At least in my subject, writing itself is an integral part of academic working and thinking. I see no use in not going through this process yourself. I don't write to record a result but the text is also the result. That might be different in other subjects! Also, I think about the use of support, i. e. for spelling, style, and grammar, less critically. I just don't need them myself and rather have more control of my text."*

According to the questionnaire, this respondent is studying linguistic and cultural studies, which is probably a writing-heavy program. They might have quite a lot of experience with academic writing and have reached a stage where they experience forms of epistemic-heuristic writing. Hence, they see the value in the writing process in addition to the product. This experience may give them confidence in their own writing. Being in control of their own writing is an advantage to them rather than a possible weakness in contrast to AI's seeming perfection.

This next person, too, sees the value in writing for themselves and has also experienced thinking through writing:

> *"I'm concerned about the pressure to deliver texts in great speed because of the possibility of getting support from AI tools. I like writing myself because I enjoy the process and it helps me think. I fear AI writing tools put more pressure towards standardized writing."*

They describe a potentially new category of fear that hasn't been considered here: The fear of unequal treatment. Even if it takes effort to get high-quality results from AI through prompt-engineering, writing with AI support may still be more efficient than writing for yourself, depending on your level of expertise. At least at this point in time, with no tools for detecting AI and still no hard rules on AI use at most universities, or alternatively on the job market, this may lead to unfair treatment of people who deliberately decide against the use of AI.

Loss of independence

What has been mentioned by others before about dependency and independence is expressed in the following comment:

> *T: "Even if I think that ChatGPT is very useful, you've got to be careful not to get too dependent on it. If all of a sudden, for every little thing (in general, not just for university) I use ChatGPT instead of quickly thinking for myself and writing the short e-mail or the like, you lose your independence and also get used to a certain mental laziness. It's always more comfortable to let the AI write than to formulate*

> *yourself but that makes you lose the competence to write texts on a good level over time. So, as a source of inspiration and a tool that makes your own sentences better, I find it legitimate. When you have everything written by AI out of laziness, it is not good for you in the long run."*

Again, this comment raises the question of which skills to keep and which to leave to AI. If we imagine AI writing tools as just another tool like, for example, a calculator, one could argue that it is no longer necessary to learn writing because we can always access AI tools on our phones, just like we always have a calculator with us now. And yet, we still learn basic mathematics in school, so we are not dependent on a calculator in spontaneous situations. Some people, then, specialize in mathematics and become professionals, who use calculators as support in complex tasks, while they have understood the basics and the mechanics behind their calculations. AI might become such a tool as well. Everyone should learn basic writing skills that are necessary in everyday situations. Those people who specialize in writing or whose professions require strong writing skills need to gain more complex knowledge before they can use AI as a support in certain situations.

Loss of creativity

Lastly, participants also mention the aspect of creativity in writing:

> *T: "In my opinion that causes a lack of encouraging creativity in writing and due to a computer-generated answer, the process that is especially important in writing is shortened."*

This respondent considers creativity an especially important aspect of writing. As mentioned before, students often have a hard time recognizing creativity in academic writing. Since AI tools progress more and more into the domain of creative, innovative work that was supposed to remain with humans, losing the ability of creative thinking could threaten the human agency on a text. Consequently, people could start wondering what use there is in writing at all.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of my qualitative analysis show that some of the participants in Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt's survey express concerns about aspects of deskilling in different writing-related skills. They are aware of the connection between writing and thinking and see their ability to think for themselves threatened by excessive dependency on AI tools. While some participants still use AI tools for certain tasks, they emphasize that their autonomy remains valuable to them and that they do not want to become dependent on the tools. Participants also express concerns in connection with their own writing style and voice. This

shows that once they have reached a level of writing proficiency that allows them to identify their own style, they are not willing to have it replaced by AI-generated text. Lastly, participants see and cherish the aspects of creativity in the writing process. Extensive AI support, in their opinion, reduces the possibility for creative expression and composition of academic texts.

Even though these findings demonstrate a reflected and responsible attitude towards AI, the group of students who contributed to the corpus makes up only 2.2 % of the whole data collected from the survey. Therefore, these individual ideas cannot be generalized to a broader society. On the other hand, the concerns expressed in these comments came from the participants without any suggestion in the questionnaire. The concerns depicted above are an intrinsic reflection and should not be ignored despite the small number.

An essential aspect in the comments is that even though the students express worries and insecurities concerning AI tools, they do not all refrain from using them. Instead, they are aiming at a form of collaboration with the tools. A possible approach to a well-balanced collaboration could be to use AI as support in achieving certain skill levels instead of having it execute them for us. This is a task that could define the future of writing centers.

Buck and Limburg (2024) demand that writing skills should still be taught despite the emergence of AI tools. Additionally, they see a need for AI skills to be strengthened in order to adapt to a changing society. As the results in Hoffmann, Grünebaum, and Schmidt (2024) suggest, stronger writing proficiency might lead to a more reflected use of AI writing tools. The results from my quantitative analysis support this assumption since the participants who expressed concerns about deskilling seem to have better writing skills compared to the complete data set. Writing centers might therefore face two major tasks in the future: (1) continuing to teach writing skills in order to enable students to develop agency and authority towards AI tools and (2) developing strategies for AI support in learning these skills. Instead of completely replacing certain steps in the writing process and thereby depriving us of the opportunity to learn the skills that come with them, AI could become a tool in making these learning processes easier for us.

As Reinmann (2023: 10) suggests, we need to define essential tasks that cannot be replaced by AI. One of these skills is writing because it enables us to become reflected thinkers. So, while some practices in writing might change due to AI development, our own writing skills should never be completely replaced by AI[3].

3 I would like to thank the AI-Colloquium at the Writing Center at Goethe-University Frankfurt for the many inspiring discussions during the creation of this article, several of which have contributed to it fundamentally.

Appendix: Student comments in their original language

Loss of thinking for yourself	Writing is thinking. It is perhaps the most critical part of thinking. Taking writing away is likely going to cause a deficit in critical-thinking skills over time. I am very against AI tools as writing assistants for LEARNING and SCIENTIFIC purposes. For more repetitive and standard processes, I am okay with AI writing tools, e. g. for standard news writing, voicing your opinions, contacting people officially, etc. Once you know how to write for a certain purpose that is external, AI tools are going to offer a huge productivity boost. This is like everyday people using calculators to do math. However, if the purpose of writing is to refine your thoughts and communicate something only you know inside your head, then we are doing ourselves a disservice over time by using AI tools to replace our thinking. This is like a Mathematics PhD student who still needs to use a calculator to do basic derivatives, and their thesis is about complex derivatives. We are only hurting ourselves in the long term. Eigenes Schreiben und eigenes Textverständnis sollte unbedingt weiterhin gelehrt und geübt werden, sonst können wir die Qualität des KI-Outputs ja nicht beurteilen. Also kein entweder oder sondern beides ist wichtig: KI und selber schreiben und denken können
Loss of learning	Ich finde Hausarbeiten sind eine tolle Art zu lernen. Ich habe schon einige Hausarbeiten geschrieben und natürlich auch Klausuren. Von den meisten Klausuren habe ich wenig von dem was ich gelernt habe behalten. Die dinge die ich beim recherchieren für eine Hausarbeit gelernt habe sind zu 90 % noch da. Ich denke dass es gut ist, dass die KI´s bisher nur in der Lage sind Texte zu verfassen, nicht aber, soweit ich informiert bin, eine brauchbare Quellenangabe zu erstellen. Somit entfällt nur das selber schreiben, nicht aber die Recherche. Auf der Anderen seite ist es ja auch das schreiben was das gelernte letztendlich einprägt. Schwierig...
Unlearn to write/not learn to write	Ich möchte gar nicht erst anfangen, diese Tools zu verwenden, weil ich befürchte, dadurch das Schreiben zu verlernen. Und ich habe wirklich keinerlei Interesse daran, meine hart erarbeiteten geistigen Fähigkeiten an irgendein Tool, das mir nicht einmal gehört, auszulagern und mich davon abhängig zu machen.
Loss of your own style	Ich finde KI Schreibtools sind durchaus hilfreich wenn es bspw. um die Sammlung von Informationen geht, aber wenn ich einen zusammenhängenden Text für die Uni schreiben soll würde ich diese nie benutzen, da ich mir selbst und meiner Fähigkeit in eigenen Worten zu schreiben mehr vertraue. Ich weiß nicht ob ich mich jemals darauf einlassen würde, ganze Texte von KI für mich schreiben zu lassen, weil es sich nicht authentisch anfühlt.
Loss of your writing-voice	Ich finde es sehr schade, dass wir in einer Situation sind, in der wir mit „Schreibtools" konfrontiert werden, deren Textgrundlage (im Falle von zB ChatGPG) auf aus dem Internet gescannten (= von verschiedenen Autoren gestohlenen) Textstücken basiert. Natürlich verarbeiten wir alle bei der wissenschaftlichen Recherche irgendwo Texte anderer Autoren, aber auf solche Programme zurückzugreifen, die so respektlos mit geistigem Eigentum ungefragter Drittparteien (was auch eigenen Stil etc betrifft) umgehen, finde ich sehr bedenklich. Was ist daran noch wissenschaftliches Arbeiten? **Ja: es kann für Leute, die Probleme damit haben, sich auszudrücken, hilfreich sein. Aber wäre es nicht besser, diese Personen darin zu unterstützen, ihre eigene Stimme und ihren eigenen Stil zu finden**? Für mich sind KI Texte einfach unehrenhaft und nicht mit dem Anspruch, den ich an wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten habe, zu vereinbaren.

Loss of writing for yourself	Zumindest in meinem Fach ist das Schreiben selbst ein elementarer Bestandteil des akademischen Arbeitens und Denkens. Ich sehe keinen Sinn darin, diesen Prozess nicht selbst zu durchlaufen. Ich schreibe nicht, um ein Ergebnis festzuhalten, sondern der Text ist mit das Ergebnis. In anderen Fächern mag das anders aussehen! Ebenso sehe ich die Nutzung von Unterstützung, z. B. für Rechtschreibung, Stil und Grammatik, weniger kritisch. Ich brauche sie nur selbst nicht dringend und habe lieber mehr Kontrolle über meinen Text. I'm concerned about the pressure to deliver texts in great speed because of the possibility of getting support from AI tools. I like writing myself because I enjoy the process and it helps me think. I fear AI writing tools put more pressure towards standardized writing.
Loss of independence	Auch wenn ich ChatGPT sehr nützlich finde, muss man aufpassen, dass man nicht zu abhängig davon wird. Wenn ich auf einmal für jede Kleinigkeit (generell, nicht nur für Uni) ChatGPT benutze anstatt schnell selber nachzudenken und die kurze Email o. ä. zu schreiben, verliert man seine Selbstständigkeit und gewöhnt sich auch eine gewisse Denkfaulheit an. Es ist ja immer bequemer die ki schreiben zu lassen, als selbst zu formulieren aber dadurch verliert man über Zeit auch die Kompetenz selber Texte auf einem guten Niveau zu schreiben. Also als Inspirationsquelle und Tool wodurch die eigenen Sätze besser werden finde ich es legitim. Wenn man sich aus Faulheit alles von KI schreiben lässt, ist es langfristig nicht gut für einen.
Loss of creativity	Meiner Meinung nach wird dadurch die Kreativität beim Schreiben nicht mehr gefördert und durch eine Computer generierte Antwort der Prozess, der beim Schreiben besonders wichtig ist, verkürzt.

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From Pencil to Prompt: Navigating AI in the Future of Writing Centres

Lena Leimgruber

Abstract

This article explores how writing centres can adapt to the growing influence of AI tools like ChatGPT, following discussions at the 2024 EWCA conference. The aim is to contextualise these insights within the context of the Chalmers Writing Centre (CWC) at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg (Sweden) to explore how they can inform future development of writing centres. The report highlights the importance of writing centres evolving as hubs for AI literacy and future skills (Kotsiou et al. 2022). Drawing on discussions about AI at the Peer Tutor Day and conference presentations about AI, the article reflects on the future of European writing centres in an age of digital transformation. The structure covers keynote insights, relevant conference presentations and actionable takeaways for improving practices at CWC and beyond.

Introduction

The European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) hosted its 2024 conference from June 11th to 14th at the University of Limerick, Ireland. The conference aimed to evaluate regional and transnational developments in writing centre research and practice while envisioning future directions. Two colleagues and I represented the Chalmers Writing Centre (CWC) at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg (Sweden). Our mission was to gather ideas on how to develop and improve our writing centre work. This article aims to contextualise the CWC within the broader themes discussed at the EWCA conference. By positioning our current practices in the context of other writing centre practices, this highlights how the insights gained can enhance practices and contribute to the ongoing evolution of the writing centre at Chalmers.

The title of this article, "From Pencil to Prompt: Navigating AI in the Future of Writing Centres" reflects the primary focus of this article: exploring the impact of AI tools in writing centres, particularly in the context of insights gained from attending the 2024 EWCA conference. The article's central aim is to reflect on how the discussions and workshops at the conference inform practices at CWC and within European writing centres more generally.

The first section of the article will outline key discussions from the Peer Tutor Day and workshops and talks at the EWCA conference. This creates the space for a deeper exploration of AI in writing centre practices. I will connect the input received in the different talks to

potential activities that writing centres could establish in their efforts to react to the changing nature of writing centres. We know that AI tools are increasingly integrated into writing practices, so it is important to do so in writing support services as well. By focusing on the practical insights shared at the conference, the article will connect these discussions to the larger theme of AI's role in shaping the future of writing centres.

Peer Tutor Day at EWCA 2024

The Peer Tutor Day, organised by Franziska Liebetanz and Anja Poloubotko, was an engaging event where peer writing tutors from Europe gathered to share experiences and discuss the future of writing centres. The day included sessions on various topics, one of the most prominent being the impact of AI tools like ChatGPT on tutoring practices. Discussions on AI were interwoven throughout the day's activities, with many tutors exploring how these tools could both challenge and enhance their work. The conversation on AI framed much of the day's activities, including the ways in which peer tutors identify themselves, support student writing and shape future writing centre strategies.

We began the day by making posters to present our writing centres. From Ireland, the Regional Writing Centre at the University of Limerick and Academic Writing Support at Maynooth University shared their contributions. From the Netherlands, Radboud Writing Lab at Radboud University and Skills Lab at Utrecht University showcased their work. Germany was represented by Zentrum für Lehre und Lernen at Europa University in Frankfurt Oder; from Sweden, the Chalmers Writing Centre provided its insights.

A major topic of discussion was the impact of AI on writing centres (see also De Matas 2023; Werse 2023). There were diverse opinions on how AI tools like ChatGPT might affect the future of writing centres. Some participants suggested that writing centres should integrate AI into their practices and train both tutors and students in its usage. This would enable them to guide students effectively on how to use these tools responsibly. Others raised concerns about the potential "death" of writing centres due to AI, questioning whether writing centres should set regulations or even ban AI tools altogether (and if this would even be possible).

Throughout the day, the topic of AI was revisited frequently, with questions such as "what about coaching on the use of AI?", "what happens to giving feedback when using AI?" and "the possibility of the death of the writing centre in the presence of AI?" being hotly debated. Opinions varied on whether to ban AI completely or find ways to integrate it constructively into writing centre practices. Most participants promoted an integrative approach, suggesting that AI could serve as a valuable tool in the writing process if used thoughtfully. For instance, some advocated for training students to use AI tools as co-coaches, helping them brainstorm ideas, draft texts and refine their writing through iterative feedback. Rather than fearing AI, these proponents saw it as an opportunity for writing

centres to teach AI literacy, guiding students on how to responsibly and critically engage with these technologies to improve their writing.

One key discussion of the day revolved around the approach of tutoring, whether it should be non-directive or directive. A non-directive approach emphasises the tutor's role as a facilitator, where the tutor refrains from suggesting solutions or providing explicit direction (see also Corbett 2013). Refraining from suggestions, the tutor encourages the student to explore solutions autonomously by asking questions about the texts. Many tutors emphasised the importance of problem-solving together with students rather than simply telling them what to do. This approach fosters a collaborative learning environment and is encapsulated by the philosophy that "in teaching we learn, in learning we teach", which represents the reciprocal nature of tutoring.

Our host, the Regional Writing Centre (RWC) at the University of Limerick, adopts a non-directive approach to tutoring, meaning that tutors do not intervene directly in students' papers by editing or suggesting specific wording. Instead, they ask guiding questions about meaning, structure or interpretation ("do I understand correctly that...?"), helping students recognise and address their own writing challenges. This understanding aligns with the definition of non-directive tutoring in Ryan and Zimmerelli's Bedford Guide for Peer Tutors (2015). The RWC at the University of Limerick also uses social media extensively, for example employing funny memes and videos to engage students. Additionally, they produce a weekly newsletter to keep the community informed and connected. Later in this article, I will discuss the potential of AI in supporting marketing strategies for writing centres, which was not something discussed at the Peer Tutor Day, but important, nonetheless.

As a result of these discussions, several action items emerged for the Chalmers Writing Centre. At the time of the conference, there were no formal workshops or initiatives in place at CWC. However, there had been ongoing discussions about the need for such programs to enhance peer tutor development and student support. Attending the EWCA conference marked a significant step forward as it provided food for thought to create new workshops and initiatives. The discussions around AI, in particular, highlighted the importance of integrating AI literacy into our offerings, ensuring that these new programs are aligned with current trends and technologies in academic writing support. We found it very important to create more workshops and meetings for peer tutors to foster continuous learning and collaboration. Additionally, implementing initiatives like workshops and writing retreats would provide students with additional support and resources. This, then, would promote both the centre's presence and visibility as well as the overall effectiveness of the writing centre.

Presentation Insights

I attended various presentations selected on their relevance to key areas of interest for the Chalmers Writing Centre. Below, I summarise the key takeaways from some of these presentations to examine how they can inform and improve practices at the CWC.

Redefining Writing Centers in the Age of AI: Embracing Their Role as 'Sponsors of Future Skills' at Universities (Isabella Buck, RheinMain University of Applied Sciences)

Buck's keynote addressed the transformative potential of AI tools like ChatGPT for writing centres, arguing that these advancements should not be seen as threats but as opportunities for writing centres to redefine their roles within universities. Buck echoed the sentiments of Lunsford and Ede (2011), who noted that while writing centres might occasionally find safe harbours, their true nature lies in continually seeking ways to expand their effectiveness. Writing centres, Buck argued, should evolve to become key agents in developing AI literacy and other essential future skills, often referred to as 21st-century skills. This aligns with Anson's (2022) perspective, which emphasises that writing centres must help students understand how AI-generated texts fit into the broader system of writing, rules and values, and guide them in using these tools responsibly.

Buck further stressed that writing centres must include larger skills like self-management, lifelong learning and higher-order thinking. These core values of academic writing include metacognition and critical thinking, for instance. This is in line with Kotsiou et al. (2022), who define future skills as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, values and competencies that prepare learners to thrive in an uncertain future. Writing centres must therefore take on a new role in nurturing a broader spectrum of skills that respond to rapidly changing educational frameworks. This shift necessitates a comprehensive transformation in how writing centres operate, positioning them as hubs for developing a wide range of future skills in an era of rapid technological change.

The insights gained from Buck's keynotes significantly inform the practices at the Chalmers Writing Centre. Buck's emphasis on integrating AI literacy and future skills aligned with current initiatives at CWC to incorporate digital tools and technologies into academic support services. Concrete examples of digital tools that could be integrated include AI-driven writing assistants like Grammarly or ChatGPT, which help students refine their existing drafts. Additionally, incorporating technologies like citation management software (for instance, Zotero) and collaborative writing platforms (such as Google Docs) could enhance the writing process. However, integrating AI tools also raises ethical questions, such as when AI assistance crosses the line from support to authorship, making it crucial to provide guidance on responsible use. These tools, alongside AI training sessions, would equip students with the skills needed to navigate the constantly evolving academic landscape. Implementing AI training sessions and workshops could help students develop crucial competencies that were increasingly relevant in today's technological landscape. Such

training could involve structured workshops where students and tutors engage with AI tools, for example by exploring their benefits and limitations. Additionally, guided experimentation, where tutors have dedicated time to test AI tools in writing scenarios, could help them develop informed strategies for supporting students while ensuring ethical use. Providing clear guidelines on when and how AI assistance remains the writer's own work would also be an essential component of these initiatives.

We're in it Together: Communities of Embodied Intelligence (Julie Nelson Christoph, Regina Duthely, University of Puget Sound, and Alba Newmann Holmes, Swarthmore College)

This presentation focused on the importance of collaboration in writing assignments, peer review processes, and the thoughtful integration of generative AI. Nelson Christoph emphasised the need for human interaction in writing centres and discussed various attitudes towards AI, from prohibition to critical exploration. Duthely spoke about the significance of faculty-tutor collaboration and embedding writing centre activities within course curricula to create a learning community. She stressed the need for strategic literacies and meaningful partnerships between the writing centre and faculty members.

However, such integration often encounters specific challenges. Faculty resistance may stem from concerns about time constraints, a perceived overlap with their teaching responsibilities or uncertainty about the writing centre's expertise in handling discipline-specific content. Scheduling issues can arise, particularly when aligning writing support with the varied timelines and deliverables of different courses. Additionally, establishing a shared understanding of academic writing across disciplines requires ongoing dialogue and adaptability. Newmann Holmes addressed these complexities by framing writing centre work as a fellowship, highlighting how structural diversity among staff can foster a sense of community and promote collaborative solutions. She advocated for reflection, listening and making the writing centre a welcoming space.

Action items that could be beneficial for the Chalmers Writing Centre include organising workshops and peer-review sessions, as well as gathering student feedback through various methods. Additionally, strengthening collaboration with faculty could enhance the centre's services, particularly in response to the growing presence of AI in writing. Collecting feedback on faculty and student expectations regarding AI tools could help the writing centre adapt its support strategies, ensuring its services remain relevant in this evolving landscape.

From Plagiarism to Productivity: ChatGP (Tim Wiesner & Griet Coupé, Radboud University)

Wiesner and Coupé led an engaging workshop on effectively utilising ChatGPT in academic writing. They emphasised its thoughtful use and the distinction between novice and expert users. They introduced a step-by-step guide for peer tutors on how to integrate ChatGPT as a co-coach in tutoring sessions. The process they suggested begins with students entering

their own text into ChatGPT and observing the changes made, specifically analysing how these edits affected academic style, that is, whether they improved or worsened the writing. Students then repeated this cycle two to five times to refine both the AI's output and their understanding of effective academic writing. The final step encouraged students to develop their own framework for evaluating the AI's suggestions, focusing on what to look for and how to adjust the text to improve its quality. This iterative approach not only built critical evaluation skills but also highlighted the importance of keeping human judgment at the forefront. The workshop further addressed the balance between fear of and over-reliance on AI, offering strategies to help students engage with AI tools productively while maintaining their autonomy as writers.

A key discussion point that arose during the workshop revolved around the adaptability of AI programs like ChatGPT, which improve with every prompt submitted. This encourages engaging thoughtfully with AI, as each interaction refines the quality of its responses. Participants noted that while AI-generated feedback can offer valuable insights, particularly in identifying structural weaknesses or suggesting stylistic improvements, it is most effective when paired with human feedback. The unique "real-people impact" of peer tutors or advisors provides a depth of understanding, empathy and contextual awareness that AI cannot (yet) replicate (see also Lee & Moore 2024).

Action items that could be beneficial based on this workshop discussion include developing guidelines for effectively incorporating AI-generated feedback alongside human feedback in writing support. Additionally, offering training sessions for peer tutors and students on how to critically engage with AI tools to make sure they are used as complementary resources rather than replacements for human interaction, could enhance writing centre practices. Finally, gathering student and tutor perspectives on their experiences with AI-assisted writing could help create and maintain best practices for integrating these technologies into academic support.

EWCA 2024 & the Writing Centre at Chalmers University of Technology

The insights gained from the EWCA 2024 conference offer valuable opportunities to refine and advance practices at the Chalmers Writing Centre. One significant takeaway from the conference was the potential for AI to be integrated into structured tutoring sessions to support students' writing development.

At CWC, adopting a methodology that guides students through iterative use of AI tools like ChatGPT could be implemented as part of structured tutoring sessions or workshops. For example, a session might begin with the student inputting a section of their draft into ChatGPT, accompanied by a prompt such as "Improve this paragraph for clarity and academic tone while preserving the original meaning". The student would then analyse the AI-generated revisions by comparing what has changed after AI's feedback. The tutor would guide the student in assessing the changes by asking some questions: "Did the AI enhance the academic style?" or "Were any critical ideas altered or lost?". This analysis encourages students to evaluate the AI's suggestions rather than simply accepting them. Next, the stu-

dent could refine their original draft based on insights gained from both the AI, their own critique and the feedback given by the tutor. Repeating this process a few times is meant to reinforce the iterative nature of writing, with the goal of improving both the text and the student's analytical skills.

Writing centres might offer handouts or digital guides that include examples of effective prompts, strategies for iterative interaction with AI and critical questions to refine its use. These could highlight common pitfalls, such as relying too heavily on AI-generated text without revision or failing to critically assess the accuracy of AI responses. Reflective questions – such as "What changes improved clarity?" or "Did the AI misinterpret any of my ideas?" – could help students engage with AI more thoughtfully. By combining these steps with targeted human feedback, students enhance their written work while developing essential critical thinking and future skills (Kotsiou et al. 2022).

Another key theme from the conference was the importance of comprehensive training for peer tutors. Various presentations emphasised that writing centres should consider implementing a structured training program for our peer tutors (see also Clarence 2018). This program could include modular training sessions and regular meetings to address various aspects of tutoring, from accommodating neurodiversity to utilising AI tools effectively. Such a program would ensure that our peer tutors are well-prepared to support the diverse needs of our student population. To integrate AI tool use into existing peer tutor training, writing centres could develop a dedicated module that problematises the effective and ethical use of AI in academic writing support. This module might begin with an introduction to the capabilities and limitations of tools like ChatGPT to examine how these tools can assist rather than replace human judgment. Tutors could experiment with prompts to understand how AI generates content and evaluate the quality of AI responses in various writing scenarios. Regular meetings could be used to share best practices and troubleshoot challenges that arise when incorporating AI into tutoring. Feedback from these sessions would improve the training program as continuously talking about related issues makes tutors responsive to both technological advancements and the evolving needs of students. Surely, integrating these strategies could potentially equip tutors to use AI tools and support them in supporting students' critical thinking skills and self-reliance.

The conference also underscored the importance of strategic marketing and visibility for writing centres (see also Bowles 2019). The effective marketing strategies discussed, including the use of social media and engaging content, provide a blueprint for enhancing CWC's presence. By launching targeted social media campaigns, creating engaging content and collaborating with the university's communication office, we can improve our visibility and better communicate the value of our services to the university community. These efforts can be supported using AI. To give some examples, AI can assist writing centres in their marketing efforts by automating content generation for social media posts by creating engaging and tailored content that matches student interests. Also, AI tools can help draft promotional material and suggest appropriate hashtags or language based on trends. Additionally, AI can analyse engagement metrics and quantitative student feedback which could

then be used to create improved marketing strategies. For example, AI can identify the most requested services and help tailor messaging around those needs. Finally, AI can assist in creating templates for newsletters or event promotions, which could help save time for the team.

Finally, the importance of faculty-tutor collaboration was a recurring theme in the presentations (see also Ferrer 2012). We can integrate this insight by conducting in-class workshops and embedded tutoring sessions to integrate writing support within course curricula. Additionally, providing training for faculty on effective collaboration with writing tutors can help create a cohesive learning environment and ensure that writing support is an integral part of the academic experience at Chalmers University of Technology.

The Future of European Writing Centres

The expansion of writing centres across European universities over the past 15 years reflects the growing recognition of the critical role these centres play in supporting student writing and academic success. However, compared to the well-established history of writing centres in the USA, European writing centres are still in a phase of development and transformation. This raises essential questions about the future of European writing centres: What directions should we take to remain relevant, responsive and effective? How should we navigate the educational shifts, global challenges and digital transformations reshaping the landscape of higher education?

These EWCA presentations suggest that the rise of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, poses both challenges and opportunities for writing centres, with one key theme being the impact of digital transformation on writing centre practices. On one hand, AI has the potential to streamline certain writing processes by offering students quick feedback and generating first drafts. In light of this, writing centres must adapt to this new reality by positioning themselves as essential guides in the thoughtful and responsible use of AI. The workshop on ChatGPT led by Wiesner and Coupé highlighted how writing centres can remain indispensable by teaching students how to critically engage with AI, rather than relying on it as a crutch. At the WC, we can implement this by integrating AI literacy into our tutoring sessions to make sure that students use these tools to enhance their writing, rather than replacing the intellectual effort that writing requires. As discussed earlier, AI can be integrated into tutoring sessions by guiding students through the process of revision and improvement rather than generating final drafts. For example, next to their own feedback and suggestions, tutors can use AI tools to help students identify areas for improvement in structure, coherence/cohesion and argumentation, so that students then make the changes themselves. AI can also offer suggestions for stronger word choice or clarify vague statements, but students should be encouraged to critically assess and adapt those suggestions to see whether the changes reflect what they had in mind during the writing process.

Lastly, visibility and outreach are crucial for the future of European writing centres. As discussed during the presentations, writing centres need to actively market their services and mark their presence within the academic community. The effective marketing strategies shared by speakers at the conference serve as a model for how we at WC can enhance our own visibility. Whether through social media, newsletters or on-campus events, we must continuously promote the value of the writing centre to both students and faculty, so we are seen as a resource rather than an afterthought.

Writing centres have long been spaces of academic support, but to remain effective, they must evolve in response to the needs of those they serve: students. A recent MA thesis, which examines students' experiences and expectations with academic writing support services, discusses the importance of integrating the student voice into the ongoing development of these centres (Leimgruber 2024). One of the key findings of the research was that students not only seek guidance on specific writing issues – grammar and structure – but also articulate clear expectations for how the service could be improved. From requesting longer sessions for complex tasks like thesis writing, to highlighting the importance of having multiple advising sessions throughout the semester, students are attuned to the kinds of support that would better align with their academic needs. Students' motivation to engage with writing centres is shaped by their belief in the usefulness of these sessions and their confidence in receiving adequate support. When their expectations are not met, students may begin to question the value of writing centres as a reliable resource. By listening to students and actively incorporating their feedback into service design, writing centres can enhance the effectiveness of their support, leading to better academic outcomes. Writing centres should be seen as dynamic, responsive entities; they are constantly evolving entities. The thesis advocates for a responsive approach and suggests that writing centres must seek to understand students' unique needs if they aim to remain relevant in a changing academic landscape.

This need to constantly adapt to new challenges becomes even more crucial in the context of AI tools like ChatGPT, where students may bring their own attitudes, concerns or misconceptions about AI and its role in writing. Students may expect tutors to help them develop critical AI literacy skills, addressing concerns such as over-reliance on AI tools or issues of authenticity. Writing centres can respond to these concerns by providing guidance on how to effectively integrate AI into the writing process while maintaining academic integrity. By listening to students and actively incorporating their feedback, writing centres can enhance their support and remain responsive to evolving academic needs and the growing presence of AI in education. This responsiveness aligns with current debates about incorporating AI in writing support. If we acknowledge AI as a tool to complement human advising, centres can free up resources to focus on personalised support, addressing students' individual and collective academic concerns while providing high quality service. AI tools could also be used when providing immediate, preliminary feedback on issues like grammar, style and clarity (Song & Song 2023). Students could consult with and receive feedback by AI prior to the session, which would enable writing centres to focus their human expertise on

deeper feedback, such as refining arguments, improving coherence and critical thinking. As a result of this dual feedback routine, the overall quality of the writing process is improved.

Conclusion

In summary, the key insights from the EWCA 2024 conference highlight the importance of integrating AI thoughtfully and enhancing peer tutor training to improve writing centre practices. The conference underscored the value of staying connected with the wider writing centre community and remaining adaptable to emerging trends and technologies. In conclusion, the future of European writing centres, including the Chalmers Writing Centre, will be shaped by our ability (and willingness) to adapt to digital advancements, meet the needs of diverse student groups and position ourselves as essential parts of the academic ecosystem. By learning from the experiences of our peers and implementing the innovative ideas discussed at the EWCA 2024 conference, we can continue to evolve and remain relevant in the changing landscape of higher education. Employing the strategies and ideas discussed, the CWC can continue to enhance its services, better support students and maintain a vibrant academic community. Attending conferences like the EWCA cannot be underestimated in its importance in terms of opportunities for learning and collaboration. It is these exchanges that contribute to the continued growth and success of writing centres.

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Statements on the Development Status of German Writing Centers

Fridrun Freise & Nora Hoffmann

Abstract

While the first comprehensive survey of German writing centers conducted in 2023 (Hoffmann/Freise 2024) revealed that 71% of the respondents were at least partially funded permanently, answers to the final open-ended question, which asked respondents to assess the current status of their writing center, revealed a less positive assessment of the establishment of writing centers. This article analyzes these statements and contextualizes them with the corresponding quantitative findings, covering the thematic categories of institutional placement, resources, offerings, demands and statements on issues relevant to writing centers. The result is an ambivalent picture of positive and negative aspects of institutionalization at German writing centers.

Introduction

German writing support facilities (WSF) have spread quickly over the past 30 years. While Bielefeld and Bochum were the first to introduce the US-American concept of writing centers to Germany in the 1990s, many new WSF have been established with third-party funding from the Quality Pact for Teaching since 2012. Studies conducted in 2015/16 (Bromley 2023) and 2017 (Hoffmann 2019) found 85 WSF in Germany (Bromley 2023: 13) and 70 WSF in other German-speaking countries (Hoffmann 2019: 16). After this startup boom, the future of German WSF seemed uncertain at the end of the temporary funding by the Quality Pact for Teaching in 2020 that financed at least 43% of the centers fully or partly (Hoffmann 2017: 22). To find out how many WSF remained after 2020, how secure their operations were, and the scope of their activities, we conducted the first comprehensive Germany wide survey of WSF in 2023 (Hoffmann/Freise 2024).

Our study revealed a high number of 146 WSF in Germany, which Bromley (2024) also highlights as the country with the strongest increase in writing centers outside the US between 2015/16 and 2022/23. In addition, our study found that 71% of the 77 German WSF that participated in our survey were (at least partially) funded permanently. While these quantitative results suggest a positive development at first glance, an examination of the final free-text question, which asked respondents to assess the current status of their WSF without any restrictive specifications, revealed that the descriptions of the WSFs situation were not unanimously positive. In addition to the favorable assessments of the WSFs estab-

lishment status, there were notably disparate assessments, including those of temporarily funded WSF, which responded markedly critically. Thus, institutional work (Girgensohn 2018: 12 f.) remains an ongoing task in German writing centers – just as in American centers, as Girgensohn (2017) has shown.

The present article aims to add an additional, relativizing perspective to the quantitative results of our survey of German WSF by analyzing the final free-text responses written by WSF staff and thereby to provide a more detailed understanding of the current status of German WSF and their potential for future development. We will first present a brief overview of the complete survey as a background. Next, we will focus on the analysis of the free-text responses, which will be contextualized with the corresponding quantitative findings. This analysis will cover the following thematic categories: institutional placement, financial and staff resources, range of services, statements and requests regarding the current status, and statements on topics relevant to WSF. Finally, the results will be interpreted and evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to the field of writing center research and their significance for possible future developments of German WSF.

Data Collection and Main Quantitative Findings

While Hoffman/Freise (2024) describe the theoretical background, data collection process and quantitative results of our study in detail, we will only provide a brief overview of these aspects here as background for the analysis of the final free-text question. As our study represents the first comprehensive attempt to systematically document all writing support facilities at German universities (see Hoffmann 2019 for a previous study conducted in Germany and Bromley 2023 for an international study), we employed a two-step data collection process. Firstly, we conducted a keyword search on the websites of all 423 German universities listed in the University Directory published by the German Conference of University Presidents[1] and hereby identified 146 WSF. Secondly, we invited those WSF via email to participate in an online survey in March 2023.

The online survey was conducted using a self-developed questionnaire (see Hoffmann/Freise 2024) which covered the following themes mostly by predefined response options: distribution of WSF across different types of university, institutional placement at university, WSF's resources (financial, personnel, and physical space), range of services, target groups, and research activities. The open-ended free-text question, the results of which are presented here, concluded the survey.

The timing of the survey in the spring of 2023 took into account the possible stabilization phase after the expiration of the Quality Pact for Teaching, and thus the end of an extensive, third-party-funded boom in the establishment of WSF in Germany. Also, the sur-

1 "all universities as TXT-file", downloaded from: https://www.hochschulkompass.de/hochschulen/downloads.html (accessed on November 1st, 2022).

vey fell in the first semester after the publication of ChatGPT (Nov 2022), and thus coincided with the hype about changes concerning academic writing and thus the work of WSF triggered by artificial intelligence (AI).

Table 1
Statistical Data of the Survey – a Basic Overview

Sample	Institutional Placement
Internet search at all German universities (n = 423)* for WSF by keyword search on university websites ► result: n = 146 WSF (contacted via email with request to participate in online survey in March 2023) ► response rate: 53 % (77 of the 146 contacted WSF): • 51 % WSF at state universities • 38 % WSF at state universities of applied sciences • 3 % WSF at state universities of education • 8 % WSF at other types of universities (e. g. private) * Cf. footnote 1.	**Location of WSF:** • 32 %: independent central institutions • 46 %: affiliated with a central institution (library, language center, student advising office, key skills center, teaching and learning center) • 16 %: located in a department or faculty • 15 %: located in a department or faculty in the humanities or social sciences • 5 %: dual location – central and departmental
Financial and Staff Resources	**Range of Services**
Financial resources (institution and staff positions): • 56 %: permanently funded • 15 %: partly permanent, partly temporarily funded • 17 %: temporarily funded • 12 %: no answer **Staff at WSF:** • 52 %: students (working average: 9 % of a fulltime position) • 15 %: academic staff (working average: 61 % of a fulltime position) • 12 %: administrative staff (working average: 52 % of a fulltime position) • 3 %: lecturer (working average: 75 % of a fulltime position) • 21 %: others (0.5 % professors, 20.5 % various types of contractors)	**Services for students in responding WSF:** • 94 %: workshops • 87 %: writing consultations • 76 %: writing events • 56 %: seminars • 45 %: writing consultation training **Services for teaching staff in responding WSF:** • 46 %: counseling • 42 %: writing pedagogical support for courses • 35 %: workshops • 17 %: writing fellow programs

77 of the 146 WSF contacted completed the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 53 %. The sample includes WSF at all types of university almost proportionally to the distribution of these types in the total number of universities with WSF contacted (cf. Table 1, and Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 256 f.).

Analysis of the Free Text Question

The open-ended question evaluated here aimed at individual thematic and emotional assessments of the current state of development of one's own WSF:

> *"Please complete the following sentence and explain your statement in a few sentences when needed: Beyond pure data: When I think about the current state of development of my WSF in comparison to five years ago, I feel..."*

As the question does not direct the focus of the answer thematically, the general topics addressed can serve as indicators of which issues are currently important and how they affect WSF. The following analysis stands on its own and serves as a preliminary study for a qualitative interview-study with WSF on their development to date and possible future perspectives, identifying relevant topics for the interview guide.

Statements from the free-text response were coded in an inductive qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2022: 68–103) in four rounds by three encoders with regard to their thematic content and their emotional-evaluative attitude.[2] The content found was first labeled, explicated thematically and summarized into larger categories. Then the text basis was evaluated again using the condensed analysis grid. Finally, the frequency of occurrence of the individual categories was determined (cf. tables 2–5), and coded statements were classified into their discourse contexts using the anchor examples (cf. Mayring 2022: 96) presented.

Emotions were coded separately, initially using a simple grid (positive, neutral, negative) for each statement. However, as it became apparent that the results were based on subjective interpretations, we abandoned the grid and referred only to emotions explicitly mentioned (cf. footnote 13).

The statements can be considered to be representative. 70 out of 77 respondents (90.9 %) answered the final open-ended question. In many cases, the themes addressed can be traced back, at least indirectly, to the fields of the WSF's work surveyed in the quantitative part of the questionnaire, but further topics also become visible.

We will first present statements on the topics of institutional placement, financial and staff resources, and the range of services, and contextualize them with corresponding quantitative results. Subsequently, assessments of the current situation as well as themes relevant to the work of WSF will be examined.

Institutional Placement

As the quantitative data concerning the institutional placement shows, approximately 3/4 of the WSF are either independent central institutions (34 %) or affiliated with one (46 %, e. g.,

2 We would like to thank Anna Tilmans for preliminary coding.

libraries or language centers). 16 % of the WSF are located in a department – most of them in the humanities and social sciences (15 %), primarily in language departments (7 %). 5 % of WSF have a dual location – central and departmental (cf. Table 1, for details see Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 258 f.).

The analysis of the free-texts allows for further differentiation, as they most frequently evaluate the stability of the institutional placement and the associated support of the WSF.

Table 2
Narratives on Institutional Placement

themes	amount	example	case No.
stable institutional placement	6	"We are more firmly anchored in the university structures, which has advantages (e. g. expertise is requested, visibility) and disadvantages (e. g. loss of autonomy)."	22
growing recognition/ establishment	5	"that the WSF is better recognized and is slowly but steadily becoming more established."	40
lack of institutional support	6	"less support from the university management."	20
		"I am very slowed down in terms of content or personnel and staff resources in view of the needs of the students in the various departments."	54
		"However, I am annoyed that after so many years, the persuasion and education work has not been completed. In addition, we still have to explain what our tasks are and why we are 'needed' or 'required'."	32
from departmental to central placement	2	"Five years ago, the WSF at our university was still a project of a department with one temporary employee. Now it is a central institution with one permanent and two temporary employees."	58
writing in the disciplines	2	"Slowly, the change from pure additional workshops to integration into teaching in the disciplines began."	69

Six times the institutional placement is positively described as stable (see e. g. Table 2, No. 22). With similar frequency (5 times), respondents are pleased about the growing recognition or establishment of their institution at the university (e. g. Table 2, No. 40). However, about as often as these two positive aspects, the lack of institutional support is also mentioned (6 times), which can manifest itself in a lack of support, a feeling of being slowed down in terms of content or financial and staff resources, or a need to justify the work of the WSF (e. g. Table 2, Nos. 20, 54, 32).

In addition to these general assessments of the situation of the WSF, the responses address the tension between departmentalization and centralization from two different perspectives. Twice WSF staff report that their WSF has evolved from a departmental facility to a central institution (e. g. Table 2, No. 58). The didactic aspect is also addressed: here it is

emphasized that there has been a development from general workshops to cooperation with departments with the aim of supporting writing in the disciplines (2x, e. g. Table 2, No. 69).

Financial and Staff Resources

In this section we look at the funding status of WSF and differentiate subgroups by cost type. The quantitative results show that 56 % of the WSF (n = 77) were permanently funded, 15 % were funded by a combination of permanent and temporary sources, while 17 % relied on temporary funding. In 75 % of the (partially) permanently funded WSF (n = 55) positions were permanently funded; in 18 % the institution was permanently funded; in 7 % both the positions and the institution were permanently funded (Table 1). The focus on the staff resources reveals that the size of the responding WSF varies greatly. 25 % (n = 55) have less than one full-time equivalent (FTE), the majority (44 %) has 1 to 1.9 FTE, and only 5.5 % work with 5 or more FTE.[3] The calculated total FTE for individual employee groups, when compared with the number of employees, also shows that many employees do not have full-time positions. For example, the average working time among academic staff (15 % of staff) is 61 % of a FTE (cf. Table 1).

The narratives on financial and staff resources that complement these findings can be roughly divided into those that deal with the expansion and further development of the WSF and those that describe its reduction.

Table 3
Narratives on Financial and Staff Resources

themes		amount	example	case No.
expansion	made permanent	16	"Within 5 years, we have grown from 0.5 positions to 3 permanent full-time positions plus 8 student assistants with a total of 120h/week."	17
	new foundation	8	"I'm where I wanted to be. There is now an WSF at my university and I have the job. Now the development can begin."	5
			"We didn't exist five years ago."	46
	expansion/ extension	7	"Our situation has become more natural, our colleagues count on us. We have also grown in size, we have a stable group of three student assistants who we are constantly training."	13

3 In addition, 13 % dispose of 2 to 2.9 FTE, 7 % dispose of 3 to 3.9 FTE, and 5.5 % dispose of 4 to 4.9 FTE.

(Continuing Table 3)

themes		amount	example	case No.
reduction	lack of support	6	"not sufficiently equipped, as I run a graduate academy and offer writing consultation and groups myself regularly every 14 days for 4 groups, but the demand is significantly higher."	55
	cut/ reduction	5	"lonely and broke, since my 75 % position – now integrated into another department – is the perpetual remnant of a large writing center with 5 staff members, a 120-hour writing consultancy, and a large Writing Fellow program."	11
	closing	2	"Unfortunately, the WSF will be discontinued in the middle of the year."	69
	secondary task	2	"This seems to be the place to say something about my particular situation. I am solely responsible for academic writing at this technical university, and only on a part-time basis, so to speak."	2
	more complex tasks/unchanged resources	1	"very frustrated by the fact that the institution's tasks have become more and more complex, but the equipment with positions (1x50 %) and student assistant hours (60/month) has not changed."	3

In the area of expansion, three blocks of themes are repeated: 16 respondents state that their WSF have been made permanently funded. This includes statements on the new permanent funding of the institution as well as of individual positions (see Table 3, No. 17). The new foundation of a WSF is also mentioned positively in eight cases (see Table 3, No. 5 and 46). Seven responses concern the expansion or extension of a WSF (cf. e. g. Table 3, No. 13).

The area of reduction can be differentiated into significantly more individual phenomena. First and foremost, the lack of support (6 times) with regard to resources and institutional support is stated (see Table 3, No. 55 and Table 2, No. 20, 54. 32). Job cuts or a reduction in work capacity are mentioned five times (see, e. g. Table 3, No. 11). Two other respondents each describe the tasks of the WSF as secondary tasks and thus as poorly staffed (see e. g. Table 3, No. 2). One statement deals with unchanged resources in spite of increasingly complex tasks (cf. Table 3, No. 3). Finally, two respondents announced the imminent closure of their WSF (cf. e. g. Table 3, No. 69).

Range of Services

The quantitative analysis shows that students are the main target group of WSF services, being addressed by 97.1 % of WSF. 50 % also aim at teaching staff. Among the services, extracurricular support for students (and in part also for doctoral students) are mentioned first.

The support includes workshops (94 % of the WSF), writing consultations (87 %), writing events (76 %), and seminars (56 %). Writing consultation training is offered by 45 % of the WSF. Services for teaching staff – as multipliers in the field of literacy education – are mainly counseling (at 46 % of the WSF), writing pedagogical support for courses (at 42 %), workshops (at 35 %) and writing fellow programs (at 17 %) (cf. Table 1, for details see Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 259–262).

Table 4
Narratives on the Services of the WSF

themes	amount	example	case No.
professionalization of services	6	"On the one hand, we have achieved a more stable position in the Language Center, and, on the other, we have become more professional and modern."	13
expansion of services, content or expertise	4	"that we have continued to develop by expanding our services and range of offers and have gained expertise within the team."	18
increase or change in content needs	3	"a growing need to consult and train students with regard to the content, layout and academic requirements of thesis and term papers."	42
		"[We] have finally regained momentum after the pandemic. However, we need to realign ourselves to some extent and adapt to the changed needs of our clientele."	15
high/growing number of users	3	"At the moment, we are working to capacity with consultations and workshops for students, so there is hardly any time for strategic planning, expanding the program, etc."	70
supplementary service	1	"that it is a good service alongside the writing center: I coach students who don't write because of (anxiety) blocks."	44

Comments on WSF services most frequently deal with their overall perception: six respondents describe a professionalization of services (see e. g. Table 4, No. 13), four others the expansion of services, content or expertise (see e. g. Table 4, No. 18).

Another group of comments is about needs-based design: An increase (see Table 4, No. 42) or change in content needs (see Table 4, No. 15) with effects on the conceptual orientation of the WSF is mentioned three times. In addition, a growing number of users is mentioned three times (see e. g. Table 4, No. 70). One WSF, which exists next to another WSF, explicitly describes its offer as a target-group-specific supplementary service (cf. Table 4, No. 44).

Statements and Requests Regarding the Current Status

In addition to comments on individual aspects of the questionnaire, the responses to the free-text question also include assessments of the current situation at the WSF and wishes for the future.

Table 5
Statements and Requests Regarding the Current Status

themes	amount	example	case No.
lonely/alone	5	"more and more pressured to get everything under the famous one roof and very often stand alone – exchange would be brilliant – there is little time for that."	10
work to secure the existence of the WSF	3	"great relief that, thanks to the very smart planning of our department head, two positions could be made permanent and long-term financing of the student writing tutors could be made possible."	12
multiple demands (in addition to content work)	3	"quite grueling with the constant writing of concept papers, applications for third-party funding, letters of request to decision-makers at the university as well as the effort involved in updating the website and advertising materials and organizational tasks."	4
need for development	1	"need for development to adapt the content to current developments in AI."	68
teaching demands	1	"have a contract as a research assistant, but in fact work as a teacher."	2
opportunity to shape	1	"proud that we have managed the transition to online consulting as a team not just somehow and tediously, but that we have shaped it well and developed new, suitable forms of work and continue to develop them further."	37
long term instead of short term planning	1	"We can now plan and implement long-term and sustainable didactic writing support and no longer have to rely on short-term successes, high numbers, sensations, and flashes in the pan."	12
wishes: more conceptional work, research, projects	5	"that the WSF and its events are established and largely well known at the university, but that it is currently unable to develop new innovative and conceptual ideas due to staff shortages."	75
		"I would also like to have time for writing research."	4
		"desire to be able to carry out more projects again in addition to the established basic provisions."	47

The descriptions of the current state of the WSF oscillate between positive and negative moods. The negative statements include the already mentioned responses that state a lack of support from other university institutions (6x, see e. g. Table 2, No. 20, 54, 32). In addition, five respondents describe their work as "lonely" or see themselves as "alone" in their responsibility for their tasks (cf. e. g. Table 5, No. 10). Other employees describe their work situation neutrally, but partly critically: Three times the extensive work to secure the existence of the WSF or corresponding management tasks are emphasized (see e. g. Table 5, No. 12). Three responses also mention the multiple demands of the work situation (see e. g. Table 5, No. 4). The mention of the need for further development to deal with AI (cf. Table 5, No. 68) points in the same direction, as well as statements describing the lack of time for research due to teaching demands (cf. Table 5, No. 2). Two positive descriptions of the current state of affairs are the opportunity to shape the future (cf. Table 5, No. 37) and the new situation of being able to plan for the long term instead of for the short term due to financial constraints (cf. Table 5, No. 12).

The wishes also relate to themes that affect the further design and the conceptual and scientific foundation of the WSF: One respondent would like to be able to design projects that go beyond the basic work (see Table 5, No. 47), three others would like to be able to work more conceptually (see e. g. Table 5, No. 75), and one would like to have more opportunities for research (see Table 5, No. 4).

Statements on Themes Relevant to WSF

Other opinions in the free-texts do not fall into one of the above-mentioned thematic areas but illustrate other issues that are on the minds of WSF staff, such as: AI (1), various individual didactic tasks (2) and their need orientated implementation (3). Further related themes are the development of WSF between conceptualizing and institutional necessities (4), university policy positions (5), and the commitment and emotions associated with WSF work (6). In the following, we will briefly outline these six themes.

(1) AI:

The expected disruption of writing by AI is mentioned most frequently. Four statements emphasize the need for development in writing pedagogy associated with AI (cf. Table 5, No. 68) as well as the expected increasing importance of WSF due to AI[4]. Furthermore, statements problematize that in a higher education context AI is perceived as a tool for automatic

4 No. 33: "an increasing importance of WSF at universities, e. g. against the background of Covid-19 or currently Chat GPT".

text production and simplifying the writing process, while the necessary reflective didactics and testing are lacking.[5]

(2) Individual Didactic Tasks:

Various individual areas of WSF work are addressed, including writing in the disciplines (cf. Table 2, No. 69) or subfields of writing emphasized by single WSF as individually important themes, such as working with refugees,[6] specific requirements for thesis and term papers (cf. Table 4, No. 42), and requirements for writing in other languages, which are mentioned together with the desire for professional networking.[7]

(3) Needs-Based Orientation:

The needs-based orientation of the WSF, which is evident in the individualized services it offers, can also be found on another level. Smaller WSF in particular show how they make services possible at all through their specific focus and their own efforts. For example, one WSF integrates demand-oriented courses into the library's program;[8] a WSF, that is run by a single person describes the writing formats developed specifically for the university;[9] and another case describes the both uncertain and exciting pioneering work involved in establishing a WSF at an art college.[10]

(4) Development of WSF Between Conceptualization and Institutional Requirements:

In the longer-standing WSF, the issue of making things possible is also addressed at the concept level – a focus that has already emerged as central in the previous section (see Chapter 2.4). Statements frequently range on a spectrum from positive to critical and address the question of how a concept for a WSF that is both professionally sound and compatible with the institution's environment can be developed. One WSF member sees it as a positive devel-

5 No. 53: "There seems to be a perception that academic writing can somehow be taught online through courses that require little human input. Personally, I believe that this is less the case than ever in the age of language-generating tools and that there is an urgent need for action."
No. 64: "Automation of text production through ChatGPT worsens the situation, as learners are deprived of strategic knowledge and laziness is encouraged. Texts produced last-minute via automated systems are of a low academic standard and in the long term are associated with a loss of academic quality and competitiveness of universities on an international scale. A rather worrying development. Nevertheless, chatbots and their advantages and disadvantages in text generation should be tested and included right now in order to evaluate the benefits of AI."
6 No. 8: "additional writing instruction for international refugee students [was] an important task."
7 No. 10: "My application for an exchange with a writing center abroad was rejected (although it would be appreciated if the WSF also worked in English."
8 No. 6: "The program runs alongside the library's program. Nevertheless, we manage to constantly align the program with demand and include new courses."
9 No. 2: "Over time [...], I've developed my own methods, working mainly with students' own texts [...], which are presented and discussed in the group. I also organize writing consultations (which are currently in high demand). I also take part in the Long Night Against Procrastination."
10 No. 77: "It is not clear what will happen next and the pioneering work at the art college is exciting, but also somewhat draining."

opment that the working time of the academic staff is no longer spent solely on writing consultations for students, but also on working with multipliers and developing concepts.[11]

Another statement highlights the difficulty of maintaining a balance between provisions for writers and for multipliers as well as between conceptual and practical work. It also demonstrates how current conditions of an institutional environment can reduce a WSF to the exclusively practical work with writers in teaching and consulting:

> *"[We] tend not to develop further. These factors include the service orientation and programmatic focus of the overarching unit and the expiring consolidation process of the university and the language center and the development policy of the current superiors. With regard to the fields of activity described by the German Society for Writing Didactics and Writing Research, we have had to focus very strongly on teaching and consultation for some time now. Thereby, all other fields of activity have been neglected." (No. 57)*

The statement explicitly refers to the document outlining the activities of WSF published by the German Society for Writing Didactics and Writing Research (gefsus 2021) as a relevant reference point for the current didactic and conceptual design of a WSF. The inability to achieve this full range of activities agreed upon by the WSF community in one's own institution is described as an unwelcome stagnation in development.

Another statement emphasizes that the drafting of "concept papers" and third-party funding acquisition to ensure financial resources can be 'grueling' (see Table 5, No. 4) and, moreover, that the necessity of initially securing the existence of WSF can divert its operational capacity from the fulfillment of its "core tasks".[12]

In addition to these critical assessments, an ideal ratio of conceptual and practical work is also described. One respondent expresses satisfaction that, following the attainment of long-term financing with permanent positions, "long-term and sustainable" practical work is feasible, while for the previous non-permanent phase, the respondent describes a necessary actionism for the assurance of financing, which involved "short-term successes, [...] and flashes in the pan" (see Table 5, No. 12).

(5) Higher Education Policy Positions:

Some statements deal with the frequent tension between concept work for financial security and for a didactically appropriate organization of a WSF on the one hand, and the practical WSF work on the other hand, which is evidence that WSF are dependent on university poli-

11 No. 43: "that the academic staff can now focus more of their working time on interaction (further training, advice, concept development) with multipliers and are no longer exclusively occupied with writing consultation for students. I think that's very good!"

12 No. 4: "The core tasks of writing advice, workshops, moderation of writing groups, training and supervision of writing tutors and development of didactic writing materials are thereby sometimes neglected."

tics. The following statement may be interpreted as both a specific political stance on the necessity for training on WSF work and on the institutional context.

> *"I don't think it's good to have workshops covered by external staff (teaching assignments) – because I can't see that we are helping to maintain precarious working conditions. [...] In the area of tutor training, however, I am also convinced that the relatively time-consuming one-semester training course [...] that I have designed makes a lot of sense and offers students a completely different opportunity to grow together, to reflect on their advisory role, their own writing and much more, throwing it in the trash and having it 'done' externally in two block days." (No. 53)*

The respondent is convinced of values, both at the institutional level and in the context of writing pedagogy, but that there are significant obstacles to implementing these standards within the institutional framework.

(6) Motivation and Emotion:

The aforementioned statement can also illustrate the fervor with which many of the expressed concerns are advocated. In accordance with the prompt to describe feelings concerning the current state, many respondents connect their statements with emotional or evaluative judgments. They express both joy at achievements thus far ("great joy", No. 67) and frustration or anger at unfulfilled requests ("I'm so angry I wish I could set off a nuclear bomb on our campus.", No. 53), while a tally of the statements that explicitly express feelings reveals a balance between positive and negative sentiments.[13] It can be concluded that the respondents have invested a great deal of motivation and energy in pursuing their concerns and that their expressed highly positive or negative emotions are due to their high dedication to their work.

Interpretation of Results

Contextualizing the quantitative results on the current status of German WSF with the narrative self-assessments of WSF staff in the concluding free-text question enhances and refines the impression conveyed by the numbers. Even from the brief statements, it is possible to derive a diverse range of statements due to the open-ended nature of the writing prompt. At the same time, behind the differentiating details, narratives emerge in which seemingly overarching attitudes materialize in the discourse of the WSF community. Against the back-

13 Positive emotions expressed: Satisfaction (4x), pride (3x), joy (2x), good (2x), very good (1x), grateful (1x), excitement (1x); negative emotional expressions: Frustration (4x), anger (2x), worried (1x), annoyed (1x), great anger (1x), very slowed down (1x), grueling (1x), draining (1x), lonely/alone (2x). Only explicitly expressed feelings such as "I feel alone" were listed, not descriptions such as "I am alone in charge".

ground of such narratives, the results of the analysis will be interpreted, and the yield for further WSF work will be considered.

Firstly, many contributions elucidate the relationship between institutional support and resource provision. In particular, the absence of both of these factors is described as a burden on work (see Chapter 2.5) and is linked to the subsequent need for justification of the professional and scientific contribution of the WSF to the university ("persuasion and awareness-raising work," No. 32; "letters of request […] to decision-makers in the university administration," No. 4). In contrast, respondents state that establishment processes are effective when university stakeholders are convinced, persuade others, and promote the WSF ("thanks to the very smart planning of our department head", No. 12). The initially optimistic impression conveyed by the quantitative data regarding the consolidation process is somewhat diminished when viewed in conjunction with the detailed descriptions of the actual circumstances. While there are indeed instances where the consolidation of a WSF is accompanied by the expansion of personnel (see Chapter 2.2), elsewhere, the process involves a pragmatic reduction to the smallest work capacity ("75 % position: the stabilized remainder of a large writing center," No. 11). While the permanent status provides a certain degree of security and continuity, the reduced capacity results in limited efficacy. This case confirms Girgensohn's (2017: 284 f.) observation regarding the institutionalization of American WSF that achieved institutionalization levels must be continuously reaffirmed and safeguarded. This is supported by the quantitative result that significantly more individual positions than institutions were funded permanently. Consequently, the current consolidation status of these positions will have to be renegotiated upon their expiration. At this point, it seems sensible to collect both the negative and the positive narratives, to provide a pool of negative scenarios that experience tells us should be avoided, and successful strategies that could be proactively consulted in preparation for further negotiation or renegotiation processes.

Secondly, the institutional and structural configuration of WSF is addressed repeatedly. Most WSF are placed institutionally central within a college or university, and statements indicate a tendency for further WSF at departments to be centralized. This development is perceived as positive (see Chapter 2.1), as centralization is seen as a success or establishment criterion for WSF, possibly because of an increase in reach. Conversely, some statements deal with the problematic aspects of locating WSF within a larger, centralized institution: This was evident where a WSF was merely incorporated into another institution's program (e. g. No. 6) or when the placement of the WSF depended on internal negotiations (see, e. g. No. 57). These findings suggest that when implementing centralized placement of a WSF, one should also make sure of a strong situational context in order to preserve one's conceptual identity.

Thirdly, respondents were most positive about the range of services, where WSF have a high degree of responsibility and freedom (see Hoffmann/Freise 2024: 264 f.). Responses address the professionalization processes in WSF that have been identified by research (see Girgensohn/Peters 2012). Some statements indicate how programs are developed to meet specific needs at universities ("refugee students", No. 8) or for precarious employment situa-

tions (No. 77). Other statements show conceptual considerations like the necessity of extending established program components, such as writing consultation for students, or encompassing a broader range of services, particularly for teaching staff (see Chapter 2.5). The establishment of a system of multipliers to sustainably extend the influence of the WSF beyond its direct work with writers is also frequently mentioned. This subject area conceals a large number of narratives on didactic writing concepts that can be used as quality arguments in institutional negotiation processes. These include convictions from the writing didactic discourse, such as the effectiveness of multiplier models or writing in the disciplines, as well as ideas tailored to the needs of university contexts.

WSF staff are aware of the value of their specialized scientific perspective and expertise. This is shown by subject-specific professional assessments such as statements on AI (see Chapter 2.5), which convey of the narrative that the university environment has not yet reached the same professional level of understanding of the didactic possibilities and necessity in relation to AI use as the WSF staff.

Fourthly, WSF see themselves as egalitarian players in the university environment. This can be seen in the statements on the current status of the WSF, which primarily concern the relationship between conceptual, institutional, and scientific foundations and the potential for institutional implementation (see Chapters 2.4 and 2.5). However, it is also clear that the staff conceptually locate and set up their own WSF according to the discourse on WSF, while in various cases funding institutions finance basic practical (e. g. No. 57) or particularly cost effective (e. g. No. 53) writing support pragmatically – and not on the basis of writing research or WSF experience and discourse. In the institutional hierarchy, WSF are subordinate.

At all levels, the necessity of work to establish and institutionalize the WSF (cf. Girgensohn 2017) is explicitly emphasized, with a particular focus on funding and persuasion work. Respondents stress the importance of justifying the efficacy and effectiveness of WSF work from a professional perspective vis-à-vis higher-level funding institutions. In some cases, this culminates in an examination of the necessity of university politics or the interconnections between strategy and concept (see Chapter 2.5).

For the future design of such institutional negotiation processes, a compilation of strategically applicable arguments and narratives would be helpful. In addition, it might be insightful to work out narratives that can be gained by analyzing the practical, conceptual and institutional set-up of the current German WSF landscape and their institutionalization work.

The insights into the status of the institutionalization of German WSF that the analysis of the free-text responses provided indicate what kinds of results could be expected from a more in-depth investigation of the institutional constellations, conceptual narratives and stories of origin. The free-text statements already showed that the themes discussed by the employees overlap with the results of Girgensohn's institutionalization study for the US, e. g. with regard to financial problems or the high motivation of WSF employees (cf. Girgensohn 2017: 155, 158 f.). The extent of these analogous structures or differences should be further differentiated. The storytelling approach seems particularly suitable for capturing the spe-

cial circumstances and constellations of WSF in their institutional context. In doing so, one could work out concepts that have already been successfully implemented and thus create a pool of arguments for the further institutionalization work of WSF. This was recently demonstrated by Giaimo & Lawson (2024: 236) in their study on the "under-researched from a labor studies perspective" (Giaimo/Lawson 2024: 4) writing centers in the US, for which they want to lay a foundation for a better systematic understanding and the conceptual and administrative expansion of WSF work (Giaimo & Lawson 2024: 236). The insights presented in the present article give a foretaste of what such results could look like for the German WSF landscape and can serve as a guideline for the design of the planned narrative follow-up study.

WSF in Germany have already come a long way in terms of institutionalization and professionalization in a comparatively short period of time, but there is still a somewhat uncertain path ahead for their future development. Summarizing the results of our free-text analysis, we can say that WSF are mostly undergoing a positive development towards centralization, permanent funding, professionalization and individualization of their services. Sometimes, this development is accompanied by a reduction in financial resources. More importantly, however, is the result that this outwardly positive development comes at a cost: It is based on the continuous time-consuming work of highly committed staff, who often have to neglect other areas of content work such as conceptual development, long-time planning or research in order to achieve these successes in the area of financial, institutional and political security. Looking to the future of German writing centers, we hope that the current phase of hard-won development will one day lead to a more secure status of WSF. When taking a comparative look at their role model, American writing centers, which, after a much longer period of existence and with a significantly wider distribution, still have to invest in institutional work (Girgensohn 2017), this hope may seem a little naïve, but where would we be without it?

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Writing Reimagined: Decolonizing Academic Writing in a Writing Center

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Abstract

The demographics of our student clientele and tutors in our writing center have changed over the years, and we are imagining how new ideas and paradigms can be realized for the future as we work towards decolonization in the academy. In this article, we introduce our writing center at a medium-sized Canadian university and explore multilingual tutors' experiences in tutoring multilingual students. Analyzing the tutors' reflections, we discuss the impact of the Western ideology of writing on multilingual tutors' writing centre practice and identity. We suggest that decolonizing academic writing pedagogy is essential to make our future writing centre more inclusive and equitable for the diverse demographic of students and tutors.

Introduction

The demographics of higher education are changing worldwide, with more diverse student enrollment (UNESCO 2022). Writing centers reflect this change, as the presence of multilingual students and tutors has grown significantly (Rafoth 2015). Like many writing centers, ours is working to adapt and envision how new paradigms can better support students. Multilingual students, for whom English is an additional language, often struggle with writing assignments, and we wonder how best to help them. In today's multicultural academic and social environments, cross-cultural competency and sensitivity are essential.

To respond to the demographic change, we believe higher education should be decolonized, starting with our writing center and how we teach academic writing. Attas (2023) says, "decolonization could be understood as 'taking away the colonial,' but this raises the question of what "colonial" means. Colonization involves one group taking control of the lands, resources, languages, cultures, and relationships of another group" (Attas 2023: para. 1) which is how Canada came to be a country. Colonization has led to a Eurocentric ideology which means that European/Western-focused cultures and languages are viewed as superior to others. What does that have to do with academia? For students for whom English is not their first language to be admitted to a university, they first need to achieve a certain benchmark or standard and evidence of language proficiency, which might lead to a perceived

hierarchy of language use, making their first language inferior to English and making them feel inferior to native speakers of English.

Students are not blank slates as Paulo Freire (1970) has maintained since the 1970s. Decolonization acknowledges that students come with a wealth of knowledge in languages, cultures, and unique attributes to contribute to the conversation. Based on this, we understand the decolonization of the writing center as a process in which we reflect our views on Eurocentricity, our role in reproducing assumptions on (language) hierarchies, and appreciate the diversity, competencies, and abilities of international students. Students are traditionally not invited into the dialogue to search for solutions; this is where we propose a change. We need to learn to listen, oppose superiority of one culture and language over another, and then make changes accordingly to what we have learned together.

What decolonizing the academy looks like is still under construction, but in our writing center as a microcosm of the wider university, it starts with listening to students and hearing their concerns and frustrations with a system that is beyond their control and then encouraging them into leadership roles to become decision and change makers. Although we cannot bring about decolonization of the academy single-handedly as writing center practitioners, we can jointly engage in the struggle and dialogue about how to change our practice to involve everyone in the decision-making process. The writing center is a good place to start because students from all backgrounds and disciplines meet here to work on writing and understanding how the academic system works as it pertains to writing. We are not there yet but are working on decolonization to the best of our current understanding.

In this article, we discuss how we can be part of the change. We explore ways that facilitate the decolonization of academic writing and writing centers through multilingual and native English-speaking tutors' reflections. Employing tutors who come from different backgrounds and opening up the conversation uniquely positions us to learn how to navigate changing academia. Multilingual tutors are ideally suited to assist multilingual peers because they share similar experiences; they have the opportunity to learn from and gain empathy for the complexity of writing as it relates to culture and identity from native English speakers. In addition, native English speaking tutors have the opportunity to learn from multilingual peers and to share similar experiences with native English speaking peers. In the writing center, we hear honest first-hand experiential accounts from students who may not feel free to express themselves in a classroom setting. In the writing center, we talk about the challenges of how to navigate some of the contradictions in academic writing and tutoring.

The goal of our academic writing classes is to prepare all students for the essays and other written assignments they will encounter in their studies at the university. The goal of our writing center is to help students who seek help with their writing assignments. Our students come from diverse backgrounds and have different expectations of what university writing should be. They come from very different places of preparedness. Some of the questions we ask ourselves are: How do we teach and tutor writing in an environment that fosters a global culture? What do we do to foster cross-cultural understanding? We speak gener-

ously about diversity, yet we represent fairly normalized standardized expectations of writing mechanics and essay structure. How do we operate within that tension? How do we live with that dichotomy as we aim to decolonize those traditional standards? Can we actually do that, and if so, how? In this article, tutors' thoughts on their experiences as tutors and students invite us to reflect on that dichotomy. Together, we try to articulate our hopes and goals for a decolonized writing center.

The discussion here builds on our presentation on the future of writing centers at the Canadian Writing Centre Association conference. We, as tutors and instructors, co-presented and shared our experiences and thoughts on how the changing demographics at our writing center affect us. We imagined our future writing center in response to the change. The multilingual tutors also shared their insights into and experiences as multilingual tutor identities in the colonial academy. With additional research, revision and editing, we jointly compiled and wrote this article as an experiment in active non-hierarchical student instructor knowledge-construction and collaboration. We adopted this method of writing since we believe that including the student tutors in this conversation, co-constructing knowledge and disseminating it with them is one example of decolonizing the academy.

Our Writing Center

The University of Winnipeg is a medium-sized university with 8,673 undergraduate students and 272 graduate students, where 11.8% of the student body identify as indigenous and 18% identify as international students (UW Fast Facts 2023). The Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications is home to our writing center where students can access writing tutoring, which is covered by student fees. Second-, third-, or fourth-year undergraduate students, who completed a required academic writing class at the beginning of their university studies and are interested in being writing tutors, are required to take a 3-credit hour course that covers tutoring pedagogy, tools, strategies, and etiquette. Once they complete the course, they become writing tutors. The coordinator trains tutors via the required course, evaluates the tutors, schedules tutor visits to classes, promotes the writing center across campus, and connects with other faculties and departments.

The writing center usually hires about 30–35 tutors per year. Tutor wages are a little more than minimum wage. Their tutoring schedules are flexible, and we work with the tutors to fit the tutoring hours in between their classes since they are usually full-time students. The writing center supervisor manages tutor scheduling and day-to-day activities in the writing center. Students from all departments are welcome to sign up for one-hour appointments to access help with existing class writing assignments. The writing center logs somewhere between 1200 and 1500 one-hour tutoring appointments per year. We also send tutors to classes if professors would like tutors to help with writing assignments in class.

Decolonizing Writing Center Practice

Our writing center sees a diverse range of students. Eighteen percent of the enrolled students at our university come from 75 different countries (UW International Students 2025). We seek to portray ourselves as, and strive to be, an inclusive place that aids students in whatever writing concerns they may face. Oftentimes, we come across multilingual students who are frustrated with their grades and the expectations they face during their writing process. They feel their writing is "not right" or lacking due to rigid writing expectations. They feel they are falling short of the expected standards. As much as we can encourage students to develop their writing in their own, individually unique way, we are still tasked with upholding a uniform expectation of a colonized institution that functions with power dynamics across social and cultural hierarchies.

Multilingual students still see their writing as something to be "fixed", to fit into the mould, and to hopefully pass their classes while adhering to a traditional ideology in research and presentation. This often causes students to see academic writing as an obstacle rather than as a skill that can be developed and is still under construction. Hence, students view writing mostly as getting the job done and fulfilling an assignment to be submitted instead of finding interest in the process of research and writing. Strict standards contribute to stress and impede growth and curiosity.

The emphasis on product over process in writing instruction has long shaped our educational approach, often sidelining critical thinking and reflective practices essential for intellectual development. Hayles (2024: 262) notes the detrimental impact of prioritizing output, asserting that when students perceive that only the final product matters, they focus on producing better output rather than enhancing their capacity to critically engage with important works and articulate insightful arguments. Hayles (2024) further claims that assignments that emphasize the writing process, such as peer reviews, iterative revisions and incorporating feedback, brainstorming, and in-class exercises, where students write freely without concern for structure or perfection, underscore the value of learning as a continuous journey. We are convinced that in times of GenAI, we need to encourage process-oriented writing as it is essential for fostering students' own voice and independent thinking. Process-oriented strategies convey that learning is the goal, with an improved final product serving merely as a byproduct of this endeavor (Hayles 2024: 262). Process-oriented writing allows multilingual students to critically engage in writing as a learning tool with their unique stories and styles, make meanings, and reflect on their linguistic and cultural repertoires instead of focusing on standard forms and later-order concerns in their writing (Moussu 2013). Later-order concerns can come later.

In the 1980s, Reigstad and McAndrew (1984) encouraged tutors to first deal with what they called higher-order concerns (HOCs). HOCs address the assignment level (what are the students expected to do), and the structural level of the text (what are the main ideas of the writing). Reigstad and McAndrew's (1984) philosophy of addressing HOCs first and then lower or later-order concerns (LOCs) has influenced writing center pedagogy since then

(Gillespie/Lerner 2008). Aligned with this pedagogy, our writing center states that tutors do not edit and proofread students' writing. However, we experience that multilingual students often ask for help with their grammar and want tutors to help them edit their work. Some even mention that their professors asked them to visit the writing center to improve LOCs, although their HOCs meet the assignment criteria. This tension causes tutor and student confusion during tutoring sessions. Multilingual students feel that their work is deficient and their writing problematic because it seems to not meet the standard criteria (Marshall 2010) of correct grammar and academic writing mechanics. This undermines their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires. Because of their language and writing, they are again made to feel inferior, which further disservices their learning. In our writing center, we coach tutors to value students' unique identity, work on HOCs, not ignore LOCs but to stress the harmony of both.

Matsuda and Cox (2011) say that those who have little experience with multilingual writers may see "surface-level errors" (2011: 5) as deficient or problematic. This is why it is important for our writing center to train tutors to work with multilingual students. Part of decolonizing our writing center is attempting to remove a colonial type relationship, which often *others* the marginalized group and practices power over them (Attas 2023); multilingual tutors can help remove the *othering* because they are able to understand the norms and conventions of other languages. They can relate to the struggles of other multilingual students and share their experiences. Being able to relate to multilingual students with their own experiences and then going over the requirements of an assignment goes a long way in assisting students. One of the multilingual tutors in our writing center shared:

> *As a multilingual student, I understand how multilingual tutees have diverse systems of coding information and arranging their thoughts. I also know it is not easy to translate everything into one language and neatly fit into a writing assignment. Based on my positionality and experience, I tell multilingual students writing is not just about language fluency, but they can create meaning even if they are not familiar with popular cultural references.*

A tutor's positionality affects tutoring practice; it is crucial to reflect today's diverse demographic of tutees in that of tutors. If students coming to the writing center see themselves reflected in the tutors, they feel a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Having more multilingual tutors in the writing centre will also change their positionality from 'English as an additional language (EAL) tutors' to 'multilingual tutors'. Because of their linguistic minority status, multilingual tutors may feel marginalized with their 'EAL identity', which may posi-

tion them as deficient (Marshall 2010). A multilingual tutor confesses their challenges with the notion of being an 'EAL tutor'[1]:

> *Sometimes I feel like imposter syndrome consumes me. The imposter phenomenon can be referred to as "an internal feeling of intellectual phoniness" (Freeman et al. 2022:1). It has individuals like me believe that I have scammed or conned others into overestimating my capabilities. How can I be a tutor when my grammar sucks? I often feel inadequate. One of the variables of the imposter syndrome associated with high achievement is the pressure to succeed leading to stress and maladjustment (Henning et al. 1998). Another factor that influences this syndrome is being a first-generation student or being the first in the family to attend post-secondary education (Peteet et al. 2015). Though I am not a first-generation student, as a first-generation immigrant, I am the first in my family to get a post-secondary education in the West. This is a big deal because the 'West' often dismisses education from the 'East'. Sometimes, my accent shows up on certain words; sometimes, it's the lack of vocabulary that makes me doubt myself. Despite where I am now, at the back of my head I still see myself as a young immigrant doing ESL classes. Even when I got to the point where I got moved to an advanced program in my reading and writing classes in the fifth grade, I was still doing ESL classes. It was the flaw in the system that made me feel like, despite the grades or achievements, I still didn't fit in the box of a proper English speaker. However, I'm in the process of learning to be more forgiving with myself, the same way everyone should be.*

Unfortunately, even as the demographics have changed, writing center practitioners, including tutors, may feel pressured to behave like a "proper writing tutor" with no foreign accent and mechanically correct writing. This dismisses multilingual tutors' positionality as "an asset to be welcomed" (Marshall 2010: 41). Our relationship with the writing process needs to be expanded and truly inclusive at its roots rather than just in its appearance and in empty statements. If we claim to aim for an inclusive environment without changing expectations and old habits, we would just offer empty words without substance. Our goal is that in our writing center we genuinely work towards an environment that allows for originality, curiosity, and joy of learning to be at the forefront, always focusing on a process-oriented approach to writing rather than basing all assessment on one final product. Writing is an iterative process, which can be messy, and if we want students to learn from the process in addition to the final product, we aim to embrace writing as a learning tool under construction. Seeing their ability to speak other languages as an asset rather than an impediment helps multilin-

1 The following student statements are reflection scripts they prepared for the CWCA 2023 conference presentation. The students included existing research in their contributions. The citations in the statements shared here are student generated

gual students gain confidence in their identities instead of considering themselves imposters in someone else's game.

Decolonizing Academic Writing for the Future Writing Center

The multilingual writing tutors and instructors in our writing center reflected on their first few years in a Canadian university as multilingual students and expressed their linguistic and cultural vulnerability and confusion in the academic writing world. Interestingly, the reflections show that their challenges with academic writing as multilingual students were not only due to their identity as EAL students but also because their cultural identities are distinct from the cultural norms surrounding them. The following are multilingual tutors' and instructors' reflections on their academic writing journey as multilingual students:

Multilingual Tutor's Reflection: Unlearning to Learn

> *I still remember that the score of my first academic final essay in another school was 42 percent. That was six years ago, and at that time, I didn't know how to cite sources properly, make sentences flow, or even know how to use my own words to rephrase other sentences. Back then, I didn't know that I had to explain things in detail in English writing because I wasn't trained to write that way in China. Mandarin is my mother tongue, and Chinese is a language that's known for its high context, which means we tend to give people indirect feedback or reactions to let them figure out what we mean on their own. Cognitive psychology explores how the structural disparities between Chinese and English languages impact how we store, organize, and process information (Schmitt et al. 1994: 421). In my culture, it is an art form using ancient Chinese poetry without explaining it when we write sentences with deeper meanings because we see those quotes as something everyone should know, which also leaves the readers a space for imagination. It can be seen as 'too extra' if the paper is filled with detailed explanations of the citations. Teachers often praise writings that don't sound too direct or followed by detailed explanations when students use literary quotations because this type of writing style shows that the students are deep thinkers and that they have mastered the art of creating imaginary space for their readers, which leads to higher grades. Since Mandarin and English contradict each other so much, I booked many appointments with the writing center, and I spent the first two years unlearning everything I learned from my first 18 years of Mandarin writing experience just to get a higher score in English academic writing.*

Multilingual Instructor's Reflection: Academic Writing as a Site of Conflicting Cultures

As a multilingual writing instructor, I often reflect on my experiences learning academic writing when I was a student at a Canadian university. I have been at various academic and emotional stages and states during the English academic writing journey. Academic writing was beyond the linguistic domain. It was a culturally bound and embedded space. When I read my essays, my prose sounded immature and awkward because of my English as an additional language and Koreanness. The grade wasn't also satisfying at first, which demoralized me and made me uncertain about my academic success and career in Canada. My new status as an English as an Additional Language student in Canada magnified these emotional challenges.

The challenge was culturally induced. Many topics and examples in academic texts were based on the Canadian or American context. When I read and had to write an article in the Canadian context, I had to spend a lot of time researching and learning about the context. It was a good opportunity to learn about a new context, but with a time constraint, it wasn't always welcome. I sometimes felt like if the topics had been related to Korea, I could have understood it better and enjoyed writing more. The way of writing academic texts was also culturally different. Academic integrity was more strongly emphasized. The consequence of plagiarism was more serious. For many multilingual students, this is the most challenging part because they have to learn to write culturally appropriate academic texts. Often, most multilingual students learn to paraphrase and cite for the first time at a Canadian undergraduate or graduate school, which can cause unintentional plagiarism or severe anxiety about mistakenly plagiarizing.

These thoughts reflect multilingual students' challenges with academic writing due to its strict standards of mechanical correctness and the prescribed essay structure with an introduction, thesis, arguments to support a thesis, in-text citations properly cited with a Reference page. Not that these standards are wrong and unattainable, but in our opinion, scaffolding the learning as a process, explaining the parts along the way, and being open to exploring other ways of demonstrating knowledge other than the traditional research essay would benefit students and enhance learning; this is all part of decolonizing academic writing.

Multilingual students have knowledge about writing in their first language. What are those traditions, and how do they compare with the new writing culture? Writing culture intersects with writing and multilingual learner identity. In the last tutor's reflection, it is interesting to see the tutor had to unlearn her Chinese style of academic writing to learn the English style of writing because of different cultural expectations and practices in writing. The multilingual instructor's reflection also resonates with the tutor's experience as it discusses how these different cultural expectations become immense challenges in learning the

English style of academic writing in English-dominant institutions. It is evident that the one-size-fits-all essay writing standard and method confined them in the colonial institution, and the resultant challenges negatively affected their learner identity.

James Baldwin said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" (Baldwin 1962: BR11). These reflections resonate with current discussions on the colonial academy, and the urgency for decolonization as necessary. We cannot make calls for inclusivity without changing the system in which we learn. Surface-level writing that attends to LOCs fits neatly into a prescribed mould and is deemed proper for success. In our academic writing classes, we experiment with multimodal communication styles. We encourage students to express their knowledge through art, music, radio programs, podcasts, and magazine articles, to name just a few. There is nothing wrong with a standard academic essay, but it is just one way of demonstrating knowledge. There are many other writing modalities that invite diversity, creativity, enjoyment, and student incentive all packaged in a learning process.

Multilingual students often experience a lack of academic and writing tools to navigate a new academic system foreign to them. For change to happen, pedagogical forms and expectations that welcome diversity in writing practices need to be explored. As instructors and writing center practitioners, we challenge ourselves to adopt culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in our writing instruction, which allows us to learn about multilingual students' cultures and select teaching materials and topics that are relevant to them (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 1995 & 2021). Our hope with the aim to decolonize writing is to see more multilingual students view writing as a skill that aids their academic journey, instead of a barrier that discourages them from pursuing and presenting topics that they are curious and passionate about. Writing should not be understood as a one-size-fits-all method that furthers social hierarchies where writing standards are curated by a few for students to figure out.

Concluding Thoughts

The writing center at our university is a dynamic place where we have animated discussions about writing, teaching writing, languages, multilingualism, and the unique role that tutors play in this important junction. We are at a crossroads in the writing center because writing is at a crossroads. The demographics of our students and tutors in our writing center are more diverse than ever. GenAI has entered the stage and challenges us to rethink writing and tutoring as it has always been done. We are looking at other ways to be relevant and essential in these changing times. To that end, we aim to keep the line of communication open to students so we can engage in a conversation about how to best learn in a dynamic environment that invites curiosity and exploration, and regards mistakes as just another piece in the learning puzzle. As we work towards decolonization in the writing center, we also suggest the decolonization of academic writing by adopting responsive and relevant pedagogy in writing instruction. We see multilingualism as an asset to be celebrated, and multimodal

and process writing as essential to make our future writing center more inclusive and equitable for the changing demographics and times.

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Multilingualism in Writing Center Work

Sandra Drumm

Abstract

Writing centers can play a key role in developing universities as multilingual organizations, enhancing access to languages and multilingualism. They support multilingual writing and language skills. This paper explores multilingualism, particularly the impact of language switching on working memory during writing. It also reviews data from writing centers in Germany that adopt a multilingual approach. The findings suggest that enabling individuals to strategically choose from their language repertoire is essential. Additionally, using all languages can boost self-confidence and reduce cognitive strain in the writing process.

Introduction

Multilingual individuals have been shown to develop unique and sophisticated strategies for language acquisition and writing compared to monolingual individuals (Canagarajah 2013). The relationship between writing skills and the different languages of multilinguals are based on the linguistic and metacognitive knowledge of such learners (Schnoor/Usanova 2023). The multilingual writing process, which we define here as an individual's writing processes where multilingualism comes into play, has been shown to have positive relationships between languages in use. This has been interpreted as an indication that languages (knowledge) serve as mutual resources.

Often, the concept of multilingualism is viewed through the lens of second language (L2) acquisition, which may consequently lead to a deficit-based perspective. The ability to speak more than one language, particularly if it is a heritage language of a minority group, is not always regarded as a valuable asset but rather as a disadvantage, particularly in monolingually-oriented environments such as educational institutions. However, pedagogical principles should aim for the general recognition of the language(s) of learners who have grown up multilingually. Furthermore, such principles should facilitate the development of multifaceted and dynamic identities and competencies within multilinguals (Gantefort 2020: 202). Writing centers are thus in an ideal position to help develop a multilingual-oriented oganization and positively influence people's access to languages and multilingualism while at university.

The benefits of multilingualism, and related aspects, are addressed in the first part of the following paper. To address the topic of multilingualism itself, the second part of the paper presents practical reports and empirical results from the tutorial practices of writing centers across Germany. The second part of the paper presents practical reports and empiri-

cal results from written communication tutoring in Germany that addresses the topic of multilingualism. From these findings, the paper concludes with how multilingual practices can become more relevant and implemented in writing center work.

Multilingualism in the brain

The writing process is a dynamic system comprising a series of writing situations in which strategies and routines are deployed and in which numerous factors exert influence (Flower and Hayes 1981; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1981; Kellogg 1996; Göpferich 2015). The role of the working memory in the multilingual writing process is significant one, given its involvement in the process of generating suitable formulations in L2 (Kellog et al. 2013). The cognitive burden imposed by the demands of writing can impede concentration on the structural level and the actual arguments themselves. It is important to understand how the use of multiple languages during the already complex writing process impacts working memory, whether it be in a stressful or enriching manner. When writing in a less dominant language, it is possible that the demands associated with language (such as vocabulary organization and grammar) may take precedence over the demands inherent to the act of writing itself (such as text development and reader guidance). This can result in a text that is less aligned with the desired register and text type (Göpferich/Nelezen 2014).

The executive function of multilinguals is enhanced due to the trained ability to inhibit different stimuli, the broad development of working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Matías-Guiu et al. 2019). Indeed, multilinguals have a greater capacity for cognitive maintenance (Sambanis 2020), which could be an argument for training reading and writing abilities in all languages of the multilingual or at least for not cutting them out. The act of reading and writing allows for the exploration of a wide range of linguistic registers and contributes to the development of a more nuanced and diverse language competence.

Contrary to what a monolingual might imagine, multilinguals perceive their languages as a continuum, with no clear boundaries between languages (Herdina /Jessner 2002). Multilingual individuals possess an overall linguistic repertoire, which they deploy strategically, flexibly, and in an integrated manner, contingent on the social context (Gantefort 2020). Translanguaging describes the flexible use of the multilingual repertoire. The term refers to a conceptual framework for describing multilingualism and multilingual communicative action (e. g. García 2009). The term multilingual is sometimes described as an additive view of the language relationship, namely a combination of different languages, in contrast to the term translingual, which is focused on synergy. In this instance, the languages are in contact and exert an influence upon one another. Accordingly, communicative actions involve lexical, grammatical, and textual elements of different languages, which multilingual people use flexibly in communication according to their needs and purposes (García/Wei 2014). Translanguaging, therefore, is defined as a "functional, interactional, and dynamic understanding of multilingualism" (Gürsoy/Roll 2018). The research suggests that languages are not discrete modular systems, but are interconnected, and simultaneously activated during the writing process. Even if they are suppressed by certain mechanisms in monolingual situa-

tions, the full potential of multilingualism for the learning process can only be exploited if learners deepen and expand their metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge in the existing languages. Even first language (L1) speakers engage in cross-linguistic relationships when they read and write in their first language since they use different registers and so on. In this sense, translingual communication affects all individuals, monolingual and multilinguals speakers alike, and manifests itself in textual products with different types and degrees of language mixing. This is a particularly productive approach for writing centers because it extends multilingualism to learners who initially see themselves as monolingual. The central approach must be to see multilingualism as a norm and resource that is open to everyone, especially at universities, which usually bring together speakers of many languages.

Multilingualism in the writing process

The impact of language switching on working memory is not yet fully understood, as it is highly dependent on numerous factors (Machura 2022: 133). The complexity of these factors underscores the need for individualized advice based on a thorough understanding of the individual case rather than generalized instruction. In order for writers to be able to use their entire linguistic repertoire for learning, the framework conditions for learning must be geared towards linguistic diversity (Gantefort 2020). Writing should be used as a learning medium for cognitive and metacognitive development in relation to multilingualism (Gürsoy/Roll 2018: 353).

When writing, multilinguals can access their entire linguistic repertoire and use linguistic resources in a strategic and routinized manner. Dengscherz (2019) presents writing as a complex process in which the heuristic and rhetorical dimensions exert an influence at each stage. The use of languages is highly individual but related to (a) situational conditions and (b) attitudes towards languages (Dengscherz 2020):

a) Situational conditions

Depending on the stage of the writing process, writers may use their languages to enhance creativity, to overcome difficulties in formulating ideas, or to indicate a shift to a meta-level. Dengscherz (2019) shows that writers use their multilingual repertoire as a resource in the heuristic dimension when planning, developing, and processing content. This suggests that multilinguals use a variety of resources in a highly individualized way, regardless of the task at hand, and develop ideas in different languages. For example, processing speed is enhanced when the more readily available first language is used in a functional way to comprehend content, among other things. The rhetorical dimension involves compensatory work. This involves writers making use of research in their L2. This can be done by using parallel texts and monolingual dictionaries to gather linguistic material to form better words and sentences.

In multilingual writing, writers consciously use all available linguistics and other resources (Friedl/Scharf 2020). For example, multilingual writers use L2, L1 and another (foreign) language (L3) at all stages up to the final version of the text, even if the L3 is not part of

the assignment. The proportion of L1 and L3 gradually decreases during the writing process. According to Friedl and Scharf's data, during the brainstorming phase, about 84 % of the text is written in L1, while about 21 % is written in L3. In contrast, during the writing of the final version, about 13 % of the text is written in L1 and about 9 % in L3. Furthermore, feedback and corrections are used more frequently in L1 and L3 than during the revision of the raw text.

Finally, the complexity of the task and the sub-processes of writing influence language choice. The more demanding the task is perceived to be, the more writers draw on their L1 and on sub-processes related to text organization (higher order concerns). It has been observed that steps such as planning, organizing, and developing, as well as problem solving, are more likely to be carried out in the L1 (Machura 2022). The extent to which the first language is used depends on the level of proficiency in the L2, the process step being worked on, and factors related to the acquisition context and the languages themselves. Advanced L2 learners use their first language less and formulate directly in the L2, especially if they are proficient professional writers (Machura 2022: 121 f.). Regarding the context of acquisition, it is noteworthy that in the context of migration, however, the first language plays a more prominent role. Learners with Spanish as their L1 who moved to the USA before the age of seven and were taught in English tend to rely on Spanish for problem-solving (Jiménez Jiménez 2015, cited in Machura 2022: 124). This can be attributed to the fact that language is also an important factor in the formation of identity and group membership within migrant communities (Ladilova 2015).

Finally, the distance between language families plays an important role in determining the feasibility and timing of their deployment: If the skills associated with conceptual writing are acquired in the first language (L1), these can be transferred to the L2, particularly if the two languages are highly related. The degree of success and smoothness differs depending on whether the switch is made between languages that are closely or distantly related. The frequency with which learners use their L1 during L2 writing is more related to L2 proficiency, while the duration with which they use their L1 during L2 writing is more related to the difficulty of the task. Furthermore, it appears that these general trends are attenuated for the closely-related languages In non-related languages, writers switched more frequently and for longer than their advanced peers. This was not the case when measuring duration in related languages, as advanced writersspent more time in their L1 than less-expert learners. Writers who spend a long time in a distant L1 during the process produce poorer[1] texts in the L2 than writers who use the same strategy but whose languages are closely related (Woodall 2002).

1 To measure the effect of language-switching on text quality, the L2 texts were rated independently and blindly by six raters (two per language). The raters, all native speakers and practicing teachers of the L2 at the university, were asked to judge each text as a first draft, using a holistic rating scale based on that of Carroll (1980, cited in Woodall 2002).

b) Attitudes towards multilingualism

The aforementioned is applicable to multilinguals who adopt a positive perspective toward their linguistic repertoire (Dengscherz 2020). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for writers to view their multilingualism as a barrier rather than an asset (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). Consequently, they may deliberately distance themselves from their first language when writing, or even conceal it (Knorr et al. 2015; Tilmans 2019). The factors influencing an individual's use of their own language repertoire has been categorized by Dengscherz (2020) into three main groups, namely factors that:

- relate to the perception of languages as a burden
- relate to the perception of the languages as an enrichment
- relate to the perception of the languages as normal

For example, the use of the individual's L1 in the L2 can benefit in terms of text quality if the writers are accustomed to codeswitching in their everyday lives or if they have experience translating (Machura 2022). This assumption cannot be made for writers who attempt to inhibit their first language in educational settings. However, if the writers are not trained in this process, switching between languages can place additional strain on their working memory or trigger interference if the structure of the L1 is retained in the L2 when translating (Dengscherz 2020). In particular, less experienced writers, or those who have yet to attain a proficient command of the L2 may be susceptible to cognitive overload in the face of language changes (Machura 2022).

However, if one's own multilingualism is not perceived as a resource but rather as a flaw that needs to be better concealed, this can lead to potential obstacles in the development of academic text competence, as Knorr (2018: 145) states. That finding is corroborated by practical experience from writing workshops (Zernatto 2021: 178). Restrictions in the use of the language repertoire can result in limitations in the ability to cope with writing tasks as a whole (Knorr 2019).

Tutoring situations with students who are still in the process of learning to write in another language should also take into account the impact of grammar-oriented second and/or another language teaching. Those learners often tend to feel insecure about their first language and focus on the grammatical correctness of the target text when writing. This can result in a lack of attention to the structural development and content of the text (Zernatto 2021). When writing in the L2 they focus on the appropriate and correct formulations, to the detriment of the overall structure, namely the argumentation of the text. This can result in a lack of willingness or even resistance to revising the overall structure (Knorr 2011). The act of searching for words can result in delays in the flow of writing and may impede the generation of new ideas with regard to regarding the overall argumentation of the text (Tilmans 2019).

Multilingualism in counseling

It is important to keep in mind that written communication tutoring is always part of the institution in which it takes place. In the event that an institution is monolingual oriented, it falls upon writing centers to undertake further work with the objective of actively and productively integrating multilingualism (Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019). On the one hand, this concerns the acceptance of counselors and the surrounding institution. On the other hand, it concerns the people seeking advice themselves. The incorporation of multilingualism into the work of writing center, however, fosters a flexible attitude towards languages and the creative implementation of collaboration across languages and professional hierarchies. This, in turn, can help to deconstruct hierarchies in educational institutions to some extent and increase students' agency (Aksakalova 2021). Severino (2002) posits that the writing center serves as a nexus where disparate cultures, languages, literatures, and discourses converge. Writing centers can facilitate the reorientation of language experience away from a deficit-focused approach and towards the enhancement of linguistic identities (Lira Lorca 2019).

In her 2020 study, Wang-Hiles examines the potential of utilizing the L1 in written communication tutoring from the vantage point of both multilingual writers and multilingual tutors. The utilization of the L1 in the counseling of multilingual writers was demonstrated to facilitate the development of their writing and English skills. This approach fosters a conducive learning environment, which markedly enhances their confidence and motivation for writing and language development in the L2.

Nevertheless, those seeking advice often perceive their first language as a hindrance rather than a resource (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). Therefore, the use of the first language is perceived as a diversion and so the text must be delivered in the second or some other language (Knorr et al. 2015). Stierwald (2016: 40) concludes that those seeking advice do not explicitly benefit from their multilingualism for the writing process, despite isolated indications of multilingual writing practice. Stierwald (2016) also assumes that students have considered the advantages of their multilingualism in the writing process for the first time in the context of multilingual counselling and are therefore not yet able to position themselves clearly. In general, the value of the first language of L2 learners at the educational institution is rated as low, and the question of whether the respective first languages should play a greater role is answered rather negatively (Dannerer 2017: 70).

In order to consider the practicality of multilingual writing with those seeking advice, it can be useful to include sample texts more intensively in the reflection, as processes of language development and language dynamics are evident in them.

Practical examples of multilingual writing center work

From the aforementioned discussion, it can be concluded that when incorporating multilingualism into the work of the writing center, it is of the utmost importance to enable people to select from their language repertoire in a targeted manner for individual process steps. In order to achieve this, writers must possess the ability to reflect and draw on all of their linguistic resources throughout the writing process. As previously discussed, this does not always come naturally. The following section presents and discusses data and examples from a writing center's work that actively includes the multilingualism of learners.

In a series of workshops on multilingual academic writing held at a writing centre of a German university, Barczaitis & Grieshammer (2021) presented suggestions for the use of languages and their different registers, as well as for reflection on the use of language. Their evaluation provides some interesting insights into the effects of the workshop on the students' perception of their own multilingualism. They show that the use of other languages in addition to the target language of the text increases during the writing process. Furthermore, the participants stated that they started using different languages in more stages of the writing process than they did before. Barczaitis and Grieshammer (2021) also observed a greater willingness to use academic literature in other languages in addition to the target language of the text. In addition, the participants reported an increase in their perceived confidence in using their language repertoire in the writing process. The use of one's first language in particular (which may be perceived as less academic by those seeking advice) can be associated with anxiety, which can be reduced by actively working with the languages. The greater the student's appreciation for their first language, the more they may use it as a resource for writing. This can result in a broader literature base, greater confidence in expression, and more stable self-confidence in language use in all languages (Barczaitis/Grieshammer 2021: 172 f.).

Learners frequently encounter difficulties in recognizing the structures of academic texts and developing them independently, largely due to the emphasis on linguistic correctness (Zernatto 2021: 184). It is imperative that learners, who have not acquired the L2 as a language of education, rapidly acquire and implement various competences. This can be explained by the fact that the standard of linguistic correctness is a criterion for assessment that is of equal importance to the accuracy of the content. This is further complicated by the fact that assessment criteria are often assumed to be transparent and known by the assessors, and are not explicitly taught (Zernatto 2021: 181).

Another practical example of writing centers and multilingualism is the work being done by Dohmann et al. (2020). They demonstrate that emotions are a central aspect of writing in another language and that these can be specifically addressed in writing tutorials. In individual conversations, emotions such as anxiety, a feeling of inadequacy, or expression problems can be addressed and redirected in a positive direction. Including multilingualism as a resource could further strengthen the positive aspects here. Furthermore, written communication tutoring can enhance the self-confidence of those seeking advice if their multi-

lingual identity is acknowledged and valued within the university context (Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019: 69).

Tilmans 2019 argues that in order to reduce inhibitions regarding the use of the first language, it can be helpful to demonstrate and reflect on its direct use in counseling. Should counselors possess the requisite skills in the first language of the individual seeking advice, they may incorporate this into the counseling process. Tilmans (2019: 22) presents evidence from counseling sessions conducted in Russian to demonstrate that those seeking advice are willing to accept the open offer to conduct parts of the counseling in their first language. The first language serves a number of functions, including facilitating more fluent communication, clarifying concepts in the first language before they are translated into the L2, and ultimately, fostering relationships. It is to be expected that various advantages and challenges will be encountered (Tilmans 2019: 23 ff.). Those seeking advice can adopt a new perspective on the writing project through counselling in the first language. This may involve a shift from the formulation level (lower order concerns) to the text structure (higher order concerns). Should the discussion of the structure also take place in the student's first language, the focus is on the process and not on the search for the required formulations.

Positive feelings such as intrinsic motivation and self-reflection facilitate the learning process, which is why Knorr (2020: 3) proposes a scale based on the dimension of feeling comfortable with the respective language. The multilingualism of learners can be leveraged to support them in different situations and writing phases. For instance, learners can be encouraged to create the overall structure in a language other than the L2, or to not write the first version of a text exclusively in the L2, but to also use formulations from other languages (Knorr et al. 2015). This approach enables the focus to be placed on the argumentation structure of the text, rather than the language itself (Tilmans 2019: 21). Furthermore, it relieves the working memory when writing.

Learners might need the opportunity and explicit encouragement to write in the language in which they feel most confident (cf. Kasprick/Mpoutsis-Voutsis 2019: 67). In order to reconcile the contradiction between the multilingual writing process and the required monolingual end product, Zernatto (2021: 185 f.) proposes four didactic pillars of counseling, namely:

1. raising awareness of one's own multilingualism and its contextual nature during the process;
2. developing individual strategies for dealing with languages;
3. supporting linguistic relief and shifting focus, especially in the area of higher-order concerns (structuring, topic narrowing, rough draft writing); and
4. building up a scientific language register in the target language at the end of the process.

In addition to (meta-)cognitive skills, external influences such as including peer feedback and feedback from supervisors also play a role in the counseling (Lira Lorca 2019: 27). At an advanced level, the teaching of writing processes should be conducted in small steps, be-

cause texts to be produced become more complex, time-consuming, and require more planning as language skills increase or in certain professional fields (Lira Lorca 2019: 27).

Lira Lorca (2019) also reports on the practice of multilingualism-oriented counseling and concludes that multilingual orientation and structuring, for instance, in the form of code-meshing[2] freewriting, can prevent writing inhibitions and blockages in a university context (Lira Lorca 2019: 28). It is crucial to identify and subsequently translate significant individual ideas into a L2 in order to transition from a writer-oriented approach to a reader-oriented one. Keywords that lack an exact target language equivalent can enrich the academic discourse if they are integrated into the text in the other language and comprehensively introduced and explained. The specific characteristics and distinctions between languages are analyzed, as are the potential benefits that lexical diversity may offer. This approach facilitates learners' reflections on the reciprocal influence of languages and thinking. It can be argued that only what can be expressed in words can be developed further and subsequently communicated to a readership. The act of reflecting on linguistic idiosyncrasies not only facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of the L2, but also fosters a deeper appreciation for one's first tongue (Lira Lorca 2019: 28–29).

Conclusion

The studies presented there thus indicate that the advantages of multilingual written communication tutoring can be found on three levels: capacity, awareness, and identity. Capacity refers to the reduction of cognitive load through the use of effective strategies. Awareness encompasses the acquisition of new language skills and registers, which serve both: language and self-reflection. Identity is supported through the self-empowerment of learners, who are able to freely use the languages available to them. The language repertoire can assist in reflecting on the communicative purpose of certain phenomena. Nevertheless, multilinguals may require encouragement and training in the utilization of their linguistic resources. There are numerous avenues through which this can be achieved in tutoring, be it in individual sessions or group workshops.

For tutors, this implies that training and further education must provide and/or create targeted opportunities for writers to experiment with their own languages and to include different languages in writing and learning processes. The fear of multilingual 'gibberish' must be overcome, and the strategies of the multilingual brain must be explicitly addressed and tested (code-meshing and code-switching, etc.). It is advisable to guide different process phases (beginning, collection, creativity, conceptualization) by using different languages and to focus on working with parallel texts and formulation aids during the steps leading to the L2 (Machura 2022).

2 Code-meshing is a form of writing in which multilingual individuals integrate their diverse linguistic resources with dominant genre conventions to create hybrid texts that employ a combination of languages.

Counseling training should draw on more recent models of the writing process (Knorr 2019; Dengscherz 2020) in order to better understand the use of languages in the preliminary talk and to be able to reflect on this with the writers. It is worthwhile discussing with the person seeking advice whether higher-order concerns and heuristic functions are currently impending in the writing process or whether lower-order concerns and formulation issues are involved. The application of certain techniques is contingent upon the relationship between the first and second languages. If writers lack experience and/or self-confidence in selecting a language, this can be addressed initially. In particular, for writers who are uncomfortable with code-switching, particularly if their written language skills in their first language are not at an advanced level, professional documents can serve as parallel texts for practicing formulations and text patterns in a later stage of the process. Writing centers can play a key role in enhancing access to languages and multilingualism in this regard.

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Writing Care Work: Reimagining Academic Writing and Its Support As Care

Andrea Scott

Abstract

This article draws on interdisciplinary theories of care to offer writing professionals a new way of theorizing academic writing and its support in German-speaking countries. The concept of care is a powerful lens for reframing writing as a social practice based on relational values like interdependence, connection, and curiosity. At the same time, the concept of care points upward to structures of inequality shaping academic labor in our field. Such a perspective on writing and writing care work invites renewed reflection on questions of growing importance post-pandemic: what structures enable or disable care for academic writers? And how can we build or strengthen infrastructure that helps writers and writing professionals thrive?

Introduction

The call for this special issue of JoSch asks contributors to reflect on "[w]hat [...] we need to rethink, what [...] we need to change" as we reimagine the future of writing centers in Europe. Since any vision of the future depends on what's imaginable in the present, I intentionally look outside writing studies as a field to develop a new lens for our interdisciplinary work. In particular, I draw on the robust and growing scholarly conversation on care to ask what the concept of care can illuminate about writing and what writing and its support can illuminate about care. More specifically, I ask the following speculative question: what if the feminist concept of care occupied a greater place in our thinking about epistemic practices at the university instead of the marketplace logics of individualistic competition and innovation? Drawing on theories of social reproduction, an important dimension of care theory, I also invite us to imagine: what if we understood our centers and writing support as sites of care—an analogy that helps us understand not only the importance of our work in the university's ecology but also its systemic devaluation? Instead of idealizing or moralizing care, I use the concept of care to help us ground our work in materialism so we can better see it as an institutional form of labor that both reproduces and disrupts structures of inequality.

To do this, this article orients readers to aspects of the scholarly discourse about care that have been under-examined in the transnational writing studies community. Since the concept of care addresses feelings, actions, and ethical obligations that are structural in nature, it is a particularly rich framework for exploring writing and its support as social

practices in higher education. This theoretical overview can also help JoSch readers better contextualize the emerging conversation about writing and care in writing studies communities on both sides of the Atlantic, a conversation that is likely to grow in the coming years since it is intertwined with larger questions about the future of work and gender equality.

Writing Center and Support Research About Care

A cluster of new works in the field of writing studies have taken up the theme of care in the aftermath of the pandemic. A sign of just how recent this trend is that most of the writing studies on the topic were published while this article was being drafted and revised. I began teaching writing seminars on care during the height of the pandemic in fall 2020, before COVID-19 vaccines were distributed. Since then, care has become an increasingly important concept for thinking structurally about the future of writing center work and consultations. Up until now, these works have mostly connected the concept of care to the themes of mothering, self-care, wellness, and affective labor, as I will discuss below. And the majority of these works privilege practice, which limits our ability to step back and come to terms theoretically with a concept of consequence to our field.

The most recent, and a particularly noteworthy, work on care to appear in writing studies as a field is the monograph Schreiben trotz Care-Arbeit: Strategien für Mütter* in der Wissenschaft [Writing Despite Care Work: Strategies for Mothers in the Academy]. It was published in fall 2024 by Vogelaar, a freelance coach specializing in writing support for caregivers and a co-founder of the online support community in German, The Writing Academic, which is arguably a close writing equivalent in Germany to the U. S.-based National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity. Building on the momentum of networks like Netzwerk Mutterschaft und Wissenschaft [Network Motherhood and the Academy] and edited collections on the structural burdens faced by mothers in the academy in Germany (e. g., Czerney/Eckert/Martin 2020; Haupt et. al 2020; Haupt et. al 2022), Vogelaar published the first handbook in the region directed at caregivers and their needs. Those who mother in the academy face a particular set of structural challenges and transformations, she argues, namely other-directed heteronomy, mental load, matrescence, guilt, and exhaustion, which make them cognizant of the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between mothering and academic labor (Vogelaar 2024: 22 ff.). Drawing on interdisciplinary research, Vogelaar walks her reader through the challenges facing new caregivers, including, the physical and psychological changes accompanying motherhood (Vogelaar 2024: 62 ff.) and the Gender Care Gap in Germany, whereby women assume on average 43 % more caregiving responsibilities than fathers (Vogelaar 2024: 51 ff.). Even as she critiques the academy's callous privileging of productivity at all costs and argues for equal care, the second half of Vogelaar's book offers a clear-eyed view of the concrete strategies that those who mother can use to sustain their academic careers and contribute their much needed (and underrepresented) perspectives to

the scholarly conversation (Vogelaar 2024: 78 ff.). A book of this quality and range in both theoretical orientation and practical advice does not exist in the U. S.

What does exist in the U. S. to a larger extent than in Germany is a growing conversation on the way that care(-work) shapes academic labor in writing centers. In their edited volume Storying Writing Center Labor for Anti-Capitalist Futures (2024), Giaimo and Lawson position writing centers as spaces engaging with six themes in labor activism, the last of which is "care work and sustainability." In this final section, the edited monograph contains seven short chapters on how, as the co-editors describe it, "mutual support, care work, solidarity, weirdness, and joy in communal practices can give rise to enjoyable and positive work experiences" in writing centers (Giaimo and Lawson 2024: 34). In the chapter most explicitly focused on care, Morris uses her personal experience with her mother's death during the pandemic to reflect on "the challenges that come with being a caretaker at home and a student/worker" in a writing center (Morris 2024: 179). The experience of life's precariousness during the pandemic led her, like many others, to "pause and re-think [her] relationship with work," a central theme in the edited volume (Morris 2024: 177). The article ends with a call for self-care, reflective of a growing focus in the field of writing center studies on wellness and work-life boundaries, themes that seem to be increasingly present in writing studies conversations in Germany as well (e. g., Homann 2024).

If Vogelaar's handbook develops practical strategies for writing amidst the structural obstacles of mothering, Giaimo and Lawson's edited volume suggests that personal narratives about lived experiences can help writing center studies as a field redefine work and its purpose in the wake of the pandemic. The latter book builds on Giaimo's monograph Unwell Writing Centers: Searching for Wellness in Neoliberal Educational Institutions and Beyond, the recent recipient of a 2024 IWCA Outstanding Book Award. Wellness, she argues, is a topic of interest to writing center professionals because it is intimately connected to questions of "labor, quality of life, and issues of access and inclusion" at the university (Giaimo 2023: 4). Giaimo recounts in her book how unprepared she was as a director to navigate unwellness in the workplace—from intoxicated students to a particularly traumatic experience with gun violence on her campus. The book attempts to remedy this, contributing to a growing body of research on wellness and writing center work, designed to address the increase in student mental health challenges and faculty, staff, and student burnout that writing professionals have been seeing in their centers and among themselves (Giaimo 2023: 5 ff.). Giaimo, like many of us, had come to see "stories about wellness as stories [....] also about labor rights" (Giaimo 2023: 9), inviting us to question the culture of "overwork" and precarious staffing in writing centers (Giaimo 2023: 10). Her book offers wellness interventions as part of its vision of the future of writing center work, including sample exercises for mindfulness (Giaimo 2023: 73 ff.), emergency planning, and risk assessment (Giaimo 2023: 84 ff).

Care enters the vocabulary of the book indirectly. She theorizes writing center work as a helping profession built on affective labor, which in turn invites writing professionals to develop an intersectional approach to combatting burnout (Giaimo 2023: 115). Affective

labor, a concept derived from the influential U. S.-based sociologist Hochschild (1983), is also cited as important to Vogelaar's thinking in her monograph, but in the latter's case the concept is invoked to illuminate societal expectations surrounding mothering (Vogelaar 2024: 53 ff.). Care is discussed in Unwell Writing Centers most explicitly (and surprisingly late) at the very end, when Giamo situates wellness in radical Black feminist traditions as important community strategies for mitigating racism, sexism, and poverty (Giaimo 2023: 119 ff.). Whereas wellness in Germany and elsewhere in Europe may conjure images of products and health resorts, in the U. S. wellness in scholarly discourse is synonymous with healing and self-care in Black activist circles, where it is defined as a liberatory practice and survival strategy under racial capitalism (see Rosenbaum and Talmor 2024). This idea is formulated most famously by activist and poet Audre Lorde in the Cancer Journals, in which she states: "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde 1988: 131). Giaimo expands on this idea to foreground methodologies for engaging in wellness research in writing centers in her WLN Digital Edited Collection titled Wellness and Care in Writing Center Work, which she compiled while writing her monograph (Giaimo 2021).

A recently published, smaller scale study on care has used collaborative autoethnography as a method for exploring writing center work as a form of care. Lane at al. draw on sociologists Hobart and Kneese's concept of "radical care" (Hobart and Kneese 2020) to question the way that writing centers have traditionally been conceptualized in U. S.-based literature as "cozy" homes of comforting care (Lane et al. 2022). As an alternative framework, they invoke Hobart and Kneese's definition of radical care as a "set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds" and a "feeling with, rather than feeling for, others" (Hobart and Kneese 2020: 1 f) to re-interpret their diverse experiences with care in writing center spaces during the pandemic. Consultations created space for tutors and tutees to bridge the intimacies between their home life and the university, they argue; and writing centers provided a critical buffer against academic precarity through forms of caring with students that helped the latter deal with expectations and structures perceived as uncaring, including unrealistic linguistic expectations surrounding the academic writing of multilingual international students (Lane et al. 2022: n. p.).

And finally, the most richly theoretical piece on care and writing centers was authored very recently by peer tutors at a small liberal arts college in the U. S. in the WLN Digital Edited Collection titled The Post-Pandemic Writing Center (Rice et al. 2024). Abraham et al. describe writing centers as a gendered "care system" because of the care they provide to writers who may have felt particularly uncared for as writers during the pandemic (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). This experience prompted their center to develop a holistic approach to tutoring that they call "care-based inquiry" and define as an approach that "empowers [tutors] to expand what writers understand to be possible in the center, set boundaries that protect their own well-being, and more effectively serve writers by scaffolding for an individualized and fulfilling session" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). Part of the scaffolding recommended involves ensuring that consultations uphold the principle of reciprocity, or not becom-

ing over-caring (e. g., "How do you feel about this") nor overly invested in a productivity mindset (e. g., "I need to get this done as fast as possible"); instead they recommend intervening with questions like "how can we work together to address your needs" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.). The peer tutors conclude that conceptualizing writing centers as "trauma informed, gender-responsive" care systems invites us to "take a step toward effectively thinking about productivity and de-gendering care models in the writing center so that efficiency and emotional vulnerability do not harm the well-being of the tutor or writer" (Abraham et al. 2024: n. p.).

This article builds on these contributions by focusing our attention on some of the most widely cited theories of care that have not yet been considered (or, in the case of "radical care," robustly considered) in studies of academic writing and its support at universities. Theories of care—and social reproduction—are powerful lenses for addressing the desire of writers (and writing professionals) to develop a language for describing academic writing outside of the more neoliberal rhetoric of productivity, innovation, and individual achievement. In what follows I explore the relevance of these theories, particularly those developed by influential feminist philosophers Tronto, Puig de la Bellacasa, and Haraway, for writing professionals in Germany, the geographical home of JoSch, and a vital region for transnational writing studies in Europe.

Writing as Care

Care is the focus of a large and transnational scholarly conversation in many humanities and social science fields, with some its most prominent theorists situated in the fields of political theory, anthropology, sociology, and feminist theory (e. g., Hobart/Kneese 2020; Malatino 2020; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Segal 2024; Tronto 2016). Care as a concept is notoriously difficult to pin down precisely because it encapsulates many of the core political crises of our time: the lack of resources to attend to activities of real value and the increasingly market-driven orientation of institutions charged with meeting basic needs like education, health, and safety. In the most widely cited definition, care is described by feminist political theorists Fisher and Tronto (1990) as a "species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible" (cited in Tronto 2015: 3; emphasis added). In short, care mends and tends to the social fabric of experience. It is, as writer and artist Costella puts it, a "fundamental action and tool for our immediate and generational subsistence and well-being"; it is a "shared, but not equalizing or consistent, need" (Costello 2020: 27).

Because it is so integral to everyday experience, care "shows up everywhere in our lives" as a set of practices that are relational and ongoing (Tronto 2015: 3). In Tronto's definition, care is enormously consequential because it "shapes what we pay attention to, how we think about responsibility, what we do, how responsive we are to the world around us, and what we think of as important in life" (Tronto 2015: 8). These questions call attention as well to

the unequal giving and receiving of care along the axes of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ability.

In this way, care has fundamental connections to academic writing and its ecologies at the university. The lens of care invites academic writers to reflect on what they are paying attention to in their research and teaching, how they define their responsibilities, and how responsive their research and teaching are to others and the world around them. Such questions can also be held up as a mirror to the field of writing studies in Europe and elsewhere. What are we attending to in our research and practice? Who and what are at the center of our conversations and actions? Who and what are at the margins and why? How do we define what we do and its importance? And what assumptions underwrite these responses?

Such a care-based framing also calls on us to ask who is this we and whom does it serve. As Murphy has argued, it is important not to conflate care with positive emotions, since thinking with the concept of care demands an attending to "who is uncared for, who receives care and who does not, and who is expected to perform care work, with or without pay" (cited in Hobart/Kneese 2020: 8). Such questions can be applied to our research and the care work provided to academic writers at the university, as I will later explore.

Since caring about writing and writers is arguably at the core of our profession's ethos, it's worth remembering that care is inherently contradictory with its own risks and rewards. Puig de la Bellacasa calls the words "[c]are, caring, carer [...] [b]urdened words, contested words" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1):

> *To care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress. Its essential character to humans and countless living beings makes it all the more susceptible to convey control. (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1)*

As Bondi (2008) puts it, care is "double-edged and paradoxical" depending on the social context of its use, "inspiring a vast range of strong feelings in both care-givers and care-recipients" (cited in Baker/Burke 2023: 22). "Care can turn into forms of control, abuse, even cruelty, from care giver or receiver," Segal reminds us, "if there is no mutual recognition or the potential for compassionate empathy within the relationship" (Segal, 2023: 8). Such a framework reminds us that caring can be paternalistic; it can upend the reciprocity that writing consultants and directors seek to achieve. In this way, care as a theoretical lens makes visible what Segal calls an "affirmation of relationality and fragility" (over "autonomy and power") (Segel, 2023: 4–5), an understanding of what feminist philosopher Butler refers to as the difficult and necessary "struggle for social and political forms that are committed to fostering a sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms" (Butler 2012: 149).

Such theoretical framing invites us to see writing—and writing pedagogies—through a lens amendable to some of the field's most privileged values, while also inviting reflection about the ways we might not be living up to those values. Writing professionals aspire to create spaces at universities for "sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms." They do this by seeking to build community around the writing process and offering writing consulta-

tions auf Augenhöhe [eye to eye] with writers. Writers in these sessions are often navigating relationships with advisors that are unequal and careers that may be uncertain. What they care about in their writing will inevitably at times be at odds with their mentors' interests, which can make academic relationships feel "burdened" and "contested." But at the same time, reframing writing as an act of care gives writers—and writing professionals—a new language for describing scholarly conversation. Instead of focusing on the individual choices of the writer in developing a research project, a care lens allows us to step back and create space for writers (and ourselves) to reflect on other values and needs, including our own positionality in structures of power. As Khúc put it recently in her account of what she calls the pedagogy of unwellness, or the foundational principle from disability studies that we are all differentially unwell due to societal structures that enable or disable access to care, we might ask newly political versions of familiar, old questions: since writing must be systemically enabled, what structures do academic writers need to be built in order to flourish? What needs can the writer ask to be met? (Khúc 2023: 27) And what can we advocate for as a field?

Cultural theorist hooks (2018) views such structural understandings of care as fundamental to human thriving. Indeed, she describes care as a "dimension of love," even as she acknowledges that it can be present in the absence of love (hooks 2018: 8). This liberatory love, according to hooks, is described in its most capacious formulation as "the will to nurture our own and one another's spiritual growth" (hooks 2018: 6).

Since writing centers and support structures aspire to nurture another person's deeply meaningful growth, such an orientation has rich pedagogical potential for conceptualizing writing as a means of social responsibility and engagement. As writing professionals, we could contextualize and adapt, for example, the community wellness planning tool from The Audre Lorde Project on how to break isolation. The website offers a tool popular in activist spaces, which in the U. S. are arguably seen as less divided from scholarly spaces than in academic communities in Germany. The heuristic asks participants to reflect on an "Event/Critical Moment/Conversation/Ask/Etc.." In the case of writing, this could be anything from a project deadline to an upcoming mentoring conversation. Participants are asked to answer the following questions for each care need. I have added the text "as a writer" to signify how this template is generative for thinking about the care-based needs of writers:

- What are the needs you anticipate during this event [as a writer?]
- Is it a heart, mind, body or community need?
- Who can help support these needs and how?
- Is there anything you'd like us to know? (Audre Lorde Project n. d.; brackets added)

In the U. S., I used this tool in a collaboration between my writing seminar Radical Care and an advanced art course on Sustainable Sculpture during an online pandemic semester in 2020. Students practiced articulating their needs and supporting each other as a community in meeting them. In collaboration with art Professor Sarah Gilbert, the Sculpture class developed a survey based on these questions to make works of art specifically for the first-

year students in my seminar. My writing students in the semesters since then have used versions of these questions to help them frame what they needed to complete our class's writing assignments with care. The value of such a framework is that it builds community based on interdependence, situating academic writing as more than the assertion of self-efficacy or the construction of rational discourse divorced from the bodymind and communities. Indeed, as Vogelaar's Schreiben trotz Care-Arbeit (2024) makes clear in the context of those who mother, writing needs are intimately connected with bodily, social, and material desires.

Such framing also invites us to see academic writing as a social practice dependent on an ethics and labor of care. Indeed, care may be the starting place for all consequential research in the social sciences and humanities. The prominent feminist philosopher Haraway argues that caring is at the very heart of moral intellectual inquiry: "caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (Haraway 2016: 36). Curiosity, in this definition, is an act of subjugation to this "unsettling obligation" to know more in our "mixed up times"—times characterized by "unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing on ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence" (Haraway 2016: 1). Asking questions—striving to understand—is an act of accepting and inhabiting this difficulty and writing our way towards a better future. Framing research as the difficult and "unsettling obligation" to know more may help sustain a writer's motivation by calling attention to the larger purpose of the work.

In addition, by defining care as a moral imperative, Haraway evokes a longstanding philosophical tradition, one that dates to at least the 17th century, in which curiosity (like care) is defined as a Janus-faced. The curious person is one "who treats something with particular care and diligence," according to Covarrubias' Spanish dictionary in 1611 (Manguel 2015: 13). The curious person "labors to scrutinize things that are most hidden and reserved, and do not matter" (cited in Manguel 2015: 13). For Haraway, however, all of this scrutiny matters and is essential. As Manguel argues in Curiosity, "What we want to know and what we can imagine are the two sides of the same magical page" (5). Writers—and writing tutors—attend to this very possibility, seeking to understand and actualize what is beyond the horizon of what has been already imagined. In this way, they engage in speculative thinking, in world-making care.

Thinking about writing through the lens of care also allows us to reframe academic writing as relationally agentive and transgressive. For Haraway (2016), staying with the trouble means staying present with the challenges of our times and not succumbing to "sublime despair and its politics of sublime indifference" (Haraway 2016: 4). Caring enables writers to move past paralysis to give shape and purpose to words and worlds. The influential feminist philosopher Puig de la Bellacasa builds on this definition to define care as a "vital affective state, an ethical obligation, and a practical labor" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 197). She calls for a "speculative exploration of the significance of care for thinking and living in more-than-human worlds" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 1). In feminist academic writing, she sees this care

manifest itself on the page through affect, responsibility, and action, which show up as a series of rhetorical moves that can be transformed, I'd like to suggest, into a set of caring methods for writers who are situated in uncaring worlds. In the aftermath of Trump's re-election and rise of the AfD party in Germany (and other nationalist movements in Europe), these ideas, I believe, have taken on a renewed urgency, as scholars on both sides of the Atlantic reflect on their social role in times of political crisis where the very notion of democratic discourse and citizenship are under seige.

Toward a Rhetoric of Care Moves in Academic Writing

Puig de la Bellacasa's set of three rhetorical moves offer writing professionals a generative framework for helping academic writers stay with the trouble. Her precise terms, informed by Haraway's feminist philosophy, are thinking-with, dissenting-within, and thinking-for (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012). Thinking-with, she argues, "creates new patterns out of previous multiplicities, intervening by adding layers of meaning rather than questioning or confirming to ready-made categories" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 200). In other words, thinking-with involves bringing sources together to repattern our understanding of a phenomenon. It centers thick descriptions over tight definitions, privileging the messiness of what's hard to pin down, much as I am attempting to do in this article by thinking-with the concept of care. Thinking-with seeks out "transformative connections" that can help forge new collectives of readers (Puig de la Bellacasa: 201). Dissenting-within involves reflecting critically on one's positionality as a member within a community with shared responsibilities for the impact of one's arguments (Puig de la Bellacasa: 207). Informed by hooks, dissenting-within also involves disagreement, recognizing that "knowledge-making based on care, love and attachment is not incompatible with conflict" (Puig de la Bellacasa: 204). And finally, thinking-for involves valuing the "knowledge conceived in the process of dealing with situations that marginalize and oppress particular ways of living and knowing" (Puig de la Bellacasa: 208). It involves reflecting critically on the dangers of thinking for a person or a group, including appointing the self or others as spokespersons for marginalized groups or unreflexively appropriating others' experiences. Much like community-based forms of research, it involves building on the knowledge of those impacted by a problem or phenomenon and adopting a responsible approach to one's research. It also involves remaining attentive to the unknown and keeping in check the impulse to control writing in the face of complexity or uncertainty (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012 199 ff.).

Translating the concept of care into a pedagogy of writing with care could include integrating the following reflexive questions into our teaching and consultations:

- What does your writing attempt to maintain, continue, or repair?
- Where does it resist being innovative, disruptive, or instrumental?
- To whom or to what do you feel an "unsettling obligation" when you write? Why?
- What are you (not) paying attention to when you write? Why?

- To what extent does care show up in your writing as a feeling, a labor, or an obligation?
- How might you begin to care more, care less, or care differently about your writing?

If we pause on Puig de la Bellacasa's heuristic for care writing, we can ask other nuanced questions as well, which keep in play the paradoxes and competing allegiances in academic conversation.

- Thinking with: What new patterns does your writing help your readers see? Who are you "thinking with" in your writing? Why this group? Why now? How is your research topic multilayered? What thread connects these layers? Where must it resist neat categories and opt instead for thick description? How is your writing creating new communities of readers?
- Dissenting-Within: How does your positionality affect your writing/research? How did you come to care about this research problem or question? How do you build caring relationships (e. g., with your sources, your research subjects), while recognizing difference in views? How do those you study perceive the way you think about their practices? How open are you to dissenting perspectives from within your field?
- Thinking-For: How do you demonstrate awareness of the pitfalls of thinking for (e. g., appointing spokespersons, fetishizing the experience of others)? How do you build upon the knowledge of others impacted by this problem or question? How do you adopt an approach responsibly? How do you manage the impulse for control in your writing or research? How do you remain attentive to the unknown?

The purpose of this rather long list of questions is to model what the framework of care can surface in the representation, teaching, and tutoring of academic writing. It models a means of representing academic writing that is informed by an intersectional understanding of its contingencies. Such questions might also help us as a field uncover and scrutinize values and approaches that have traditionally been invisible or represented as ideologically neutral in the study and practice of writing. It can enable more speculative forms of thinking about our field's and writing's future(s) in troubled and troubling times.

Writing Centers as Institutional Sites of Social Reproduction

If writing can be theorized as a feeling, an obligation, and an act of care, to what extent do writing centers (and other structures of writing support) institutionalize that care? I am calling this labor writing care work to be inclusive of the many forms of freelance and salaried labor that happen in and around writing support in German-speaking countries—within and outside writing centers. Writing care work, I argue, is a form of labor that political theorists call social reproduction.

Broadly defined, social reproduction is the unpaid—or underpaid—labor required to make the political economy go round. My focus here is on the political economy of knowl-

edge production. Frasier (2016) describes social reproduction as the "activities of provisioning, care-giving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds," including (but not limited to) "caring for the old, maintaining households, building communities and sustaining the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation." Capitalism depends on these acts, even as it "free rides on them"—or undercompensates them. She goes on to say:

> *In capitalist societies much, though not all, of this activity goes on outside the market—in homes, neighbourhoods, civil-society associations, informal networks and public institutions, such as schools; and relatively little of it takes the form of wage labour. Non-waged social-reproductive activity is necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. None of those things could exist in the absence of housework, child-rearing, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which serve to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and shared understandings.*

Of course, writing care work is waged in our field—in the form of writing centers, writing consultations, writing workshops, and writing retreats, for example, but it often serves to "maintain social bonds" by building community and developing "shared understandings" of academic discourse and labor within what are overwhelmingly public institutions in Germany. Yet it is also a form of care work that invisibly supports the more valued and visible labor of knowledge production in the form of writing that leads to publications, degrees, and academic careers. Our work as writing professionals in supporting and mentoring writers helps produce generations of academic workers and replenish existing ones, not only by supporting writers in the completion of their projects but also by assuming the labor of care that professors or research associates do not always want to—or have time to—assume: the close one-on-one work with writers needed to build the caring discursive communities that help bring projects to fruition.

The literature on social reproduction is rife with accounts of how this care work is difficult, if impossible, to scale. It is labor-intensive precisely because—like domestic care work, like teaching built on an ethics of care, where feelings, emotions, and relatedness matter (e. g., Seidl 2023), it happens on a human scale, one-on-one or in small groups. Aspirationally collaborative and supportive, it is also largely gendered as female. According to a recent survey, 83.3 % of writing professionals in Austria, for example, identify as women and 2.7 % identify as non-binary (Dengscherz/Mertlitsch/Wetschanow 2021: 311). It would not surprise me if statistics are similar in other German-speaking countries.

This gendered dynamic helps illuminate the structural devaluation of writing care work at universities. "While capitalism as a system only cares about profit, profit being capital's life blood and motor," Bhattacharya (2020) argues, "the system has a relation of reluctant dependence on processes and institutions of life-making" (n. p.). Support structures like

writing centers and consultations are arguably enlisted for their "life-making" work in sustaining academic (re)production. Even if capitalism is dependent on these cooperative activities to replenish and support the labor pool, "capital is reluctant to spend any portion of its profits on processes that sustain and maintain life," Bhattacharya concludes: "This is why all care work is devalued or unpaid under capitalism while institutions of life making [...] are either constantly privatized or underfunded" (n. p.).

This reluctance to spend funds on writing care work may also help explain why so many writing centers are still without permanent public funding in Germany (see Hoffmann/Freise/Tilmans 2023) and those with permanent funding still often report structural challenges ranging from high teaching loads to the undesired exclusion of teaching or research from their contracts that inhibit their integration into the university as equal partners. It also explains why a number of popular academic writing retreats in Germany and Austria—like the writer's studio, the Schreibashram, and schreibfertig retreats for academic writers who identify as women--are organized outside of the university as an institution, functioning as privatized spaces that offer intensive forms of support and care unavailable to the same degree at public institutions. At these retreats writers are cared for in meaningful ways: they have a schedule, individual writing consultations with experienced writing professionals, and built-in community with other writers; they are also given healthy meals and instruction in bodymind practices. The robust network of freelance writing consultants in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and beyond who partner with academics outside of the waged labor contract of the university is further evidence of the privatization of life-making labor around writing in the academy. These colleagues fill a critical gap in university services and needs, indeed a crisis of care in the mentoring of M. A. and Ph.D. students. They are the invisible network of support that makes academic labor within the university—publications, theses, career advancement—possible within an increasingly competitive and precarious labor market (see Bahr et al. 2022).

Given these trends, what might it mean for the future of writing centers if we were to see ourselves not as innovators in our field but as maintenance workers in the ecology of knowledge production? We are part of the infrastructure—at times neglected, but undoubtedly necessary—that makes academic writing possible (and pleasurable) for many writers. What are we in these roles helping to maintain? What are we helping to repair? And just how much does the political economy of the university depend on the largely invisible social reproduction labor of writing professionals? We might be, as uncomfortable as it may sound, rather closely related to the growing number of unnamed and uncited ghost writers that help keep whole bureaucratic enterprises afloat (see Brandt 2015). How can we, as a field, advocate for more equitable labor conditions for ourselves and the writers we support?

Conclusion

Thinking about academic writing through the lens of care invites us to see ourselves and writers differently and to ask new questions. Who benefits from our work as writing care workers? How might caring relationships at universities be made more equal? And how might we disrupt pressures to make our labor "scalable," "efficient," or "valuable"?

This article is a call for more research on the material conditions of our labor—both its problems and its possibilities—in Germany and beyond. It's also a call for a clear-eyed view of the care work that we do perform—as writers and as writing professionals. Sometimes a great deal of self-preservation can inhere in considering how we might care less or care differently about our jobs. A care framework invites us to reconsider our relationships to and within political economies that don't serve our flourishing. Only when we are unsentimental in our thinking about care can we get out from under the grip of paternalistic imperatives to care ("the caring teacher," the "labors of love") and reclaim care on our own terms—as a cooperative and potentially transgressive act that can nourish our mutual thriving.

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Book review: "Booksprints in der Hochschullehre"

Stefanie Everke Buchanan

Abstract

This review examines Booksprints in der Hochschullehre: Schreiben lernen im Team (2024), a volume that explores the use of booksprints as an innovative didactic format in higher education. The book presents booksprints as structured, collaborative writing processes that foster both academic writing skills and transferable competencies relevant to professional fields. While emphasizing writing as a means of learning, the authors also address the challenges of integrating booksprints into university curricula, including assessment regulations and group dynamics. The volume balances theoretical insights with practical guidance, offering materials for implementation. Despite some complexities in terminology and structure, the book effectively demonstrates the benefits of booksprints, particularly in enhancing student engagement, collaboration, and social integration. Ultimately, the review highlights the book's value for educators seeking to implement innovative and student-centered writing pedagogies.

Introduction

The book "Booksprints in der Hochschullehre: Schreiben lernen im Team" [Booksprints in higher education: Learning to write in a team] (2024), published in German by wbv media, begins with a quote from a lecturer[1]

> *I don't believe that booksprints can be sold as a way to make thing easier for lecturers. They simply aren't. But they are definitely something for people who are interested in teaching formats, in didactic approaches, in opportunities to promote skills development among students on many different levels. For that, it is a really great format. (I.2) (p. 9)*

If you do not have time to read more about this book today, this sums up several important insights readers will take away from this book: "Sprint" does not mean that the main aim is to get your writing done faster than usual. "Book" does not mean that the outcome will necessarily be a book. But in this volume, the authors explain that booksprints are a worth-

1 Direct quotations from the book have been translated from German.

while addition to established didactic formats in higher education because they provide not just a way of finishing a writing project but also convey transferable skill sets that are relevant for a variety of professional fields.

Booksprints are a form of collaborative writing which originated in the early 2000s. They use the idea of a sprint, a form of agile work developed in project management and software development, to bring a project to the finish line in a highly structured and efficient manner (Zennaro et al., 2007). Participants of a booksprint work according to a clearly defined timetable and clearly distributed and regularly changing roles towards the publication of a text. While the format is well established in fields such as publishing and various areas of the economy, the authors of the volume took inspiration from a few pioneering examples of booksprints in higher education and aim to establish it as a didactic format in university settings. They define such booksprints as

> *a format in which writers write a text*
> *together,*
> *over a short period of time,*
> *in different roles,*
> *in a strongly pre-structured manner,*
> *in an authentic writing arrangement. (p. 30)*

The authors address university lecturers (with or without prior experience in the teaching of academic writing) who would like to employ an innovative didactic format in higher education and at the same time promote their students' writing and project-related professional skills (e. g. agile work). While many aspects are similar to more established forms of collaborative writing, the highly structured approach and the clearly defined but evolving roles of the individual participants make booksprints a different and innovative format.

The book is divided into eight parts, the first five of which serve to theoretically conceptualize and embed booksprints in higher education. These five parts are followed by a bibliography as well as a handout and an appendix of materials for carrying out booksprints. The book thus serves both theoretical and practical needs, from fundamental considerations on teaching and writing in higher education to pre-formulated emails that can be sent to participants right down to the number of A4 sheets required per group.

In the introduction, the authors provide a contextualization of their volume and an initial orientation to booksprints against the backdrop of the current higher education context in Germany. Their aim is to "present booksprints as a didactic format that is intended to promote the aforementioned competences in different higher education contexts and can address the problems with its design [...] and enable a transfer into different forms of higher education and discipline specific cultures" (p. 11).

The authors consistently emphasize the importance of writing as a means of learning. What sounds obvious to teachers of academic writing needs more explanations for others. And since the volume is not only aimed at the writing center scene but also at lecturers from

other disciplines, they undertake a well-founded examination of the respective didactic principles both from the perspective of higher education and from the teaching of academic writing. The concepts of knowledge and competence are differentiated and placed in the context of the shift from teaching to learning, learner-centeredness is specified, but also critically assessed, and the authors reminds us of the great responsibility of teachers in didactic arrangements in higher education.

Learning in a university context always takes place within the framework of existing examination regulations, into which didactic innovation often cannot be easily integrated. In the context of booksprints, challenges can occur for instance in regard to graded/ungraded student assignments, and the authors provide suggestions and examples for solving such issues. They emphasize the potential of authentic, situated writing tasks which can become visible beyond the specific course and which can have a highly motivating effect. Reflection plays an important role here, as it can help turn irritation into productivity. Hitting a roadblock in our writing can be helpful in rethinking what we are trying to say. And writing, as the authors emphasize in this section, is also a wonderful means of reflection and thus of learning and expanding our skills. However, learning does not only take place through our own writing but also through looking at the texts written by others and through structured feedback. Often, what brings about an increase in competence for the students is not so much the work on one's own text, but insights from collaborative writing in the way that it is the norm in professional contexts.

Critical analysis

Booksprints are a highly ambitious format, and the project that this book takes on is as well. If a lecturer wants to organize a booksprint with these instructions, they need to spend a significant amount of time preparing and familiarizing themselves with the handouts and the terminology, which can be confusing at times. What is the difference between the roles of facilitator and project manager? When do the groups receive the group scripts, and which version of the master plan is displayed in the room? The wide range of material that the authors offer can be overwhelming in some places. Just one example: In order to understand the instructions given in the book, you need to know or look up terms such as HOC and LOC and the definitions of master plan, input or plenum that apply in this context. The authors' aim of presenting the complex subject matter at one glance runs into challenges here.

The volume is polyphonic, and the working method on which it is based leads to a special form of presentation. On the one hand, the book itself has been produced in a modified version of a booksprint; on the other hand, the authors emphasize that the volume has a collective authorship, that any sequencing of names would have meant a weighting, and that they all stand equally for all parts. This is a challenge for readers who are used to associating words with people, and to different criteria for attributing ideas in academic texts. The poly-

phony becomes particularly noticeable in chapter 4.1.3., Students (pp. 76–81), where student authors have their say and the tone of the text changes along with the perspective.

A few sections do not appear as part of a coherent narrative, which may be partly due to the fact that the book also represents the conclusion of a third-party funded project. For example, sub-chapter 3.3 on the SPRint project seems comparatively long, as the project had already been contextualized in the introduction. Some aspects appear in several places, such as the positive effects of the authentic learning setting, the definition of a booksprint, the explanation of handouts such as the master plan, or the conditions for success. There is a certain duplication in the material in their long and short versions: for example, in the master plan or the checklists (e. g. checklists 1, 3 and 7). While one could argue that many readers will not read the book from cover to cover but selectively (and this is explicitly desired!), this fact can also be seen as part of the concept. However, one could also say that a clear, maybe more directive approach in terms of the narrative by the authors could make booksprints in higher education even more attractive to a wider audience. It is indeed a great challenge to present the complex endeavor of a booksprint in higher education in a simple way. There might still potential here for further digital processing of the materials as an interactive, clickable or expandable version beyond the comprehensive collection of digital materials the authors already provide on twillo. Maybe the Schreibstationen material by Katrin Girgensohn (2023) can serve as an inspiration here?

Conclusion and recommendation

The strengths of the book outweigh the challenges. Time and again, the book focuses on the tension that arises between motivation through authentic, situated writing tasks and the resistances that make booksprints challenging: issues of examination regulations in higher education contexts but also tension that can arise in student groups, especially in collaborative and jointly assessed writing processes. In their explanation of how to overcome these issues, the authors successfully walk the tightrope between clearly naming and positively transforming these difficulties. When students wrestle with questions of fairness and workload, they prepare themselves for precisely such difficulties in professional contexts and can discover previously unknown potential in themselves, which is another important lesson from a booksprint.

The authors also explicitly emphasize levels in designing booksprints that are rarely highlighted so clearly in the teaching of writing: on the one hand, the conflicts and challenges; on the other hand, the importance of an emotional level on which "breaks, fun and celebrations" (p. 41) deserve their own sub-chapter. This also includes this realization: "The positive social effect that booksprints have cannot be overestimated in view of the fact that 40 % of dropouts state that they felt alone during their studies and that social integration is essential for successfully completing their studies" (p. 91). This effect was also emphasized by the participants of the booksprint discussed in this chapter in their final evaluation

(p. 103). This social-emotional level plays a role in several places of this book and is reminiscent of discourses that Andrea Scott (2023) and Lisa Nunn (2021) address with their thoughts on relationship-rich learning and campus belonging.

For all the extra work that booksprints do entail, all of the lecturers involved agree on one thing: "that the texts by the students who took part in the booksprint were better than those of students who did not write their texts as part of a booksprint" (p. 84). To return to the beginning: Yes, it is a lot of work and yes, it is a complex task – but all in all it is worth it. Anyone who would like to integrate an innovative teaching format into their course will find practical guidance in this book.

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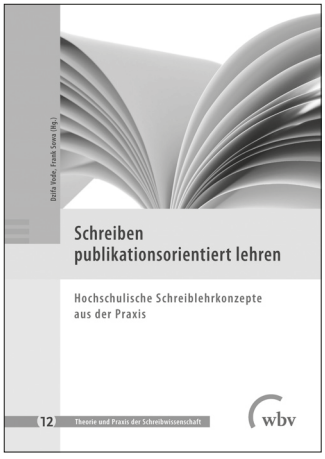

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