

CHAPTER 20.

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS INITIATING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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In this chapter, two literacy development projects will be introduced as a means of initiating institutional development with regard to the role of writing in higher education and beyond. In the first portrait Katrin Girgensohn presents Gerd Bräuer's model of literacy management. Through Gerd's eyes, she will shed light on the role of a specialist, called "literacy manager," whose profile is taking shape in educational and professional settings as someone to initiate and facilitate substantial change not only in the daily practice of writers and readers but in the literacy culture of entire institutions. In the second portrait Gerd Bräuer presents Katrin Girgensohn as a pioneer of literacy management and her model of autonomous academic writing groups in Germany's higher education. Through Katrin's eyes, he will shed light especially on the role of the faculty and the writing center in facilitating such groups of writers.

PORTRAIT 1: GERD BRÄUER (AS PRESENTED BY KATRIN GIRGENSOHN)

When Gerd, who grew up in the former East Germany and had also lived for several years in Prague (Czech Republic), joined the University of Oregon in 1992 as a post-doctoral fellow, he had no clue about what literacy management could mean. As a matter of fact, at that time he had barely started to grasp a notion of writing pedagogy. As he says himself, looking back, at his research on US writing pedagogy during the early 1990s, writing pedagogy for him at that time was merely teaching methods and techniques related to creative writing.

Having worked on a PhD thesis in the late 1980s on the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, he adapted Brecht's strategy of handling writing in the different literary genres as a means of constructing knowledge for his teaching in the field of German studies. Already at the time of his PhD thesis (1989), Gerd understood writing, based on Bertolt Brecht's aesthetic concept (Brecht, 1957), as a mode of learning that applies to the act of text production as well as to the act of receiving texts through the audience. While Brecht imagined this collaborative learning between those who write and those who read/watch as part of the theatre as a truly educational institution, Gerd envisioned this learning for schools and universities. With this vision he went to the US, where he hoped to learn from the rich experience of Anglo-Saxon writing pedagogy that he had started to encounter through his academic research.

It took Gerd about ten years of work and two monographs, one on US writing pedagogy (1996), one on adapting Anglo-Saxon writing pedagogy for the existing writing culture in the German-speaking countries (1998), before his ideas received some attention in his home country. In 2000, he was asked by a small university of education (Freiburg/Germany) to set up the first writing center in European teacher education. From the beginning of his work in Freiburg, his main focus was on "training the trainers" so that the changes he suggested for the role of writing in teacher education would trickle down the educational pyramid and trigger similar changes in primary and secondary education. Early he saw the need for providing knowledge to student teachers and in-service teachers with regard to strengthening sustainability of outcomes of individual projects on writing and reading. When Gerd started a certificate program for writing coaches at the Freiburg Writing Center in 2003, he not only wanted to foster the development of active writers and readers in various educational settings, but also intensify the impact of the many creative ideas of individual instructors in higher education and in professional training.

Despite the more than 100 graduates of the certificate program so far, he today sees the limitations of training that focuses solely on coaching writers. Too often in the past years he witnessed his graduates struggling and reaching their limits of professional development quickly, simply because they didn't know enough about how to initiate institutional change toward redefining the role of writing as a mode of learning instead of a mere mode of knowledge reproduction and presentation. He started to understand that these writing coaches also needed specific expertise in how to initiate and set up writing programs and/or writing centers.

He, therefore, coined the term literacy management (Bräuer, 2011) and conceptualized a specific training for literacy managers. Based on Gerd's description in our interview, literacy management aims for the optimization of

the individual handling of information and of the flow of texts between writers and readers within and beyond institutional settings and local cultures of literacy. The International Literacy Management Consortium, initiated by Gerd and others, sees literacy management as an “emerging professional field at the intersection of literacy research, pedagogy of reading and writing, instructional design, and institutional development” (see homepage of <http://www.international-literacy-management.org>).

From my own experience as a writing pedagogue in secondary and higher education, I can clearly see the demand for literacy management is developing rapidly due to a profound transition from the so-called information age to the so-called knowledge age that is being initiated and shaped by a growing variety of literacies and the specific demands of each of them. As with labeling of any other emerging professional field, terminology to describe the specific features of literacy management has not been established yet. Therefore, different names, such as knowledge worker, writing coach, or educational analyst are currently in use synonymously to speak of the same area of interest.

So, what do literacy managers in Gerds's vision actually do? He says the contour of a field of practice becomes more alive when listing individual tasks and highlighting those that carve out a specific profile of action. Gerd sees literacy managers juggle the potential, demands, and challenges of the different literacies such as “computer literacy,” “digital literacy,” “multimodal literacies” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003), “visual literacies” (ibid.), and critical literacy in order to solve problems with efficient handling of information by individuals within the larger framework of schools, universities, companies, and/or organizations. For that, as Gerd tells me in his interview, literacy managers

1. Analyze the current state of both handling information in general and specifically in text production, distribution, and reception, including visual, audio, spatial, behavioral aspects of forms of representation of meaning, within their home institution and beyond;
2. Assess the quality of the latter processes and try to determine a price tag for any loss of information and/or understanding of texts in order to quantify the urgency of change;
3. Identify the current needs of the main stakeholders with regard to in-house communication and the flow of information beyond;
4. Develop concepts and prototypes for optimizing the management of literacies within the organization;
5. Test and assess procedures, methods, materials, and training programs in order to further develop and successfully implement them;
6. Initiate necessary structural change within the institution and facilitate steering groups in this matter.

(For applications of these principles in various German-speaking institutions, see the Bräuer essay in this volume.)

Gerd wants us to read this list also as an overview of expertise needed to support lifelong learners in understanding and actively living local and global differences. In this process, literacy managers make strategic use of the differences each individual involved contributes to an institution. This way of seeing opens up not only new opportunities to understand one's own way of writing, reading, and handling of information, but to optimize existing literacy resources of an entire institution. Gerd in our conversation also stressed the role of literacy managers as change agents in shaping local cultures of readers and writers who interact with global practices. The list provided by Gerd above can also be read as an overall procedure in managing literacies. This procedure is based on the key principles of instructional design: (a) Analysis of learner characteristics and the learning environment; (b) Design of learning objectives and instructional approach; (c) Development of instructional frameworks and training materials (prototype); (d/e) Implementation and evaluation of the prototype in action.

As a result of this overall procedure the following tasks could be performed as part of literacy management projects: establishment of writing/reading centers; development of literacy programs and workshops for primary/secondary schools, colleges, and universities, and professional training; establishment of (e-) portfolio systems; conducting in-house staff/faculty training; development of self-learning material for students and instructors; research, assessment, and optimization of existing literacy processes in the institution; constructing an overall literacy culture in the institution that is beneficial for peer feedback and tutoring; development and testing of diagnostic procedures, methods, and materials.

To perform those tasks successfully, literacy managers need specialized training that Gerd several years ago had hoped to establish at the University of Education in Freiburg. However, realizing a vision of this scope requires patience and persistence, and the willingness to work within an institution's constraints. Gerd's experience at the University of Education/Freiburg illustrates typical challenges a literacy manager faces and offers an example of slow but steady progress.

To Gerd, the writing center at Education/Freiburg still plays a limited role in the institution. While he envisions the writing center as a place of instructing, coaching, and facilitating writers and readers from different literacy domains, the university still sees the center fulfilling the service function of providing hands-on help to beginning students in their status as rather inexperienced academic writers—despite the wide range of projects, publications, and expertise that resulted from the effort of the writing center team.

In order to make sense of this limitation, it is important to provide some information on the University of Education Freiburg, which is located in the South-western corner of Germany. The region of Freiburg borders France to the west and Switzerland to the south. The city of about 250,000 inhabitants is the home to a large research university and several small professional universities, one of them being the University of Education. There, teacher education for primary and secondary schools and professional training is offered. Like the other small professional schools in town, the University of Education puts a lot of effort into profiling itself against the large university in Freiburg. Instead of focusing this effort on what is known and performed best here—professional training—this college tries to raise attention with large-scale pedagogical research projects carried out by a few established faculty. Any entity of the University of Education that would not be able to carry out, for whatever reason, such large-scale research projects is doomed to stick to a rather limited profile of a service institution.

Nevertheless, the center has achieved a vital place in the university's culture. The writing center itself is a rather small but attractive space right next to the cafeteria and frequented daily by the majority of students and faculty. When Gerd accepted the university's invitation to develop a writing center in 2001, he urged the institution to provide this central location, which he saw as urgently necessary in order to get a new and mainly unknown entity such as a writing center off the ground. Gerd remembers his first day on campus, when the provost for teaching showed him around in order to find a decent place for the writing center:

After the provost took me to two far-away locations on the edge of campus, which he suggested to me as possible places for the writing center, he was about to take me for lunch to the cafeteria in the heart of the campus. I spotted a room of about 50 qm, with all glass walls, right next to the entrance to the cafeteria. To my curious question about what this room was for, he answered with hesitation in his voice that it was reserved for staff meetings of the president's office. When I told him this would be the ideal place for getting a writing center started successfully due to its central location and its transparency, I noticed his body stiffening and he didn't comment at all. The next day, he called to tell me that the university president agreed to assign the room to the writing center. I was in awe and, at that time, very hopeful to also successfully move writing more toward the center of academic life in the years to come (Bräuer, 2002).

Nevertheless, what seemed promising in the beginning wasn't easy in the process of defining the role of the writing center beyond a "fixit shop" (North 1987). It was not before the success of an EU-sponsored project called "Scriptorium," which Gerd directed from 2005 until 2008 (see also Bräuer, 2009; and Bräuer, this volume) that the writing center gained substantial attention among the university's faculty. This project brought together teams of literacy specialists from eight European countries who developed a modularized training program for student teachers and in-service teachers in reading and writing development and support. As a result, high school writing/reading centers appeared in Poland, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany. Training materials in the first languages of these countries as well as in French and English can be accessed through an e-learning platform (<http://www.scriptorium-project.org>) where teachers gather not only for in-house workshops but also exchange ideas and experience across the educational pyramid and across national borders.

With this training program in place, Gerd had hoped to lay the foundation for further steps in institutional development at the University of Education, Freiburg. The university, unfortunately, was neither able on a financial basis nor willing in conceptual terms to move on toward a full-fledged WAC and WID concept. Writing training remained isolated in German studies and in the writing center, although the latter instituted additional certificate courses on journalistic education and on portfolio instruction in secondary education. These courses are sometimes team-taught by colleagues from the German studies department, foreign languages department, and the departments of education and psychology. Gerd still hopes that this interdisciplinary effort will, in the near future, result in a more substantial change with regard to a more central role of writing in all parts of teacher education in Freiburg.

Symptomatic of this very slow pace in institutional development is what has been happening since 2007 with regard to implementing portfolios as an emerging genre of academic teaching and learning and an alternative form of individual and institutional assessment. Despite the fact that the university sponsored the development of a concept and testing of a prototype, the institution is currently not ready to engage in all consequences necessary to successfully implement a college-wide ePortfolio system; i.e., mandating a steering group by the university president. While some changes have already been made to the exam rules and guidelines, the university was not willing yet to make a firm commitment to a well-working ePortfolio web application. While recent portfolio research (e.g., Baumgartner et al., 2009) does provide enough evidence and guidance on the best digital applications, this research is not being discussed freely and openly among the faculty. The part of the administrative

structure that is responsible for e-learning follows closely the recommendations provided by a central committee for all teacher colleges in the state of Baden-Württemberg. Since the discourse of this committee is not communicated openly with local faculty members, many of them feel disempowered and, therefore, discouraged to contribute to finding a solution that would meet the real needs with regard to ePortfolio in Freiburg's teacher training.

A similar situation can be witnessed with regard to further developing the literacy management approach established already some years ago with the Scriptorium training program. The development of a necessary MA program on literacy management has been postponed indefinitely and in the meantime Gerd has moved his initiative to the Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur (ZHAW) (Switzerland), a place much more open to substantial institutional development, as can be seen in the chapters in this book by Otto Kruse and Daniel Perrin, both faculty members of the ZHAW. The near future will unveil whether Gerd Bräuer's hope for Education/Freiburg will come true: for this new distance-learning program in Winterthur to further shape writing as a central means of academic training in Freiburg.

PORTRAIT 2: KATRIN GIRGENSOHN (AS PRESENTED BY GERD BRÄUER)

Before Katrin started working at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder (Germany), she used to hold writing courses and writing groups outside the university for more than 10 years. These groups sometimes belonged to community centers or other institutions for adult and continuing education. Others started outside the institution and met in cafés or other places. At that time, Katrin worked with people from different age groups and levels of writing experience: old and young, female and male, authors and people who had never written before. In order to meet the different needs of these diverse groups, she experimented with several methods and settings, such as presenting and discussing texts at a regular open stage;¹ group and performance work for women only; projects for writing and publishing books with autobiographic stories.² Through these projects Katrin expanded her understanding of different approaches to learning-to-write and to facilitating writing-practice groups.

In 2002, Katrin was asked by the European University Viadrina to teach writing seminars. This invitation followed from the university's realizing a need to foster academic writing. Since the opening of the university 15 years ago a stable number of about 30% of the student population at EUV is not

of German decent and therefore represents either foreign or second language writers. Soon, Katrin realized in her writing seminars that there was low motivation for writing in general and academic writing in specific, and no willingness to freely share drafts and provide peer feedback. One of the reasons for that, she recognizes, is the teacher-centered seminar format practiced widely in higher education in Germany—a model that she saw herself obligated to follow at the beginning of her teaching career at the university. Katrin, from the beginning, felt the desire to bring to EUV her experience of working with writing groups outside higher education. When she finally followed her desire, she was very much aware that there has been no tradition at universities in Germany—and this is true also for the other German-speaking countries—with autonomous groups.

Let's mention a few additional facts about the European University Viadrina in order to better understand the circumstances of writing at EUV: this old university (originally created in the sixteenth century) reopened in 1995 with a new face, after about 150 years of mainly politically-motivated self-denial. The university is situated in Frankfurt—the “other” Frankfurt in Germany, located on the river Oder, which forms a physical border between Germany and Poland. Frankfurt/Oder is 80 km (about 50 miles) east of Berlin. EUV is a small public university with three faculties and about 6,000 students total.³ Katrin Girgensohn is still the only faculty member at EUV with a distinct teaching profile in writing. When Katrin started at EUV, there was no writing center, no composition classes, nor any other form of writing instruction. Katrin's students have been mostly BA and MA students of cultural studies who can choose her writing seminars to obtain credit points in “practical skills.” Besides writing in Katrin's courses, these students do not have to write very much other than take-home-exams at the end of the semesters and a thesis at the end of either BA or MA studies.⁴ Looking back at the beginning of her teaching career at EUV, Katrin says:

I worked at my university as an adjunct faculty for two semesters and tried to teach academic writing the traditional way in front of a class that was restricted to 25 students (from about 100 students who initially wanted to join the course but weren't allowed to sign up) and with a time budget of only 90 minutes per week.⁵ This, to me, wasn't satisfying at all. I tried using various forms of group work and peer learning and I gave as many tips and tricks about academic writing as possible. However, what I was missing was students really thinking about their own writing and practising

writing voluntarily, out of intrinsic motivation, so to speak. So, I began thinking about other ways of facilitating these writers and how I could transfer the experience I gathered with writing group work outside university to my courses at EUV (Girgensohn, interview, 2011).

Eventually, Katrin designed a concept for autonomous academic writing practice groups and started to experiment with it. Her understanding of writing practice groups is one that focuses more on writing together at the time of the group meetings than on giving each other feedback on drafts brought to the meeting. What follows is a list of aims she formulated for a new model of writing classes at the university: first of all and very simply, she wants the students to write more often and learn to enjoy writing. In other words, Katrin stresses what she calls a hedonistic approach to writing, which focuses first on the moment of happiness in the creation of texts (Girgensohn, 2007). From the perspective of instructional design and institutional development, her main concern is balancing the tendency in traditional German education to tackle the writers' weaknesses instead of acknowledging and making use of their individual strengths.

In Katrin's concept of autonomous academic writing groups, she wants

- students to write regularly,
- to offer encouragement for writing,
- to help students search for different ways, strategies, and methods of writing,
- to make students aware of their own writing processes,
- to encourage students to share their writing in progress,
- to give students a real audience for their writing,
- to leave responsibility for the learning process with the students themselves,
- and last but not least: to give the teacher a chance to really get to meet and know each individual writer in an otherwise large group of class participants.

In her 2005 presentation at the conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW), she named this obstacle of having to deal with large lecture classes and a very small classroom time budget "How to make a virtue out of necessity." Her autonomous writing groups are now offered as a regular credit-bearing course—not only in EUV but also in five large research universities throughout Germany. The term "autonomous writing group" follows Anne Ruggles Gere, who defines the term as follows (1987, p. 100):

Although groups take a variety of forms, they can be categorized into three main types—autonomous, semi-autonomous and non-autonomous—depending upon locus and degree of authority. The voluntary constitution of writing groups within literary societies, young men’s associations, women’s clubs, and in a myriad other self-sponsored gatherings identifies them as autonomous. Authority resides within individual members of autonomous groups because they choose to join other writers with whom they are friendly, share common interests, backgrounds, or needs.

In Gere’s opinion, university writing groups can never be autonomous “because of the authority invested in the educational institution and its representative, the instructor” (1987, p. 101). Nevertheless, Katrin Girgensohn had gained the experience—from her work outside university—that the autonomy of a writing group is the key for its success and the shaping of the individual desire to write: All members have to possess equal authority and must be “stage crew” and spectator at the same time. Katrin reflects on her experience in the first semester of putting this approach into practice:

I decided to let the groups meet without me, the “representative authority.” The groups are teacherless groups, which means that they are prepared and moderated alternately by all participating students. Furthermore, this decision solved my practical needs: I knew that I couldn’t supervise several groups as a leader. With no more than 90 minutes of teaching time per week I would not be able to lead even one. At the beginning I worried a lot about students’ development as writers and their willingness to collaborate with each other and, even more fundamental, to actually do their work without being closely supervised by me.

When Katrin started assessing process and outcome of the groups’ work, she found this: both motivation for giving feedback and the quality of the feedback provided changed for the better. How come? First of all, she detected a certain natural curiosity in the students’ reactions to each other’s writing. Also, students showed more awareness of the writing process simply due to the fact that one can see in each other’s actions what process writing is all about. There was also a stronger personal incentive for experimenting with writing strategies, settings,

modes, and genres. All in all, Katrin witnessed a change of attitude regarding the responsibility for one's own writing and that of others.

How could she make the students work in a way they never did before? What she expects them to do is a lot. They are asked to constitute small groups with students they never met before. They are expected to write together—though most of them usually haven't written on their own initiative before joining the group. Katrin's concept requires them to read their own texts aloud in their small group and talk about their drafts as well as about their personal writing processes. All this they are expected to do without direct teacher guidance. There is a very important reason why Katrin's concept is actually working well: the idea of autonomy is taken seriously by transforming the role of the instructor into one of facilitating writers by challenging them to build confidence and trust with each other. This transformation is supported through the following additional elements of her concept:

- Katrin takes the idea of an *autonomous* writing group seriously: this means that the groups have to be self-elected. Furthermore, the students are free to choose the themes and methods or strategies *they* like. They can produce texts the way they like and they do not have to show Katrin the product of their work until the end of the semester—there is no pressure to hand in or publish the results of their work. There is no doubt for them that *they* are responsible for their work. They are free to meet wherever they want—inside and outside the university. Katrin points out: “I don't grade their texts but instead I provide feedback on how the students engage in the writing process based on the information provided to me through team protocols and personal conversation during my office hours. The textbook they put together during the semester in each small group counts as group work. Nevertheless, I don't monitor how much each individual member contributes to the book.”
- Her role as teacher is transformed: she becomes a facilitator, a resource for the students and their learning processes. She *offers* them help with preparing the group meetings. After the group meetings, Katrin receives a protocol, which, based on focus questions, helps students to reflect their individual work and the group processes.
- During an intensive kick-off writing weekend Katrin gives a hands-on introduction to writing group work and combines it with efforts to build confidence and trust among the students. This is happening mainly through a task called “Stationen-Schreiben,” where students get a chance to explore their individual writing strategies, including an analysis of personal strengths and weaknesses. This leads them to

acknowledge not only their own current developmental state as writers but also to accept each other in their individuality. This Katrin sees as the foundation of individual confidence and trust among all members of the group.

In 2002, Katrin joined a group of writing pedagogues in Germany initiated by the Bielefeld University Writing Lab, with the goal of investigating the pedagogical potential of peer tutoring. In Bielefeld, Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail presented a three-day workshop on peer tutoring. Katrin's experience of this workshop was one that opened her eyes to the larger community of writing pedagogues and the writing research related to peer learning in general (e.g., Bruffee, 1984) and peer tutoring of writing in specific. This experience, first of all, had a large impact on the further development of Katrin's concept of the autonomous academic writing group. It actually provided her with enough confidence to finally put it into practice in 2003.

At the same time she started to develop a concept for a peer-run writing center at EUV, including a training program for student writing tutors. Katrin wanted to provide a home base not only for the autonomous writing groups but also for other writing seminars and workshops to come and, last but not least, for individual peer-tutoring of writing. In the process of preparing for the opening of the center in 2007, Katrin spent several months visiting US writing centers. She also profited greatly from German writing pedagogues who had started their own writing centers in Bielefeld, Bochum, and Freiburg. Katrin also participated in the certificate program for writing coaches at the writing center of the University of Education Freiburg. Several alumni of this program started an informal network where people freely share their experience not only with coaching writers but also with initiating change with regard to writing in institutions of higher education.

After the opening of the writing center at EUV in 2007, Katrin initiated several developmental projects with great impact on redefining the role of writing at EUV. The most important for her is a course Katrin developed on collaborative writing as a mode of cultural learning. "Intercultural writing teams" is an innovative seminar model that is integrated into the curriculum of the cross-disciplinary master's degree in European Studies and arranges cross-cultural encounters based on creative writing methods. Students work in interculturally mixed small groups that meet regularly once a week during the semester. In addition, every two weeks all small groups join a seminar on academic writing. This mix of academic and creative-oriented teamwork aims at a more holistic academic socialization for both the international as well as the German master's students. Therefore, students aren't just practicing academic literacy skills, but also intercultural competence and team skills.

The growing impact Katrin has had on institutional development at EUV with regard to writing over the years doesn't stop at the gates of the university, but bridges the traditional gap between higher and secondary education. Through the project "high school writing coaches" she initiates and facilitates the development of high school writing centers staffed with high school students, an approach that has been developed in Europe through the Scriptorium project, led by the Freiburg Writing Center (Bräuer, 2009). Sponsored by the Robert Bosch foundation, high school students of two different partner schools visit the writing center at EUV and get a three-day training in peer tutoring methods. Afterwards, the high school students work for one year as peer tutors at their schools. They are supervised by two students of the EUV writing center. After one year a new group of high school students will be trained to become peer tutors in writing. Teachers of the schools are trained as well. A long-term goal is to establish writing centers at these high schools.

With this said, it becomes very obvious that Katrin's initiative for shaping autonomous academic writing groups laid the foundation for a slowly-changing role of writing in the university and the formation of new curricular structures supporting writers and creating sustainable support of writing.

NOTES

1. See ULR <http://www.theodoras-literatursalon.de>
2. See ULR <http://www.girgensohn.schreibreisen.de>
3. See ULR <http://www.europa-uni.de>
4. The German "Hausarbeit" causes many problems because students have to manage these demanding research papers without support during vacations.
5. For adjunct teachers, who tend to take on more and more university classes in Germany, this is all—you are not paid for the time you need to prepare the lessons or to read and comment on the papers, you just work for the honour of being a university teacher. Young teachers often are not paid at all.

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