

Excerpts from proposals for the 2019 IRC workshop at CCCC

Prompt: Provisional Title

Writing Centers' Institutional Work: An International Case-Study among Three Writing Centers Across Europe

Prompt: Research Questions

Based on a model of institutional work of writing center directors (Girgensohn 2017), this collaboration will examine how writing center teams in Sweden (Gothenburg University), Ireland (University of Limerick) and Germany (European University Viadrina) conduct institutional work in their writing centers. The research collaboration asks how the local actors interact in their writing centers, with whom they interact and in which strategic action fields they interact in order to institutionalize their centers.

Prompt: Methodology

The method is within the strategic framework of participatory action research. A small group of actors of all three universities will visit each other's centers for one week to learn more about them and gain insights about strategic action fields and the ways of interacting with stakeholders. They conduct semi-structured interviews and observations. At each center, a fishbowl-activity will ensure the involvement of the writing center's staff: The visitors share first findings and discuss them in a "fishbowl" within a larger circle of staff members. The staff members are invited to discuss the findings with the visitors by joining them in the fishbowl. The fishbowl activities will be video-captured, transcribed and analyzed. An overall approach of the whole research project is grounded-theory-oriented, because topics and further questions will evolve visit by visit.

Prompt: How do you see this project fitting into the work of other writing researchers? What might other participants get out of interacting with your research?

This project focusses on contextual influences on the pedagogical work of institutions that support writing (writing centers, learning centers, language centers...). Other researchers might experience this as widening focus their focus, because undoubtable, contextual factors have a high impact on writing and on pedagogical work. Other participants might get motivated to conduct this kind of research with other institutions as well. Additionally, the framework of participatory action research and the fishbowl-method might expand the methodological repertoire of other participants. Furthermore, we think that testing Girgensohn's model of institutional work in writing centers will show ways how to use it as a practical tool in different contexts. This might become helpful for others, too.

Prompt: Tentative Results, Conclusions, or Hypothesis

Institutional work is defined as "purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006, 215). According to Girgensohn's research, institutional work in writing centers includes specific strategic action fields and uses 'collaborative learning' as a tool to interact with stakeholders. After the first visit we can see that the institutional work within one of the partner universities takes place within the same strategic action fields that were found in writing centers in the

USA, but that several context conditions are quite different and that another important strategic action field evolves: Administrative support from university governance. The ongoing content analysis of the data will show more details about this. One more visit will be finished by the time of the CCCC-workshop, one more will be coming.

Prompt: What kind of professional audience, journal, or scholarly venue might be interested in your research?

Researchers from centralized support for writing, learning and teaching as well as researchers from higher education studies will be interested in this study.

Our plans for publication include the following: A presentation at the conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) and a paper in Journal of Academic Writing (JOAW), a methodological paper in "FQS - Forum Qualitative Research", a paper in an international Journal of Higher education and case studies in local papers."

Prompt: Any Other Information

The study is partially funded by the EU-COST Action "COST Action 15221 – We ReLate -- Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development". One of the goals of the COST Action WeReLaTe is to start and foster a global conversation around new models for the centralised support of teaching, learning, research and writing, for both staff and students. Those conversations should be based on shared reported findings on what leads to effectiveness, success and productivity of such centralised support units.

Prompt: Provisional Title

Visuality and academic writing: Making design choices across different writing systems

Prompt: Research Questions

How do students who write academically within more than one writing system understand or articulate the visual design choices they make?

What are significant differences or similarities the writers navigate in terms of the visual dimensions of their written academic texts as they move from one system to another one (for example, directionality, conventions of quoting and documentation, spelling and transliteration, paragraph formation, and so on) ?

What roles does genre play in shaping similarities and differences across contexts?

Prompt: Methodology

This qualitative, exploratory research study aims to learn more about the choices multilingual students make as they compose academic writing. Given that texts are designed and read as “units that are complete in terms of their social environment” (Kress, 2004, p. 64), it makes sense that visuality, defined by as “how we learn to see socially” (Walker & Walker, 2004, pg. 23), is relevant for the design and reading of texts, especially academic writing. My university Institutional Review Board approved this study. Four participants were recruited from a graduate-level English course called “Writing in the Disciplines,” which enrolls students with high levels of academic achievement and a wide range of backgrounds and levels of experience as academic writers. Participants shared some of their written work in English and other languages (French, Arabic, and Dari), and they engaged in semi-structured interviews (about one hour each) to discuss the texts they shared as well as to reflect on their experiences as academic writers. Analyses of the interview transcripts and student texts will inform designs for further, more extended research.

Prompt: How do you see this project fitting into the work of other writing researchers? What might other participants get out of interacting with your research?

Although writing is a visual medium, theorists, researchers, and instructors have historically paid more attention to writing’s role in representing spoken language than to its visual characteristics. As Jan Blommaert (2004) observes: “Visuality is not lost in practice, but it is lost in the ideological conception of the writing and reading process” (655). Gunther Kress (2004) and Theresa Lillis have also emphasized the inherently multimodal character of writing, given that texts convey meaning not only through language, but also through choices of scripts and fonts, the formation of paragraphs, documentation practices, punctuation; inclusion of images or other non-script elements, capitalization, and many other features.

Participants may be interested in discussing how we understand writing in relation to visuality. Visual aspects of texts are highlighted as linguistic comprehension diminishes, and as the differences between writing systems widens. Thinking of textual architectures, scripts, and other aspects as contributing to texts' meaning-making may suggest new ways to teach writing or to talk to writers.

Other researchers might be interested in discussing innovative or more sophisticated ways of studying how the visual elements of texts figure into composing and reading. I hope that the workshop will help refine and strengthen the design for further research.

Prompt: Tentative Results, Conclusions, or Hypothesis

The writers interviewed are navigating across different writing systems, but shared very few representations of this process in terms of visual/spatial features. They are more articulate about rhetorical and verbal aspects and knowledge and less so about visual meaning-making.

Some visual elements foster mobility across writing systems and languages. Some visual elements hinder mobility across writing systems and languages.

Visual elements are typically treated prescriptively in teaching assignments and textbooks, with a focus on error. Regulation in English academic writing constructs compartmentalization of languages and forms. In less regulated environments (such as a private notebook) writers are more likely to use visual dimensions of writing for their own needs or expression.

Increasing immersion in a discipline can be signalled by changes in visual features of texts, or a heightened awareness of textual conventions in a field.

Interviews disclosed other, non-textual ways in which writers draw on visual or spatial images while they are writing to inform their work, including metaphors for crossing boundaries, disciplines, and languages.

Prompt: What kind of professional audience, journal, or scholarly venue might be interested in your research?

Scholars in rhetoric and composition would be interested in the ongoing discussions about the contributions of multilinguality to our understanding of writers and writing. This research could inform teaching in composition and technical writing. Some findings of this study also lead me towards research that views writing through spatiality.