

# Mutual Growing: How Student Experience can Shape Writing Centers

Katrin Girgensohn  
*European University Viadrina, Germany*

## Abstract

This article claims that working with peer tutors in a writing center can be very valuable for the center's development, if the director and tutors work together according to crucial principles in writing center pedagogy. Based on the example of the writing center at European University Viadrina, this article shows how ideas of autonomy and collaboration, for both writing support and writing center leadership, led to the writing center's growth.

## 1 Introduction

Europe is still at the initial stage of developing writing center work. Although a remarkable number of writing centers opened during the last decade, we still have a long way to go before writing centers become typical in European universities. While writing centers can be found at more than 90% of all colleges and universities in the U.S.A. (Grimm 1996, referring to Bushman 1991), in Europe they remain so few and are often institutionally invisible, that there is not even a number that could be cited. We recognize the growth of writing center work in Europe because colleagues tend to seek each other, for instance, on our listservs or at our conferences, asking for support with the numerous challenges that directors or founders of writing centers face. Challenges include financing (the most frequent concern), explaining our mission, managing in- and off-campus communication, staffing, etc. (European Writing Centers Association 2010: 22).

Obviously, there will never be general answers to the question of how to deal with these challenges. As Elizabeth Boquet (2001), Muriel Harris (1991), and many others have stressed, writing centers are too dependent on the different contexts they serve to allow for universally valid advice that could guide writing center leaders. Nevertheless, it might be useful to take a closer look at those writing centers that have managed to succeed despite difficult circumstances. What could the development of these writing centers tell us about successful writing center leadership? This paper identifies a writing center at a German university as one example of newly opened centers in Europe. The writing center at the European University Viadrina in Germany opened in 2007. Success is always relative, but the growth of the different services of the writing center is remarkable. Although its financial position is still not sustainable because the center remains dependent on external grants, it has managed not only to survive but also to flourish during hard times. Currently, it serves as a model for new writing centers in Germany. This became visible by the high number of requests for advice to the directors about how to open and sustain a writing center and led to the implementation of a certificate program in writing center work and international literacy management (cf. Schreib Zentrum n.d.).

In this paper I will summarize the development of this writing center. I will argue that the center's success and expansion depended primarily on the efforts of student tutors. Their active involvement and

participation in leadership led to the extraordinary growth of the writing center. This was possible for them because they could work autonomously on the one hand and collaboratively on the other hand. The leadership style in the writing center was strongly influenced by the pedagogical ethos that the center tries to espouse: to respect the autonomy of each writer while working collaboratively on the writer's writing process. As such, this paper claims that the success of a writing center is not only dependent on how we work with the writers who come to the writing center but also on how we work within our team. Both parts of our everyday writing center work have to fit together to allow a mutual growing process.

This essay will illustrate this thesis by tracing the history of the writing center at the European University Viadrina and by demonstrating how its ethos is based on ideas of both autonomous and collaborative learning. Both concepts became fundamental for the writing center in that they not only shape the way the center works with writers but also how it involves the writing tutors. Letting tutors work autonomously –for example, by allowing them to make mistakes during tutoring sessions – and letting them work collaboratively on projects – such as the definition of a mission statement – benefited the development of the writing center as an institution. Overall, the article is based on my own experiences and might therefore be seen as a case study. It also draws on a small-scale study with focus groups of writing tutors

## **2 The Experience of Autonomy in Writing Support**

The European University Viadrina is situated in Frankfurt – the 'other' Frankfurt in Germany, located on the river Oder which forms a physical border between Germany and Poland. Frankfurt at Oder is 80 km east of Berlin (about 50 miles). The university is literally located 'in the heart of Europe' and declares its mission explicitly as the 'promotion of a greater coherence of our united Europe' (Europa-Universität Viadrina 2012). With 20% of foreign students from over 80 countries and an extensive network of partner universities, it is one of the most international public universities in Europe. It includes three departments and serves about 6,000 students total.

It was the high percentage of international students that inspired the first steps toward a writing center at our university. The department of Cultural and Social Sciences recognized how international students struggled with the task of academic writing in the German language. Until 2002 there was no writing support beyond the language courses for foreign students at the language center, in which students only participated if they took language classes. As at all German universities, neither composition courses nor any explicit writing instruction classes were available. In 2002 the faculty of Cultural and Social Sciences asked me to offer one writing class per semester. I was a freelance writing teacher at this time, and I had previously worked with groups outside the university, mainly through organizing creative writing groups.

When I started to teach writing at university, the majority of students were not foreign students, but German students who felt strongly that they lacked skills in academic writing. Nevertheless, I struggled with the students' lack of motivation in the seminar. There was low motivation for writing in general and academic writing in particular, even though the students had signed up voluntarily. This experience nourished my desire to bring in my experience of working with writing groups *outside* higher education. From my work outside the institution I knew that people can enjoy writing and how valuable it can be for them to share writing processes.

I therefore started to experiment with autonomous writing group work at university. The term *autonomous writing group* follows from Anne Ruggles Gere (1987), who divides writing groups into non-autonomous, semi-autonomous and autonomous. Non-autonomous groups are leader-centered. Decisions about participation and content of group work come from one person, which in a university will be the teacher. On the other hand we have autonomous writing groups. They are self-sponsored groups in which, according to Gere,

Authority resides within individual members [...] because they choose to join other writers with whom they are friendly, share common interests, backgrounds, or needs. Autonomous writing

groups depend upon members who are willing to give away, temporarily at least, authority over their own writing, indicating that they respect and trust one another. (Gere 1987: 100)

Gere states that writing groups within university can never be truly autonomous 'because of the authority invested in the educational institution and its representative the instructor' (Gere 1987: 101). As such, Gere defines writing group work inside university as semi-autonomous. She says: 'Instructors have many ways of enabling students to take on a portion of the authority enjoyed by autonomous groups, and when they are successful they can become semi-autonomous' (Gere 1987: 101).

In my writing classes I noticed exactly what Gere describes: that the peer feedback groups were not successful but resistant, although I tried to let them work semi-autonomously. I therefore decided to take a more radical approach and try to establish truly autonomous groups within university. I wanted them to experience what Gere calls a *sense of empowerment*: 'The sense of empowerment [...] characteristic of writing groups both past and present results from simultaneous giving and receiving authority' (Gere 1987: 100). To foster this sense of empowerment I developed a seminar concept based on experiences with writing groups outside universities. The seminar is called 'Let's write!' It is part of the curriculum at the faculty for Cultural and Social Sciences. Participants are mainly BA students, but it is also open to Masters students and participants from other faculties. One third of all places are reserved for foreign students. The seminar starts with a kick-off weekend where students choose their groups. After this, students meet weekly in autonomous writing groups to practice writing. The writing tasks are self-chosen and mainly creative writing. The seminar finishes with a collective portfolio and a public reading.

The kick-off weekend is based around a writing journey to a seminar house in the countryside. I do this to take the students physically outside university. We all stay there for three days; we cook together and share our meals. During this kick-off weekend I give an introduction, informing students briefly about some basic findings on writing processes. Based on the ideas of Ingrid Böttcher and Cornelia Czapla (Böttcher and Czapla 2002), I developed writing tasks that direct students to practice with the ten different writing strategies Ortner (2000) categorized (cf. Girgensohn 2007b). For a whole day, students dedicate themselves to several of these writing tasks autonomously, but come together in small groups to share their experiences and texts on three occasions. Through writing, sharing texts and living together for a weekend, students get to know each other quite well. This helps them to choose the writing groups in which they want to work throughout the semester. I do not intervene at all in the group-finding process. Students have to find their partners by defining goals and wishes for group work, but also by reflecting preferences in genre or writing style. The group-finding process is sometimes very long and difficult because students take it very seriously.

After this weekend, students meet their writing groups weekly and they literally 'write without teachers' (Elbow 1998). For twelve weeks they meet for writing sessions, alternately prepared by other group members. They are free to choose or to develop the writing tasks they want to explore. Most often they choose creative writing tasks. My role in this setting is to serve as a facilitator: students can get help from me for preparing the group meetings and they get feedback on reflective minutes they write after the sessions they prepared. What I experienced with this seminar is that students really become motivated to write. They assume responsibility for their learning and really want to learn more - instead of just seeing writing as something they have to do.

I examined this seminar concept with autonomous writing groups in a very detailed qualitative research study. Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) I analyzed ten in-depth interviews with students and four focus-group discussions. I also included students' texts and field notes in the study that involved the autonomous writing group work of three semesters. The results revealed the importance of what one student called 'the social factor', i.e. the possibility for students to work within a self-chosen group where everybody takes responsibility and works with others on the same level. Most of the groups in the study were able to develop this 'social factor' that is so important for the success of autonomous writing group work (Girgensohn 2007a). This showed me that the term autonomous is right for this concept. The group work also leads to the empowerment that Gere describes and to a growth of writing competences. I am more than happy that the concept is by now adapted at four other German

universities and even one in Austria (University of Bochum, University of Hildesheim, University of Paderborn, Humboldt-University Berlin and University of Klagenfurt). Autonomy became a central idea for my understanding of writing support at university. These findings back up what other researchers found out many years ago. For example, in the 1970s Janet Emig showed that students do not learn writing *because* teachers teach it to them but *although* teachers teach it to them. She claimed that writing teachers should become facilitators, that students should have the option to choose self-sponsored writing tasks, and that students learn most from each other (Emig 2004).

### 3 Peer Tutoring

In addition to autonomy, the second concept that became very important for my understanding of writing support at university is the concept of collaborative learning, which is connected with peer tutoring in writing.

Peer tutoring is based on ideas of collaborative learning. In general this means that you do not work alone while writing but work collaboratively to become a better writer. And you do that with the help of peers – people who come from the same peer group. At university this means that peer tutors are trained student colleagues. Ideas of collaborative learning have a long history, not only in the U.S.A. The idea of peer writing tutors was not new but became popular when Kenneth Bruffee reported on his experiences with peer writing tutors at Brooklyn College in 1978 (Bruffee 1978). He learned that students at the college in Brooklyn did not make use of writing support offers, although many of them had problems in college due to their lack of academic writing competences. Bruffee started to train students as tutors, with the result that Bruffee's tutors came from the same peer group as their peer colleagues. Students began to use these so called 'drop-in' consultations to talk one-to-one with their student peers about their writing assignments. Furthermore, the tutoring sessions showed that students needed more than writing skills. Talking more freely to their student colleagues, it became obvious that many could not write papers because, for different reasons,

they did not believe in the capacity of their own minds to generate ideas from their own experience, whether in life or in the library. Yet given the opportunity to talk with sympathetic peers, these same students seemed to discover knowledge they did not know they had. (Bruffee 1978: 451)

This shows that peer tutoring in writing is a method that goes far beyond training of writing skills. It is also a way to support students in becoming a part of an academic community. It helps students to develop critical thinking and it develops their self-confidence, based on their own experiences. Bruffee describes the conditions at Brooklyn College in 1978 as hostile and alienated and concludes that if peer tutoring works under these conditions it would certainly work under better ones. Bruffee was right; currently, peer tutoring in writing is very common at writing centers worldwide. Over the decades, a larger discourse on peer writing tutoring developed. The idea was discussed, researched, theorized, developed further and sometimes ideologized. A literature review on the history of ideas about peer tutoring is provided by Brian Fallon (2010). He summarizes that the promotion of Bruffee's model meant 'establishing and promoting a philosophical framework that would shift pedagogy from a model that privileged a hierarchical flow of knowledge to one that relied on co-construction of knowledge' (Fallon 2010: 23).

In 2002 I came across the concept of peer tutoring in writing for the first time, when Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail gave a workshop at the writing lab of Bielefeld's University. This workshop opened my eyes to the larger community of writing pedagogues and the writing research related to peer learning in general. The idea of peer tutoring matched my experiences with writing group work very well. After a research trip to the U.S.A. in 2004, where I visited several writing centers which practiced peer tutoring, I realized that it had to be the next step for writing support at my university. Luckily, at this time Gerd Bräuer had started to import this model to Germany. Not only did he start a writing center with student writing tutors at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Freiburg, but he also offered a distance certificate program for writing coaches. This distance certificate program became an important step for the

implementation of peer tutoring in Germany, because it provided me and many others with an opportunity to learn more about this field (cf. Bräuer and Girgensohn 2012). Most of the German writing centers nowadays work with peer tutors and many of their directors have participated in the distance certificate program and disseminate this knowledge when they educate their peer tutors.

It was very important for me and my colleagues to gain this knowledge in a systematic and structured way because peer writing tutor education is crucial for the success of the idea of constructing knowledge collaboratively during the tutoring sessions. In training courses and ongoing tutor education through staff meetings, peer tutors learn to follow some basic principles in tutoring sessions. These basic principles can be found in writing tutor guides (see, for example, Gillespie and Lerner 2000, Rafoth 2005, Reigstad and McAndrew 1984, Ryan and Zimmerelli 2010). I summarize here what has been most important to me in my writing center work.

### **3.1 The tutoring sessions aim to help students help themselves**

This means that support is provided not only for the text the student is writing at the time, but also for future texts, as our tutors try to foster in students writing strategies, knowledge and thinking skills that help them become better writers in the long term. Hence, tutors help students to find out for themselves what they want to express or what their problems at this point might be. Tutors do this through posing open questions, through conversational techniques like mirroring and through the use of different writing techniques.

### **3.2 The tutoring sessions are student-centered**

This means that the tutors follow the students' needs. They try to find out what at this very moment is the most important issue for the student. Sometimes, this may not always correspond to what students express at the beginning of a session. For example, we often have students come in and ask for help with citations and reference systems. But during the session it becomes clear that they need support to find a research question or to structure their thoughts properly. In this situation, the tutors have the difficult task of following the wishes the students express on the one hand and explaining their point of view on the other hand. They have to explain that it might be a good idea to have a general look at the structure without being too directive. The idea of non-directive tutoring is delicate and often discussed in the literature on peer tutoring (cf. e.g. Shamon and Burns 1995). Nevertheless, it remains a basic principle that it is the *student* who sets the goals for the tutoring session. The session follows his or her needs.

### **3.3 The tutoring sessions depend on collaborative work**

As already explained, peer tutoring relies on the construction of knowledge and not on a hierarchical flow of knowledge. Tutors and students work together on the same level. The tutor might have more knowledge about writing processes, but the student will have more knowledge about his or her topic. In the session, students can talk together among peers without being in a hierarchical situation. They share the same experience of being a student at the same university and often they share a lot of other experiences. At this level they can work together collaboratively on constructing knowledge.

### **3.4 Tutoring sessions are professional**

Although peer tutoring profits from the peer-to-peer relationship and therefore seems to be more personal than other counseling situations at university, it is important to realize that peer tutoring in writing is a professional behavior. This is true for both parties – for the student writers as well as for the tutors. Student writers can learn that talking about texts is a professional behavior that they will need at university as well as with regard to their later careers. For example, I would define myself as a very experienced writer. Nevertheless, I always need to talk about my writing and my texts and I never publish anything without asking colleagues for feedback. This is the behavior of a professional. In the writing center, students will experience how to make use of conversations about their ideas and their texts. They will experience how talking will help them to express their thoughts clearly and how an outsider's perspective on their text might differ from their own perspective. And the tutors are professional because they learned how to talk about writing in a professional way. They learned to hold back their own opinions and spontaneous advice and instead to listen carefully, ask questions and guide the conversations in a

way that helps the writers to find their own answers. A study conducted in our writing center revealed that writers explicitly value how professional writing tutors are in the way they guide the conversation and also because they use opportunities themselves to talk about their writing center work in team meetings (Peters 2010).

### **3.5 Tutoring sessions aim at encouragement**

Writing is difficult, especially at university. There are many reasons for this, but one of them is that writing is related very much to our inner thoughts and feelings. If we show our writing we show a piece of ourselves. Unlike oral language, written language is materialized and therefore it is even more difficult to show our thoughts and feelings because we get the feeling that we cannot step back. It is very difficult for students, especially for novice students, to trust their own words and thoughts, as Kenneth Bruffee discovered at Brooklyn College. Student writers therefore need encouragement. They need this more than they need a teacher searching for errors.

In sum, peer tutoring in writing consists of respect and encouragement for the writer's autonomy on the one hand and on collaborative construction of knowledge on the other hand.

## **4 Peer Tutoring as Collaborative Leadership**

So far I have explained two concepts that became central to my idea of writing support at university and therefore for the writing center that I was going to develop: autonomy and collaboration. At this point, before I come back to the history of my writing center, I am going to add another observation which will account for my central thesis: that directing a writing center has to follow the same concepts our pedagogy does. I am going to show that not only the student writers profit from peer tutoring, but also the peer tutors themselves.

I tried to explore the outcome of peer tutoring for writing tutors in a small research project. At the third peer writing tutor conference in German language, held at the University of Hildesheim in 2010, I initiated a group discussion (cf. Bohnsack 2006) among seven peer tutors from various writing centers. I asked them to talk about their experience as writing tutors and to discuss why they work as tutors and what they get out of it. After the transcription of the discussion I coded the text: I grouped similar expressions and subsumed them into categories. These categories give an impression of what peer tutors, from their own point of view, get out of the working experience as peer tutors. This goes beyond writing skills, and it supports what Bruffee found out more than thirty years ago. According to the discussion, during tutoring sessions and through their work tutors learn to

- concentrate on main objectives
- handle critique
- master challenges
- master pressure
- act creatively
- foster insights
- be tolerant
- listen
- refrain from directiveness

Furthermore, they

- feel more confident and encouraged in relation to their work as peer tutors
- feel satisfied after many tutoring sessions.

The findings of this small research project support what a large research project, located in the U.S.A., illustrated. In their *Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project*, Brad Hughes, Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail asked former peer writing tutors from three different universities what they took out of their writing center work for their future lives (Hughes, Gillespie and Kail 2010). The results of the research are

impressive: Up to 30 years after their tutoring experience people still stress how much they learned from this. The researchers found that the former tutors gained not only 'a new relationship with writing', but also

- analytical power
- a listening presence
- skills, values, and abilities vital in their professions
- skills, values, and abilities vital in families and in relationships
- earned confidence in themselves
- and a deeper understanding of and commitment to collaborative learning (Hughes, Gillespie and Kail 2010: 13).

These findings suggest, as my group discussion does, that peer tutors gain a lot from their work. They gain collaborative leadership experiences and this allows them to grow. I will now show how this growth can be transferred to the growth of the writing center itself.

## 5 The Growth of the Writing Center at European University Viadrina

Coming back to the writing center at European University Viadrina and its history, I will illustrate how the tutors' autonomy and collaboration helped to develop our writing center. As explained earlier, I started as a freelance writing teacher with a writing class and then developed the concept of autonomous writing group work. When I started to explore peer tutoring in writing I began on a very small basis. I secured a little bit of money for writing tutors and asked three very enthusiastic students from my current writing group seminar if they would be interested in becoming writing tutors. At the beginning we did not have tutor training. We just read the books I mentioned and some more material I brought from the U.S.A. Every one of us read some books and presented the content to the others. We discussed the principles and points of view and decided on a kind of policy for the tutoring. Because I did not even have an office at this time we learned very much about peer tutoring while sitting in the *Mensa* (cafeteria) and drinking too much coffee. Then we started to offer tutoring sessions. Because we did not have a writing center, the tutors offered their tutoring sessions in the faculty meeting room or the dean's office. In the beginning only a few students came, but those students expressed so strongly how much they out of these talks about writing that we felt encouraged. From the very beginning we had as many German students as foreign ones.

After I finished my PhD, I could offer the university a starting grant that I received from my sponsor, the Hans Böckler Foundation, as a reward for finishing my research on time. The foundation offered to pay half of my salary for one year if the university would pay the other half and would allow me to open a writing center. The university agreed and in 2007 I opened the writing center. From the moment we had a physical room for the writing center, the number of tutoring sessions increased. Not only had the number of tutoring sessions grown, but also the writing center itself. New ideas were born and many new projects started. Today we offer writing consulting hours for students and for PhDs; we offer workshops and seminars within the curriculum; we conduct writing center research; we network; we work together with high schools to foster writing center work; we carry out public relations. This shows how much our writing center has grown in only four years. When I compiled documentation for our third birthday, I was astonished at the size of the writing center and the richness of its activities. It made me smile, because I initially had to fight for the right to call the institution a writing center. The university did not want to call a place that only consisted of one woman a center. A one-woman-show is not a center, they said. I eventually convinced them because I could prove that 'writing center' (*Schreibzentrum*) is a technical term that is used internationally. However, the university was right with regard to one point: a one woman show would not have made the institution a writing center. This growth of the center was only made possible by the collaborative work of my student tutors. The majority of all the projects and content we now offer were developed with or from peer tutors and most of them are run by peer tutors. For example, the *Long Night against Procrastination*, which had excellent publicity throughout the country, was developed and run by peer tutors. The peer tutors' work is crucial for everything we do in our writing center. Without the tutors

my writing center would not exist in the way it does – if at all – as it might have become a victim of all the budget cuts our university faced during the last few years.

This diagnosis leads back to my starting point and my thesis: writing center work is a mutual growing process between peer writing tutors and the writing center, based on autonomy on the one hand and collaboration on the other hand. As I pointed out, the learning outcomes of peer tutors are really high. And because they learn so much they want to keep on growing and they want to apply what they learn. They want to prove their new capacities. And a writing center is an ideal space at university to do this. If tutors get the chance, their growing leadership skills will lead to the growth of the writing center.

## **6 Autonomous, Collaborative Writing Center Leadership**

But how do tutors develop these skills that enable them to share responsibility for the writing center? They develop them when writing center directors act in the way they want their tutors to act in the tutoring session. In a tutoring session the writers are the experts for their theme and their paper; in the writing center the tutors are experts for students' experiences. Student tutors know best the needs, challenges and wishes of students at the university much better than the writing center director. If student tutors are regarded as experts they can develop valuable knowledge for the writing center. Tutors, in the same way as writers, need the possibility to work both autonomously and collaboratively. For a writing center director, this means that he/she should lead the team to work in a non-hierarchical way and to be confident that tutors can co-construct the knowledge that the writing center needs. The autonomy that is so important for learning to write is also important for writing center work with peer tutors. At the writing center at European University Viadrina, the seminar concept with autonomous writing groups eventually became a part of our tutor training. All tutors experience writing in truly autonomous writing groups amongst peers. They learn to learn autonomously. Therefore, student tutors want to bring this knowledge of autonomous learning into the writing center. This means that a writing center director must allow them to work autonomously. As director, I had to learn to sometimes step out of the way and allow the peer-tutors to perform a task as they saw fit. This is not always easy, because it means allowing the tutors to experiment and sometimes do the wrong thing. However, as we know from writing research and from general research on learning processes, making mistakes is crucial for learning. The same principles apply to tutors: if the tutors just corrected the errors in the written paper, then, in the long run, the author of the paper would not learn how to do it themselves. To let the author become a better writer it is necessary that he or she becomes able to detect his or her own errors and avoid them in future. If the writing center director acts as a controller of the writing tutors and does not let them do it in their own way for fear of mistakes, then the tutors cannot become more professional and avoid mistakes in the future. In contrast, if tutors are allowed to take responsibility, to act autonomously as colleagues in the writing center, then they will become very professional and this will lead to development of the whole institution of the writing center.

### **6.1 Examples which illustrate how peer-tutor autonomy helps to develop writing centers**

One example was our common search for a mission statement for our writing center. We had very fruitful discussions and very creative writing sessions while we worked to develop it. In the end our mission statement was not only about what I, as the director, thought our writing center would be. It also expressed what our tutors saw as the mission of our writing center.

A further example was the writing center's third birthday. The tutors said that this would be a good occasion to raise awareness of the writing center. Some of them decided to create an exhibition as a birthday present for the writing center. They started to interview professors of our university about their writing processes and took pictures of their desks, offices and other writing places. Interviews and pictures were set out at the wall next to the library and were a great public event for the writing center. Furthermore, the interviews were a very good opportunity to talk with our professors about our writing center. I had to trust that the tutors would make a good impression on our professors. In actual fact, one tutor had a strange discussion with a professor, who called the writing center a shame for the university. He thought a writing center would indicate to people outside of the university that we have weak students.



This experience led three of my tutors to theorize their experience with communication in hierarchical systems, which they presented at a EWCA conference.

To conclude, my tutors create a written record of each tutoring session. On an average of two pages they describe what happened during the session, the results of the session and a personal reflection on the session. Reading these records I sometimes think, 'Oh no! What have they done here? That is not the way it should work.' But almost always, when I read the personal reflections in the last section, I see that the tutor gained the same thoughts as I while writing the record. They recognize if the session is problematic and often they are more self-critical than necessary. Furthermore, we discuss the records in our team meetings. One or two tutors always prepare discussions. They read all records from the last two weeks very carefully and prepare questions or critical comments for a team discussion. I am always astonished by their critical thinking skills and their awareness.

Overall, the case of the writing center at European University Viadrina reveals that, if tutors are allowed to take responsibility and to act autonomously, and if directors work with them in genuinely collaborative ways, then writing center work will go far beyond writing; it will lead to a mutual growing process and let writing centers flourish.

## **7 Conclusions**

We can see from this that there is a very strong relationship between the nature of writing processes, the pedagogy of peer tutoring in writing, and writing center work in general. Peter Elbow says, with regard to writing processes, that 'In any event, I advise you to treat words as though they are potentially able to grow. Learn to stand out of the way and provide energy or force the words need to find their growth process' (Elbow 1998: 24). I am sure that we can replace *words* with *tutor*. 'In any event, I advise you to treat tutors as though they are potentially able to grow. Learn to stand out of the way and provide energy or force the tutors need to find their growth process.'

And where does the energy that tutors need to grow come from? On the one hand it comes from the work as a peer tutor, as I found out in the above mentioned group discussion. This work itself provides them with energy. On the other hand, this energy emerges from autonomy and from collaboration. Thus, the word 'force' in the citation seems to be conflicting on the first glance. But letting students act autonomously means, at the same time, forcing them to act. It does not mean leaving them alone. As the writing center director it is my responsibility to create an environment in which they can act autonomously. However, it is also my responsibility to provide orientation, training and ongoing education. This responsibility for the growing processes is shared by the whole writing center team including student tutors.

This kind of writing center leadership can develop writing centers further and therefore foster the growth of writing centers in Europe. I strongly agree with Brian Fallon's conclusions about the role of peer tutors in writing centers: 'Tutors are vital to the future of our work and are absolutely necessary for our conversations to continue. [...] The more seriously we take our tutors, the more seriously the institution will take our writing center' (Fallon 2010: 7).

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