



Writing Mentors as Change Agents Theoretical Perspectives on the University of Vienna's Writing Mentoring Program

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Abstract

The University of Vienna's writing mentoring program, one of the university's academic writing services was launched in 2013, to disseminate knowledge about writing processes among students in earlier stages of their studies (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nosseck, 2021). The program supports the development of students' academic writing skills and facilitates change in higher education practices. This article explores the potential of considering writing mentors as change agents. Writing mentors, similarly to writing fellows (Zawacki, 2008), act as multipliers, who disseminate writing process knowledge and strategies. The research is based on a conceptual framework, which centers on the role of change agents and connects it to key concepts and approaches of writing mentoring, such as process orientation, peer group setting, and community building. This paper provides theoretical insights about the role of writing mentors as change agents and emphasizes the potential of this perspective for higher education practitioners seeking strategies to facilitate change in the institution's writing culture.

Keywords: writing mentors, change agents, academic writing mentoring, peer-group setting

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Writing Mentors as Change Agents

Theoretical Perspectives on the University of Vienna's Writing Mentoring Program

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Introduction

"Universities consistently grapple with the challenge of supporting students in their writing development" (French, 2022, 1-2). This is an ongoing challenge in the higher education context, in which institutions often respond by offering mentoring programs, as academic writing support. Mentoring has gained prominence in educational research, demonstrating its positive impact on university transitions, fostering belonging, and enhancing retention rates and skills development (Skaniakos et al., 2014, 75). This also applies to academic writing, as several programs rely on the concept of mentoring when it comes to supporting students in their writing development. Programs like Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and the Writing Fellows Program (Haring-Smith, 1992) have gained attention for using mentoring concepts as their foundations and for their potential to reshape institutional writing culture.

Zawacki (2008) elaborates on the concept of "change agents" in connection to writing fellows. She names two goals of the Writing Fellows program: first, seeing writing as a tool for learning, and second, seeing writing fellows as actors, who can be utilized as tools in the learning community (Zawacki, 2008, 12). Ultimately she reveals that the highest aim of writing fellows as change agents is to "build and sustain the rich culture of writing" at the institution (Zawacki, 2008, 13). This example leads to the idea that by considering mentors as change agents, it is possible to discuss their potential impact on institutional writing culture. Change agency can refer to the potential for individual, team, and organizational change. According to the definition formulated by Cameron and Green:

a change agent is seeking or supporting some sort of organizational change in, for example the strategy, the structure, the systems and processes, the people, their capabilities, the management style and the shared values all within the context of the organizational culture. (2024, 218-219)

This study centers around the role of the change agent, namely in connection to writing mentors. Similarly, yet in many aspects different from the writing fellows, writing mentoring programs have the potential to reshape institutional writing culture.

The writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna was introduced in 2013, to disseminate writing process knowledge among students (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nossek, 2021). The program stands out for its unique peer-group setting, a process-oriented approach, and the aim to build a writing mentoring community (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nossek, 2021). This paper discusses the shift of perspective, that emerges from considering writing mentors as change agents, who can enact change directly among their peers, acting as multipliers of academic writing knowledge, and building a

community with a shared mindset towards writing.

The academic significance of this research lies in exploring new perspectives for change and development of university writing culture that can be meaningful to the program's structure, educational research and writing studies. Furthermore, the research offers practical relevance to practitioners in higher education and decision-makers who can benefit from valuable insights when looking for inspiration on how to support the development of students' academic writing skills.

Following a conceptual approach, the article focuses on the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna. This program, with its extensive 10-year history and the university's status as the largest German-speaking higher education institution, serves as an illustrative example. Thus, in this research project, I would like to answer the following question: how can writing mentors be considered "change agents" in the case of the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna? I want to find out, whether the principles of writing fellows as change agents (Zawacki, 2008) align with writing mentors, as well. Furthermore, I want to show that the shift of perspective from the role of writing mentors to change agents enables thinking about change at the institutional level.

The research question will be answered by an argumentation based on a conceptual framework. I aim to define key concepts and create a framework with which these concepts and their underlying connections can be analyzed. The argumentation that uncovers the potential in the role of writing mentors as change agents is grounded in the existing literature on related concepts, including writing mentoring in higher education, process orientation, peer settings, community building, and change agency. As a starting point the literature review, then the conceptual framework, and the analysis will follow. Finally, the emerging theoretical findings will be integrated into the discussion.

Theoretical Background: Change Agents

The role of a change agent has become more and more significant from the 1980s on. Starting from the idea of change agents "as charismatic heroes of radical corporate transformation that sought to destroy rigid and inflexible structures", change agency spread gradually from leaders, first to specialists, then to employees, and conveyed the idea of embracing change and innovation (Caldwell, 2003, 131). The term comes from organizational development (OD) research and gained diverse meanings in various contexts.

As described by Cameron and Green (2024), change agents guide organizations through transitions at multiple levels (individual, team, organizational). According to the "change through learning" paradigm, an approach to change that has its roots in organizational development, change agents focus on providing opportunities for learning to take place. This might involve taking on the role of a facilitator, coach, mentor, or communicator, which requires knowledge about learning and educational theories, and OD thinking. Designing and facilitating learning situations, creating an open and safe environment, and coaching, listening, and providing feedback are among the needed skills. Finally, this paradigm relies on an open, inspirational, trustworthy, creative, flexible, and self-confident attitude. Through acquiring these characteristics, the goal is to equip individuals with the tools necessary to successfully navigate transitions and be prepared for broader changes (Cameron & Green, 2024, 227-232).

When working with teams, there is an added complexity. Cameron and Green discuss the importance of team level, which involves understanding team roles, goals, and interpersonal relationships, as well as specific models for broader organizational change efforts (2024, 221-226). They demonstrate in detail, how change agents bridge individual development and organizational transformation through context-sensitive interventions.

Brady et al. (2018, 187) discuss change in the context of a writing center, while also referring to WAC change. They raise attention to OD theory, and Vaught-Alexander's (1999) thoughts on writing centers and WAC programs, and the understanding of structures, motivations, and resistance associated with change in this context. Based on this background, Brady et al. (2018, 187) explain change as contextual, spiral, gradual, strategic, and ongoing. In this article, I focus on the principle that "change is contextual", to narrow the scope of analysis on the specific environment. By examining the particular context regarding the writing culture, I concentrate on mentors and mentees (student level), as part of the writing mentoring program (program level), and its embedding in the institutional context (institutional level). I examine how the specific context of the writing mentoring program might shape writing mentors' role as change agents, while also considering how writing mentors can facilitate change in the institution's writing culture through their interactions with other students (mentees and other mentors).

The current literature about how writing mentors as change agents might be considered is limited. However, some examples that are similar in certain ways, are worth reviewing. According to Kay et al., seeing students as change agents "enables students to be actively engaged with the processes of change, often taking on a leadership role" (2010, 2). This involves a profound engagement with the institution and the subject, as well as autonomy in making decisions about the focus and direction (Kay et al., 2010). Teachers can also be seen as change agents – as stated by van der Heijden et al. –, when they are "personally driven to initiate change in education at both the classroom and school level by using their professional agency" (2015, 683). Furthermore, teachers must consider themselves change agents, and aim to make a difference, as "being a change agent is a mindset, a way of thinking about the teaching profession" (van der Heijden, 2015, 683). While Cameron and Green (2024) explain change agency in coaching and mentoring by the potential for individual, group, and organizational change, Zenzen studied how mentors of teachers can act as change agents and enable new teachers to challenge the status quo in education through pedagogical and instructional innovation (2021, 3). In essence, the role of a change agent involves engagement in change processes, autonomy in making decisions, and the active use of the professional agency to facilitate change. Being a change agent can be considered as a mindset, aiming for an impact not only on the individual but on the group and organizational level.

In connection with academic writing support programs, Zawacki (2008) elaborates on the concept of "change agents" in connection to the Writing Fellows Program at Brown University, established in 1992, which is a notable example of the WAC initiative. This program was designed to address the ongoing issue of developing students' writing skills throughout their university studies, based on knowledge about writing, separate from disciplinary knowledge. The program involves students, writing fellows,

faculty members, program associates, and the institution itself. Writing fellows are specially trained students, who guide students in improving their writing skills through peer feedback and writing consultations and cooperate in writing-intensive courses with the faculty and teachers (Haring-Smith, 1992, 1).

The goals and thus the potential impact writing fellows can have as change agents is connected to their specific role and scope of work. Haring-Smith, – the founder of the program –, envisioned the idea that writing fellows serve as change agents within the WAC programs because they can change faculty and students' attitudes towards writing. She also points out the necessity for these initiatives to align with institutional goals and practices to ensure their effectiveness. The Writing Fellows Program has two main goals, (1) emphasizing writing as a tool for learning, and consequently, (2) utilizing the writing fellow role as a tool for the learning community (Zawacki, 2008, 12). Ultimately Zawacki reveals that writing fellows can be considered change agents because every writing fellow placement contributes to “build and sustain the rich culture of writing” at the institution (Zawacki, 2008, 13). For this article, it is important to acknowledge that Zawacki's article is relevant because it shows how considering writing fellows as change agents makes it possible to think about their impact on institutional writing culture. It has to be mentioned, that the University of Vienna has also implemented a Writing-Fellows project, in which several approaches are combined, such as the WAC, WID, Peer-Feedback, and individual writing counseling. As described by Römmer-Nosseck et al. (2018) fellows are responsible for assisting in courses, providing guidance in writing didactics and serving as mediators between students and teachers. The advantage of this program is that process-oriented writing didactic methods and knowledge shared by the writing fellows in the collaboration are directly implemented in teaching practices. While sharing the feedback culture is a central component of this project, the long-term aim is to leave a mark and influence teaching by multiplying process-oriented writing (Römmer-Nosseck et al., 2018, 221-222). We have seen that writing fellows can be considered change agents, because of their placement as mediators between teachers and students, and their potential to influence the organizational level. Highlighting the principle that change is contextual, and adding the concept of agency, it becomes visible that the role of the change agents is linked to adopting a mindset focused on making a difference, autonomy in making decisions and initiating change within their field by using their professional agency. Being a change agent in the context of academic writing support comes with taking on an active role in the development of the writing culture at the university, and aiming at making a difference in the direct and institutional environment. Given their role, could writing mentors at the University of Vienna also be seen as change agents? Moving forward in formulating the answer, the next chapter features the example of the Writing Mentoring Program at the University of Vienna.

Example: Writing Mentoring at the University of Vienna

The characteristic structure, training components, content, and aims of the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna are key to understanding how such a program can support students' academic writing development and improve the university's writing culture. The University of Vienna, the largest university in the German-speaking area, has implemented a comprehensive writing mentoring

program, originated at the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and organizationally embedded in German Studies. Kuntschner and Römmer-Nosseck (2021) describe the program in detail, including its organizational embedding, structure, curriculum, aims, development, and fundamental concepts.

First introduced as a pilot project in 2013, the program has become a reliable part of a support system for students across various disciplines. The Writing Mentoring Program's aim is "to create a means of disseminating knowledge about writing processes amongst students in earlier stages of their studies" (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nosseck, 2021, 99). This objective is achieved through a curriculum that addresses all phases of the writing process, writing difficulties, and self-management and includes – when requested – individual counseling and text feedback. The program is embedded in the context of higher education institution support programs and other academic writing services (CTL, 2024).

To understand the aims and function of the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna, the terms mentoring and peer mentoring have to be explained. Mentoring is described as a relationship, in which one person having less experience in a particular field is paired with a more experienced, to receive guidance and support (Blackwell, 1989). Cohen (1995) emphasizes that both the mentor and the mentee learn and grow through this process. As opposed to the traditional asymmetrical mentoring relationship, peer mentoring involves "participants who are roughly equal in terms of age, experience, rank and/or position along hierarchical level within their institution" (Angelique et al., 2002, 198-199). Accordingly, peer mentoring relies on the shared information, knowledge, and goals among peers, with all participants contributing and adding valuable experience to the relationship. Typically, the specific goals are determined by the institution (Angelique et al., 2002, 199).

To qualify as a writing mentor, the program at the University of Vienna consists of training, practice, and supervision. The program's unique peer-group setting emphasizes the support of the writing process on a non-hierarchical level. Mentor teams, formed by students, run peer-level group mentoring sessions for other students. The 90-minute long sessions are typically conducted face-to-face and take place weekly during the term. For mentees, participation in the program is voluntary, writing mentors support mentees by conveying academic writing knowledge on a more general level without technical, discipline-specific content. This approach helps form a local community of writing mentors who work together to improve the mentees' and their own writing skills. Kuntschner and Römmer-Nosseck highlight that the writing mentoring program aims to foster a sense of belonging within several spheres: locally among writing mentors, within mentoring groups with mentees, and also in the broader scientific community (2021, 105).

Kuntschner and Römmer-Nosseck show that the Writing Mentoring Program has had a significant impact on teaching practices at the university, as "[w]orking with both the faculties and the writing mentors has enabled the program to initiate change in the teaching practices" (2021, 105). The establishment of the program has introduced a distinctive organizational dimension to the university. As noted,

the implementation of peer-mentoring programmes and the developments sparked in their wake add an organisational level to the university that is incommensurable as it can neither be replaced by traditional teaching contexts nor by interactions of peers not specifically trained for this very purpose (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nosseck, 2021, 106) This organizational level created by the writing mentoring program, similarly to writing fellows programs, is an intermediate level between students and the institution. It allows us to view writing mentors' roles from a larger perspective and consider their contribution to the development of the institution's writing culture.

Three Concepts Underlying the Writing Mentoring Program

This chapter highlights three foundational concepts integral to the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna: process orientation, peer settings, and community building. I aim to show how they are applied to form the fundamentals of a supportive writing culture and create an environment for change through learning.

Process Orientation

Process orientation highlights the writing process beyond the finished text product, and writing as a learning process. This approach focuses on the continuous development and refinement of writing skills through ongoing reflection, rather than on the outcome. Ruhmann and Kruse (translated by AS, 2014, 17-18) formulate six principles of process-oriented writing didactics:

- writing is more than just jotting down,
- writing is an iterative and recursive process,
- writing requires continuous problem-solving,
- writing can be learned and taught,
- there are large individual differences in writing,
- writing should be viewed from the perspective of the writer.

Process-oriented writing didactics aim to enhance writing competence by providing knowledge about the writing process, targeted support, and feedback. At the University of Vienna, this method is reflected for example in the training and supervision offered to writing mentors, where they are guided to reflect on their writing processes (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nosseck, 2021). In this way, the thought processes that accompany writing are recognized, made visible, and can be influenced (Ruhmann & Kruse, 2014, 18). In the mentoring sessions, mentors pass on this attitude by providing guidance and support to other students in their writing processes. Process orientation spreads throughout the entire program and functions as an essential principle in the mindset toward writing and learning.

Peer Setting

As mentioned above, a peer-setting approach in academic mentoring emphasizes the value of peer-to-peer learning in group settings, with peers working on skill development and knowledge acquisition on eye level. Because of an "awareness of peerness", creating a supportive environment where members are seen as equals in specific aspects (Skaniakos et al., 2014, 76) effectively encourages students to adopt new perspectives and attitudes. This approach recognizes that while peers share similar educational experiences, they also come with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, which should be

acknowledged rather than masked by an illusion of complete equality (Widhalm et al., 2023, 94).

At the University of Vienna, the peer mentoring setting creates supportive small group environments where advanced students guide their peers through the writing process and help in facing academic challenges, recognize and address both shared and individual needs, and provide feedback on an eye-level (Kuntschner & Römmer-Nosseck, 2021).

Community building

A community-based approach to writing mentoring is characterized by collaborative learning and mutual support among mentors and mentees, including writing and learning as shared processes within the community. In his essay on collaborative learning, Bruffee (1984) discusses the role of peer communities in tutoring. He argues that collaborative learning creates a social context for conversation, where a “community of knowledgeable peers” emerges. He describes this community as “a group of people who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions” (Bruffee, 1984, 642). The writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna embodies this approach by building a peer community of writing mentors, as well as groups of mentors and mentees. Within these groups, students collaboratively acquire a shared foundation of knowledge and attitude toward writing based on the principles of process-oriented writing didactics.

Bruffee explains, on the one hand, that such a community functions as a “normal discourse” based on shared knowledge, interests, and common ways of understanding (1984, 646). On the other hand, it is inherent to collaborative learning that these peer communities establish knowledge through conversation, enabling new approaches, change, and community growth (1984, 650). At this point, Bruffee highlights that while teachers represent an established knowledge community, they must act not only as conservators but also as agents of change and social transition. This dual role creates a contradiction, while in the local community there is an interest in maintaining established knowledge, the larger community aims “to bridge gaps among knowledge communities and open them to change” (Bruffee, 1984, 650). For both mentors and mentees at the University of Vienna, the community-based approach similarly carries these dual interests: creating a sense of community based on shared knowledge and values, and enabling a conversation through collective learning and writing that opens a discourse oriented toward change.

Conceptual Approach

The above-listed concepts emerged as central elements of the writing mentoring program of the University of Vienna, therefore they serve as the basis for the conceptual framework. The main undertaking of this chapter is to create an overview, in the form of a conceptual framework that can explain the connection between these concepts.

The current study utilizes a conceptual approach based on Imenda (2014). Creating a conceptual framework is an inductive approach that brings together several related concepts to offer a comprehensive understanding of a research problem. Unlike a theoretical framework, which relies on a single, established theory and follows a deductive approach, a conceptual framework combines

different views from both theoretical and empirical sources. This synthesis creates an integrated model that offers a wider view of the topic (Imenda, 2014, 189). Imenda argues that “[b]y assembling individual concepts into a cohesive structure, researchers can better explain events and understand the complexities of the research topic” (2014, 189). Creating a framework is not a linear process, rather, it is a continuously evolving procedure that involves alternating prioritization of tasks such as research, analysis, visualization, argumentation, and writing. Thus, several cycles of rethinking and recreating are fundamental parts of the research and writing process.

Methodologically, relying on theoretical argumentation based on literature research and a conceptual framework – while keeping relevance to the research question in mind – ensures logical coherence. The article written by Kuntschner and Römmer-Nosseck (2021) is the primary source for describing the program. The development of a conceptual framework involved selecting a starting point, in this case, the concept of change agents. By using existing theoretical concepts such as WAC programs, and looking for overlaps, similarities, and differences among the concepts, I broke down the process of building a complex framework into smaller steps. The study of existing literature on the related topics followed. Next, the key concepts – process orientation, peer-setting, and community building – were identified by determining the conceptually consistent core characteristics of the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna. For these steps, a visualization of the structure of the writing mentoring program and a table about the important aspects provided clarity. Finally, the conceptual elements were combined to illustrate the connections within the framework. After the literature review and the creation of the conceptual framework, the theoretical findings about the role of writing mentors as change agents emerge from the argumentation.

Analysis

When focusing on the contextual aspect of change, one question is, in what respect and in what context the change agents can aim for change. In the case of writing fellows (Zawacki, 2008), the primary focus is on the relationship between the faculty and fellow, and their embedding into institutional realities. Writing fellows as change agents aim for changing attitudes – of the faculty and students – towards writing, which involves supporting students in improving their writing, as well as the faculty in teaching writing (Zawacki, 2008, 1). The central characteristic here is in the scope. Writing fellows work with faculty and teachers, helping to embed and improve writing practices within the curriculum.

In contrast, at the University of Vienna, writing mentors do not engage directly with faculty but focus on their peers, aiming to disseminate writing process knowledge, and thus change the writing culture at the student level. Therefore, the change that writing mentors as change agents can engage in is centered at the level of mentors and mentees and realized in interactions among students. While writing mentors primarily target their peers, the indirect dissemination of their knowledge may also reach other levels. This change in writing culture among students can lead to broader institutional changes over time. Considering the level of the program coordinators should be mentioned as well, as writing mentors as change agents could participate in the evaluation process of the program to initiate change on the program level, however elaborating on this aspect would exceed the limits of the present research.

The agency is a crucial factor in understanding how writing mentors can take on the role of change agents. Writing mentors primarily interact at the peer level, where they share writing process knowledge and provide guidance and support to students. Their interactions are influenced by the interconnected principles of peer-setting, process orientation, and a community-based approach.

The peer setting is highly significant for the role of writing mentors as change agents for several reasons. First, in an environment, characterized by less rigid hierarchies, initiating change can be a smoother process. Change agent activities can rely on effective peer influence and the mentor's function as role models. In mentoring sessions, peer feedback is a central topic and skill set, which actively supports the development of a constructive feedback culture. By concentrating on their peer communities, writing mentors as change agents can promote a more supportive environment among students, one that enables change through learning. Engaging collaboratively in the academic writing process involves understanding writing as a shared task in the peer community, accompanied by giving and receiving peer feedback. This perspective underscores a broader learning experience shared by all participants. At the intersection of peer-setting, process orientation, and a community-based approach, writing mentors make key connections, and establish a common understanding of the writing process. This activity emerges as the most important factor, which is also central to the role of the change agent. Emphasizing the process nature of writing, mentoring, and learning is fundamental, as it creates opportunities for growth and transformation. This change in the attitude toward writing is a main proposition of writing mentors as change agents. Sharing writing process knowledge, practices, and ideas in a peer environment plays an essential role in forming a supportive writing community. As change agents, writing mentors can actively contribute to building and improving the writing culture, potentially by creating a peer community – of writing mentors as change agents –, that views this change as its mission.

A direct comparison (Figure 1) between the role of writing mentors and writing mentors as change agents, emphasizes how the latter works as an extension of the mentor role. The key differences between writing mentors and change agents lie in mindset, agency, activities, and aims. Writing mentors focus on process orientation and peer interaction, with their main goal being the dissemination of writing knowledge and providing support and feedback for students. As change agents, however, their scope widens.

	ROLE AS WRITING MENTOR	ROLE AS CHANGE AGENT
CONTEXT	In the interactions among mentors and mentees (level of students) and with the coordinators of the writing mentoring program (level of program)	
AGENCY	Professional agency as a writing mentor is used with a focus on content	Professional agency as a writing mentor is used with a focus on change
ACTIVITY	Disseminating writing process knowledge and providing feedback and support for students	Building and improving a supportive peer community with shared knowledge and mindset Actively engaging in change process
CHANGE	Level of students In the peer community of mentors and mentees	Level of students and institution Among students (considered as part of the institution) In the community of writing mentors as change agents In the institution's writing culture
AIM	Development in the student's academic writing skills	Development in the institutional writing culture

Figure 1: Role as writing mentor and as change agent: context, agency, activity, change and aim.

The change agent mindset involves active engagement in changing institutional writing practices and promoting a shared understanding of the writing process across the university. This entails thinking about long-term goals and taking action to influence not just mentees on an individual level, but collectively the broader student community, and eventually teaching practices and institutional structures. This shift in focus highlights again the significant role of agency. Writing mentors, when aware of their capacity to act as change agents, have the potential to influence the writing culture at multiple levels. The peer community they build can become the foundation for larger institutional changes, promoting a more supportive, process-oriented writing culture.

SHIFT OF PERSPECTIVE AS A CHANGE AGENT

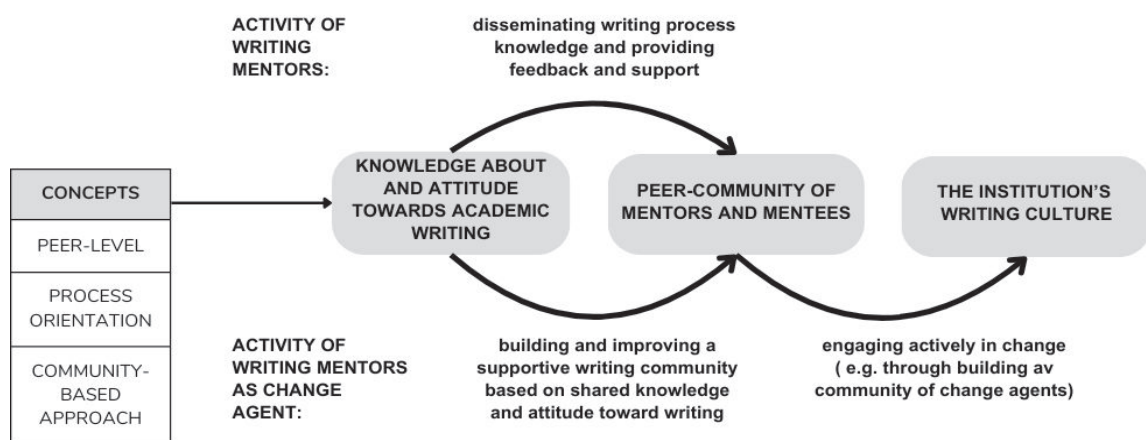


Figure 2: Shift of perspective as a change agent. Concepts, activities, and the scope of change.

The difference in the scope of influence of writing mentors and change agents (Figure 2), shows that when writing mentors become aware of their agency, their role can shift from simply supporting their peers to initiating more far-reaching changes. Their activities as change agents can still focus on the interaction with peers, but considering their peers as students, who are part of the institution can lead to a clearer path for taking action. This shift in perspective involves a greater emphasis on making a difference at the institutional level.

Discussion

This research aimed to answer the question: How can writing mentors be considered “change agents” in the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna? The key arguments can be listed based on the central concepts.

The role of writing mentors as change agents is linked to the use of their professional agency as writing mentors to initiate change. When considering the agency, the focus shifts to the active role and engagement in making a difference. In the context of writing mentoring, the role of the mentor is to create an environment for learning and developing the writing culture. By working together as peers and sharing knowledge and ideas in a peer setting, mentors and mentees collectively create a space, where agency is exercised through collaboration and mutual influence. These interactions provide the opportunity to use the professional agency for disseminating knowledge, and additionally, for sharing a process-oriented attitude towards writing, thus giving room for change agent activities in addition to the mentor role.

The change agent role can manifest also, for example, in activities such as strengthening the awareness of belonging to a writing culture, or aiming at reaching more students through the program. These aspects also connect the writing mentor’s role in disseminating knowledge and the change agent’s role in creating an environment for change through learning, as shown by Cameron and Green (2024).

As for the contextual nature of change (Brady et al., 2018), writing mentors act as change agents primarily by influencing the writing culture among their peers (mentees and mentors). Unlike writing fellows (Zawacki, 2008) who engage with faculty, the mentors at the University of Vienna focus primarily on peer-to-peer interactions, using their professional agency to promote a writing culture among students, that has the potential to eventually lead to broader, bottom-up institutional changes. Writing mentors create non-hierarchical, collaborative communities where shared knowledge and attitudes to writing are central. Linked to Bruffee’s ideas (1984), we can thus consider the members of this writing culture as a community of knowledgeable peers, who aim at maintaining established knowledge about academic writing but also open new discourses toward change.

Outlook

As this research has shown, there is great potential in considering writing mentors as change agents. Regarding the framework’s adaptability, it could be interesting to modify and apply it in the case of other levels within the institution of the University of Vienna, such as mentees, program coordinators, or the program itself. Emphasizing the role of change agents at these levels could further enhance the

impact of the writing mentoring program, ensuring that the writing culture – and the attitudes and concepts linked to it – spreads throughout the institution. The methodological framework may apply to similar contexts of practice or may serve as a basis for empirical research about the topic. For instance, it could be used as a basis for evaluations of feedback from mentees in CTL evaluation questionnaires on writing mentoring. Moreover, to make a comparison, interviews with mentees, mentors, and study programs where writing mentoring is available and where it is not, could be evaluated.

However, the study has several limitations. As a case study focusing on the University of Vienna's writing mentoring program, more specifically on the role of mentors as change agents, the findings are contextual and are not directly transferable to other institutions or levels without considering the unique case and its context.

While the theoretical findings are promising for a discussion about writing mentors as change agents, additional (and empirical) research is needed to explore the reality of writing mentors.

Conclusion

In this theoretical argumentation, I discussed the potential of considering writing mentors as change agents within the writing mentoring program at the University of Vienna. The research focused on how writing mentors can shape the institution's writing culture, particularly through spreading a process-oriented approach to academic writing among their peers. By developing a conceptual framework that connects key concepts like process orientation, peer group settings, and community building, the study provided a detailed overview of the context in which writing mentors can facilitate change.

Considering the links and intersections of the concepts, the writing mentors as change agents can use the advantages of peer settings to disseminate writing process knowledge and to share the process-oriented attitude toward writing – that serves as the foundation for the supportive writing culture. Regarding the agency of writing mentors, the shift of perspective – when considering them change agents – shows their potential to actively engage in the development of a supportive writing culture at the institutional level. This can involve building a student community that is characterized by a shared attitude to writing and committing to sustaining a supportive writing culture at the institution. Further, writing mentors as change agents can form a community that sees this change in the writing culture as its proposition.

In conclusion, the University of Vienna's writing mentoring program serves as an example of how institutions can initiate and sustain change in their writing culture through strategic mentoring initiatives. Writing mentors not only contribute to improving individual writing practices but also have the potential to reach further. By being aware of their professional agency, writing mentors as change agents can extend their influence beyond mentoring sessions and contribute to broader institutional changes in the writing culture.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: Role as writing mentor and as change agent: context, agency, activity, change and aim.

Figure 2: Shift of perspective as a change agent. Concepts, activities, and the scope of change.