

The Impact of Pedagogic Research Writing Retreats on Participants' Identities and Writing Habits

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Abstract:

Writing for publication is a core activity in higher education. It serves many purposes including dissemination of good practice and the development of personal and institutional reputations. Writing is a practice that benefits from support and protected time away from the competing pressures of the 'day job', and one way of providing both of these is through writing retreats. In particular, pedagogic research writing retreats provide dedicated time and space to write, to develop new writing practices, and to foster a community of practice. They can be made available to both academic and professional staff. In this paper, we show how attendees learned new writing approaches and strategies such as recreating the retreat structure at home, and developed and maintained a coherent and vibrant interdisciplinary community of practice within which they reframed their identities as academic writers.

Keywords: pedagogic research; writing retreats; community of practice

Introduction

Pedagogic research (PedR) is a central focus at Anglia Ruskin University. PedR activities were originally led by the Learning and Teaching Development Unit

(LTDU) and included the Learning and Teaching Project Award scheme (LTPA) offering funding of up to £3,500 for small-scale PedR projects, an annual Learning and Teaching Conference (LTC), an online repository of PedR outputs (the PedR Directory), monthly meetings, and PedR writing retreats. Subsequently, the University created the Pedagogic Research Centre (PRC) in 2018 to manage PedR activities and advance the intersection between innovative educational research and pedagogic practice.

In January 2019, the PRC launched a project to investigate the impact of writing retreats on the writing practices and habits of both academic and Professional Services participants (Coonan, Pratt-Adams & Warnes 2019).

Writing Retreats

PedR writing retreats are open to all members of staff (i.e. both academic and Professional Services colleagues), regardless of their experience, and offer protected time for writing in company with others. Their aim is to help maintain focus, write productively, and develop effective writing strategies. They have a light-touch structure based on Murray and Newton's (2009, pp.541-2) 'typing pool' model involving:

- all writing together in one room for the whole of the retreat
- structured retreat time as a series of fixed writing and discussion slots
- discussion of writing-in-progress throughout the programme

Drawing on the work of Murray and Newton (2009) and Davis, Wright and Holley (2016) the facilitators ask participants to bring a writing project to the retreat and to work exclusively on it. Projects have included journal articles, book chapters, and other papers for submission to peer-reviewed publications.

PRC PedR writing retreats are distinctive because they:

- last only one day, rather than 2-5 days
- are offered as part of a support package designed to develop PedR
- are located in one university affecting institutional and cultural change by developing interdisciplinary research and writing
- focus on PedR contributing to sustaining a community of practice (Pratt-Adams & Warnes 2021)
- support colleagues to make intellectual contributions as members of the broader university community
- offer equality of opportunity and outcome for both academic and non-academic colleagues, including opportunities for networking and collaboration
- are facilitated by an associate professor and a research fellow working in PedR with whom most participants are already familiar

Although off-campus writing retreats foster a sense of distance from everyday distractions, ubiquitous access to Wi-Fi mitigates against this. The facilitators 'encourage' attendees to disengage from external communication and focus exclusively on the task, and participants agree to use the internet only to check source material or support development. Most participants find the permission to remove themselves from everyday responsibilities liberating, although sometimes challenging.

While initially delivered on one campus, increased demand led to the PRC delivering two writing retreats per year on two campuses. Despite the team delivering retreats during the Covid-19 pandemic which were shared between both campuses, they have remained highly popular and successful. Participants are self-selected via an invitation distributed to the PedR Community mailing list, or announcements on the PedR website, the University newsletter and social networking channels.

The retreats have two strands: Strand A is a sequence of shared, timed periods of free writing based around a loose structure; whereas Strand B includes optional academic writing support for attendees who need focused help with the topics offered. These activities are interspersed with breaks that enable participants to plan their day or reflect on progress (see Table 1). Additionally, refreshment and lunch breaks provide opportunities for networking where, given the diversity of the group, discussions are usually lively and productive.

Table 1: Writing Retreat Timetable

Morning		
Time	Strand A	Strand B
09.30-10:00	Welcome and Refreshments	
10:00-10.10	Set Goals and Morning Targets	
10.10-11.00	Free writing (<i>50 minutes</i>)	Planning and Structure
11.00-11.15	Break	
11.15-12.50	Free writing (<i>95 minutes</i>)	Writing an Abstract
12.50-13.00	Pair Share: Reflect on your writing	
13.00-14.00	Lunch and Networking	
Afternoon		
Time	Strand A	Strand B
14.00-14.10	Review Goals and Set Afternoon Targets	
14.10-15.00	Free writing (<i>50 minutes</i>)	Walk and Talk
15.00-15.10	Break	
15.10-16.00	Free writing (<i>50 minutes</i>)	Identifying Journals
16.00-16.30	Evaluation and Feedback	
16.30	Close	

Literature Review

Either within a single organisation or more generally (Moore 2003), writing retreats are examples of the development an enduring community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) through the shared practice of writing. Authentic participation in a non-hierarchical learning community helps shape approaches to academic writing, particularly where facilitators encourage attendees to share, reflect upon and develop their writing practices and habits (Jones et al. 2016). 'By talking about writing, writing together, and making our tacit learning explicit through reflection, we created an effective and valuable community of practice that has, in turn, nurtured and stimulated our writing potential' (Kent et al. 2017, p.23). However, Benvenuti (2017), in her study of peers participating in writing retreats, noted that artificially constructing communities of practice may present certain challenges concerning authenticity. While Cox (2005) suggests that *actively engineered* writing retreats may over-simplify the view of a community of practice, a writing retreat can model some of the key elements that define a community of practice such as having clear goals, shared resources and the use of common jargon (Li et al., 2009).

Most writing retreats mirror Grant's (2006) model with varying degrees of informal to formal structure, and lasting from single writing days to five days off-campus. They also usually include structured interventions and support together with bounded periods of writing. Some retreat facilitators require participants to complete prior writing tasks with the retreat offering the opportunity for finalising, copyediting and submitting the manuscript to a journal (Oermann, Nicoll & Block 2014), while others, including the writing retreat evaluated here, do not exert such control (Moore, Murphy & Murray 2010). It has been recognised that co-located writing creates positive conditions which serve to make the experience successful and enjoyable through total immersion and *getting in the zone* (Moore, Murphy & Murray 2010; Oermann, Nicoll & Block 2014; Kent et al. 2017). Usually, attendance is

open to all with participants self-selecting on a *first come, first served* basis, but other examples include participants competing for places (Oermann, Nicoll & Block 2014), or groups for specific teams or people at similar career stages such as early career academics (Kent et al. 2017). However, merely bringing people together with nurturing does not produce a community of practice. Rather, a community of practice needs to be actively fostered through critical review, feedback and dynamic discussions (Li et al. 2009), as provided within the present study.

While external consultants or academic writing experts run some retreats, others are run by enthusiastic, or more experienced, peers. Kent et al. (2017) found that familiarity with fellow participants made attendees more comfortable discussing sensitive issues like lacking confidence. In a hierarchical leadership situation, senior colleagues opted to mentor junior colleagues rather than sharing their own experiences.

Academic writing productivity is a crucial measure of the impact of writing retreats. Kent et al. (2017) reported pressure on academics, particularly early career academics, to produce research outputs which can unlock funding and contribute to a university's status and reputation. Hence, writing retreats have become a popular means to support academics to increase publication outputs (Murray & Newton 2009; Moore, Murphy & Murray 2010). More specifically, MacLeod, Steckley and Murray (2011) advocated ring-fencing time and space for writing to address the anxiety and pressure of writing for publication in a culture of performativity and time scarcity. They proposed *containment theory* as a strategy to prioritise writing over other tasks, which they describe as the process of managing (i.e. containing) the unmanageable, whether that be thoughts, feelings or tasks.

While writing retreats offer previously silenced authors the opportunity to write by counteracting the 'absence of a supportive writing dynamic within

participants' own work contexts' (Moore, Murphy and Murray 2010, p. 21), some managers view writing retreats as an avoidance of other duties and so resist colleagues' participation. Indeed, academics frequently report administrative and teaching responsibilities as barriers to academic writing (Kent et al. 2017). Nevertheless, '[b]y reclassifying our writing time as a scheduled group meeting, it gained legitimacy in our calendars and became a protected activity, bringing value and importance to academic writing' (ibid, p. 22).

People attend writing retreats for reasons including opportunities for: protected time and space; gaining confidence; the communal experience; mentoring; and sharing information and knowledge (Kent et al. 2017). Evidence suggests that retreats are useful in increasing writing productivity through acquisition of effective strategies (MacLeod, Steckley & Murray 2012; Oermann, Nicoll & Block 2014; Kornhaber et al. 2016), and this present study adds support to this broader discourse around the value of writing retreats.

Writing retreats can have positive and transformative effects, both immediate and long term, in participants' approaches to writing. Although Moore, Murphy and Murray (2010) point to a paucity of literature concerning long-term effects and benefits, Oermann, Nicoll and Block (2014) conducted a five-year study of nurses attending one retreat focusing on writing for publication, where the most noteworthy effect was on long-term writing behaviours. Although 72.6% of participants had little or no previous publishing experience, 61.3% submitted manuscripts for publication. McGrail, Rickard and Jones (2006) and Kent et al. (2017) have also reported an increase in output and publications. Furthermore, Benvenuti's (2017) two-year study of four writing retreats also noted the benefits to actively cultivating communities of academic writing practice.

MacLeod, Steckley and Murray (2012) argue that retreats enable the acquisition of writing strategies and aid the containment of anxiety related to the writing process. Similarly, Murray and Newton (2009) found that, through setting clear goals, motivated and reflective participants reported changes to their approaches to writing and an awareness of their own transforming identity as writers. Furthermore, Kent et al. (2017) concluded that a formal structure together with co-located writing and opportunities for discussion among equals led to the success of their peer-led early career writing retreats. These findings resonate with those of Aitchison and Lee (2006, p.272) who refer to '[t]he 'horizontalizing' pedagogy of peer review... in which student-peers work together and with more experienced researchers and writing specialists to develop expertise in different aspects of research writing, at the same time as entering explicitly into a network of peer relations as becoming-researchers'.

It seems that writing retreats offer a cultural experience different to everyday academic life (Knowles 2017). This results in a shift from individualistic experiences of writing anxiety or negativity, to morale-boosting, collaborative, and collective writing involving: jointly reviewing progress; sharing work; acknowledging others' achievements; and providing encouragement and feedback (Moore, Murphy & Murray 2010; Kent et al. 2017). Knowles (2017) refers to this cooperative model as *generous scholarship* and *intellectual generosity* that contributes to participants' sense of well-being (Hammond 2020). Conversely, Oermann, Nicoll & Block (2014) argue that individualised support is central to the process.

PedR necessitates a dual disciplinary focus (Bennett & Dewar 2012), and researchers who are accustomed to working within their discipline need to adapt their approach when engaging in PedR (Hutchings & Shulman 1999). For instance, for some researchers PedR may be their first experience of

working in the qualitative paradigm, conducting research with human subjects, or addressing issues of rigour and generalisability (O'Brien 2008).

Methodology

The PRC collected data from two sources: nine semi-structured interviews and one focus group. Nine past attendees at face-to-face retreats (anonymised as IP1 to IP9) agreed to participate in interviews which explored: their anxieties, fears, and confidence levels around writing; the blockages they experienced, and solutions they used to address them; their development of strategies to increase productivity; and their maintenance (or not) of a writing habit between retreats.

Due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions the focus group took place during an MS Teams online retreat. With the attendees' permission, the PRC recorded their discursive sessions (see Table 1). It is worth noting that, in our hands, recording and analysing via MS Teams presented some challenges concerning accessing and transcribing the recording. Since recordings of MS Teams sessions are automatically stored and transcribed by MS Stream, access to the video and transcription files may be restricted to the owner of the session. Furthermore, available transcripts are downloaded as .vtt files which require converting to .docx files for ease of handling. Furthermore, while the MS Stream transcription was found to be readable, substantial editing was still required to ensure accuracy. This differed from our previous experience of using MP4 video files which are then converted to MP3 audio files for MS Word 365 transcription.

Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts revealed six overarching themes and several smaller additional topics.

Reasons for attendance

Interviews

The most frequent reason for attending a retreat was to take advantage of protected time and space. As IP8 explained:

I wanted to extract myself from my normal environments, where I often just end up falling into my email, falling into other activities, and moving through different... requirements and job roles, and... lists of things to do and that sort of thing... by removing myself, I wanted to be able to get that focused time.

While two participants said that they had been invited, four participants noted they had attended other writing retreats, both PRC (i.e., "I went to the second one because the first one had been useful" (IP9) and non-PRC (i.e., "I've taken part in the faculty writing retreats before" (IP1).

Collegiality was a popular reason, with IP7 saying that they attended "to learn from others, to learn from their experience, maybe their styles of writing". IP9 noted how "it was actually a really good networking opportunity because in the breaks I met... other people who are doing pedagogic research and they don't all come to the [PedR] meetings. I met people that I've collaborated with subsequently". IP6 also noted the usefulness of networking, while IP2 referred to the shared experience of working in a room with other writers. Some participants intended to "basically get the ball rolling" (IP8) and IP2 described having had "severe writer's block and... was really struggling to find the time and mental space to write". Other participants referred to the opportunity to write, to learn, to improve writing, and increase productivity. IP4 was "trying to find whether there was a magic formula to writing, and whether or not there was something I was missing".

Participants' aims included writing a book chapter, understanding PhD viva feedback, developing a project proposal, writing up a LTPA project, pedagogic research, or simply *writing*. Other participants were engaged in collaborative writing, with IP9 using a retreat to work with a colleague "when he wasn't between 16 other meetings... so we did a fair amount of collaborative work".

Three participants noted that they had achieved what they had set out to achieve. IP2, for example, stated that they:

wrote a lot more than I would normally have written during any given day, even a day that I set aside at home, and that was really interesting because I was able to write, and I came away feeling like I'd really achieved something.

Another three participants partly achieved their goals. IP7 noted how "my colleague and I have managed to finish one piece of work that we're working on, but... perhaps stalled on other things". For IP9, deciding on the level of achievement was problematic:

I wrote maybe 1,500 words of the 6,000-word [Fellowship] application, but I ended up throwing most of it out and starting again. But there was a deadline, and if I hadn't got started, I wouldn't have ever got started. So, I think, in that sense, I did achieve.

Focus Group

Similarly, three focus group members worked on journal articles, two on book chapters, and others concentrated on an application for Senior Fellowship of the HEA, a systematic review, PhD corrections, data analysis, and "some time to write up a project that I started last year".

Following the first period of free writing, the facilitators asked the attendees how they were progressing. Four reported that they had made substantial headway (e.g., “I managed to get it done and I’ve sent off my chapter”). After the second free writing session, the facilitators again asked attendees to feed back. One attendee “almost lost track of time. It was only when I noticed that things were appearing on the chat line I thought, ‘is it that time already?’”. Another admitted struggling despite “normally... I’m a morning person and... I do all of my writing in the morning... [but I] did persevere with it, and I did get that flow in the end”.

During the final feedback session, participants reported on their overall progress. Some participants referred to a research analogy that it is better to design and build a bike than to design a Ferrari and not complete the project, with one saying, “I can see a positive outcome of what I’ve done – more than build a bike!” Another noted that, “I don’t think I’ve got anywhere near a bike or a Ferrari... But even though I was only here this afternoon, it was a great opportunity just to not think about anything else, just to write”.

Emotions toward writing during the Retreat

Many participants described their mood in non-emotional terms, with IP9, for example, “just doing my job”. Other interviewees described both positive (i.e., excited, liberated, meaningful) and negative emotions (i.e., disappointment at the lack of writing, or lack of preparation, and being self-conscious about sharing). IP8 reported not enjoying writing:

My brain works in a very illogical order. I’ll write about something and then go way off [track] and write about something completely different... trying to get that story... I find really difficult... I also see it as a bit of a waste of time; there must be other things I should be doing... I’m very happy to draw lovely diagrams... but hate writing! It’s

probably also [related to the earlier] writing retreat, where I was at an earlier stage of pedagogical research and I did most of my thinking and most of my designing, and most of my creation... as opposed to the writing. So, I look forward to the next one where I'll be coming to write stuff.

IP8, however, felt that "I haven't really done the writing retreat properly... [and] my perception is I'm not doing it properly because I'm not writing [and that] my feedback [is], don't call it a writing retreat, call it a research retreat", adding that, "I want to think about pedagogical research. I want a space where I can start putting down papers, and not worrying about anything other than just those papers. So, maybe 'writing retreat' isn't the best label".

Participants commented on how the atmosphere of the retreat allowed them to focus on their work. IP2, for example, recalled that "other people around me [were] writing in silence, clearly concentrating on what they were doing, it made me do the same", and for IP8 it was "actually having that... silent time. At the writing retreat, the whole room is basically silent".

Interviewees commented on how the structure of the day affected their approach to writing. IP3 described how "a little bit of a preamble and... setting the scene in the morning, and then short bursts of writing... that appeals to me", and for IP7 "because you're encouraged to write for a certain length of time, mentally you... do that. So... if you hadn't been given that semi structure... you perhaps wouldn't".

Emotions toward writing after the Retreat

Interviewees described an increase in confidence and a sense of achievement resulting from more structured time and learning from feedback (i.e. "feedback from your own reflection and rereading, from colleagues [and] from peer reviewers" (IP7)). Nevertheless, IP1 bemoaned "I'm quite slow. So,

it would be nice to be a bit more productive in a shorter space of time... it's not an unrealistic expectation – I think I could do more [more] quickly”.

IP7 learned that writing is both a process and a skill that involves:

drafting, whether it's a single author or multiple authors...
then rewriting, peer review, editorial control, all of that... It's
taking ownership of it to make sure that you realise that that
is a process and that we all have to go through that, and it's
painful.

Similarly, IP4, described how, “[m]y whole attitude to writing has changed a lot because I've had the opportunity of writing two other articles with somebody else, but in a completely different subject area, and I found it's radically altered the way I write”.

Writing blocks and strategies to overcome them

Several interviewees described themselves as ‘morning people’ who found postprandial motivation difficult to maintain. For IP8, afternoons were a problem: “I'm a very early morning writer, or a later writer, [but] post lunch, I'm really poor”. IP3 also noted trying “to do as much as possible in the morning because I work well before lunch. After lunch, it's quite difficult to get started again, but I did manage at least an hour solid writing”. IP5 had a productive morning and although “was a bit exhausted by about half two” was able to help colleagues.

Two participants stopped writing briefly “to figure out what I was going to say next” (IP9). Other reasons cited for stoppage included loss of focus, lack of planning, needing more research, organising data, or needing to edit (despite the ground rules of free writing). IP5 argued that they were not a linear thinker, while IP6 was not a natural writer. IP2, however, stopped writing to

go “to the library”, explaining that they were searching online for journal articles.

Participants’ strategies to overcome blockages included thinking and reflecting, taking a break (alone or with others), re-familiarisation with or re-reading the text, free writing, solo brainstorming, or, if collaborating, “space and time to talk and discuss” (IP6). IP4 suggested, “you might have two things you’re trying to do... and you [work on one] then swap back to the other”.

IP7 and IP8 commented that they found they benefited from deadlines (i.e., “you just have to give yourself a deadline and say, ‘Get on with it’” (IP7)). IP8 described feeling obligated to achieve the targets set at the beginning of the day:

I think the strategy of talking to someone about what you’re trying to do during the day is a good way of psychologically assigning yourself a task that you’re not only holding yourself to, [but] you’re also then having to talk to someone else about whether you’ve achieved it. I think that was the best for me.

Competing identities and voices

Attendees commented on the conflict between subject-based writing and PedR. Four participants from the science faculty noted the challenge of writing in the first person. IP9 explained that:

I have come from the natural science background where you have this very objective stance and you try not to put yourself into the writing at all, and part of the learning curve... is to break myself of those habits. ... When I’m writing educational

stuff, I'm consciously trying to be more of an involved researcher and be less of a neutral observing, positivist type, than would come naturally to me. I have been practicing saying, 'I used to be a biologist, but now I'm an education person', and it's still... quite an identity shift to be talking like that.

Other participants, however, referred to being able to compartmentalise their voices, and focus primarily on academic writing or writing as a researcher. IP4, for instance, noted how "I've regarded these workshops as being for academic writing, not for writing... policy statement[s]". Some attendees, however, noted a combination of voices (i.e., "I don't have to separate it out. It can be all in one" (IP1)) or being able to direct their writing to specific audiences.

IP1 commented on the difference between PRC and science faculty writing retreats, noting how:

pretty much everything we did, and also that we do in the department, is quite 'science-y'... [and] I like coming to the pedagogic writing retreats as [there are] other people who understand qualitative research... [and] the pedagogic writing retreats [seem] a lot more loose and a bit more open, so you could write about what you wanted... I liked that because I feel I am a social scientist within a science faculty.

New writing strategies

While four interviewees had not adopted any new strategies, others had acquired novel writing approaches. Some participants referred to the benefits of rests between focused periods of writing, and "the chance to have a little break and pause... slugging away at something for five hours is not

necessarily the most productive way” (IP7).

Three participants referred to the freedom of engaging in free writing, such as:

I like being encouraged to write even [if] it’s a bit rubbish... I’m quite slow, but it’s because I’m a perfectionist. So, whatever I do write tends to be quite close to what it ends up being. Whereas sometimes it’s a good idea to push myself to just write some stuff, and if it’s just a bit rubbish, then that’s fine (IP1).

Nevertheless, free writing can result in disordered thinking as ideas compete for attention. IP8 recognised this, noting “I’ve got Evernote as my second brain... because I need to dump things out of my brain, otherwise they’re lost forever”.

Again participants highlighted the importance of collegiality, particularly feedback from others, or simply networking. Similarly, IP5 enthused about the “opportunity to talk with people about what they are doing and... it’s amazing what contributions you can make to other people’s work, just by being you, isn’t it? Because they’ve just got a perspective that doesn’t see the same”. IP3 reflected how “someone else from a different part of the university, with more of a scientific background... looked at my work... and that’s quite helpful because they can give you another angle on your work... or how you write”.

Participants reported gaining greater confidence through reassurance from colleagues. For IP2 it took “talking to other people [who] had done more research than me to realise that actually I was not alone in what I was feeling, [and that] was quite reassuring”. Others created their own protected

time, became more disciplined, and acquired new techniques and tools including free writing.

Two participants argued that the retreats had not affected their writing habits, with IP2 stating categorically “No, no. My writing hasn’t changed as a result of the writing retreats. No”. However, other participants felt less need for feedback on drafts, were more focused, and more prepared, with, IP3 remarking that “getting all the material together rather than stopping, starting, stopping, starting, and it focuses the mind”.

When discussing maintenance of writing habits between retreats, some participants described how they tried to recreate them. IP2, for example, reported “[t]rying to replicate the environment at home”, and being “able to get into the zone much quicker on the days I’ve allocated towards my study... [At the writing retreat] I didn’t make myself available for work for the entire day and I was very much in the study zone, and when I try to replicate those days at home, that’s exactly what I do”. The challenge for IP4 was “learning how to switch that on when you’re at home or at your desk, and you’ve got people... chitter-chatting or phones going... [but] you’ve just got to be disciplined about it”. IP1 took annual leave and booked an Airbnb to create an individual writing retreat, as they had tried to write off-campus in coffee shops, “but it’s a bit harder then, because it’s easier for email to come through, or student-facing things”. Participants also referred to *needing* to write to an internally or externally imposed deadline, however artificial it may be.

Additional topics

In addition to the above, three additional themes emerged from the transcripts.

Frequency

A common request was for more frequent writing retreats, (i.e., “there should be more of them, quite frankly” (IP3)). IP2 suggested one retreat per trimester, and IP5 suggested “a 12-month program where you do 12 writing retreats and then go into self-directed attendance groups”. In addition, three interviewees asked for Academic Writing Workshops to help them to develop their skills. Attendees at the monthly meetings have also asked for help improving their writing style and the facilitators are currently developing such a workshop.

Support

Four interviewees described the retreats as helpful (i.e., “I think they’re really good, really helpful for me... the most useful thing that I’ve taken part in” (IP1)). Similarly, IP2 “found them incredibly valuable” and a member of Professional Services noted how “they are really useful, particularly for people that are not being offered opportunities to focus on research, particularly those that don’t do research within their jobs”. Finally, IP7 mentioned the effectiveness of the monthly drop-in sessions.

High-level writing

Professional Services colleagues commented on what they perceived as *high-level* writing. IP4, for example, noted how “this is probably the highest level I’ve written at... because I regard this as being masters/PhD kind of academic writing”. Similarly, IP2 did not “want the achievement of my [doctorate] to be the end of my academic research” and was looking forward to authoring “journal articles or writing something collaborative with other academics”. IP2 also felt that attending the retreats had enhanced their professional credibility, noting that “the fact that [academics have] seen me at a writing retreat in an academic capacity, and then I’ve been across the table with them in a [professional] capacity... has elevated my status”.

Discussion and Conclusion

Participants repeatedly referred to three overarching themes which are broadly analogous with the three features of Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice (i.e. Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise, and Shared Repertoire):

- development of a community encompassing collegiality, interdisciplinarity, and inclusion of academic and non-academic staff
- conflicting identities between discipline and pedagogy
- the nature of the retreats, including structure, protected time and space, and the acquisition of new writing practices

Development of a community

This retreat demonstrates the power of writing to build a sense of community and joint enterprise in a semi-formal context. Despite having an overall structure, the informal and relaxed setting was conducive to a positive experience, and participants perceived this collegiate experience of sharing both the writing space and process with others as making a significant contribution to their learning (Dean & Warren 2012). Opportunities ranged from becoming aware of new practices and approaches, to feelings of reassurance through common principles and practices. The communal writing space helps to address writing anxiety, and participants described the mutual benefits of helping each other, sharing thoughts and work, and providing feedback, and, in particular, informal networking interactions (Aitchison & Lee 2006). As Benvenuti (2017) found, this was particularly the case for early career academics.

Associated with collegiality and networking, an essential and distinctive element of PedR Writing Retreats is interdisciplinarity. The retreats are both cross-faculty and open to Professional Services departments. While most academics have academic writing experience, many non-academic staff are less familiar with the esoteric intricacies of academic English and commented

on the high level of writing with which they engaged. One significant outcome of the combination of interdisciplinary colleagues at the retreats was the resulting collaborative projects. Four of the 23 applications for LTPAs in 2021 came from inter-faculty teams, two of these also included colleagues from Professional Services, and there was a further application from the University Library.

Conflicting identities

A valuable finding was retreat attendees' movement between research identities and voices, and the degree of difficulty associated with this. Academic participants attending a writing retreat were engaged in the practice and language of two fields: their specific discipline and PedR. Moving from one to the other was not always straightforward, and this was particularly true for natural scientists who, being more comfortable in a positivist paradigm, found the interpretivist methodology and language of PedR alien and challenging. For example, one focus group participant noted how:

all my stuff is quite quantitative, and it's very to the point, and there's set rules, and parameters that I need to be hitting ... So I always find it almost... I don't want to use the word fluffy 'cause that sounds really derogatory against pedagogic research, but I always feel like there's just so many extra words in some of the publications.

A similar identity conflict arose for Professional Services colleagues, who recognised that the writing was of a much higher academic standard than that required for writing internal reports. However, as Aitchison and Lee (2006, p.72) explain, 'differing epistemological positions, manifested in widely divergent methodologies, and modes of writing, [become] secondary to the

mutually identified desire for a writing companion to facilitate critique and completion’.

Retreat structure

Participants referred to the retreats’ structure, protected time and space, and new writing practices. Participants appreciated the bursts of writing interspersed with reflective breaks, and some noted how this had increased their productivity. This finding is supported by Benvenuti’s (2017) longitudinal study on the development of writing retreats as a community of academic writing practice which also found that careful consideration needed to be given to the construction of the retreat, and that participants’ motivation derived from the community of practice extended beyond the retreat itself. Similarly, in our study, participants described recreating the retreats at home by protecting time and space to focus on writing and by writing only for short periods with regular breaks to avoid *burn out*. However, for us, not all participants appreciated the short, concentrated bursts of writing, and a minority viewed the breaks as interruptions. While these particular attendees may be better suited to uninterrupted writing over an extended duration, short periods of writing proved attractive to most participants.

Several participants commented on gaining new writing skills at the retreats. Participants particularly enjoyed the liberty offered by free writing. Rather than agonising over each word and hunting for evidence, participants recognised the benefit of simply getting the words on the page and editing later (Badley 2009).

In sum, our findings show that writing retreats are highly valued and make a substantive impact on writing productivity in terms of both output and attendees’ writing habits and practices. Notably, PedR writing retreat participants have published peer-reviewed journal articles (Harvey & Keyes 2019; Stebbing et al. 2019; Walshe & Driver 2019; Jay, Etchells & Dimond-

Bayir 2021; Stodter, Cope & Townsend 2021). Another impact of the PedR writing retreats is that some attendees have organised school-based writing retreats using this model, while other participants are running them with their students. Furthermore, through coming together as a shared endeavour, writing retreats support colleagues' well-being, including the management of anxiety associated with writing, and developing agency and competency in their writing.

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