

Writing Groups: Staff-Student Co-Creation of a Transformative Learning Space

Theresa Clementson

University of Brighton

Abstract

This case study discusses a qualitative research project undertaken by a team of academic literacies lecturers to investigate the effects of belonging to a writing group on students' perceptions of their role in learning. The researchers aimed to explore how a shift in students' approach to their studies might affect attitudes and support completion. Previous research into writing groups, in which small groups of researchers meet regularly to share ideas and write together, has largely been conducted at doctoral and post-doctoral level (Aitchison, 2009). Benefits to members occur through facilitated peer learning and talk rather than through traditional teaching. Our purpose was to discover whether similar benefits can take place at undergraduate and postgraduate level in a post-'92 university. The team was in the process of facilitating student-generated and co-created writing groups across the university. Seven participants in different groups answered an online questionnaire after one session and subsequently contributed voice recordings reflecting on the effects of belonging to the group. The results demonstrate that attending three or more writing groups at various levels of study may significantly improve students' learning experience, enabling increased confidence and competence, agency and joy in learning. The paper argues that co-created student-led writing groups should be encouraged within and across the curriculum to help students overcome learning transitions, complete writing projects and have much more enjoyment and success.

Key words: facilitated peer learning, staff-student co-creation, agency, learning transitions, transformative space

Introduction

A current challenge for higher education (HE) institutions is to foster a sense of community and belonging among students (Gilani and Thomas, 2025). The number of students suffering from mental health problems and anxiety has reached a record high, with over half of students surveyed by Student Minds (2023) reporting a mental health issue. This may result in students' not completing their assignments and studies (Wynne et al., 2014), particularly if they feel their needs are not being met by their institutions (Schifano, 2023). At the target institution in 2025, more than thirty per cent of students were supported to build a sense of wellbeing. Incorporating student-led peer learning into universities can foster a sense of community and belonging, potentially improving attainment, retention, progression and completion (Chilvers and McConnell, 2025). This paper discusses a research project which took place in a post-'92 university and explored the effects of a small-scale peer-learning initiative on students who had sought support for their studies from the Skills Hub on account of multiple challenges hindering assignment completion. The paper considers how interactive writing groups – as an example of peer learning communities of practice (CoP) – serve to help. They were offered to

students across the university as regular, supportive, creative spaces in which to “talk, write and learn together” (Aitchison, 2009, p.261) as they completed assignments.

In 2023-4, a small team of academic literacies lecturers in the university’s Skills Hub investigated how belonging to a writing group might impact students’ perceptions of their role in their own learning experience. The researchers aimed to explore how a change in students’ approach to their studies might positively alter their attitudes and so support assignment completion. Previous research into writing groups has largely been conducted at doctoral or post-doctoral level (Aitchison 2009; Allen, 2019), where small groups of student researchers met regularly to share ideas and talk and write together. More recent research includes postgraduate students’ experiences within writing groups. Wilmot and McKenna (2018, p.880) found writing groups to be “a transformative space for postgraduate students to learn, question and challenge”. This study aligns with Gimenez and Thomas’s (2015, p.30) definition of transformative practices as aiming to:

“help learners to develop a deep understanding of themselves as main agents in processes such as knowledge creation and discourse construction and co-construction, their own location and positioning, their relationship with other learners and their teachers, and their feelings about themselves.”

Our purpose was to build on current findings and to discover whether similar benefits can take place at undergraduate level and for diverse groups, such as apprentices and mature students, who are navigating challenging learning transitions. The paper considers writing groups as co-created peer learning spaces which are collaborative, dialogic and democratic, and in which aims and outcomes are negotiated and students and staff share responsibility for learning (Bovill, 2020). The paper argues that co-created writing groups should be facilitated within and alongside the curriculum, offering an inclusive approach which can help students overcome a range of transitions, develop confidence, competence and agency and become agentive participants (Freire, 1970; Gimenez and Thomas, 2015) in their own learning journey.

Literature review

Writing groups as spaces for learning through peer talk

Writing groups can offer HE students a “non-threatening” (Chihota and Thesen, 2014) creative space for learning through peer talk. Postgraduate researcher writing groups tend to have from five to eight members, who meet regularly for up to two hours in a space facilitated by a tutor or more senior researcher (Aitchison, 2009; Allen, 2019). Broadly, writing groups support writers through peer learning (Wilmot, 2018). However, they can be seen as spaces which do a great deal more than develop writing skills. Aitchison describes them as inspiring learning spaces where students feel “nurtured, empowered and stimulated” (2009, p. 261). Significantly, these benefits occur through students’ collaboration and conversation with peers, rather than with tutors and academic staff, in a “low stakes” (Wilder, 2021) space: non-performative, non-assessed and focused on development rather than outcomes (Crocker and Trede, 2009).

In keeping with situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000), belonging to a writing group allows students to develop confidence in their academic voice (Larcombe et al., 2007), develop a working knowledge of academic requirements through peer review (Aitchison, 2009) and strengthen motivation through peer pressure (Achadu et al., 2018) and accountability to the group (Aitchison, 2009). These positive outcomes stem from the student-oriented, collaborative nature of writing groups in spaces alongside but separate from students' academic departments. Within these groups, Aitchison argues, talk is the primary vehicle through which students engage reflexively in learning about reading and writing as 'meaning making' (2009). The teaching team drew on the research to develop an interactive model of writing groups where students can talk freely about their academic ideas, make sense of academic knowledge, language and conventions together and start to understand how they might fit into their academic discourse communities (Clementson, 2025).

Writing groups as sites for the development of agency and competence

A significant advantage of writing group membership is the opportunity to build agency through peer talk, which can enable students to develop an identity and voice within their academic discipline. Wilder argues that novice researchers can negotiate an emerging sense of authority and identity within their disciplinary communities through explaining ideas to a peer (2021). Shared membership of an academic community in a safe space (Wilmot and McKenna, 2018) is key because that space is not directly supervised by tutors (Gilewicz, 2014; White and Miller, 2015). The facilitation of writing groups as peer learning spaces connected to, but apart from, existing sites of disciplinary practice fosters more democratic relationships between members, in turn encouraging trust and developing a respectful peer learning culture (Kinney et al., 2019, p.20).

The extent of the tutor's role in facilitating these groups varies; Aitchison (2009) and Allen (2019) contend that the tutor's authority is necessary to ensure the accuracy of students' shared working knowledge, while, for others, the principle of a pedagogy that is "horizontalized and distributed" (Boud and Lee, 2005, p.502) is key to levelling out responsibility and agency within the group (Kinney et al., 2019; Wilder, 2021). Achadu et al. (2018) found that writing groups act as spaces of agency development owing to their non-hierarchical set-up and peer collaboration. Because what happens in them is negotiated and co-managed by members, decision-making is put back into the hands of the students, empowering them to be proactive in their own academic development. In this more democratic learning environment, the groups can offer a potentially transformative space (Wilmot and McKenna, 2018) for students to develop autonomy and agency through peer learning.

This case study investigated the groups as co-created, dialogic, democratic learning spaces established by staff in which students set the agenda and lead the learning. In a community of practice (CoP), Wenger claims that members' shared responsibility for the learning agenda "pushes their practice further" (2000, p.231) and suggests that internal leadership contributes to the development of the community. Internal leadership within a group would indicate student leadership, which would positively affect the power dynamics and relationships of members and contribute to students' sense of agency and identity (Clementson, 2025).

Many benefits of writing groups have been established at doctoral level (Aitchison, 2009). However, there is a gap in the research for less advanced students and in institutions such as post-'92 universities which often include many students with complex learning needs.

Publications about writing groups are beginning to emerge in other parts of the world at Masters level (Achadu et al., 2018), but almost nothing exists at undergraduate (UG) level. This presents a valuable opportunity to explore the benefits of the groups from students' perspectives at UG and PG levels.

Methods

The purpose of this research was to investigate how writing groups affected students in one university at different levels of study, in order to broaden the scope of this field of enquiry. Our core research question was: 'Does belonging to a Writing Group impact students' perceptions of their role in learning?' Prior to set-up, the writing group facilitators agreed a set of principles for parity, with the primary aim of fostering a positive and productive peer-learning culture. The focus was on: process, not product; empowerment and autonomy; and building an inclusive and confidence-building CoP through peer talk. The facilitator role involved negotiating with members the aims and anticipated outcomes, in order to co-create a supportive space for peer learning which fostered a culture of collaboration and shared endeavour. The role was not to teach students to improve writing but to enable them to help each other by facilitating focused talk about their writing projects, by offering strategies and by answering questions when appropriate.

The research adopted an interpretive approach in order to study participants' individual perceptions. From themes emerging from the findings, we hoped to make assertions about how the groups influenced study participants and then to consider to what extent our findings might be scalable, generalisable and applicable to other students in our university and in the sector (Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

The quantitative data collected in the online questionnaire provided context to the findings, including first language, age range, gap from previous full-time study and each participant's writing group, course and year of study (appendix, table 1). Seven participants in three different groups (WG1, WG2 and WG3) agreed to participate in the study; the writing groups had additional members who did not participate.

The participants within each group were studying together prior to and after the current study. Anne, Adei and Sally (WG1) were Social Work UG apprentices in their first year, all returning to study after a long gap from full-time education. Theo and Isobel were writing dissertations for their taught PG degree in Community Psychology (WG2) and both spoke English as a second language. Tamara joined WG2 for support with her PG research degree and was also returning to study after a long gap. Yulia was writing her dissertation for her taught PG degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (MA TESOL) (WG3) and returning to study after an eight-year gap working as a Japanese teacher of English. In total, five participants were mature students returning to study after a long gap from full-time education. The gap was significant because many of the students saw this as a major challenge. Other challenging transitions included shifting from practitioner to student (Anne, Adei and Yulia); progressing from essay to dissertation (Theo, Isobel and Yulia); and changing education system, country and culture (Theo, Isobel and Yulia). The participants represented, therefore, a wide range of life experiences and learning transitions, broadening the scope of the study.

All writing group members were invited to participate verbally by a facilitator. Interested members were provided with a participant information sheet with further details and consent forms for signing. The range of qualitative data, collected in two stages from self-selecting participants, provided a “thick” description (Scotland, 2012, p.12; Cohen et al., 2018, p.289). In stage 1, participants completed an online questionnaire shortly after joining the group (the results section provides details). In stage 2, participants recorded a reflective account in answer to structured interview questions after a minimum of three sessions. Stage 2 was exploratory and echoed many of the questions in stage 1, in order to explore any effects of attendance at the group sessions. (The appendices contain materials from stages 1 and 2.) All participant information was anonymised and all personal data protected in accordance with the university’s data protection policies. Ethical approval was given by the Cross School Research Ethics Committee before data collection began.

Analysis

We analysed the qualitative data thematically, using a constant comparative method to enable us to identify themes emerging from participant responses (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Similar themes were colour-coded, allowing patterns to emerge. Rather than entering into the analysis with fixed notions, we aimed to immerse ourselves in the data and allow the “meanings being constructed” by the participants to emerge (Thomas, 2013) – for instance by identifying words and phrases repeated by various participants in response to open questions.

We opted for interpretive analysis in order to focus on what we could learn from participants about their attitudes to their study experience and sense of agency before and after attending the writing groups. The analysis of responses to questions repeated across two stages allowed us to identify significant changes in perception as a result of attending the groups. From the findings, we hoped to be able to demonstrate the value of the groups to students’ learning experience and to use these findings to promote the embedding of writing groups within programmes of study in our institution (postscript).

Results and discussion

The results demonstrated that attending three or more writing groups can have a profound impact on UG and PG students’ perceptions of their role in learning. In stage 1, participants responded to the following questions using three words or phrases:

1. How do you feel about your independent study time?
2. How do you feel about your own role in learning at the university?
3. How do you feel about your upcoming assignments?

As UG apprentices, Anne and Adei were mature and experienced social workers but less confident about academic study and writing. Their responses to questions 1 and 2 are largely positive, including: “*productive, fruitful*” (Q1, Adei) and “*confident*” (Q2, Anne), “*hopeful*” and “*resourceful*” (Q2, Adei). Their answers to question 3, though, are much less confident, including: “*worried, unsure*” (Q3, Anne) and “*anxious, unprepared, stressed*” (Q3, Adei), reflecting serious concerns about forthcoming assignments. Isobel and Theo were

international students navigating their PG degrees in English as a second language. Their responses to Q1 and Q2 are mixed, with Isobel feeling she is “*expected to be independent and proactive*”, but feeling “*lost*”, and Theo feeling he is “*unmotivated*” (Q1) and finding his own role in learning to be “*big*” and “*difficult*” (Q2). With regard to assignments, Isobel repeats “*lost*” and feels “*insecure*”, while Theo feels “*defeated*” (Q3). All the respondents reflect similar concerns and doubts about how to tackle approaching assignments except for Tamara, who feels “*excited*” and “*curious*” about her studies and assignments. This may reflect her more advanced stage of study (2nd-year masters), although still acknowledging doubts about her preparedness.

Stage 2 questions asked participants the same questions as those in stage 1 but included additional questions to prompt reflection on the effects of attending three or more writing groups. (Stage 2 questions appear in the appendices.)

UG themes from self recordings

Key themes that emerged from the UG self-recordings demonstrated: to what extent attendance at the groups modified confidence, working knowledge and competence; perceptions about roles and identities as learners; and surprises and changes in attitude. (UG data appear in appendices, table 3.)

Confidence and competence

Anne’s and Adei’s confidence and competence levels grew as a direct result of participating in the writing group. The realisation that all questions and doubts could be shared and potentially resolved with peers, and that “*asking might not be a silly question*” (Anne) was a key finding at UG level. Not only did the respondents’ sense of competence and understanding of academic expectations evolve and grow but they also felt more able to tackle assignments with confidence, thanks to a greater awareness of where and how to look for and ask for help.

Roles and identities

Anne found a natural role as a student leader who was able to engage others in attending the group and setting up peer sessions between groups. Adei felt much clearer about what she was supposed to do as a student and felt enabled to “*go ahead and do it*”. Both students were able to find a way to view their learning positively despite their enormous workloads and personal responsibilities outside the university. They co-constructed an understanding of their roles as students alongside more familiar roles as social worker, mother, colleague. In other words, belonging to the group made them feel significantly more positive in their attitudes to study as first year UG student apprentices, because they became more confident and competent in their academic disciplines and “*active participants*” (Adei) in their own learning.

PG themes from self recordings

Key themes that emerged from the PG self-recordings include reflections on peer learning, feelings about agency and role, and surprises and changes in attitude. (Stage 2 PG data appear in appendices, table 4.)

Peer learning

Perhaps the greatest discovery of all for the students was that learning with their peers was not only helpful, motivating and more fun, but also empowering. Yulia (MA TESOL) focused on how she would be able to share new knowledge with colleagues when she returned to Japan. Theo discovered a new sense of *“what learning’s about, bouncing ideas off each other and all wanting to improve together”*. Both Isobel and Theo not only encouraged and helped each other but passed on new knowledge and understanding to peers *“after the writing group”* (Isobel). This appears to result from a new awareness of their role as *“active participants”* in their own learning, gaining new understanding that they could learn and simultaneously help others through sharing new knowledge and competence with peers both inside and outside the group.

Agency and role

All participants expressed a new sense of agency as learners who could help themselves and their peers gain understanding and competence. Theo stepped into a lead role managing the members and organising the groups. Isobel found a new role as *“an agent that has things to say”* while also helping peers. She felt *“empowered”* by the *“participative”* nature of the learning environment. Theo felt that *“everyone was important and necessary”* and that it *“could not have happened if we’d just been on our own”*.

Surprises and changes

Isobel expressed surprise at how much she had learned from participating in the groups. Theo expressed newfound excitement and motivation to learn as a result of participation. Most significantly, Theo reflected on the *“joy”* and *“love”* of learning he discovered in the groups, free from the stress of focusing directly on assignments.

Evaluation

The study demonstrates that attending three or more interactive writing groups can profoundly alter UG and PG students’ attitudes to study and assignments and their perceptions of their role in learning. Six of the seven participants felt anxious and overwhelmed by approaching assignments before attending the groups. The subsequent responses demonstrate just how much all the respondents gained, including increased confidence and understanding of academic expectations, agency and, for some, enjoyment in learning. The non-performative, low-stakes nature of the groups was central to overcoming the fear of assignments through sharing and solving problems and concerns, as well as building competence and knowledge together. The participatory nature of the groups was responsible for these positive effects, giving learners dedicated time and space to discuss ideas and concerns about their projects and assignments.

A major factor contributing to the sustainability of the groups was the emergence of a student lead who worked with the staff facilitator to communicate with students and organise meetings; this represents an outcome in keeping with Wenger’s (2000) theories regarding shared responsibility and internal leadership (Literature review) and reflects the need for co-creation to the sustainability of writing groups.

Limitations and recommendations

The research was conducted by a team of teacher researchers who were colleagues and staff members in the university. There are several advantages for the 'insider' as researcher, in having facilitated access, insider knowledge of the workings of the institution and insights into both student and university processes (Teusner, 2016). However, there was also a need for vigilance, given the relationships of the research team members to each other and the institution (Basit, 2010). The research was designed with these aspects in mind. For example, our choice of self-recorded accounts from participants (rather than focus groups or interviews) was intended to reduce researcher bias and to respect the participants' own reality of existence (Sennett, 2003, p.43).

Although few in number, the participants were representative of a broad student body including first-year UGs, taught PG and research masters' students, apprentices, international and mature students. The focus on UG first-year students is valuable new information for practitioners and researchers in HE. All participants were experiencing challenging learning transitions, including five who had experienced long gaps from study, which makes the findings potentially generalisable to similar institutions. The study is replicable and it would be interesting and helpful to extend the research to longitudinal studies in other universities and a wider student body.

Several of the original writing groups in the project failed to continue meeting, which resulted in a smaller data set than intended, and in students from fewer disciplines. For the purposes of the case study, the groups all relate to practice-based degrees apart from one PG student. It would be valuable to extend writing group research and similar studies to students from contrasting disciplines, such as engineers and sports sciences.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that writing groups can be helpful for UGs in their first year of study as well as students in higher-level study. All participants grew in confidence and competence, agency and in gaining understanding of how they could help themselves and their peers to study effectively, both within and beyond the groups. Regarding the broader context of rising mental health concerns and anxiety about study and assignments, the groups appeared to alleviate stress by encouraging peers to share thoughts, ask questions and work through problems together. In other words, the groups went well beyond improving writing: they fundamentally modified students' attitudes to learning and completing assignments. In brief, encouraging the implementation of interactive writing groups allows academic staff and students to co-design an active and potentially transformative learning space in which students can develop peer-learning skills and agency, prepare effectively for assignments and find joy in learning at university.

Reference list

Achadu, O., Chakona, G., Mataruse, P., McKenna, S., Oluwole, D.O., Asfour, F. and Mason, P. (2018) 'Postgraduate Writing Groups as spaces of agency development.' *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(6), 370-381. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-6-2963> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Aitchison, C. (2009) 'Writing Groups for doctoral education.' *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(8), 905-916. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070902785580> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Allen, T. (2019) 'Facilitating graduate student and faculty member Writing Groups: experiences from a university in Japan.' *Higher Education Research and Development*, 38(3), 435-449. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1574721> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Bovill, C. (2020) 'Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in higher education.' *Higher Education*, 79(6), 1023-1037. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00453-w>

(Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Chihota, C. and Thesen, L. (2014) 'Rehearsing 'the postgraduate condition' in writers' circles.' In: Chouliaraki, L. and Fairclough, N. (eds.) *Discourse and Late Modernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN: 9780748610822

Chilvers, L. and McConnell, C. (2025) *The Peer-to-Peer Framework: Embedding Peer Learning and Support in Higher Education*. Advance HE. Available at: [The Peer-to-Peer Framework FINAL_1761663448.pdf](#) (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Clementson, T. (2025) *Towards a transformative pedagogy for developing voice through peer talk*. PhD thesis. University of Sussex. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.28381529.v1> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research methods in education*. 8th edn. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 9781138209862 Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/plink/3ada8b5d-7b8b-3197-9bc3-75502364052b> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Crocker, A., Higgs, J. and Trede, F. (2009) 'What do we mean by "collaboration" and when is a "team" not a "team"? A qualitative unbundling of terms and meanings.' *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(1), 28-42. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0901028> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum. ISBN: 0816491321

Gilani, D. and Thomas, L. (2025) 'Understanding the factors and consequences of student belonging in higher education: a critical literature review.' *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi34.1385> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Gilewicz, M. (2014) 'Sponsoring student response in writing center group tutorials.' In: Moss, B., Highberg, N. and Nicolas, M. (eds.) *Writing Groups inside and outside the classroom*, Abingdon: Routledge, 63-78. ISBN: 9781410610164

Gimenez, J. and Thomas, P. (2015) 'A framework for usable pedagogy: case studies towards accessibility, criticality and visibility.' In: Lillis, T., Harrington, K., Lea, M.R. and Mitchell, S. (eds.) *Working with academic literacies: case studies towards transformative practice*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearing House/Parlor Press. ISBN: 9781602357617

Kinney, T., Snyder-Yuly, J. and Martinez, S. (2019) 'Cultivating graduate Writing Groups as communities of practice: A call to action for the writing center.' *Praxis*, 16(3), 16-24. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/3175> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Larcombe, W., McCosker, A., and O'Loughlin, K. (2007) 'Supporting education PhD and DEd students to become confident academic writers: An evaluation of thesis writers' circles.' *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 4, 54-63. Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=jutlp> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521413084

Miles, M. and Huberman, A. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis*. California: Sage. ISBN: 9780803946538

Schifano, I. (2023) '“They made me feel invalid”: Shocking new figures show scale of student health crisis.' *The Tab*. Available at: <https://thetab.com/2023/05/02/they-made-me-feel-invalid-shocking-new-figures-show-scale-of-student-mental-health-crisis> (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Scotland, J. (2012) 'Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms.' *English Language Teaching*, 5(9). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n9p9> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Sennett, R. (2003) *Respect: the formation of character in a world of inequality*. London: Allen Lane. ISBN 0-713-996

Student Minds (2023) *Student Minds Research Briefing*. Student Minds. Available at: *Co-producing mental health strategies with students - Student Minds* (Accessed: 6 June 2026).

Teusner, A. (2016) 'Insider research: validity issues, and the OHS professional: one person's journey.' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 19(1), 85-96. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1019263> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Thomas, G. (2013) *How to do your research project. A guide for students in education and applied social sciences*. 2nd edn. London: Sage. ISBN 9781446258866

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521430173

Wenger, E. (2000) 'Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems.' *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

White, S. and Miller, E. (2015) 'Senior-thesis Writing Groups: Putting students in the driver's seat.' *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 39(5/6), 1-5. Available at: <https://wacclearinghouse.org/docs/wln/v39/39.5-6.pdf> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Wilder, S. (2021) 'Another Voice in the Room: Negotiating Authority in Multidisciplinary Writing Groups.' *Written Communication*, 38(2), 247-277. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088320986540> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Wilmot, K. (2018) 'Designing Writing Groups to support postgraduate students' academic writing: A case study from a South African university.' *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(3), 257-265. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1238775> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Wilmot, K. and McKenna, S. (2018) 'Writing Groups as transformative spaces.' *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(4), 868-882. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1450361> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Wynne, C., Guo, Y.J. and Wang, S.C. (2014) 'Writing Anxiety Groups: A Creative Approach for Graduate Students.' *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 9(3), 366-379. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2014.902343> (Accessed: 22 June 2026).

Postscript

After presenting this research at the target university, writing groups were added to the 'Access and Participation Plan' (2025-2030) for undergraduates. A range of writing groups are running in several schools and departments and are continuing to be implemented across the university.

Appendices

Stage 1 (Jisc) online questionnaire

Students were asked to give a pseudonym, select an age range, state gap from previous full-time study and identify course and year of study.

Questions (three words or phrases)

Why did you join?

How do you feel about your independent study time?

How do you feel about your upcoming assignments?

How do you feel about your own role in learning at the university?

Stage 2 questions for self-recordings (ten mins max)

1. What do you see as the purpose of the Writing Group you have attended?
2. Which aspect(s) of the Writing Group have surprised you?
3. How do you see your role in the Writing Group?
4. How do you feel about your independent study time?
5. How do you feel about completing your future assignments?
6. How do you feel about your own role in learning at the university?
7. How has the Writing Group impacted you or your learning? Speak for up to one minute.

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonym and first language	Age range	Gap between current and previous full-time study	Writing Groups (WG) 1-3, Course and year
Anne (English)	35-44	18-year gap	WG1: Social Work BSc Apprentice, 1st year
Sally (English)	45-54	26-year gap	WG1: Social Work BSc Apprentice, 1st year
Adei (English)	35-44	10-year gap	WG1: Social Work BSc Apprentice, 1st year
Theo (Dutch)	18-24	No gap	WG2: MA Community Psychology
Isobel (Spanish)	18-24	No gap	WG2: MA Community Psychology
Tamara (English)	45-54	28-year gap	WG2: MSc Soc Res Methods, 2nd year part time

Case Study

Yulia (Japanese)	18-24	8-year gap	WG3: MA TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language)
------------------	-------	------------	--

Results

Table 2: UG and PG responses to questionnaire (stage 1)

Question	UG responses	PG responses
1. How do you feel about your independent study time?	unsure where to start, need this time to gather thoughts and ideas (Anne) productive, fruitful, good (Adei)	you need a lot of willpower, draining, lost (Isobel) difficult, unmotivated, interesting (Theo) engaged, overwhelmed, confused (Tamara)
2. How do you feel about your own role in learning at the university?	confident, supported, helpful (Anne) hopeful, resourceful, rewarding (Adei)	big, beneficial, difficult (Theo) curious, untethered, engaged (Tamara) I'm expected to: be very independent, be very proactive, know how to approach different assignments (Isobel)
3. How do you feel about your upcoming assignments?	worried, unsure (Anne) anxious, unprepared, stressed (Adei)	defeated, struggling, endless (Theo) excited, unprepared, curious (Tamara) doubtful, insecure about writing, lost in how to approach it (Isobel)

Table 3: UG self recordings to stage 2 questions organised by theme

Themes	Anne	Adei
Building confidence	"I now feel confident to go away and study; I know where to begin my essay writing" "I feel a lot less panic now, now I can unpick the criteria of an essay and answer an essay question"	"I'm more confident about my role as a student"

Case Study

Developing working knowledge and competence	“I didn’t know where to begin at all; it was the most daunting part of coming to university; now I feel able to organise my writing, structure paragraphs, understand about referencing”	“I’m now able to go straight to the point and address the marking criteria” “I don’t panic anymore. I try to focus on what I’m supposed to do, then I go ahead and do it”
Role and identities	to engage others in attending the group; setting up peer sessions between Writing Groups; “to write with others, talk with others and share experiences”	“I see myself as an active participant” “I know my responsibilities, I know what I’m supposed to go ahead and do”
Surprises and changes	“It’s not just me that doesn’t feel very confident, ... so we can work through and develop that together” “to feel able to ask for help if we need it and that asking might not be a silly question”	“My Writing Group has been a great impact on me as a mother, as a worker. I have spent a lot of time contemplating how I can write my essays, how I can work things out so I can achieve to the best of my ability.”

Table 4: PG self recordings to stage 2 questions organised by theme

PG themes	Isobel and (Yulia)	Theo
Peer learning	“It also has created a support network between the peers who’ve attended the Writing Group. It started like this support thing between us and with my housemates. But with my peers, we have been helping each other more after the Writing Groups.” “What I learned in the Writing Group will be helpful as tools for other teachers in my workplace. I think that when I go back to my country I can teach them how to write essays because I think teachers	“It was quite a communal thing, ... we motivated each other, and we helped each other learn and grow and it could not have happened if we’d just been on our own.” “just having a meeting with somebody I think that would help, but it helps so much to be with others, and to hear what other people are doing” It felt that that’s what learning’s about, bouncing ideas off each other and all wanting to improve together without the stress of the

Case Study

	need to improve and reflect themselves about their writing skills as well as their students.” (Yulia)	deadline in those moments.
Agency and role	“It’s different to what we always received in school, which is the teacher giving all the information and the students just receiving. It’s participative. It gives agency to the students to also participate in the feedback.” “Not as a number or just a receiver of information, but an agent that has things to say and can also help their peers. It kind of empowers you in a certain way, like you’re still learning but at the same time you’re still helping your peers learn.”	“It just showed me that you can learn with other people and you can write with other people even though it doesn’t feel like it.” “We motivated each other, and we helped each other learn and grow and it could not have happened if we’d just been on our own. ... everybody was important and necessary and because of that we all had a really good central role in the group’s functioning and how successful it was.”
Surprises and changes	“I’ve learned so much, so much. It’s just some basic things that we don’t normally learn in [university]. We just learn about the subject, but they don’t tell us the practicalities, how to deliver the thing, our thought in a paper. So yeah, I’ve extended myself a lot.”	“It brought me a lot of joy actually because everybody was so lovely and I love learning but I don’t like assignments and everything because it stresses me out.” “I think I would normally have seen it as something I didn’t want to go to (as extra work). But actually it was so useful and so motivating that I felt really excited to go. I just really wanted to go and I always felt so much better and lighter, like I knew which direction I was going in afterwards. “