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Writing retreats as spaces to create Indigenous postgraduate research communities of practice

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ABSTRACT

Publish or perish is the cautionary aphorism reminding academics to produce academic work for career longevity. For communities historically excluded from tertiary institutions, this aphorism can also signify a responsibility to ensure their voices are heard. Tertiary institutions recognise the importance of fostering productive writing opportunities; and writing retreats are a valuable approach. This article demonstrates the importance of writing retreats from the perspective of Indigenous postgraduate scholars in Australia. Two writing retreats were held off-campus in 2018–2019. To identify the impact of the writing retreats, we (the participants in the retreat) used an active participatory approach to explore our experiences using data collected from Yarning circles and written critical self-reflections. We identified three key themes: (1) writing retreats as supportive spaces for academic writing, (2) the development of an ongoing community of practice and (3) the importance of managing cultural risk in Indigenous programs. The findings demonstrate the importance of providing culturally grounded opportunities that support Indigenous scholarship.

Introduction

Writing is a foundational pillar in academia. Early in an academic's career – during postgraduate studies – they are expected to build their writing skills and understand the importance of publishing to disseminate findings. The quantification of publications is an important measure of an academic's productivity and success (Gray, Madson, and Jackson 2018) that influences higher education policy

and practice. Despite the *publish or perish* expectation, writing practices are often overlooked and some institutions offer little support for researchers to develop writing practice (Jackson 2009).

We are a group of Indigenous[1] authors who, as postgraduate researchers enrolled in Higher Degree Research (HDR) programs at an Australian University (including PhD and Masters by Research degrees), participated in writing retreats designed by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples. Some of us were also working within a university as staff in academic or non-academic positions at the time of the retreat or at the time of writing this article. Finding time and support to write can be challenging when transitioning between roles within and outside of the academy (Corporal 2020; Corporal et al. 2020).

As minoritised and marginalised peoples, writing tensions are exemplified for us as we experience higher workloads due to institutional biases and structural disadvantage, including greater mental load, and increased contributions to committees and equity agendas (Anderson et al. 2022; Fredericks et al. 2019; Zambrana 2018). This paper draws on our experiences participating in a writing retreat and challenging the legacy of colonisation and marginalisation of Indigenous perspectives from across disciplines and throughout the research process (Smith 2021). After generations of exclusion followed by the fight of our academic predecessors, advocating for time and space to write, so our voices are read, is crucial to meeting our cultural and academic responsibilities.

Writing retreats

Writing retreats are powerful, productive pedagogical tools to support writers and create opportunities for learning (Aitchison 2009). Writing retreats are characterised as designated time and space to focus on writing and are proven to be cost-effective investments often used by universities to boost publication outputs (Gray, Madson, and Jackson 2018; Jackson 2009). Studies have reported that participants of writing retreats experience personal benefits of increased confidence and motivation, reduced writing anxiety, a sense of accomplishment, pleasure in writing (Kornhaber et al. 2016) and improved writing quality (Gray, Madson, and Jackson 2018). Writing retreats also bring together novice and experienced writers in sustained coaching relationships, which facilitate collegial relationships, team building (Jackson 2009) and fortitude for critiquing in a group context (Aitchison 2009); all necessary skills for postgraduate student success (Papen and Thériault 2018; Tremblay-Wragg et al. 2021).

Minoritised groups have gained significant benefits from participating in writing retreats (Aitchison 2009; Grant 2006). Akuhata-Huntington et al. (2020) demonstrated the importance of minoritised and isolated students coming together to write, particularly when institutions have failed to provide adequate support. These are important considerations for institutions engaging with Indigenous postgraduate researchers (Fredericks et al. 2019; Konttinen, Jang, and Silan 2021). We – as Indigenous postgraduate researchers – need culturally-grounded spaces to write, accelerate the development of our writing identities and establish ourselves as active participants in the academy (Fredericks et al. 2019).

Writing communities of practice

Universities have implemented some initiatives to support Indigenous research capability, including a multitude of Indigenous-led, strengths-based initiatives that facilitate the excellence of academic research by Indigenous researchers (Anderson et al. 2022; Campbell and Chang 2021; Cook, Whatman, and Sammel 2023; Elston et al. 2013; White and Fredericks 2011); however, there are still gaps. There are indications that writing retreats are a productive mechanism to support Indigenous writing (Fredericks et al. 2019). A key characteristic of writing retreats is the collegial framework they create, where a group of like-minded individuals come together for a designated purpose. This collegiality is a unique function of writing retreats that has been characterised as the development of a 'community of practice' (CoP) (Benvenuti 2017; Knowles 2017; Kornhaber et al. 2016; Murray and

Newton 2009; Tremblay-Wragg et al. 2021). A CoP is defined as a group of people who share a common practice and deepen this expertise of practice or create new practice through regular inter-action (Wenger 1998; Wenger, Mcdermott, and Snyder 2002). From an Indigenous perspective, a CoP creates the collegiality central to achieving research goals that draw on our Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003).

Methodology

To discuss our experiences of writing retreats and the benefits from our perspectives as Indigenous postgraduate researchers, we used a methodological approach featuring Indigenous ways of inter-acting. Indigenous conversational styles (i.e. yarning modalities) draw upon people's relationships, inherent responsibilities and respect for Country[2] and culture (Bessarab and Bridget 2010). We used yarning modalities with an active participatory approach when sharing our own stories, reflect-ing, analysing and writing as a group (Aitchison 2009; Kendall et al. 2011). Fredericks et al. (2019) describe active participation as a 'group way of thinking/writing', the current study embodies this active participatory approach as we are the participants from the writing retreats, researchers inves-tigating our own experiences, and the authors of this paper. This paper presents our individual and collective Indigenous standpoints (Rigney 1999) as we convey our experiences as Indigenous writers attending two off-campus writing retreats held for Indigenous postgraduate students in 2018 ($n = 11$ participants) and 2019 ($n = 12$ participants).

Both off-campus writing retreats were attended by new participants and some returning writers, which ensured continuity of the retreat community and culture (Grant 2006). We began each writing retreat with a yarning circle (outlined below) – an appropriate approach for introductions, establish-ing connections between participants, goal setting and program planning (Grant 2006; Jackson 2009). The yarning circle was followed by workshops on writing tips, editing and publishing (Papen and Thériault 2018; Tremblay-Wragg et al. 2021). Workshops were interspersed with periods of self-directed writing time (e.g. writing manuscripts or a thesis chapter). Beyond organised sessions, participants shared meals together, discussed our research, reflected on learnings and benefits of the retreat, and made the most of restorative time away from demanding lives and insti-tutional pressures (Acker and Armenti 2004; Grant 2006). An Elder (cultural mentor), an Indigenous academic and an editor, mentored participants with targeted areas of support (Jackson 2009; Murray and Newton 2009).

The first retreat provided the opportunity to discuss the importance of having Indigenous voices in the published literature and publishing our writing retreat experiences. To this end, we collected data on participants' experiences during the second retreat held in 2019 using two data collection methods: yarning circles and critical self-reflections (Griffith University ethics approval 2014/873).

Yarning circles are processes of verbal exchange within a democratic space, drawing on Indigen-ous knowledge systems according with cultural protocols and principles, encompassing elements of respect with the discussion being free to meander, fixate or diverge and take creative flight (Barlo et al. 2020; Bessarab and Bridget 2010; Dean 2010; Walker et al. 2014). Yarning circles were held at the beginning (e.g. introductions and goal setting) and end of each retreat (e.g. retreat obser-vations and experiences) and where appropriate were audio recorded and transcribed.

Participants provided *critical personal self-reflections*, facilitating a deeper understanding of how our views were formed and influence our values (Ortlipp 2008). The critical, self-reflexive practice captured our stories, thoughts and feelings as we considered the impacts of the retreat. Eight par-ticipants from the 2019 cohort contributed a written self-reflection.

Following the second retreat, data were analysed, and all participants were invited to contribute to data analysis and co-authorship of this paper, so that participant voices are directly influencing the analysis and writing process. The iterative analysis process included a reflexive thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2021) and 'collaborative yarning' (Bessarab and Bridget 2010; Walker et al. 2014) to analyse the yarning circle transcripts and reflections. After initial coding, co-authors

performed inter-coder reliability by comparing and discussing the coded data. Themes were identified and refined amongst the co-authors until a consensus was reached.

Results and discussion

Three main themes were identified from the data and subsequent yarning discussions. The first theme, *Supportive Spaces for Developing Academic Writing*, is an explicit outcome of writing retreats (Figure 1) and is depicted as the exposed portion of the iceberg. Creating supportive spaces for academic writing includes the sub-themes: the development of writing practice (1.1) and the value of retreating to write (1.2). The second, more substantial theme from our discussion, was the formation of an *Indigenous CoP*, depicted as the portion of the iceberg hidden underwater (i.e. unobservable). The Indigenous CoP theme includes four sub-themes: stronger collective identity as members of this writing community (2.1); re-fusing boundaries between individuals and disciplines (2.2); strengthening academic kinship networks (2.3); and navigating challenges as Indigenous writers and postgraduate researchers (2.4). Surrounding the CoP is the importance of *Cultural Risk Management*, the third theme that emerged. We consider the themes and sub-themes in turn.

Theme 1 – supportive spaces for academic writing

Our experiences supplement existing literature (Aitchison 2009; Grant 2006; Gray, Madson, and Jackson 2018; Kornhaber et al. 2016) on the benefits of writing retreats as supportive spaces for
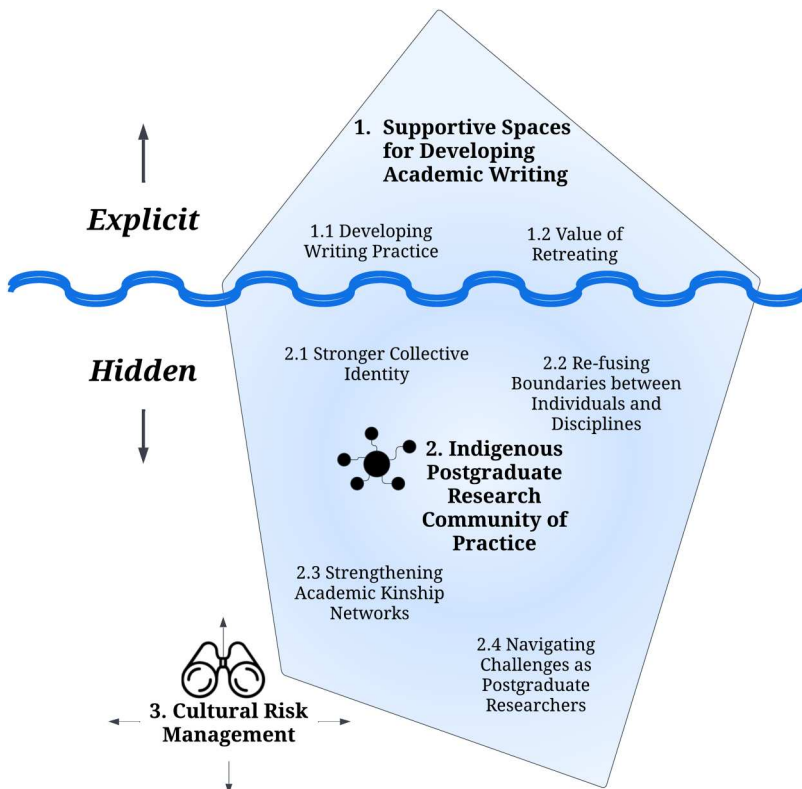

Figure 1. Iceberg diagram representing the emergent themes from Indigenous postgraduate researchers' experiences of writing retreats.

developing writing practice. Retreating from oppressive power structures and obligations empowered us to develop our skills as Indigenous writers.

Subtheme 1.1: developing writing practice

Transferring ideas to written words was frequently highlighted as participants' primary goal for the retreat:

> … there were comments like, getting words on paper, putting thoughts on paper, how to write 'academic speak' … communicating in different ways, transitioning from creative to academic, that the process is often challenging or jarring but that we need to do it. (Second Retreat, Yarning Session 3)

Translating ideas to written words took different forms depending on our writing goal or discipline. While writing experiences varied between participants, our collective goal was to improve our writing efficiency and effectiveness. We discussed the importance of capturing ideas by writing and improving readability and impact. For example, in personal reflections (notated with 'PR' and numbered), participants wrote about having learnt 'new academic writing skills […] skills for future practice […] skills which will make me a better researcher' (PR1), being 'equipped with more tools in my pocket, ideas […] and energy to keep on writing' (PR3) and awareness of 'the skills and tools that are needed in academic writing' (PR4). These reflections indicate the writing retreats improved the quality of our writing, our proficiency in the 'tools of the trade' and empowered us to convey ideas in academic contexts.

Having attended other conventional writing retreats, some participants reflected on how gathering exclusively with Indigenous colleagues allowed them to see how writing could be used to address the challenges of Indigenous scholarship.

> … the seminars provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss how these topics effected Indigenous [postgraduate research students] differently … we were able to discuss how academic writing compared to ways of interacting between Indigenous people; the impacts of publishing on Indigenous topics and how to do this in a way that contributes to the community. (PR5)

Overall, the structure of the writing retreat allowed for engagement according to the participants' writing needs.

Subtheme 1.2: retreating to write

Meaningful development of academic writing skills and identities as Indigenous postgraduate researchers required physically and metaphorically retreating from the constraints, oppressive structures and agendas of the institution. We freely explored ideas in the space and time provided outside the restraints of complex everyday life responsibilities (Grant 2006). The importance of retreating away from campus was discussed in many reflections, for example:

> It can be challenging to find time to purely focus on writing and immerse myself as a student […] holding the retreat away from campus was important as this provided a physical separation […] it provided a greater opportunity to focus in an environment conducive to writing. (PR1)

> Being in this space while removing distractions, provides a safe space to tackle our writing demons and in a broader sense face the fears that plague progress in writing. (PR3)

Retreating away from other life demands is a key component of increasing the benefits of writing retreats (Aitchison 2009; Grant 2006; Kornhaber et al. 2016). The ability to remove distractions and ground oneself within a writing 'sanctuary' (Grant 2006) gives writers freedom and relief, in turn increasing confidence and risk taking within the writing space (Aitchison 2009) which is important for writers whose voices are often excluded from the published literature.

To increase one's confidence and grounding within the writing space, location is important. This is especially true for Indigenous writers, where connection to Country and place is a key component of cultural identity and protocol. For some participants, sanctuary meant being away from urban busyness and institutional pressures.

> The location of the retreat was a powerful and strategic choice. Being away from the urban environment […] essentially forced me to commit to the entirety of the retreat with writing being my main focus as I did not need to worry about the everyday concerns I face at home. (PR6)

Another participant reflected on the importance of connecting to a particular site off campus and grounding on Country:

> The cultural history of the Country where the retreat was held was significant. The Welcome the Country and explanation of the significance of the area was very motivating and positively impacted on the time I spent at the retreat […] this reinforced the privilege of retreating and focusing fully on our work. (PR5)

The writing retreats empowered Indigenous postgraduate participants and addressed our needs to have unencumbered space to write.

Theme 2. Indigenous postgraduate research CoP

The writing retreats brought together Indigenous postgraduate researchers to share common experiences, academic work and create future collaborations. The requirements for a CoP were met by providing; (1) a shared domain (i.e. a common interest and identity as Indigenous postgraduate researchers), (2) the community as a social fabric of relationships and interpersonal engagement lasting beyond the writing retreats (e.g. the development of this paper) and (3) the practice of a shared history featuring intellectual engagement across disciplines and cultural knowledge that contributed to our personal, professional and academic development (Wenger 1998; Wenger, Mcdermott, and Snyder 2002). Consistent with the CoP literature, we found short-term, long-term, tangible and intangible outcomes that benefit individuals and the organisation (Wenger 1998; Wenger, Mcdermott, and Snyder 2002). As depicted in Figure 1, the four subthemes encompassing the CoP include; stronger collective identity (2.1), re-fusing boundaries between individuals and disciplines (2.2), strengthening academic kinship networks (2.3) and navigating challenges as Indigenous postgraduate researchers (2.4).

Subtheme 2.1: Stronger collective identity

The benefits of supporting a particular cohort have been shown to be useful in other studies (Grant 2006). Participants stressed the importance of coming together as Indigenous postgraduate writers (Fredericks et al. 2019; White and Fredericks 2011). As one participant reflected, the writing retreats: 'changed the focus from doing "research" to being a writer. Focusing on embodying the persona of the writer […] I felt excited to focus on just that aspect of being a researcher' (PR3). Another participant reflected:

> I found [retreating with Indigenous writers] was particularly unique and added immense value to my [postgraduate researcher] journey. [The retreat] offered an environment for Indigenous postgrads to connect through our shared experiences in a very targeted way towards our studies; this wasn't available in other forums. (PR5)

That the retreated gathering of only Indigenous postgraduate writers was highly valued, it meaningfully contributed to the group's collective identity, and supported sub cohorts.

> having the opportunity to meet with my amazing Indigenous [postgraduate research] peers is always something I value and benefit from, both professionally as a PhD candidate and personally as an Aboriginal woman. (PR6)

> networking with others was fantastic - it is important for me to meet other older female First Australian women. (P7)

We all shared similar challenges and experiences within the academy which helped us bond as a group. In the concluding yarning session, many participants mentioned:

> Challenging, fighting, resistance, provoking, confronting … there was a lot of people who used the word 'challenge'. We said things like challenging the lens, challenging the academy, confronting the unwritten. (Second Retreat, Yarning Session 3)

As a collective of Indigenous writers, it became evident that we were all challenging, resisting or confronting various discipline ideologies. In this way, we identified as 'writing warriors', fighting with written words. We often felt isolated in our disciplines, fighting our individual battles as unexpected leaders. We found strength in hearing experiences complimentary to our own.

> It was useful to hear the stories of the others, each on their own journey but with similar experiences of responding to change and in some cases trauma caused by this change. There were key themes of resistance though, of challenging, perseverance … provoking the system … (PR3)

One participant wrote about sharing resources and opportunities to support the fight for the recognition of our ideas and issues:

> It is important to know the work that is being completed by other Indigenous researchers […] it gives us an opportunity to connect each other to any opportunities. This could be formally through opportunities such as promoting their work, and informally through letting people know what types of issues are important to us (as Indigenous researchers), and how we are approaching these issues within academia. (PR5)

In coming together as a community of writers, it is important we experience a degree of commonality and a group identity. Through discussions and reflections, our group identifies with being writers, Indigenous researchers and writing warriors.

Subtheme 2.2: Re-fusing boundaries between individuals and disciplines

While the writing retreats facilitated a group identity, the retreats also had us identify and challenge (re-fuse) boundaries. We entered the retreat as independent researchers and formed a collective understanding, creating a network of ties between individuals and common experiences. For example, one writer reflected that:

> [Another participant] offered her beads to share in the yarning circle […] As those beads were passed around, they collected the thoughts, experiences and hopes of all of us (Figure 2). We were then strung together like the beads, linked in a joint experience, a journey we would take tied to each other for the next few days […] around the room I see individuals on their own unique journeys typing furiously away at their writing goals, sometimes with jubilation and sometimes with a furrowed brow but together in this room or even outside by the trees we are still writing together. (PR3)
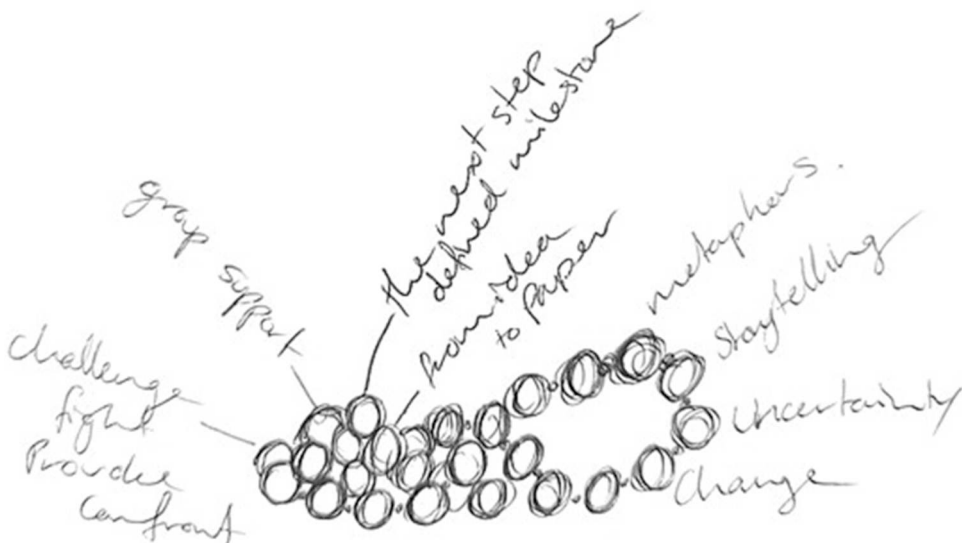

Figure 2. Ideas and experiences strung together liked a beaded necklace.

The distinctions between individuals and the collective began to blur. By writing as individuals and reflecting as a group, we began to fuse together, recombining individuals and ideas in various ways. The collective gave each of us the strength and support needed to keep writing and gain confidence outside the writing retreat. The following reflections provide the evidence of feelings of empowerment:

> It can be daunting … [but] I want to acknowledge the support and guidance [from this group of postgraduate researchers at the retreat] it creates a feeling of connectedness can strengthen the belief you have in yourself, a necessary skill to possess as a researcher [to overcome feelings of isolation]. (PR1)

> Being here in this group, I feel strength in numbers … we are walking this path together. I don't feel alone here, [I feel] part of a combined effort to change the world through research. (PR3)

These reflections highlight the value of collegial support working alongside other Indigenous post-graduate researchers. An emerging sense of purpose from writing companionship (Jackson 2009) was mentioned:

> Connecting with mob,[3] who have the same world views and values made it easy for me to explain and be myself in the process. It feels like you are working as a collective, as we all have the same underlying values … (PR4)

This reflection also highlights that despite our different areas of research, we have common goals and commitment to our communities. Connecting through the shared experiences is a common strength-based approach for Indigenous peoples (Cook, Whatman, and Sammel 2023; White and Fredericks 2011).

The 'common purpose' began to change how we thought about our discipline boundaries. Through our yarning we refused the disciplinary labels placed on us, re-fusing the boundaries (Grant 2006), to engage across disciplines. We began discussing cross-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary ideas which also influenced our writing and future research plans.

> At the retreat I had a profound moment of realisation where I noticed for the first time the importance and significance of cross-disciplinary research. Hearing the research backgrounds of others in attendance was fascinating and I found myself finding numerous ways in which my discipline 'fits in' with theirs. (PR2)

> I was able to connect with other students that were studying similar issues. This was particularly beneficial when we could connect from different disciplines. This is important to me as I do not have any contact with people working in this way on Indigenous topics in my School. In terms of worldviews, I was able to connect with how other students were using their experiences and values to address their topics and how it impacts on their work as a [postgraduate researcher]. (PR5)

> Although we peers span many different schools and disciplines, we are all united by our positions both in the university setting and socially as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This connection is foundational to the group dynamic and creates the building blocks to a relationship of unconditional support, acceptance, and understanding … without our connections and our shared histories the group dynamic and the retreat itself would not work as we would not be able to facilitate a culturally, emotionally, and spiritually safe place for everyone. (PR6)

Coming together across many research disciplines, a shared identity provided the space for us to share and compare our experiences. This sharing blurred distinctions between disciplines and individuals, reinforcing the group.

Subtheme 2.3: Strengthening academic kinship networks

An important outcome from connecting with each other through shared experiences was the development or strengthening of kinship networks to create synergies and information sharing. Creating networks based on shared experiences is a noted way Indigenous researchers connect and support each other in the academy (White and Fredericks 2011). These networks helped us address uncertainty and isolation.

> [At the start] there was a lot of uncertainty, there was a lot of language around vague intentions, not knowing what to do, not knowing what was going to happen … And a lot of people mentioned requiring group support,

> reaching out to each other, feeling lonely, needing to normalise experiences, learning from each other, sounding boards, safety nets, connecting. (Second Retreat, Yarning Session 3)

This sense of connectedness helped us overcome isolation and develop enduring relationships (Kornhaber et al. 2016).

> It makes you feel you are not alone. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are underrepresented within tertiary education. At the postgraduate level this disparity is greater … it is nice when we can all come together for the retreat with common goals. (PR1)

The social and emotional support from fellow writers acknowledges the need for holistic support.

> The social aspect has become just as important if not more important than the 'working time'. It allows for discussion and timely feedback from peers but also peer support and counselling. (PR3)

We learnt through yarning and creating networks for future connection (Grant 2006). For example, one participant said: 'I did value and benefit from being able to ask ad hoc questions of the consultants and fellow attendees of the retreat' (PR2) and another said: 'being around students who also express similar feelings to your own and who are at varying points of their study creates a sense of community and a learning opportunity' (PR1).

Many of us reflected on the importance of connecting with cultural advisors, Elders and knowledge holders to gain guidance on distinct challenges for Indigenous writers in the academy.

> I value the inclusion of a Cultural Advisor […] As an Aboriginal student, I have my views contested and at times I can find it difficult to situate myself as a [postgraduate research student]. I also face opposition from those who only accept Western views within the academy. It is a constant battle between being authentic to myself and my research and fitting in with academic expectations […] I feel privileged to have such guidance and support. (PR1)

> Spending time with [Indigenous academic mentor] forced me to consider some heavy issues […] these times are important opportunities to access cultural knowledge from more knowledgeable others (PR7)

> … as an Aboriginal person in the sometimes-isolating environment of the university and higher education system where the Indigenous conversation are limited, especially with our Elders, this is something that needs to happen a lot more within the writers retreats and the university overall. (PR8)

These reflections illustrate the deep importance of building connections, cultural advisors and Elders to discuss cultural challenges and clarifying ideas and thoughts through critical conversations (Cook, Whatman, and Sammel 2023; Jackson 2009). These critical conversations happened in the working spaces, the yarning discussions and during meals. Our confidence to have these conversations grew as the community and kinship networks strengthened.

Subtheme 2.4: Navigating challenges as indigenous writers and postgraduate researchers

Through Yarning we also identified challenges we navigate as Indigenous postgraduate researchers, i.e. degree milestones and outputs. Aitchison (2009) found that many early career researchers and postgraduate researchers require knowledge, understanding and writing skills that transcend subject and disciplinary knowledge, including an understanding of expectations and development of scholarly researcher identities. It was important to learn from each other how to translate our work, capturing complex ideas in writing to navigate institutional requirements while attending to our identity formation as Indigenous researchers. For example, 'a lot of people talked about navigating change, changes in topic, changes in supervisors and how they were navigating that change' alongside 'goalsetting, a focus on the next milestone, or output … confirmation, early candidature of milestones, submission, writing for a conference, writing for a chapter' (Second Retreat, Yarning Session 3).

Coming together to yarn about our experiences of navigating milestones and identity allowed us to share our practice. For example, the following reflections illustrate the reassurance that comes from other Indigenous researchers who have experienced similar challenges.

> Hearing how others have tackled milestones such as confirmation, data analysis, discussion and writing publications has been incredibly important to me. As I started this program with limited research experience, learning from my peers provides a sense of reassurance. (PR1)

> I am close to finishing the thesis and need senior Indigenous academics to reaffirm that I am going well […] and should not stress over minor academic issues that she has been through … I really appreciate her time to share with me. (PR8)

Another reflected on how hearing other's experiences normalises our fears and insecurities when faced with complex challenges when navigating research environments.

> In coming together, we step out of our isolation and can normalise our experiences, building confidence to face difficult situations – supervisor conflict, complex research topics, confronting research, institutionalised racism. (PR3)

By sharing experiences, we are sharing knowledge on navigating institutional structures and barriers and emerging as stronger connected writers.

The writing retreats strengthened the Indigenous postgraduate researcher networks by forming an Indigenous postgraduate community of practice that extended beyond the 2018 and 2019 retreats. We continued to meet and discuss writing practices as postgraduate researchers and later as academics and community-based researchers. We, as a collective, developed this paper as a product of these discussions and we continue to strengthen our academic networks by sharing our experiences and knowledge through other writing projects.

Theme 3 Cultural risk management

One of the ways we navigated critical conversations and faced challenges was through the cultural practice of Yarning as a cultural modality to establish safety protocols. 'The inclusion of yarning circles brings a cultural element […] we know we have a safe space to share our thoughts and relate to each other' (PR1). Yarning built rapport and a collective connection to manage social, emotional and cultural risks.

> Facilitated yarning sessions throughout the retreat has been uniting, bringing us together as one cohort … the yarning circle establishes an equal footing for all [to] have voices and [a] space to be heard. The safe space established by yarning circles allows that mutual respect to be established publicly and sets the expectations for how the group will come together. (PR3)

Although yarning and cultural protocol can differ between Indigenous nations and peoples, there were common principles established by our group that are consistent with the literature (Barlo et al. 2020; Dean 2010). For example, many of the quotes included in this paper reflect the shared principles of creating connections to develop academic kinship relationships, publicly establishing mutual respect, supporting each other's strengths and rebalancing power to establish equal standing amongst participants.

Yarning can contribute to establishing cultural safety, however, there can be internal harm to the group when this established understanding is not respected. There was an example of this occurring during a yarning session at the second retreat:

> I had mixed feelings […] one of the yarning circles was well structured, and offered the opportunity for participants to share their stories […] towards the end however, the circle turned into a more 'open' forum where participants could talk freely. This was unexpected and very in the moment. I felt as though the power dynamics of the group shifted and there was a clear imbalance among those in the circle. This imbalance inadvertently created a spectrum of culture identity and I felt as though the dialogue encouraged that. I was compared, my identity and heritage, knowledge of my peoples and practices (or lack thereof), to other participants. (PR2)

This can also occur due to the diverse cultural nuances and mores that exist in a gathering of diverse Indigenous peoples.

> I would not call the group meetings we had 'yarning circles' because the [yarning circle] cultural mores I recognise were not present. I wonder how other people differentiate a yarning circle from a meeting … to me they are definitely not the same thing. (PR7)

Yarning experiences highlighted the diversity of perspectives and cultural practices amongst us (see Theme 3). We are not a pan-Indigenous group, rather we entered the space with diverse and complex cultural and academic identities and roles (Corporal 2020). While endeavouring to establish an understanding of collective values and expectations at each retreat, problems arose when not all members respected these, creating internal risk when cultural obligations and protocols to establish cultural safety were ignored. This internal risk created tension between individual and collective identities (Subtheme 2.1).

Externally, there are also risks (Subtheme 2.4) to culturally entrenched initiatives when institutions fail to see the value in 'other' ways of knowing, being and doing. We felt pressure to include more structured elements into the retreats to fit with existing perceptions of what 'academic work' looked like. However, in our experience, including more structured sessions reduced the freedom of writing and yarning time, consequently producing less authentic work.

Summary

This paper highlights the importance of supporting writing practices within the demands placed on Indigenous postgraduate researchers. We examined the benefits of participating in Indigenous postgraduate writing retreats, having undertaken the data analysis from the perspectives of Indigenous postgraduate researchers. Unsurprisingly, the primary outcomes of participating in writing retreats directly related to academic writing – including having time to write, re-enforcing the importance of writing within our careers and to strengthen our writing practices through structured sessions. The predominant unexpected outcome was the capacity for writing retreats to build an Indigenous postgraduate research CoP. Culturally grounded practices during the retreat provided the foundation for an enduring CoP that made space within the academy to elevate our voices and experiences. Overall, Indigenous writing retreats were found to be a valuable way to provide culturally grounded support for Indigenous postgraduate researchers.

Implications

Our findings support the wider literature in recognising the multitude of benefits of holding writing retreats away from academic institutions to create safety and connection (Fredericks et al. 2019; Grant 2006). However, the richness of our data demonstrates that these benefits are dependent on the needs of the participating group. For culturally diverse groups, retreats should be tailored, organised and structured appropriately. A novel outcome was understanding the important role writing retreats can have in supporting Indigenous postgraduate researchers through the formation of a CoP. Culturally grounded writing retreats encourage the sharing of distinct Indigenous experience and knowledge, which is important for the personal development of the participants and our communities. The CoP and underlying connections, practice and principles developed during the retreat also provided the foundation for our approach in developing this paper. We have also demonstrated culturally grounded research methodology using yarning in data collection, analysis and collective writing. This approach allowed us to enrich the data and provide an in-depth analysis which is applicable across disciplines to produce informative research outcomes.

Considerations

While our approach was inclusive and collegial, a participatory approach may not lead to a research consensus (Grant 2006). As the 'researched' became the 'researchers', anonymity was not

guaranteed, however, all research participants agreed on this collective and collegial protocol. More-over, our sample was a small cohort from one university, which administered the same approach to the writing retreat over 2 years. Experiences from other universities that incorporate different approaches to writing retreats may strengthen our understanding of the key mechanisms of supporting writing and additional benefits, particularly for other marginalised groups in academia. Finally, we acknowledge that writing retreats are only one mechanism that supports academics.

Conclusion

Writing will always feature in academia. Institutional policies and practices should create environments to produce quality writing and publications. For minority groups, including Indigenous peoples, an institution lacking cultural competencies and suitable support mechanisms will impede the wellbeing and performance researchers, ultimately compromising an institution's performance. For researchers to be equipped with the skills and time to write effectively, institutions must provide spaces and services that facilitate positive writing experiences. We demonstrated that writing retreats can not only provide a positive writing space but can also provide mechanisms to support the personal and professional development of postgraduate researchers. This is crucial for postgraduate researchers from minoritised groups and scholars whose perspectives have, and continue to be, marginalised within academia. Culturally grounded writing retreats are a legitimate initiative that can support scholars and provide empowering and long-term benefits for Indigenous postgraduate researchers.

Notes

1. We identify with various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and respectfully use 'Indigenous people' as a collective term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Peoples of Australia.
2. The term 'Country' has complex meaning in different contexts, including referring to the ancestral and physical lands of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and nations and the metaphysical entity that is a vital part of Indigenous cultures (Corporal 2020). Country can also form part of an Indigenous person's identity as a relationship with and representation of their cultural and spiritual origins (Elston et al. 2013).
3. Mob is a colloquial term used by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to refer to family, extended family or community group (Corporal 2020).

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