

Retreating to Write: Are Publications the Only Important Outcome?

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Abstract

In many South African universities, the academic writing retreat has become a popular means to increase participants' publication rates and complete higher degrees. Yet retreats that focus on publications as their main outcome may overlook other benefits to participants. Research managers, writing mentors and those involved in the professional development of academic staff could benefit from knowing how a wider range of outcomes may arise from writing retreats designed from a holistic perspective. The authors conducted an email survey of academic staff who had participated in a total of 27 writing retreats held over a five-year period to find out what they valued about and achieved in the process-oriented writing retreat offered by the authors. The results strengthen arguments which favour a process-oriented writing retreat because of its ability to increase a sense of writerly and academic identity, strengthen collegiality and develop a sense of agency and community in writing.

Keywords: writing retreats; research publications; hard and soft outcomes; identity; collegiality

Introduction

For years now academics in South Africa and other countries have been under mounting pressure to conduct research, attract research funds, and publish more, while their teaching and administrative duties have grown (Devlin & Radloff 2012; Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald & Burns 2012; Hanson 2009). This development causes great anxiety, especially for early career academics and

those in professional disciplines, such as accountancy, law, or nursing, where research and publication have not been a strong aspect of academic identity. In our ‘research-intensive’ institution in Johannesburg, academic staff who do not write for publication risk being labelled ‘unproductive’ or ‘research-inactive,’ implying that they do not merit respect, recognition or reward as academics. There is also increasing concern about the quality of research articles and higher degrees as university academics rush to churn out papers or complete dissertations (Mouton, Boshoff & James 2015) in the shortest possible time to qualify for promotion and performance bonuses. Both these trends are causes for concern in our university where many staff are, in addition, confronting rolling student protests over fees and demands for more responsive curricula in higher education.

Moore (2003) points to a widespread assumption that if you are an academic you are willing and able to write academically. She adds that even if this were true at some (distant) time in the past, the profiles and backgrounds of academics in the United Kingdom, as in South Africa, have become more diverse in the past decade or two, making the assumption valid for only a small number of them. In addition, academic writing is not easy, and may not be simply a matter of acquiring technique.

The response of some research managers and academic staff developers who acknowledge these trends has been to initiate workshops and courses to enhance lecturers’ writing skills and to equip them with strategies to write for publication. But technical advice on writing, while helpful, is not sufficient for establishing productive writing habits among academics, as Moore (2003) and Murray (2013) amongst others, attest.

In research-intensive institutions such as ours, funds to support research writing are liable to be diverted because of pressing needs for other expenses, such as student fees, student support, and new learning technologies. The effectiveness of writing development strategies, especially relatively costly writing retreats, needs to be strongly motivated. Research and line managers in universities typically demand an account of writing products as evidence that papers are a direct result of attending a writing retreat. This external sanction and surveillance may create an additional source of stress – both for academics and academic staff development professionals. Added to this is the erosion of traditional institutional collegiality, autonomy and freedom (Hanson 2009). ‘Getting away from it all’ is, we argue, a reasonable and essential response to pressures to write for publication.

In this paper we reflect critically on the design and outcomes of a process-orientated writing retreat and report on the results of a survey to find out what participants valued about and achieved in the retreat(s) they took part in.

The Purposes and Benefits of Writing Retreats

In the past fifteen years, university academics committed to research and writing development for staff and students have created a vibrant literature on writing retreats, mainly from the perspective of those who design and facilitate them. We extract some of the main themes about the purposes and benefits of writing retreats below. Relatively little, however, has been published about the outcomes of retreats from the perspective of retreat participants. Our paper contributes to redressing this imbalance.

In response to institutional pressures on academics to publish, some proponents of writing retreats have argued that they increase the quantity and quality of publications for individuals and departments (Dickson-Swift 2013; Grant, Munro McIsaac & Hill 2010; Jackson 2009; McGrail, Rickart & Jones 2006; Rickart, McGrail, Jones, O'Meara, Robinson, Burley & Ray-Barruel 2009). These authors attribute the increase in 'outputs' to retreats because they offer structured time, space and support for writing. Retreats provide time and space for writing; as well as an opportunity to help academics 'get on with it' (Murray 2005; Silvia 2007). By allocating time for writing rather than obliging academics to *find* time for it, they 'legitimate' writing as part of research, as part of 'normal activity' (Lee & Boud 2003; Moore 2003). Furthermore, writing retreats enhance the visibility and importance of academic writing in the institution (Elbow & Sorcinelli 2006). Retreats allow writing to be practiced in community with others, rather than in lonely isolation (Grant 2000). The emphasis on producing publications can burnish the reputation of early career and established academics in departments which have regularly scheduled retreats for their staff.

Yet at least some proponents of writing retreats (Dwyer *et al.* 2012) have argued that claims to increase rates of research publication through writing retreats are limiting. Retreats which engage with participants' struggles to write, and which explore the pedagogy of writing development, may have more benefits for participants. Authors such as Murray (2013), Grant (2000) and Grant & Knowles (2000) advocate increasing participants' pleasure and

confidence in writing, thereby increasing their motivation to write. We agree with these authors.

Writing, and exposing one's writing to others for scrutiny and critique, can make writers feel vulnerable and exposed (Murray & Moore 2006; Murray 2013). Retreats which provide support for academics in the form of mentoring, peer feedback and peer learning not only develop trust and confidence among participants, they also contribute to building a community of scholars (Jackson 2009). The community provides a support system for writers (McGrail *et al.* 2006) and is especially beneficial for academics operating in a high-stress institutional environment (Castle & Keane 2016, forthcoming).

Some advocates of writing retreats, such as Dwyer *et al.* (2012) and Elbow and Sorcinelli (2006) suggest that retreats also enhance the growing diversity of academic staff by offering opportunities for exchange and sharing. These retreats bind people of different gender, age, length of experience, motivation and disciplinary background for a period of time and for an agreed purpose in a process which is simultaneously social and private (Grant & Knowles 2000). These opportunities to appreciate diversity take place outside institutional agendas for diversification or transformation of staff and are reportedly enjoyable and beneficial for participants.

By paying attention to psychological and social aspects of writing, academic staff developers can reframe academic writing as a community based, collaborative and social act (Grant & Knowles 2000: 12-13) in which writers experience writing as rewarding and enjoyable. Retreats can also support communities of practice, and sustain relationships, collaborations and networks developed in other writing development strategies, such as workshops and courses (Murray & Kempenaar 2014).

Finally, women appear to derive clearer benefits from retreats than men (Grant 2000; 2006; Moore, Murphy & Murray 2010). One reason given for this is that women more often than men juggle complex domestic responsibilities with their academic role. Grant (2006), writing about women academics in New Zealand, suggests that just deciding to participate in a retreat away from home and the university is transgressive for many women who are not used to putting themselves first, or leaving their children and students for a week. A different argument would be that women, and some men, may appreciate the nurturing, sociable culture of some retreats that offer an alternative to the competitive, stressful environment of the university.

Moore *et al.* (2010) point out that the diverse interests and needs of

individual participants create difficulties for evaluating the impact of writing retreats. For example, some participants only want time and space ‘away’ from other duties to work on a pre-defined project; others come to a retreat because they feel ‘stuck’ or ‘blocked’ and hope that the retreat will stimulate them to write productively; some want to learn, or revise, technical aspects of writing; many want feedback on their writing; some wish to establish or affirm better relations with colleagues and to establish communities of practice alongside the retreat. We recognize this diversity of interests and acknowledge the challenge it poses for evaluating the impact of retreats on individuals over time. We believe, however, that a diversity of interests and experience can be a strength. We take up the challenge of accommodating diverse interests and experience in the section which follows.

The Process-oriented Retreat: Design Considerations

As its name suggests, the focus of a process-oriented retreat is on the processes involved in writing and becoming a prolific writer. A process-oriented retreat is not shapeless or unstructured, but the structure is flexible rather than rigorous, and is often negotiated by and with participants. An important aim in a process-oriented retreat is to increase participants’ sense of agency in writing alongside their identities as writers. Ivanic (1998) explains that the process of writing, in community with others, is socially constructed by participants and therefore open to contestation and change. This is in contrast to a ‘product-oriented retreat’, which is akin to a workshop or course, where the focus is on generating measurable outcomes, such as books, journal articles, grant applications and conference papers. A product-oriented retreat is likely to consist of a sequence of pre-determined practices or activities to initiate or train academics in research writing. We contrast these orientations to retreats in earlier work on writing development and writing retreats (Benvenuti, Castle & Keane 2013).

The process-oriented retreat supports and encourages academics to flourish as writers by providing an enjoyable, stimulating opportunity for personal writing development. The retreat aims to build confidence, community and collegiality among writers. Thus the focus is on holistic development. In our process-oriented retreats, a small group of writers is involved, usually 8-12 writers, in a location away from the university campus, for a period of five days. The nature of the venue is important. It should have

spaces for communal and private writing, and offer good light and comfortable seating. A pleasant, quiet, physical and social environment provides a counterweight to the culture of performance, competitiveness, measurement and surveillance which has become widespread in institutions of higher education. Thus the retreat takes place off campus in an environment designed to be an oasis, a getaway, or an escape. The venue is pleasurable, intimate and comfortable. The food is good. Writing time *and* resting time are respected.

Participation in the retreat is voluntary. People from different disciplines and fields of study, levels of seniority, race, gender, age and experience are welcomed. Diversity is cherished as a strength. In our process-oriented retreat, most participants are women who may be completing a higher degree or establishing a publication record. Participants have already completed a two-part, eight-day workshop held on campus at our academic staff development centre (Castle & Keane 2013). The workshop introduces them to a wide range of techniques and practices which support writing and writers. Participants motivate their participation in the retreat by setting a writing goal to be completed in the retreat and attaining their Head of School's consent. This process shores up personal responsibility for writing productively, as well as pleasurably, during the retreat.

The retreat strikes a balance between communal and solitary writing time and activities. Community and collegiality are built through shared activities undertaken in pairs and small groups. We place emphasis on personal responsibility and commitment to the group. Collaborative writing, reflection and feedback processes at the beginning and end of the writing day strengthen participants' sense of identity and agency as writers, and also enhance commitment and accountability to one another as writers.

A process-oriented retreat, such as the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) retreat, employs a pedagogy which is holistic and learner-centered, responsive to the stressful and demanding conditions in which academic staff work. We place emphasis on dialogue, experiential learning, reflexivity and creativity. We use methods including brainstorming, mind-mapping, free writing, loop writing, drawing, reading aloud, peer response, giving and receiving feedback, among others. Participants are engaged in authentic processes of pre-writing, writing, talking, listening, reviewing, rewriting, and more talking, listening, critiquing and writing. They also provide an active, appreciative and critical audience for reading texts aloud. This pedagogy may be eclectic, but it is not atheoretical. Kamler (2001:

14) describes process writing as a ‘powerful, interactive structure for learning to write and learning about writing’ consistent with Vygotsky’s (1980) theory of learning in the zone of proximal development and Bruner’s notion of scaffolding the learner’s understanding (Bruner & Haste 2010).

We encourage the growth of networks of support among colleagues, through group work and by sharing the facilitation of retreats with experienced members of the group. We find that informal mentoring and coaching techniques are helpful in assisting writers to create and fulfil meaningful and achievable goals for themselves and to reframe experiences of being ‘blocked’ or ‘stuck’. Over time, and with active engagement in the process, participants begin to write with more ease, confidence and regularity, as shown later in this article.

Reflective Practice and Research Design

Reflective practice (Argyris & Schön 1978; Schön 1983) helps people reflect on their practice, think critically and ask questions about why something or someone acts the way it does. Brookfield (1987; 2012) points to the importance of questioning our assumptions, particularly when researchers are implicated in the object of enquiry, as in the case of this research.

We considered that an authentic way to research the outcomes of a process- oriented retreat was to ask participants to reflect on what was important about the retreat for them. We do this regularly by conducting written and oral evaluations at the end of each retreat, and keeping records of participants’ responses to many of the writing activities we design. These forms of research and evaluation provide us with regular, high quality, personal accounts of the value of retreats to individuals. We wanted to supplement the evaluative data, collected over several years, with data collected from a sample of participants at a particular point in time (at the midpoint of the fourth year in which we offered retreats). We also wanted to put time and space between us and participants in our retreats, enabling them to reflect on the benefits and outcomes of the retreats after the fact rather than in the glow of moment. In other words, as Saunders (2011: 4) recommends, we wanted to expand our understanding of the quality and value of the retreats beyond the participants’ implicit and tacit knowledge, to include their explicit knowledge.

We decided on a survey that could be administered online because this method could provide data rapidly (Creswell 2009: 146). We also believed that

the results of an online survey might have greater credibility and weight with auditors and research managers in our institution than the handwritten free writes and evaluations we had collected over the years.

Our interest was in the impact of the retreat on the writer and her writing practices over time, in addition to one of the products (publications or thesis chapters) which could be attributed to participation in retreats. We were also interested to find out whether we could extend findings collected in a small scale survey to a larger population of retreatants who had similar characteristics. We designed a questionnaire to focus on whether participants considered that they had become more confident and prolific writers, and whether they had continued to use techniques designed in the process-oriented retreat to promote flow and creativity in writing. We also asked what published work participants had completed in, or as a consequence of, participating in a retreat, and whether they had received any recognition or reward related to their writing from significant others.

The Respondents

Twenty-four writing retreats were held by the academic staff development centre (CLTD) between November 2011 and July 2015. The ‘headcount’ of individuals who had participated in the retreats was 107. Nineteen of the 107 academics had participated in more than one retreat. One of the nineteen writers had participated in seven retreats, but most repeat-writers participated in two or three retreats.

In September 2015 we sent a questionnaire to 49 of the 107 retreatants whose email addresses were still current. Automatic responses received from three staff members indicated that the intended recipients were ‘out of the office’ for an extended period of time. This brought the total sample of writers who received the questionnaire to 46 people.

Nineteen members of staff responded to the questionnaire, representing a respectable 41% return. Sixteen respondents were women and three were men. Nearly half of the respondents (nine of the nineteen) were employed as academics in the School of Education, but they had different disciplinary bases, length of service, experience and career paths or trajectories. More than half of all respondents were concurrently registered for a higher degree (a Masters degree by dissertation or a PhD). We considered that the respondents to our questionnaire *could* be generalized internally,

because the majority of them were women, and many were from the School of Education. However, our intention was not to formulate generalizations, but rather to gather and interpret a group of academics' opinions about the value of our retreats (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011).

The Questionnaire

We invited participants to complete a short, open-ended questionnaire on the 'longer term effects or benefits (if any) of their participation as a writer in a CLTD writing retreat'. Participants were asked to comment 'briefly and honestly' in response to three open-ended questions.

Participants were informed that the authors had received clearance to conduct the survey by the university's research ethics committee. While we could not guarantee anonymity within the relatively small group of respondents, we assured them that confidentiality would be maintained as their names, email addresses and demographic data would not be revealed in written or oral accounts of the research.

We developed questionnaire items by first reviewing the stated aims and outcomes of the retreat, and then identifying the foci of previous evaluations of writing retreats, including those conducted by Devlin and Radloff (2012), McGrail, Rickart and Jones (2006), and Moore, Murphy and Murray (2010).

In our first question we asked whether participants had become more regular, confident and or prolific writers following participation in one or more retreats. We also asked whether they had continued to use any of the techniques practiced in the retreats, such as free writing or mind mapping.

The second question asked whether specific outcomes, such as publications or completion of chapters in a higher degree, could be attributed to attendance of a retreat.

The third question enquired whether the participants had received any comment, recognition or reward (for example confirmation in their post, or promotion) which reflected an observed change in the quality or quantity of their writing.

We present the findings of our survey below. Respondents' own words appear in *italic* script. The number in brackets following a response is a code number for the respondent.

The number of 'similar responses' to a question (see the second

column in the reporting tables below) do not always add up to 19, the number of respondents to the survey. This is because the open-ended questions allowed respondents to respond to more than a single aspect of a question.

Findings and Discussion

Q1a: Have you become a more regular, confident or prolific writer?

	No of similar responses	Examples of responses
Regular	9	<i>I have become a more regular writer and [feel] more confident about my writing. (10)</i>
Confident	5	<i>I am now a more confident writer and although neither regular nor prolific due to my own time management problems. I am quite productive when I do get to writing. (8)</i>
Prolific	7	<i>I am a more prolific writer; I need to attend retreats in order to write. My workload is such that there is little time for writing under normal circumstances. (17)</i>

Q1b: Have you continued to use freewrites, mindmaps or other techniques to ease into a stint of writing?

	No of responses	Examples of responses
Freewriting		<i>I use the freewrites ... so that my mind opens up and frees up before I focus on</i>

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	10	<i>my academic planning. I find this helps me from feeling overwhelmed. (4) I find freewriting and loop writing really helpful. (1) Freewriting has been a powerful tool that I still practice today [as] it has helped me to deal with my fear of academic writing. (7)</i>
Mindmaps	3	<i>I use freewrites and mindmaps when I am stuck rather than at the beginning of a writing session. (4)</i>
Other	1	

A striking feature of participants' responses to this part of the survey was that many respondents were not content to simply answer the questions posed, but wanted to place additional comments on record. Their comments included remarks on focus, feedback, momentum (impetus), identity and social aspects of the retreats. These responses yield interesting and nuanced responses to the CLTD retreat, so they are grouped below under relevant headings.

Focus

It is the absolute focus on writing, with no wiggle room to do anything else but write, plus the inspiring energy that comes from everyone else also writing, that enables me to take the substantial step forward. (1)

The writing retreat helped me focus on my writing and get away from the world for a short while. (6)

The retreats help me get unstuck and focus on the parts of my research that I am most likely to avoid. (9)

The focused time on task, together with the emotional and cognitive support offered in writing retreats, is a very productive way to generate academic writing that would otherwise be put to the backburner in the very hectic work life that teaching academics have. (1)

These responses underline the multiple demands placed on academics in the workplace, and the difficulty that many people have in prioritizing time for writing. Retreats may be the only opportunity which some academics have to focus on writing.

Momentum/ Impetus

A retreat usually gets me going on a writing task and I am able to maintain the focus afterwards for various amounts of time. (5)

I write every day- this is already a big achievement. (10)

Feedback

My writing improved as a result of regular feedback. (13)

Identity

XX enabled me to understand that as a PhD student, I need to take on [the] identity of a writer, i.e. that being a researcher meant being a writer. (1)

Often (and I still struggle a lot) I think back to writing retreats and find comfort in remembering that other academics also find academic writing challenging. (18)

Social

The retreat helped me connect with people outside my department who were facing the same challenges of balancing work, study and family demands. (7)

I have made friends who are now writing buddies. We organize our own retreats. (10)

Wider Applications

Some respondents not only used the writing techniques and strategies featured

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in the process-oriented retreats, they introduced them into their teaching:

I introduced writing and reading as components of my third year engineering course. (3)

The techniques of freewriting I now use with my own students to get them writing. Being a better writer can be taught and learned. (2)

However, as Grant, Munro, McIsaac and Hill (2010) remark, not everyone is successful in embedding new techniques in their personal practice. Two of the three men who responded to the questionnaire indicated:

I haven't used any of the techniques and exercises- although I did find them useful in confidence building and easing into writing. (16)

I don't tend to use freewrites outside the CLTD retreats. I find reading each other's work is very useful through. (17)

Yet the first male respondent also remarked:

I found every retreat both valuable and stimulating. The collegial atmosphere, the sense of a shared project, the ability to discuss issues and challenges with others, and the feedback from the readers has been invaluable in increasing output both during the retreat and beyond. (16)

In summary, in response to question 1, respondents indicated that the writing retreats were useful to ease anxiety and to reduce feelings of vulnerability. Often they release the writer from feeling 'stuck'. Participants used the techniques and exercises introduced in the retreats in a variety of ways: to motivate and sustain their own writing after a retreat; to teach and supervise senior or postgraduate students; to be more focused and creative in research supervision; and to set up writing groups and retreats of their own. As one respondent remarked:

The wonderful creative techniques introduced at CLTD writing retreats have helped me in many ways with my writing. But, of even

greater value: the approach, planning, respect, innovative input, and so much more- which actually taught me to be kinder to myself as a writer. This, in turn, has permitted me to learn (baby steps) to enjoy and value my own writing I have overcome many fears and insecurities re writing and so create in a far less restricted way. I have overcome many fears and insecurities re writing in second language through the wisdom and support of the facilitators.... (18)

Q 2: What published work, if any, have you produced as a (partial) outcome of participating in a CLTD retreat?

Eleven of the 19 respondents indicated that they produced ‘*most of an article*’ or ‘*wrote a first draft of a journal article*’ during a single retreat. Rates of productivity differed considerably among participants. One writer indicated that she had written one article in three retreats spread over a period of one and a half years. By the time she attended her fifth retreat, she was able to produce an entire draft journal article in one retreat. Two of the eleven repeat-participants were able to write two articles each in two retreats. In total, eight of the 19 respondents claimed to have written and published a total of eleven articles in ‘accredited’ (DHET or ISI recognized) academic journals as a direct result of participating in a retreat(s). Two of the male respondents provided references to their published work. The female writers did not.

Two participants ‘*wrote/ reworked a book chapter*’ during a retreat, and seven drafted or wrote an entire chapter of their thesis. These accomplishments were often managed in addition to working on journal articles or conference papers. Two participants completed PhD proposals which they had barely begun before the retreat. Three participants noted that they had written conference abstracts or had planned and written conference papers in the retreat.

One staff member, also a doctoral student, wrote ‘*I made significant progress [on my PhD] in each of the retreats I attended. [Retreats] provide an opportunity to pull together work and ideas that are often fragmented or need further thinking....*’ (9)

Another wrote ‘*I only had to do minor corrections for my thesis [following examination] thanks to the writing retreats for constructive feedback*’. (8)

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The most prolific writer was a repeat participant who ‘*published one accredited journal article; wrote a successful funding proposal for an NRF grant; two international conference papers; 2 educational resources; and most of my PhD on retreats*’. (10)

In summary, responses to question 2 indicated that the CLTD retreats provided dedicated time and space for writing, allowing participants to disconnect from work responsibilities, everyday life, social media, and the internet. Most participants used the opportunity of a retreat to meet a self-imposed goal to develop a journal article, thesis chapter, conference paper or proposal. Retreats provided the feedback, momentum and support needed to complete writing goals and tasks during or shortly after the event. Writers who participated in more than one retreat increased their rates of productivity. Increasing productivity enhanced participants’ sense of achievement and satisfaction, which may have increased the motivation to write.

Q3: Have you received any comment, recognition or reward (a commendation, a promotion or monetary award) from anyone (a colleague, supervisor, an HOD or HOS) about your writing since participating in a CLTD retreat?

	No of similar responses	Examples of responses
Comment	10	<i>One of my PhD examiners told me how well written she thought it was- some credit must go to those who helped me think it through and work on it.... (2)</i> <i>I have been commended for clarity and for generally writing well. I give the CLTD retreats credit for [raising my] consciousness of the audience for each piece of writing. (8)</i>
Recognition	2	<i>I received an ‘Outstanding Dissertation Award’ for my PhD from the International Study Association for Teachers and Teaching. (1)</i>

		<i>I became Ass. Prof in 2013. I attained an NRF rating in 2014. Both of these can be attributed to my publication record, which has been enhanced by participating in CLTD retreats. (17)</i>
Reward	1	<i>I managed to get my PhD finished in 2013. I got a 5% pay rise for this. (5)</i>
	9	<i>Sadly no.</i>

The responses to this question are interesting for several reasons. The *comments* which respondents noted in the survey were commendations of the quality of writing, or clarity of expression of ideas in writing, rather than the number of ‘outputs’ achieved. Respondents’ higher degree supervisors and examiners were among those who recognized and commented on achievements or improvements in the quality of writing. Most respondents indicated that they were ‘gratified’ by positive feedback on their writing, and attributed this to qualitative improvements in their writing as a consequence of participating in one or more retreats. Two writers noted that their colleagues and students had expressed appreciation for the retreats that they, as staff members, had organized after participating in a CLTD retreat.

Public recognition, in the form of an award, on the other hand, was granted for the quality of an entire dissertation, or for both quality and quantity of publications, as noted by two of the respondents. One writer noted a pay rise given as a reward for completing her thesis.

Nine writers, nearly half of all respondents, indicated that they had received no comments, recognition or reward for their writing. The reasons for this non-recognition were not explored in the survey, but it is worth noting the ‘sadly’ attached to the ‘no’ in many responses, because it contrasts sharply with the gratification expressed by writers who did receive positive feedback. Guiding participants to solicit and give feedback on writing remains an important, but challenging, aspect of facilitating the CLTD writing retreats.

Concluding Remarks

The survey reported above shows that the process-oriented retreat designed by the authors and offered by our academic staff development centre has multiple outcomes. Respondents indicated that participating in a retreat had a positive

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impact on their productivity *and* pleasure in writing. Retreats contributed positively to their enjoyment of writing, and to becoming a generative writer.

While participants valued the opportunity-benefit of a retreat (dedicated time and space to write) their comments show appreciation of opportunities to talk to others about their writing and their workplace-- opportunities which seem to be fast receding in academic life today. They valued the diversity of participants in retreats, remarking on the benefits of exposure to different views, knowledge and experience of research and writing. Some respondents' supervisors and HODs remarked that participants' writing had improved qualitatively. Examiners and reviewers wrote encouraging comments about respondents' writing. Recognition from these sources was appreciated by participants, confirming their own growing self-confidence and ability in writing.

One of the surprising outcomes of the survey was the way that respondents adapted the questionnaire by expanding on the questions asked. For example, in responding to question 1, participants directed the authors to other aspects of the retreat that they valued equally, if not more, including the atmosphere of the retreat which allowed them to focus on writing; the nurturing physical and social environment; and discovering a new identity as a writer. Some respondents reported that they had initiated similar retreats for their postgraduate students and departmental colleagues, to positive effect. Other respondents had started their own writing groups, or sourced other retreats offered in the university which would help them on their road to completing their writing goals. Taken together, these findings validate the authors' view that a process-oriented writing retreat produces important outcomes which extend far beyond increasing participants' publication 'output'.

Planners and facilitators of writing retreats may benefit from reflecting on the process and outcomes of their retreats by conducting an open-ended, online survey of participants as we did, with a focus on whether the aims of the retreat were valued by participants after the passage of time and with increasing experience of academic writing. Planners and research managers may also question whether they wish to collaborate with those who offer writing retreats whose sole purpose is to increase rates of publication. Such retreats may bring status and reward for individuals, their departments and institutions, but they also reinforce the more ruthless, competitive, and controlling aspects of university life which may deny opportunities for self-respect, personal growth and collegiality. These are, for many, more meaningful features of academic

identity and purpose—features which can be nurtured in a process oriented writing retreat, as shown in this research.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge and thank the colleagues who participated in the survey as well as Candice Michael of the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development at the University of Witwatersrand for her coordination of the retreats and her unstinting support for the authors.

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