C. AITCHISON AND C. GUERIN (EDS.), *WRITING GROUPS FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION AND BEYOND: INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE AND THEORY*

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In recent years, writing groups have gained attention as a new pedagogical practice to develop doctoral students' disciplinary writing. Previous research has shown their positive impact on improving participants' writing (e.g. Aitchison, 2009; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Guerin et al., 2013; Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011). However, the contents, contexts, and pedagogies of writing groups remain underexplored. *Writing Groups for Doctoral Education and Beyond* edited by Claire Aitchison and Cally Guerin provides an overview of the diverse practices of writing groups across a range of contexts, and describes topics and themes that emerge from these groups useful for researchers, academics and academic educators.

The book consists of three parts. Part One provides the background to the emergence of writing groups in academia by drawing on their history, overarching theories, pedagogies, and previous research. In Chapter 1, Aitchison and Guerin describe contextual factors in the emergence of writing groups in doctoral education. The contextual changes around scholarly writing have created the need for new pedagogies in doctoral education, and writing groups have helped not only match such necessity but also build communities. However, the authors point out that how and why writing groups work in academic scholarship is yet to be explored.

In Chapter 2, Paré explains the historical and theoretical underpinnings of writing groups. Historically, writing groups have drawn their support from the North American composition and rhetoric traditions in English education in the last half century. Many arguments from different fields such as anthropology, sociology, literacy theory (e.g., Bakhtin), and psychology (e.g., Vygotsky) have supported writing groups with a social view of academic writing. In this view, the social interactions created in writing groups are helping develop new doctoral students' language, knowledge and knowing in their disciplinary community.

Chapter 3 by Haas examines 'the nuts and bolts' of developing writing groups. The typology she puts forward is organised along 11 dimensions, each of which has variables and sub-variables. One such dimension called 'In-meeting activities' encompasses what actually happens in the meetings, making one writing group distinctive from another. The activities in this dimension include writing, reading (each other's writing), giving and receiving feedback, discussion, and other research-related activities. The chapter provides a description of

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various activities; however, it does not touch upon which activity works most effectively in which condition. More detailed information on how each activity works in relation to participants' preference and needs would help the reader to decide which nuts and bolts to use in developing writing groups.

Part Two of the book attempts to answer how and why writing groups work positively using empirical studies. For example, in Chapter 4, Aitchison focuses on how feedback works in improving postgraduate students' writing, specifically how students respond to feedback. From data collected through interviews, writing samples, written feedback and audio recordings of writing groups, the author shows the desire among post graduate students for feedback on their writing in supportive environments and the strategies they developed to reconcile feedback from peers with feedback from different sources such as supervisors. Postgraduate students learn to selectively incorporate feedback according to their needs. Their valuing of the reviewer's knowledge and experience is also reflected in the decision to incorporate feedback.

In Chapter 5, Starke-Meyerring's study including a survey of 3,000 doctoral scholars and follow-up interviews reveals a paradox in institutional environments with regard to doctoral writing. On the one hand, writing groups help students develop a social support network and a research community. On the other hand, there is a general assumption that developing an argument in writing is a universal skill which higher degree research (HDR) candidates should master on their own. This assumption undervalues the collaborative approach used to develop and sustain writing groups and contradicts the notion that writing is a rhetorical practice.

In Chapter 6, Maher looks into a writing group consisting of both doctoral students and their supervisors, and examines how this group helps to facilitate disciplinary writing. Following the cognitive apprenticeship model, the students and the faculty together developed a community where private practices for disciplinary writing become transparent. This is a unique situation where doctoral students and their supervisors work in the same writing group. However, this modeling approach (experts revealing their writing experiences) could be used in groups consisting solely of students: some of the students would act as experts if the group was comprised of HDR students at different stages of their candidature.

In Chapter 7, Murray investigates casual writing groups formed after writing retreats, and describes how doctoral students applied practices they learned at structured writing retreats in these micro-groups they formed. The survey results show that these groups follow the same format as the retreats and prefer to work together with the same people who experienced the retreats.

Chapters 8 and 9 describe what is happening in writing retreats using metaphors. In Chapter 8, Knowles and Grant use the metaphor of the labyrinth, and explore writing retreats for female doctoral students and academic staff to break from their daily life at school and home

where they are expected to play multiple roles such as doctoral student and mother. Evidenced by the participants' feedback, the features of the retreats are described using four principles of the labyrinth: the secured space, a fixed writing goal, various outcomes, and the disciplines for both an individual and the group to work effectively.

In Chapter 9, Guerin uses gift exchange theory to examine the experience of doctoral students' writing groups. The focus group discussions and the participants' reflection on their experiences to show the central role of reciprocal gift giving (the giving and receiving of gifts of feedback) in promoting confidence to participate in disciplinary communities.

Part Three focuses on various innovative pedagogies in practice facilitating the effects of writing groups. In Chapter 10, Li studies a writing group for multilingual international students at an Australian university. This group looks at a writing sample by one of the group members and discusses how to use language effectively to make meaning clear. Data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and students' written work suggest that the students gained critical awareness of disciplinary discourse and genre knowledge in their own field of study from these group discussions. Li also argues for the necessity of valuing multilingual learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as resources for language and genre learning.

In Chapter 11, Thesen explores a writers' circle at a university in South Africa focusing on the links between laughter, risk and writing. The weekly circle discusses two pages of writing by one of the members and pays special attention to either predetermined writing skills or a theory focus. The author found that in this circle, laughter has a role to play in managing risks derived from contextual or emotional factors, and allowing writers to think outside the box to gain a new perspective on the world.

Chapter 12 by Wolfsberger describes a writing group called 'Thesis Marathon'. The aim of this group is to bind thesis writers and encourage them to write. The goal is to produce 80 pages in 8 weeks by asking participants to write quickly without rereading what they have written. The distinctiveness of this writing marathon is the weekly applause participants receive in every workshop. Wolfsberger argues that this is one of the key features leading to the success of the marathon.

In Chapter 13, Ings explains the 'Studio Model' of writing groups. This takes two forms: collective critique and writing in writing groups, and individual online writing groups. In the first form, students gather and work on questions or problems relating to the writing of one of the members. The second form, emerging as a consequence of the first, uses Facebook and discusses almost anything related to academic life. Ings argues that these two forms cater to the different needs of different people with one notion in common: writing as a social practice.

In Chapter 14 Bosanquet, Cahir, Huber, Jacenyik-Trawöger, and McNeill reflect on their participation in a writing circle for women. Drawing on feminist literature, the authors

examine two dominant themes; the multiple responsibilities and identities of women writers in higher education, and the intimacy between members that develops with the building of trust, and shared experiences particular to women writers in the university.

In Chapter 15, Newburn, Osborne, and Caldwell reflect on the process and outcomes of an attempt to form informal doctoral writing support groups, called 'Shut up & Write!' at two different institutions in Australia. All writers in the group write together in silence for a period of time, take a break and then have a chat. This is followed by another writing session. By analysing their own narrative accounts, the authors argue that 'Shut up & Write' movements promote informal learning and a sense of belonging to a small cohort in a research community.

The strength of this book lies in the light it sheds on the themes and concepts that emerge from various types of writing groups such as variation in space, social elements, emotions, gender, and culture. These themes would be helpful for researchers to explore the impact of writing groups. They are also beneficial for practitioners to organise and manage writing groups. This book would be even more insightful if it critically examined the differences between the two major types of writing groups that, in my opinion, can be categorised into two types, according to their activities: feedback-centered groups and 'keep-writing' centered groups. These two groups cater to the students' different needs and therefore work in different ways. These differences would be one of the primary concerns for both researchers and practitioners. Overall, however, the book will be a distinguished stepping stone to demystifying the potential of writing groups in doctoral education and beyond.

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