

Doctoral Writing Groups for the Advancement of Dissertation and Publication Writing

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Abstract

In writing groups (WGs), participants exchange drafts so that their partners' feedback can be used to improve writing. These groups accompany participants while they face authentic dissertation or publication writing projects, are linked to situated and real demands, and promote participants' engagement. Nevertheless, this type of pedagogical initiative continues to be uncommon, especially in Latin America. This qualitative exploratory study analyses participants' perspectives about the benefits and drawbacks found in joining doctoral WGs in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It focuses on three separate sets of doctoral writing groups implemented and facilitated within the last eight years in Argentina. Despite some drawbacks, participants considered these groups as valuable not only for the advancement of dissertation and publication writing, but also as horizontal spaces to develop as scholarly writers. Higher education institutions worldwide could benefit from similar pedagogical initiatives to enhance and promote research writing at the graduate level.

Introduction

Today's recognized ways of producing knowledge assign a central role to scientific publications. First, publication rates are usually used as a quantitative indicator of scientific production, and it is then assumed that researchers cannot be considered as such if they do not make public their research results through writing (Lee, 2013). Thus, writing for publication should constitute a central point in research education (Aitchison, 2010; Aitchison et al., 2010; Thomson & Kamler, 2010).

In the last two decades, Latin America has experienced an increase in teaching initiatives, events, and research regarding reading and writing in different academic and professional settings (Navarro et al., 2016). A review of the studies about the teaching of writing at the postgraduate level carried out in this region (Chois Lenis et al., 2020) indicates that the majority of programs geared towards the development of academic writing are undertaken, first at the master's level and second at the doctorate level in the form of workshops or seminars, with most of them centring on dissertation writing. Interventions centred on the development of writing for publication seem to be scant (e.g., Mostacero, 2013; Sabaj, 2009). Because the majority of the initiatives are of short duration (e.g., a semester or a few weeks), for the most part, doctoral students are left on their own and have sole responsibility for learning to participate in disciplinary conversations through writing. WGs, which have the potential to be sustained across time (Haas, 2014), are generally uncommon in Latin America (Colombo & Carlino, 2015). However, international studies characterise them as a pedagogical tool to advance thesis or dissertation work as well as writing publication, while working across time on a real writing project.

WGs present several benefits. They help doctoral students by promoting the advancement of their dissertation and increasing the publication rates of their members (e.g., McGrail et al., 2006). In this line, the commitment that is established with each other within a group makes it possible to sustain the writing endeavour systematically and throughout a longer period of time (Galligan et al., 2003; O'Malley et al., 2006). At the same time, participants in WGs feel less isolated (e.g., Colombo et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2009; Grant, 2006; Kozar & Lum, 2015; Larcombe et al., 2007) and increase the development of knowledge as constructed and negotiated through dialogue and interaction with others (Aitchison, 2003; Dysthe et al., 2013; Van der Linden & Renshaw, 2010; Wells, 2007), who contribute with different perspectives and levels of experience (Aitchison, 2010). Additionally, in these groups participants are able to develop their identity as scholars and discipline writers (Aitchison, 2010; Aitchison et al., 2010; Lassig et al., 2013) by gradually taking part in certain contexts and communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and through group member interaction. Finally, these groups help participants to organise their time and manage the writing process (Rodas et al., 2021).

In addition, WGs present doctoral students with a space in which to work on important points of writing for publication. First, they allow first-hand experience of literacy practices, such as peer review (e.g., Aitchison, 2009; Rankin, 2001), a key component in the scientific publication process. Furthermore, students can take part in this type of activity within a safe and low-risk environment (Li, 2014; Washburn, 2008) in order to be better prepared when ready to publish. Second, peer response WGs, where members review a text and give each other feedback, have been shown to help participants improve their writing skills through dialogic activities (Guerin & Aitchison, 2018; Wegener et al., 2016) since the audience does not assume the content but demands clarity in the text's structure and organisation (e.g., DeFeo et al., 2017). These dialogic exchanges are possible because WGs allow authors to access peer reviewers that can share their reading experience and thus adjust their writing so as to communicate knowledge to a broad audience beyond their own disciplinary field (Aitchison, 2010). Additionally, in the case of interdisciplinary WGs, developing writers often receive richer and varied feedback (Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017; Colombo & Rodas, 2020; Cumbie et al., 2005; Cuthbert et al., 2009) and are given a space to consider their own assumptions regarding their topic.

This paper analyses a series of experiences that have taken place for almost a decade in Argentina where three different sets of WGs have been implemented as a pedagogical space to promote the situated learning of scientific literacy practices. In these groups, members have met regularly in order to share drafts of texts, such as dissertation chapters, and conference and research papers, addressed to the disciplinary communities to which participants are intending to be members. We present the results of three sets of WGs. First, we offer a brief description of how each set of WGs was implemented. Then, based on the analysis of group and individual in-depth interviews, survey results, and email communication with some members, we detail participants' accounts on the benefits and drawbacks found by participating in WGs. We conclude that WGs can work as a pedagogical device oriented to the situated learning of literacy practices related to the communication of science.

Implementation of the writing groups

All of the WGs were implemented with Argentinian graduate students enrolled in different graduate programs in varied universities. For all of the doctoral WGs implemented, peer review activities were undertaken in a similar way. Before each group met face-to-face, the author of the text to be reviewed shared it via email or Google Drive with their peers in order to receive asynchronous written comments. These drafts were connected to participants' graduate research and could be conference papers, research articles, or dissertation chapters (most graduate programs in Argentina require a monograph written in Spanish to complete the degree). Then, during the face-to-face meetings, authors and readers further elaborated on the written comments about how to improve the draft. Participants were encouraged to offer comments focusing mainly on the content and not on surface or minor language issues. This combination of previously written feedback and face-to-face discussions increases students' engagement with feedback by encouraging them to offer constructive comments and by holding them responsible for the feedback they give (Schillings et al., 2021). The idea behind these

groups is that students learn by enacting real academic writing practices (Colombo, 2017). As a result, their participation in collegial exchanges helps them to develop their academic identity while embracing writing projects on their own (Subedi et al., 2022). Additionally, by interacting with others who are not from their disciplinary fields, members are encouraged to address a wider audience as well as acknowledge different ways of doing and writing science (Colombo & Rodas, 2020). Since the three sets of WGs analysed here were different in terms of the number of participants, their facilitation, the disciplines involved, and the duration of the groups, we offer profile descriptions for each of them.

WGs1 were implemented within an interdisciplinary research team that studied the relationship between teaching, learning, reading, and writing in different disciplines and at different education levels. This team also worked as a research training space for six of its members who were doctoral students. In the biweekly research team meetings, members routinely reviewed each other's drafts first by reading and then by offering oral feedback, critically commenting on these preliminary pieces of writing related to ongoing research projects. The research team director (who was also the doctoral students' supervisor) commented on the drafts as well. These established procedures for reviewing texts constituted a valuable foundation when the WGs1 were organised, setting the basis for the comments' format and purpose (for a detailed explanation of how the groups were structured, see Colombo, 2013). As Table 1 shows, WGs1 consisted of two groups each composed of three doctoral students who started meeting every two weeks in May 2012 by request of the participants' supervisor. The first author, currently a postdoctoral student, acted as facilitator and also as a participant reviewing and presenting drafts. She had experience training writing tutors and had been teaching and researching academic writing in higher education for approximately five years. Regular in-person meetings were held for approximately two years until two of the six participants relocated and found it hard to attend meetings. As a result, the peer review activities became sporadic, with only a couple of virtual meetings held and then replaced by written comments exchanged via email.

WGs2 started in April 2015 and—unlike WGs1—they were composed from PhD students who belonged to different research teams and whose dissertation was supervised by different professors (see Table 1). To set up the groups, an invitation was sent to those who had taken a graduate course on doctoral writing offered in 2013-14 at one of the main public universities in Argentina. The course was taught by the first author and by her postdoctoral supervisor at the time. The first-hand experience with real writing projects and peer-review activities offered in the course constituted the basis for the procedures established regarding the comments' format and purpose in the WGs2. Additionally, those who had taken the course also recommended others to join the initiative. For WGs2 to begin interacting, the facilitator organised three plenary meetings with all of the participants as preliminary sessions before they would separate into their WGs. In the first meeting, the configuration of each group was jointly decided and organisational issues were agreed on (meeting frequency, time and day of the meetings, as well as deadlines to turn in drafts and to send comments to the authors, among others). During the second and third meetings, plenary sessions were used to further discuss organisational issues and participants shared different writing and revising strategies used to advance their drafts. From the fourth meeting on, each group met and worked independently, tape-recording their sessions and copying the facilitator in their exchanges via email. During 2016, the WGs2 were re-organised since some participants could not continue. As a result, two WGs2 with three participants each functioned until 2018, sharing drafts of texts based on their doctoral research. Participation in the WGs2 was on a voluntary basis and was not related to the fulfilment of a supervision agreement (as it was the case of WGs1) or a requirement of their postgraduate program.

WGs3 started in 2018. Seven groups were formed, facilitated by WGs2 participants. Unlike WGs1 and WGs2, WGs3 began with a different pedagogical intervention. While the work of WGs1 and WGs2 had been framed by sustained activity for several months, which made it possible to scaffold the activities of commenting and receiving feedback on drafts organised dialogically and collaboratively (Dysthe et al., 2006), the work of WGs3 had been pedagogically framed by a four-hour workshop offered by the first author who oversaw these groups and advised the facilitators.

Table 1. WGs description according to participants, members' disciplinary background, group composition, facilitator, duration of group, recruitment, pedagogical intervention and data collected

	WGs1	WGs2	WGs3
Participants	6 doctoral students plus 1 postdoctoral student as member/facilitator	9 graduate students	18 graduate students
Members' disciplinary background	Biology, Psychology, Education, Linguistics	Psychology, History, Sociology, Education	Biology, Psychology, History, Sociology, Education, Translation
Group composition	2 groups of 3 members each plus the member/facilitator rotating her participation in both groups	3-2 groups of 3-4 members each	7-6 groups of 3 members each
Facilitator	Peer-led by the postdoctoral student (first author)	Expert-led by a writing specialist (first author)	Peer-led by doctoral students and overseen by a writing specialist (first author)
Duration of group	May 2012-April 2014	April 2015 - March 2018	April 2018 to January 2020
Recruitment	Compulsory: requested by thesis supervisor	Voluntary by invitation	Voluntary by invitation
Pedagogical framework for peer interaction	Research team meetings Focus: review of research team member drafts	Two-semester graduate writing course Focus: whole-class text review and peer review activities	Four-hour workshop for members and facilitators Focus: how to give peer feedback Three-hour workshop for facilitators Focus: how to facilitate WGs
Data collected	6 anonymous surveys 1 group interview with all of the members	9 anonymous surveys 9 in-depth interviews 2 group interviews with 8 and 6 members	18 anonymous surveys 12 in-depth interviews (2018) 1 group interview with facilitators

Methods

This qualitative exploratory study analyses participants' perspectives about the benefits and

drawbacks found in joining doctoral WGs. As Table 1 shows, in the three initiatives participants were graduate students with different disciplinary backgrounds, who were writing their dissertations (monograph type) in their native language, Spanish. A total of 21 individual interviews and four group interviews were transcribed verbatim. This information was complemented with data from two online surveys administered (33 responses) and email exchanges. All data collection instruments were carried out in Spanish. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and codes; participants were informed of the purpose of the study and they gave their consent. The main purpose of the instruments was to collect information regarding the participants' opinion about the benefits and drawbacks associated with participating in WGs as well as to obtain suggestions to improve their functioning. The survey was anonymous and it was administered using Google forms; it gathered data about participants' background information, such as demographic data, academic trajectories, and status. It also asked about previous experiences with reading, the benefits and drawbacks of taking part in the WGs, and suggestions to improve the initiative, including what advice they would offer someone who is about to participate in a writing group.

During the group and individual interviews participants were asked to further elaborate on their survey answers and also on the following topics: Their supervisors' opinions about their participation in a writing group, advantages and disadvantages of holding face-to-face group meetings or participating in an online modality, and challenges and benefits of working with people with different disciplinary backgrounds. Participation in the interviews was on a voluntary basis. Individual interviews were conducted on-line and lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Group interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 1 hour and a half and 2 hours. All participants of WGs1 and WGs2 and 12 of WGs3 were interviewed. Finally, members who ceased to participate (two from WGs2 and one from WGs3) were contacted via email to ask them to share the reasons why they had left the group and if they wanted to give any suggestions for improvement.

Open coding of transcriptions, survey responses, and emails was undertaken through recurrent readings to determine categories and codes. The constant comparative method was used to analyse data inductively (Strauss, 1987). The material was read repeatedly to identify phrases, sentences, or paragraphs/fragments that would represent an idea or unit. Afterwards, units were organised in descriptive categories, adjusted and redefined continuously to identify new units (Creswell, 2007). Concurrently, data was categorised and contextualised (Maxwell & Miller, 2008), combining deductive and inductive processes. After one of the authors conducted this process, the second researcher revised the analysis, confirming or questioning the coding assigned. Finally, they deliberated about the few cases where opinions differed until reaching an agreement. The analytic units, categories, and interpretations were discussed with other members of the research project to ensure reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The themes that derived from this analysis were used to report the results.

Results

Data was analysed to explore participants' opinions on the achievements and challenges of participating in WGs as a means of improving and acquiring literacy practices related to research writing. For the most part, members highlighted the positive aspects of participating in this initiative while, also recognizing some aspects that needed to be considered in future WG implementations.

Organising writing time and managing the writing process

Most of the participants in all of the WGs expressed that attending the meetings helped them structure their writing practices and, thus, advance with their writing projects in a steady manner. As Carla, one of the members of a WGs2, stated: "participating in the writing group has helped me to internalise writing time a little better. I consider myself a very inconstant person and committing to others helps me stay centred¹". That is, by engaging with others,

¹ We clarified information necessary to understand the participants' statements within square brackets.

doctorates externalise their commitment, setting in motion their own writing projects since it is easier to fulfil an obligation assumed with others than with oneself. In a similar vein, Juliana (WGs1) explained how her group meetings helped her organise her own writing schedule:

the good thing about the writing group was that we had time to review before the meetings; then we set dates: 'OK, this is the due date to give back the comments, so we can receive the draft until this date'.

Deadlines set in coordination with others, then, helped members to adjust their own writing projects and allocate time to write and revise others' texts. Additionally, this seemed to help members split extensive projects into smaller tasks, thus making writing accessible and easier to manage. As Shannon (WGs3) expressed:

one good thing about the group is being able to set deadlines, even when you know sometimes you will have to ask for an extension, but you know the deadlines are there. And they help you break down the huge work that the dissertation is for me into smaller tasks.

In addition to organising the time for writing and making the dissertation writing process something "doable", participation in WGs seems to give members the opportunity to share different ways of facing the intricacies of this long and complex endeavour with their peers. For example, according to Silvia (WGs2), "you rethink your own practices when you talk to others, read others' texts, while carrying out these writing practices". This does not only make the writing complexities more tangible but also allows participants to discover new ways of managing the dissertation writing process to improve it (Castelló, 2007).

Dealing with insecurity and loneliness

Another positive aspect mentioned by most of the participants in all of the WGs was related to better management of the feelings of insecurity or anxiety often experienced by novice writers due to their lack of confidence. First, it seemed to be comforting to realise that writing was a laborious task not only for them but for everyone in their group. As Juan (WGs3) stated, "knowing that there are others that are also struggling" with their dissertation made them feel less lonely. In addition, as Maria (WGs1) indicated, the peer review process texts went through constituted a sort of "proof of quality" within the group before sharing it with others beyond their sphere. She said:

Whenever I was submitting a course assignment or a conference paper, I felt relaxed knowing that at least two people were reading it beforehand. It was like that made me write more relaxed, knowing that someone was going to proof-read it. That calmed me down.

Along the same line, Sara (WGs3) also alluded to what many doctoral students experience: writing as a challenge. She expressed that "the group is a space of support in this process [the dissertation writing process] and, in other words, gives me confidence in an activity that I usually carry out alone".

Besides making them feel more confident about their writing, WGs seemed to help doctoral students fight the isolation often experienced when writing a dissertation. For example, Ana (WGs2) expressed that the biggest benefit that she found in attending her group was "the company through the process, right? To feel accompanied in such solitary processes as it is to write the dissertation". Yani (WGs3) also expressed that her group gave her "a possibility of fighting the loneliness to which the academic system throws us many times". As a matter of fact, most doctoral students in the Humanities and Social Sciences do not necessarily have to attend a lab or a workplace where they can meet other novice or experienced researchers. Therefore, they often conduct their dissertation work almost in isolation.

Similarly, for most doctorates, WG meetings were valuable as they provided a space to express their feelings of insecurity associated with being novice academic writers and researchers. For example, Anthony (WGs2) expressed that his group

as a catharsis space is super valuable. It is evident, I mean, it's good to frame the catharsis space because, yes, you need to vent, every time you meet other doctorates all this stuff comes up. Well, then let's give it a framework, a space and let's value it.

This was seconded by another member, Maria (WGs1), who also referred to the groups as “a place of catharsis”. As was the case regarding the writing process, for most participants, the space created by the WGs became valuable because, within it, they could share the frustrations and struggles of being a doctoral student. Sharing with peers, then, allowed participants to realise that there were others who also felt ill-equipped to face the demands associated with research writing. The discovery that facing a research writing process was challenging for the majority contributed to empower participants.

Becoming scholarly writers through horizontal relationships

As the WGs presented opportunities to show what they knew about their subjects and academic writing, another positive aspect was the possibility it gave members to see their growth as scholarly writers. For example, Danika (WGs2) claimed that in her group “you allow yourself to show what you know”. Similarly, Ana (WGs2) indicated that through interaction with her peers, she confirmed what she had learned:

It's the same when we are talking [refers to herself and her writing group partners] about what they are writing, to externalise, to say 'no, the abstract should look like this' and in those situations I start to realise all that I have been learning, because I exteriorize it and I say 'oh, wait, I kind of know what a keyword or an abstract is'.

To complement Ana's opinion, her group partner Carolina stated: “Yeah, you realise all that you know. Because it's not that we don't know [...] we do know a lot of stuff”.

At the same time, conversations among members made room for more horizontal relationships, where everyone's comments were valued and considered. This was felt to be the opposite to feedback sessions with supervisors, where, as Carla (WGs2) indicates below, power dynamics tend to be uneven.

Communication [in the writing group] is more legitimate. For me, it is not the same as when you are with your supervisor, where you feel inferior. In other words, my role there is to listen. It is much quieter and hierarchical. And the truth is that with the girls [the members of her WG], when I start arguing about my text, I put myself on the line. That's when I realised that I know something.

As can be seen from this excerpt, a WG contributes to the empowerment of its members where they are able to validate, within a low-risk environment, what they know. Additionally, as spaces where relationships are horizontal and interactions more open, WGs allow for members to learn from each other (for example, recommending bibliography, constructively criticising drafts, and discussing genre features). Although in some WGs participants often did not share an area of expertise, all group members agreed that the opinions of others, even if peripheral to their research topics, were enriching; they permitted participants to receive feedback from a broader audience and helped them to improve their texts as well as their research projects (Colombo &

Rodas, 2020). Valery (WGs2) explained that “the very naivety of that question made by one who reads from the non-expert position” helped her revise her writing.

There is never enough time

Doctorates also mentioned some drawbacks associated with their participation in the WGs. Time constraints were pointed out by most of them. In Carla’s (WGs1) words: “The challenge always consists of maintaining the group functioning as time goes by”. Apart from participating in biweekly or monthly WG meetings, members faced other demands, such as the time needed to produce their texts and to review other people’s drafts. As Ariana claimed (WGs2),

the writing group cannot be dissociated from the conditions and the context of production in which we write. In my case, it was complicated to maintain my participation in the group not so much because of the group in itself but because of all the other things.

Similarly, most participants affirmed that it was difficult to make time for the WGs due to the different responsibilities and tasks that doctoral students face, especially when they are part of a research team. Nevertheless, most of them also agreed with the idea that participating in this type of initiative was worth the effort since it was “super productive” (Nadine, WGs1), and “a learning experience as well as a beautiful and very fructiferous task” (Ana, WGs2).

Not everyone commits 100%

Another challenge mentioned by a few of the participants consisted of how to ensure that everybody would show a similar level of commitment to the WG’s activities. For example, Peter (WGs2) specified the following:

What I do consider to be of utmost importance is the active work of everyone in the group. The activity starts to decay a little when deadlines are modified, the level of commitment or the objectives of those who participate start to decrease. It would be good, I don’t know how, to come up with some kind of mechanism to reactivate the group when something like this happens.

This type of situation probably indicates that either in person (as in WGs1) or via email (as in the WGs2), the facilitator should consult regularly with participants about the perceived level of commitment or other issues that might arise. This would allow making adjustments to ensure that WGs function well, an important factor that makes a difference in their sustainability and longevity (Aitchison, 2010).

To sum up, most of the doctorates positively valued their participation in the WGs since this type of pedagogical initiative helped to structure their writing practices, making them visible. It also helped them to discover new ways of managing the writing process as well as to give and receive critically constructive feedback to improve drafts. Additionally, these groups seem to provide a space of catharsis and empowerment and thus to help novice researchers manage the emotions associated with learning the ropes of academic writing and of becoming scholarly writers. Nonetheless, there are some challenges to consider. In this vein, participants mentioned issues having to do with time constraints due to the variety of demands doctoral students face as well as the level of commitment required for the sustainability of the WGs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results show that WGs constitute socialisation spaces that help participants in several domains through interaction with others. First, they seem to be of use to improve not only the texts that are revised but also their participants’ textual practices. According to the members, writing groups are a tool to organise their writing time and learn new strategies to manage their writing processes, which has been noted as a benefit in other studies (Rodas et al., 2021). Since WGs are sustained across time and are not of short duration, such as is the case of workshops and seminars, members adjust their schedules and make writing part of their day-to-day activities,

splitting the long process of writing the dissertation or other texts for publications into manageable tasks (Ferguson, 2009; Kumar & Aitchison, 2017). This first aspect is of great importance as it could help participants to organise their writing time and avoid procrastination, thus helping to create good time-management habits (Galligan et al., 2003; O'Malley et al., 2006). To our knowledge, few graduate courses teach students how to break down the tasks associated with dissertation writing (such as the one reported in Álvarez & Di Fabio de Anglat, 2019) or writing for publication. In this sense, WGs could be organised by writing centers or by research supervisors. Therefore, they could be sustained over time and would not depend on specific course timeframes.

Additionally, working with others seemed to be an enriching experience for the participants since they learned new ways of carrying out writing practices and raised their awareness regarding how they managed their own writing projects. In this sense, dialogue and interaction with others allowed for the development of constructed and negotiated knowledge (Aitchison, 2003; Dysthe et al., 2013; Van der Linden and Renshaw, 2010; Wells, 2007) about how to better enact literacy practices connected to the research process. In the case of these WGs, this benefit was possible due to the horizontal relationships that were cultivated within them, which helped participants to connect with others in similar situations.

WGs also seem to deal with isolation and insecurity issues often faced by doctoral students on the road to becoming full members of their disciplinary communities (e.g., Colombo et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2009; Grant, 2006; Haas, 2009; Kozar & Lum, 2015; Larcombe et al., 2007). In the Humanities and Social Sciences postgraduate programs, as is the case of the participants in this study, students usually experience this isolation more profoundly since they write their dissertations alone (Aitchison, 2003; Cuthbert & Spark, 2008). Distance doctoral students experience a similar situation. For this reason, institutions could promote the implementation of virtual WGs since they do not have geographical restrictions and thus promote the sustainability of groups overtime (Dawson et al., 2013; Johnson & Lock, 2020).

At the same time, discussing research with others allows for the relationship between writing and research to become tangible, thus demystifying it (Cuthbert & Spark, 2008; Ferguson, 2009). As a matter of fact, the writing process becomes more manageable when it is shared with others: Doctorates do not only learn from more experienced peers, but they also start discovering the intricacies of their own academic communities while explaining them to others (Colombo & Rodas, 2020). Therefore, it seems that, especially in institutions where the number of graduate students per discipline is limited, graduate interdisciplinary writing groups are a good option.

On the other hand, WGs allow participants to exercise peer review practices in a less risky environment than dissertation committees and journal editors (Aitchison, 2014). By practising within a writing group how to give and receive feedback on their written production and research, doctoral candidates prepare for the reviews they may receive when submitting their articles for publication. Moreover, they also become critical reviewers of their partners as well as of their own texts (Aitchison, 2014). Not only this, but within WGs, peer feedback is perceived as horizontal, unlike what many experience with their supervisors (Boud & Lee, 2005; Guerin, 2014), allowing participants to develop identities as scholarly writers. WGs, then, help fight isolation and feelings of insecurity and offer a buffered space where they can start embracing and developing academic writer identities (Aitchison, 2010; Aitchison et al., 2010; Lassig et al., 2013) along with their peers through interactions that allow them to show what they have learned in a more equitable way (Aitchison, 2003; Dysthe et al., 2013; Van der Linden & Renshaw, 2010; Wells, 2007). In this line, it seems beneficial for supervisors to connect doctoral students but not to facilitate WGs themselves, thus allowing for the aforementioned camaraderie environment to develop among peers.

However, WGs also present some challenges. As was noted by the writing group participants, there is never enough time and not everyone participates fully. These findings are similar to what Fisher (2006) found in peer support groups: Participants can experience some drawbacks such as how to deal with time pressure and with maintaining participants' commitment throughout. Nevertheless, a timely intervention by the WG facilitator could address these

concerns (Aitchison, 2010). For example, the facilitator could be involved in the first WG meetings to scaffold the feedback process or provide support by contacting members via email to check on their progress.

To conclude, we believe that WGs can play a central role in accompanying doctoral students in the process of writing their dissertation and writing for publication. The latter is of utmost importance so as to make available their research, which constitutes a contribution to their respective disciplinary fields through the production and dissemination of knowledge. We hope that our study has contributed to expand our knowledge on the universal affective benefits of participating in doctoral writing groups regardless of the context where they are implemented. It is our belief that WGs can benefit researchers and writers alike as well as the advancement of science.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

- ¿Qué te parece lo mejor de participar en el grupo de escritura?
- ¿Qué te parece lo más desafiante de participar en el grupo de escritura?
- En el grupo primero se intercambian comentarios en forma escrita y luego se reúnen en persona/en forma sincrónica a charlar sobre esos comentarios. ¿Te parece que hay un plus en juntarse?, ¿cuál?
- Si en el grupo sostuvieron reuniones presenciales y a distancia: ¿Hay alguna diferencia entre mantener la reunión en forma presencial y hacerla en línea?
- Tres consejos que le darías a alguien que va a presentar un texto para que se lo comenten en un grupo de escritura
- Tres consejos que le darías a alguien que va a comentar (por escrito) un texto de un/a compañero/a en un grupo de escritura
- Si en el grupo provienen de diferentes disciplinas: ¿Qué opinión te merece estar en un grupo de escritura con gente de otros campos disciplinares? Si no entiende la pregunta: ¿te parece que suma o que resta?
- ¿Recomendarías a alguien que se suma a un grupo de escritura?, ¿por qué?
- ¿Harías algún cambio en cuanto al funcionamiento de tu grupo de escritura?, ¿por qué?
- ¿Qué opina tu director sobre tu participación en el grupo de escritura?
- ¿Algo más que quieras agregar?

Appendix B

CUESTIONARIO GRUPOS DE ESCRITURA

A continuación encontrarás una serie de preguntas sobre tu participación en los grupos de escritura. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas, simplemente queremos conocer tu punto de vista. Disponer de esta información nos puede ayudar a mejorar el funcionamiento de los grupos. Contestar el cuestionario toma aproximadamente 15 minutos y éste es anónimo, por lo que te agradeceremos enormemente que respondas con sinceridad y de manera directa tanto las preguntas abiertas como las de opción múltiple. Desde ya, ¡muchas gracias por tu colaboración!

Datos generales

1. Edad:

2. Sexo

Masculino

Femenino

3. ¿Tenés hijos?

Sí

No

4. Formación académica. Por favor, listá tus estudios aclarando si están en curso o los abandonaste y la fecha. EJEMPLO: 1) Lic. en Letras (abandoné, 1999); 2) Lic. en Cs. de la Educación (terminé, 2001); 3) Maestría en Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales (en curso)

5. Nombre del programa doctoral en el que estás inscripto/a aclarando la universidad que lo ofrece.

6. ¿En qué año comenzaste tus estudios de doctorado?

7. ¿Tenés una beca? Si fuera así, detallá de qué tipo y hasta cuándo. Si no fuera así, escribí un guión (-).

8. ¿Cómo estás haciendo la tesis?

De manera individual

De manera individual pero en un equipo

Trabajando

en

equipo

9. ¿Alguna situación vital ha retrasado tus estudios de doctorado?

Sí

No

10. Si tu respuesta fue 'Sí', ¿cuál? Si tu respuesta fue 'NO', escribí un guión (-)

11. ¿Cuándo calculás defender tu tesis? (mes y año aproximados)

12. Enumerá tus trabajos publicados (artículos, ponencias, capítulos de libro, materiales de cátedra, etc.) detallando el año. Si todavía no tenés publicaciones, escribí un guión (-). EJEMPLO: 1) Capítulo en el libro 'La educación Latinoamericana', 2013; 2) Artículo para la revista Signos, 2014; 3) Ponencia para la 'IV Conferencia en Educación, UBA', 2014 (en prensa); 3) Ponencia para el IV Congreso de Educación de la Universidad de Blabla (enviado)

13. Enumerá tus trabajos que estén en proceso de elaboración, evaluación o en prensa. Si todavía no tenés ninguno, escribí un guión (-).

Los grupos de escritura

14. ¿Desde cuándo participás en los grupos de escritura?

EJEMPLO: marzo 2014

15. ¿Compartías borradores con otra gente antes de participar en los grupos de escritura? Si tu respuesta es afirmativa, explicá brevemente en qué ámbitos o con quien lo hacías.

16. ¿Qué tipos de textos presentaste en el grupo de escritura? Enumeralos y aclará: si fueron enviados al público al que estaban destinados o publicados y la fecha.*

EJEMPLO: 1) Plan de tesis para el Doctorado en Educación de la UBA, aún no enviado; 2) Ponencia para el 'IV Encuentro de Investigadores sobre Educación de la UBA', enviada 2015, no publicada; 3) poster para el 'I Congreso de Psicología de la UNLP', enviado y presentado 2015

17. Enumerá tres consejos para alguien que va a presentar su texto en el grupo de escritura.

18. Enumerá tres consejos para alguien que va a leer un texto de otro presentado en el grupo de escritura.

19. El grupo de escritura ha sido útil para llevar adelante la escritura de ponencias, trabajos para seminarios y/o artículos.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

20. El grupo de escritura ha sido útil para llevar adelante la escritura de la tesis

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

21. El grupo de escritura ha ayudado a mejorar mi escritura en general.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

22. El grupo de escritura ha ayudado a mejorar mis hábitos de escritura.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

23. El grupo de escritura ha ayudado a mejorar mis hábitos de revisión de textos (propios y/o ajenos).

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

24. Me he sentido más seguro al presentar mis textos en forma pública luego de trabajarlos en el grupo de escritura.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

25. Comentar los textos de otras personas me resultó fructífero.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

26. Recomendaría a otras personas participar en un grupo de escritura.

Nada de acuerdo 1 2 3 4 Totalmente de acuerdo

26. ¿Hay algo que cambiarías del grupo de escritura?

27. Si tienes algún comentario o sugerencia, puedes agregarlo aquí: