Building a community of writers in a university

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Take one university...

- 20 hours teaching per week
- High number of ‘second-career’ academics
- Focus on applied courses
- Key priority: improved position in REF

...one writing group

What is the role of a writing community in developing the writing practices of academics?

An ethnographic study: telling their stories

Thinking differently about writing

“Writing is much more of a priority...I’ve been more intentional about setting aside specific parts of my week for writing.”

Making the tacit explicit

“[It was] a space to acknowledge that the writing process is complex and emotionally draining but ultimately potentially satisfying.”

Co-constructing ideas and understanding

“A space] for discussion and debate...you test and work through those ideas that are kind of bubbling up from the surface.”

Building a community

“It feels like I am among friends who share my goals and can help keep me on track.”

“I learned about how other people work, how they think about writing.”

Producing writing

“The story paints a picture of progress with writing, but also some false starts, derailments and changes of direction...challenges and triumphs.”

The end of a chapter

Writing spaces need to be:
- About process before productivity
- Both social and individual
- Both visible and protected

Participants developed a more coherent sense of their wider academic identity and began to see writing as a legitimate and valuable activity.

The interplay between individual and institutional is key: the University needs to clearly articulate the nature and purpose of writing within the institution.

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