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Building a community of writers in a university

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Building a community of writers in a university

Take one university…

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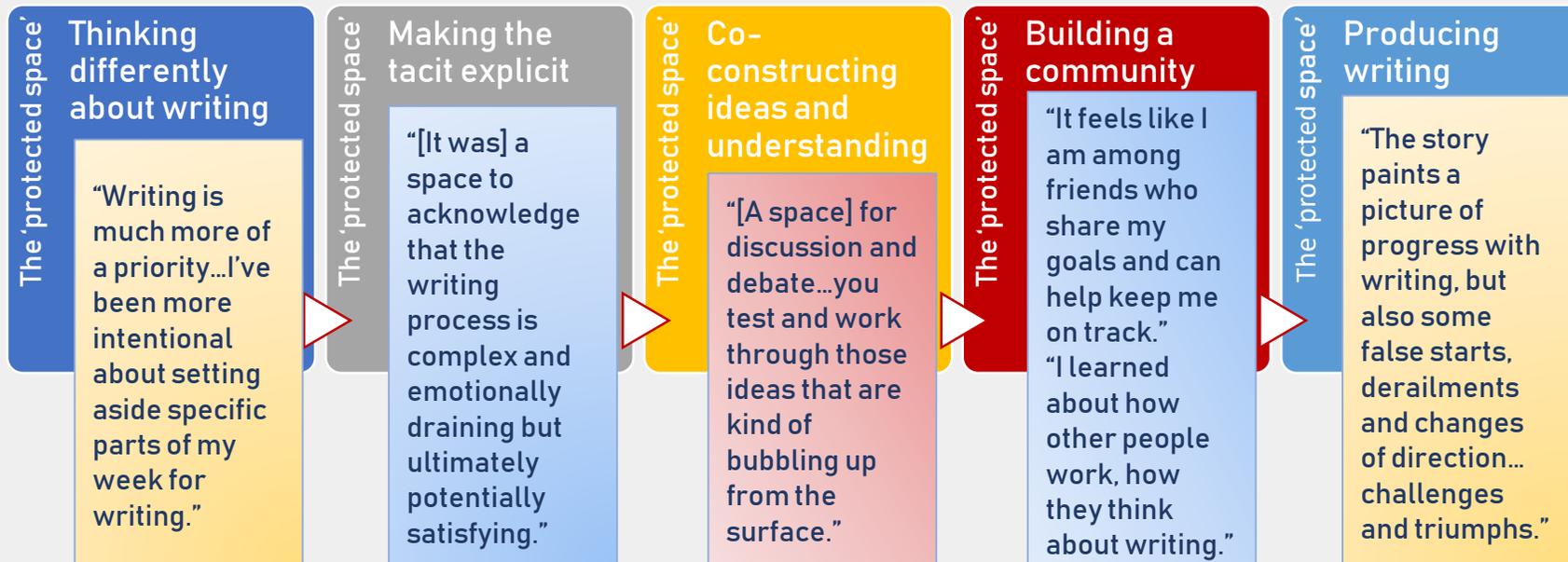
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…12 academics…

…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
The 'protected space'

"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
The 'protected space'

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

Co-constructing ideas and understanding
The 'protected space'

"[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
The 'protected space'

"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 'protected space'

"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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