




Mathematics Education Lecturers' Experiences of a Virtual Writing Retreat and its Impact on Publication Output

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ABSTRACT

Departmental writing retreats for academics in higher education are one of the strategies used to enhance publication outputs and information sharing as well as the development of research discourse. Using a collaborative autoethnographic reflexivity approach, the aims of this consolidative analysis were to identify the attributes that the participants (seven Mathematics Education researchers) regarded as effective in the online writing retreat and examine the components of the writing retreat that facilitated publication output. This paper employs Wenger's Community of Practice as the theoretical frame to critically evaluate reflective experiences from the online writing retreats. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis was used to analyse reflective experiences. The analysis unearthed many personal research needs and some of the key elements of the writing retreat that were regarded as conducive to fast tracking and advancing publication outputs. The elements I focus on in this paper are protected quality time and space to write; formation of a community of practice and attending to reviewers' post-review comments. The contention is that researchers can achieve greater publication outputs for their departments and organisations during the writing retreats, particularly when provided with critical and formative feedback on their writing. Further research should be conducted to explore and examine researchers' experiences of attending the writing retreats, especially using online platforms, as well as understanding the elements of writing retreats that advance the publication outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Writing retreat; community of practice; publication output; collaborative autoethnography; higher education.

INTRODUCTION

It is accepted that research papers, book chapters and/or books take a longer time to complete and publish, which is compounded by other academic obligations such as teaching and learning, research supervision, academic citizenship, and community engagement, to name but a few. These stringent demands, coupled with the journals' relatively long turnaround times often result in academics not prioritising research writing and publication. This being the case, academics are still expected to meet the standard performances in showing research outputs in the form of publication in accredited journals. Accordingly, writing retreats are considered as a productive writing method as they are one way of creating uninterrupted space and time for academics to write papers, book chapters and/or books in a more concentrated period (Atwood, 2008; Filippou & Plamper, 2022). Within the higher education space in South Africa, the writing retreat method is used occasionally by higher education institutions to help both academics and students to achieve their individual writing goals which in turn helps the institutions to achieve specific research and innovation goals (Davis et al., 2016). The writing retreat method is not a formalised way of enabling academics and students to write; however, this does not take away from the fact that once academics and students are granted opportunities to participate in writing retreats, they become captivated (Noone & Young, 2019). Notwithstanding these discussions, there is a dearth of research or writings on this concept within the South African context. Thus, as a way of addressing this knowledge gap, this paper, using the auto-ethnographical approach, aims to identify the attributes that seven Mathematics Education researchers from an Open Distance eLearning institution regarded as effective during an online writing retreat, and examine the components of the writing retreat that facilitated publication output.

Through research writing and publication, academics and students construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, and extend educational knowledge and in turn advance their own career horizons. In this paper, this is an important area of research, not only to contribute to the participants' experiences and knowledge about academic writing processes, but to also explore innovative ways to counter the negative effects of academic writing (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021). Although dated, Grant and Knowles (2000, p. 6) argued that writing retreats create "imaginative space" for academics to write articles and some academics generally enjoy writing in the company of other academics, which becomes a motivation for them to write and produce quality writings. Previous studies have demonstrated that writing retreats facilitate the development of ideas and advance fluency in academic writing (Castle & Keane, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In the writing retreat which is the focus of this paper, a virtual writing retreat strategy was adopted, in which:

- academics were first provided with individual writing time and space to create a more 'typing model',
- all remained online throughout the writing sessions,
- participants had fixed writing sessions as discussion and feedback slots, and

- all reflected on the writing progress throughout the semi-structured programme.

(Murray, 2015) as depicted in Figure 1.

A critical look at the programme for the virtual writing retreat may reveal that there was over-surveillance and close monitoring of writing progress throughout the writing sessions. One of the conditions for participation in this writing retreat was that the academics submit 70% completed manuscripts, which they were going to further develop, complete and prepare for submission during the retreat. At the end of each day, the participants reported on their progress in relation to the goals which were set at the beginning of each day and reviewed daily achievements in terms of how far they were towards achieving the #100%Manuscripts.

Figure 1.

The Intended Structured Virtual Retreat Programme (see Appendix)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Writing Retreat and Publication Output

As a part of their job expectations, academics have the increased pressure to conduct research, write and publish their work, which is a standard indicator of individual, departmental, and even institutional performance (Maheux-Pelletier et al., 2019). Within the academy, research publication is the most valued currency for both appointment and promotion (Cable et al., 2013). It is equally important to note that research and publication in quality and accredited journals are an important source of internal and external funding for the university, making the expectation for academics to perform in these areas even higher. However, most academics require support to develop and produce manuscripts that are ready for submission for consideration in high impact and accredited journals. Writing retreats provide this support, as they offer academics and/or students uninterrupted time and space for developing their research ideas and writing (Castle & Keane, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This resonates with Lee and Boud's (2003) argument that there is lack of support in academic writing and, considering the increasing expectations that academics should advance their research horizons, "there is a need to help academics identify new goals and desires in the changing climate and to help them locate themselves in a productive relationship to change" (p. 190). Thus, the online writing retreat played a crucial role in creating a thinking space and disrupting the inclination of writing in isolation (Maheux-Pelletier et al., 2019).

In light of the above discussion, Murray (2015, p. 2) views writing as follows:

When we write we are influenced by the society of writing around us, [but writing] is not generally discussed in those terms. In some settings it is not discussed at all – it is the very opposite of 'social' in that sense. This is paradoxical: a social process that is practiced without the use of social processes. Moreover, when the process of writing is 'secret', 'denied' or 'not shared' it can be difficult to build skills, networks and habits required for writing.

It is my contention in this paper that the pedagogies of structured writing retreats can help alleviate the paradox mentioned in the above statement. In the writing retreat, writing was

positioned as the primary task, with continuous opportunities for individuals to present sections of their work, providing feedback to each participant, discouraging procrastination, and addressing research and writing anxiety (Paltridge, 2016). As will be seen later, the academics came away from the three-day virtual writing retreat either having some articles that were ready for submission or having developed more writing. The academics learned more about writing processes and what journals are considered to be acceptable and publishable manuscripts, as well as attending to reviewers' comments during the submission and publication processes to improve their writing. That is, the participants learnt through continuous mutual engagement in writing activities which was defined by the interactions and negotiation of meanings both within and outside the writing community that was created.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation and Writing Retreat

The design and approach of the writing retreat was influenced by Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which was appropriate for an academic writing retreat. Lave and Wenger view learning as an integral aspect of social practice, which subsequently suggests that participation in communities of practice will certainly involve learning. In other words, when an individual participates in social practice, it is seen as a way of being a part of a community. Participation in a community and therefore learning is enabled by becoming a member of that community (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). The processes and relationships formed within a community of practice, as well as the experiences which characterise the individual's sense of belonging, shape the nature and the extent of learning they receive. Lave and Wenger (1991) encapsulated this dynamic and complex notion using the term 'legitimate peripheral participation', stating that "each of its aspects is indispensable in defining the others and cannot be considered in isolation. Its constituents contribute inseparable aspects whose combinations create a landscape—shapes, degrees, textures—of community membership" (p. 35). Of importance to note is that 'legitimate peripheral participation' is characterised by social relations and social structures:

Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29)

The virtual writing retreat allowed the development of manuscript writing through shared engagements among the participating writers (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the individual writings during the writing processes. This retreat created a thinking and writing environment where the participants could interact as a community of practice, simultaneously producing article drafts, discussing, and reflecting on the quality of the drafts. As will be seen later, as writers, the participants experienced the positive contribution of "common knowledge, energy and a commitment to shared understandings" about article writing and publication expectations, and these are important features of communities of practice (Churchman, 2005, p. 11). In this case, understanding and experience of the different articles that were developed

and the writing process were in continuous interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The paper addresses the following research questions:

- a) What are the benefits of a virtual writing retreat on academic writing and research publication?
- b) What are lecturers' lived experiences of participating in a virtual writing retreat?

To explore and answer these research questions, a collaborative autoethnographic reflexivity approach was espoused, as discussed in the following section.

Collaborative Autoethnographic Methodology

Writing about personal experiences or using the participating academics in an online writing retreat as bodies of knowledge in educational research and writing remains underdeveloped within the South African higher education space. The use of the collaborative autoethnographic writing approach places emphasis on describing, systematically and critically presenting, and analysing specific lived experiences of multiple participants relating to a shared activity (Ellis et al., 2011). This paper adopts this approach to writing to critically reflect on the academics' experiences of participating in a virtual writing retreat and how it facilitated the fluency in writing and helped each participant to improve and complete manuscripts for submission in accredited and reputable journals. What stood out for me about this approach was that it treats research processes and writing as socially responsive, politically laden, and as a socially conscious process of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing educational knowledge. Thus, this paper draws on the participants' personal experiences of participating in the virtual writing retreat as the key sources of educational and research knowledge in and of itself. The paper specifically employs a collaborative autoethnographic reflexivity approach to unearth the multiple intersections between researchers, the university society, and the higher education space (Ellis 2009). In terms of the participants' sampling for this study, all the academics who participated in the writing retreat were invited to engage in reflexive conversations and provided permission for their utterances during the recorded online writing retreat sessions to be used for writings. Thus, I draw from the information the participants provided during the writing sessions and the extracts from the email conversations post the retreat.

Employing collaborative autoethnography "facilitates inclusion and allows for multiple voice(s) and knowledge(s) and thus adds to our collective, multifaceted understanding" (Schmid 2019, p. 266) of writing and publication processes. In the current paper, the collaborative autoethnography reflexivity approach helps to bring to the fore opportunities to share lived experiences relating to an online writing retreat and how interactions, feedback, and support that the group provided to one another enable successful writing of articles and submissions for publication. It is my contention that the use of the collaborative autoethnographic reflexive approach promotes academic inclusion by allowing multiple voices on the experiences of academic writing and research publication (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

In autoethnographic research, it is important to provide details of the participants' backgrounds such as their worldview and social positioning as a way of helping the readers to better

understand the contexts and identities that frame the ideas expressed in the writing (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010). This resonates with Fook and Askeland's (2007) argument that in autoethnographic research and writing, "critical reflection must incorporate an understanding of personal experience within social, cultural and structural contexts" (p. 522).

Table 1.

Participants' Biographical Information

Participant	Biographical Information
HM	Middle class Black African man, who is a lecturer of mathematics education and a recent doctoral graduate.
FM	Black African male professor of mathematics education.
JD	Black African male associate professor of mathematics education and Chair of Department.
TM	Black African male senior lecturer of mathematics education.
MN	Black African female professor of mathematics education.
BM	Coloured female lecturer of mathematics education, currently completing her doctoral studies.

In view of Lave and Wenger's theoretical framing, these varied academic levels and experiences were not viewed as a determinant of who could be supported and those who could support others, but through the membership in the virtual retreat, each academic became a full participant in the virtual writing community that was created.

Analysis

Using Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I looked at three key elements of the writing retreat that I regarded as conducive to fast tracking and advancing publication outputs and in the development of research discourse:

- Protected quality time and space to write.
- Formation of a community of practice.
- Attending to journal reviewers' post-review comments.

CDA foregrounds the dialectical relationship between language and society. The ways of thinking and knowing within a society are intricately shaped through language in use, just as language is influenced by the society in which it is used (Fairclough, 1989). Considering this, Fairclough's CDA was espoused for the current paper as it seeks to interrogate and uncover the academics' thinking and experiences of participating in a virtual writing retreat which are explained through language. Specifically, textual analysis is used to explore the relationship between what was said during and after the retreat, how statements were made and the reasons for the utterances because the various statements were located within the wider social context. Fairclough (1993, p. 138) defined textual analysis as the process of segmenting and revealing embedded meanings from "the written or spoken language produced in a discursive

event”, which in this paper was how participants talked about the writing process, the writings, as well as the publication processes. The letters such as HM, FM etc. before or after the excerpts from transcripts in the next sections represent individual participants in the retreat. The following section discusses the emerging lessons from the retreat.

Benefits of Virtual Writing Retreat and Lecturers' Experiences

The information generated from the participants' statements address the two predetermined research questions. I identified three themes that simultaneously address both research questions: Protected quality time and space to write, formation of community of practice, and attending to journal reviewers' post-review comments.

Protected Quality Time and Space to Write

The online writing retreat created legitimate time and space for academics to focus on writing articles, time away from the job priorities such as attending to students' queries. At the beginning of the retreat, JD reminded all participants to ensure that they had activated automatic replies indicating their unavailability to attend to conflicting demands. JD stated: *“Colleagues, please do not forget to activate the auto reply in your emails, to ensure that we do not get disturbed during the retreat.”* This was interesting because JD, as the Chair of Department, viewed the online writing retreat space as a writing refuge, to avoid competing job demands as academic professionals, especially if the choice of words in JD's statement “to ensure that we do not get disturbed” is seriously considered. Similarly, HM reminded the participants that the goal of the three-day online writing retreat was to ensure that 100% of the manuscripts were submission ready to journals post-retreat. He said: *“Colleagues, please be reminded that we agreed to have at the end of the three days manuscripts that are ready for submission to research journals; let's make use of this time and also assist each other to reach this goal.”* It is important to note that the legitimisation of online writing retreat time and space was regarded as favourable in accelerating writing and ensuring that manuscripts were ready for submission at the end of the retreat. This resonates with Girardeau et al.'s (2014) observation that retreats are effective for legitimising space and time for development of writing as they resolve many conflicting priorities that are often barriers to writing.

In relation to the foregoing discussion, although dated, Moore (2003) used the concept of “residential writing sanctuary” (p. 335) to denote the value of having uninterrupted space and time to just focus on the writing, and the notion of sanctuary represents a secure space to engage in academic writing. In the context of the online writing retreat, the protected time in a ‘writing sanctuary-like’ environment brought together seven colleagues, with the ultimate explicit objective of producing full manuscripts to submit for publication. It is the contention of this paper that the online sanctuary enabled the participants to engage, build relationships and provide each other with formative feedback on the writings as a way of ensuring that the goal of preparing the manuscripts for publication was realised, addressing the formation of a community of practice (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Formation of Community of Practice

While the previous section addressed the need for protected time and space to engage in prolonged uninterrupted writing to develop and improve the different manuscripts the participants worked on during the retreat, this section focuses on how a ‘Community of Practice’ was formed and the participation in order to provide thorough formative feedback to each other’s sections of writings, mentorship, as well as interactions to seek and/or offer collegial support to each other during the retreat. During the retreat, having a shared objective to produce manuscripts that would be ready for submission contributed to participants feeling free to seek assistance or feedback on different parts of the manuscripts. Consider the following extracts from the interactions during the retreat:

“Dr HM, can you please share Usher's with us?” (TM).

“I would appreciate any recommendation/suggestion for a Theoretical framework for analyzing procedural understanding and procedural fluency. Currently, I only have Two strands (Mathematical proficiency) by Kilpatrick et al., in mind for a paper, but I am not sure whether it will be sufficient” (EM). – “You can use Kilpatrick et al in relation to Skemp (1976) concepts of relational understanding and instrumental understanding - in this case you will have a conceptual framework” (HM). – “Skemp, EM - How to construct mathematical schemas” (BM). – “I am also using Skemp, we can share EM” (FM).

“Pre-service teachers’ understanding of misconceptions and errors in grade 5 learners’ presentation of fractions solutions. Good afternoon colleagues, any suggestion on a Theoretical framework, please?” (BM). – “To analyse errors and misconceptions, look at the work of Karin Brodie” (HM). – “You can also look at Machaba 2016 and Machaba and Moyo 2021 for misconceptions” (FM). – “Prof Luneta from UJ has also written extensively on errors and misconceptions” (JD).

The conversations during the retreat did not only improve the quality of the manuscripts we focused on but aided in-depth understanding of the research discourse in general. I was humbled by colleagues’ willingness to share their work and the openness to feedback. My other key takeaway was the synergy amongst the participants, it did not feel like ordinary virtual engagements; we connected, argued, and helped each other to improve the quality of our manuscripts. Looking forward to more enriching retreats soon. (Email from HM).

As demonstrated by the extracts above, group discussions of the different papers provided a supportive writing environment as the formative feedback and suggestions made regarding parts of work that needed improvement created a meaningful writing environment (Cable et al., 2013). The benefits of collegiality during an online writing retreat is manifest in the statements, “I would appreciate any recommendations”, “I am not sure whether it will be sufficient”, “any suggestion on a theoretical framework, please?”. It can be said that the participants felt safe to share their work in progress with constructive colleagues in order to enhance the quality of their writing, which Moore (2003, p. 399) referred to as “feeling safe” and sharing their drafts of work “without fearing negative outcomes.” Accordingly, the

statements also unearth social interaction, mentorship, and shared vision to ensure that after the online writing retreat the articles were ready for submission and were publishable. This resonates with Murray and Newton's (2009) findings that a shared purpose in a group setting contributes to participants experiencing connectedness during social interactions, which in this study did not only make the participants comfortable to seek assistance from the group, but led to constructive suggestions from the group on how to develop the writing. In addition, the participants valued and continuously sought the immediacy of peer feedback, which is equivalent to getting editorial comments in real time (Singh, 2012). Social interaction in an online space, which is not conventional for writing retreats, promoted a sense of connectivity and created space for informal dialogue and feedback to develop the manuscripts for submission. What was peculiar about the formation of a community of practice during the online writing retreat is that it was not only facilitated by experienced published researchers, but also the less experienced offered constructive comments on other writers' writings.

Attending to Journal Reviewers' Post-Review Comments

While some participants worked on manuscripts that had not been submitted for consideration in any journal, two participants decided to work on manuscripts on which they had already received editorial feedback from journals in order to prepare the manuscripts for resubmission (in a case where resubmission was allowed) or for submitting the manuscripts to other journals for consideration (in cases where the manuscript was rejected, with no resubmission option). These academics attended to the comments provided by the journal reviewers' and editors' feedback. HM used the sharing of screen functionality on Microsoft Teams and shared the feedback he had received for an article that required minor revisions and the other participants offered suggestions on how HM could address the reviewers' comments. Consider the following extract:

HM: *So, I recently submitted a paper to Pythagoras, so I think we can try and see how they actually think about the papers or how they go about reviewing the papers. So, the common practice is that there are actually two reviewers, some journals even go to have the third reviewer, but mainly the third reviewer is actually the journal editor or the sectional editor. So, in terms of how they actually review the papers from my personal experience, you know, when I'm submitting papers to various journals, be it rejection, acceptance, or revisions, what I'm seeing is that the focus starts right from the title in terms of the relevance of the title and also in terms of it being related to that particular field or that particular focus that you are submitting to or theme. The title itself needs to address all the components in the paper. So, I have seen that the reviewers will look at the title, they look at the abstract that there is a structured abstract and we can continue to assist each other in terms of structuring the abstract and then they look at the argument, you know, from the introduction until the conclusion that you have carried a particular argument. And in your writing and that you made links with between the theoretical framework, methods and also your research questions, so I'll just go through these particular reviews to just look at those elements and how we can actually reflect as we continue.*

From this excerpt it can be seen that HM continued to present the feedback from the reviewers, highlighting the key takeaways from the feedback and the other participants discussed some of the key takeaways from the presented reviews, especially aspects of article writing that they found to be important to observe for their own writing. The journal reviewers' comments on HM's article helped to frame participants' thinking and writing, particularly things to avoid to ensure that the paper was not rejected before journal editors sent it to reviewers. It was also interesting how the participants took the time to provide HM with suggestions on how he could go about responding to and/or address the reviewers' comments as he prepared the manuscript for resubmission. A day after the retreat, HM resubmitted the article as depicted in Figure 2 and the article was subsequently accepted and published by the journal.

Figure 2.

HM's Article Progress Dates

Editor Decision			
Decision	Resubmit for Review 05-May-22		
Revision Due Date	26-MAY-22		
Notify Editor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Editor/Author Email Record	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 05-May-22
Editor Version	696-10045-1-ED.DOCX	04-Apr-22	
Author Version	696-10125-1-ED.DOCX	12-May-22	DELETE
	696-10125-2-ED.DOCX	12-May-22	DELETE
	696-10125-3-ED.DOCX	12-May-22	DELETE
Upload Author Version	<input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen		<input type="button" value="UPLOAD"/>

As depicted in Figure 2, the due date for the resubmission of the article was 26 May 2022 and because of the suggestions from the other participants on how to attend to the comments from the reviewers, HM managed to resubmit the article on the 12th of May 2022. Thus, the sharing of the reviewers' feedback during the online writing retreat played two roles: assisting HM to address the comments from the reviewers and highlighting things to avoid during article writing to maximise the chances of the article being accepted.

Like HM, FM also presented feedback he had received from another journal, as demonstrated by the following extract:

FM: *The article that I've written with one of my master's students from a master's study. Uh, this situation, it was about teacher questioning and responses to Grade 6 mathematics learners, comparison of fractions and it was submitted to African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education, I think you know this journal, it is accredited in most indices, even DHET. And my first reaction was to suggest that that is the reviewer. My first reaction was to suggest that the literature review had to be developed. One of the reviewers commented that the paper is about teachers' questioning and there is only data on learners. The reviewer was making a point again to reflect on the alignment on the question of teacher questioning and the responding to learners as the topic indicate. But he seemed to be not sure about what it actually entails in the body of the article. We also included the interviews. The data collection method with observation in the interviews, but it's raising a point that the interviews were not enough. So, we need to decide whether we really need to include the interviews or we need to focus fully*

on one data collection method which is the classroom observation. Another reviewer asked whether the paper is about the students' learning of fractions or is about questioning and suggested that we must frame it more appropriately in whichever we decide the central theme to be.

A week post-online retreat, FM sent the following email to all the participants, thanking the team for the constructive comments on how to respond and address the comments.

Attached please find the published paper which I shared the review reports of it from the reviewers during our writing retreat. The paper was initially rejected but we were given the grace to resubmit if wanted to address the reviewers' comments ... Thanks, colleagues for your comments on shaping this paper during our writing retreat. (Email from FM)

The collegiality and sense of community and social interaction demonstrated in both HM's and FM's extracts reveal that the presentation of the reviewers' comments to the other participants offered an opportunity for both academics to receive suggestions to plan the responses and language to revise the articles to address the reviewers' suggestions (Patino & Ferreira, 2019; Wong, 2019). The comments from the other participants after HM's and FM's presentations are exemplified by JD's statement. He said:

Thank you so much, colleagues. In fact, I do not have the specific reviews to share with you, but I'm just picking up very important issues that you are raising as you share with us your reviewers' comments. Especially with the Dr HM, I think you have mentioned something that we all need to take heed of that, you know, when presenting an abstract you don't try to put it in a way that is actually attempting to be overreaching or over covering. Like you said that the issue of a theory, it really doesn't need to be explained in thoroughly within the parameters of an abstract and I think all aspects of the research paper. Yes, they need to be mentioned in the abstract, but I think we just need to scratch the surface when dealing with them, especially in the abstract. I think that is one thing that we are learning even in terms of the design. I think it's sufficient to mention. But also what I'm picking up is that each and every piece of information that you put in the abstract it's the information that would also need to be thoroughly dealt with in the paper.

From the social interactions within the developing community of practice established in the retreat, it is observable that the key reason for the academics to be able to address the reviewers' comments can be attributed to the presentations and suggestions made by other participants on how to attend to the comments, ensuring that the comments are adequately addressed before resubmission. The discussions helped in the creation of the plan of response and addressing the reviewers' comments (Wong, 2019). It can also be said that the presentation of the reviewers' comments in the online space became foundational in how other colleagues subsequently structured their writing to ensure that their articles were publication ready post-retreat.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Writing with others in an online space was important as collegiality and space for constructive feedback was created, providing access to feedback on the writings even post-retreat. The benefits of the online writing retreat included dialogic engagements, participants' increased motivation to write, and immediate feedback to different parts of writing. Although every participant engaged in the online writing retreat from the comfort of their own space, the online writing retreat addressed issues of professional isolation, as every participant had the opportunity to unmute the microphone and seek assistance from the group and group discussions offered opportunities for manuscripts to be enhanced in the moment. Other observed benefits of the online writing retreats are that they promote teamwork, the development of community of writers as well as increased feedback skills. In addition, the sanctuary of the online writing retreat seems to have encouraged ongoing collaborations and social interactions, as the participants continued to request others from the group to read their work in progress and share feedback via email post-retreat, thereby strengthening the formation of a community of practice and legitimising writing. It can be said that the sharing of a common goal to ensure that the articles were ready for submission fostered opportunities for the participants to work together, as well as to seek and offer feedback when needed.

This paper has demonstrated the need for group members participating in a virtual writing retreat to decide and agree on the frequency and duration of their sessions, to ensure that the intended targets are realised at the end of the retreat. This was emphasised by JD at the beginning of the retreat, when he also reminded the group to activate automatic replies for their emails to ensure non-interruptions during the sessions. I also recommend the need for groups to establish a clear agenda for each session, outlining the processes, topics or themes to be covered as well as the times for different activities.

For future studies, I recommend that throughout the data generation processes, the participants should engage in continuous reflection and reflexivity pertaining to their experiences of the virtual writing space in relation to the intended goals both as an individual and for the whole group. Opportunities for all participants to critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and positionality within the research process should be created and encouraged. Reflective statements can be added alongside the meeting notes or transcripts to act as the group's self-reflection.

Limitations of the Study

Although all the lecturers who participated in the writing retreat were involved in the reflexivity process and sharing of personal experiences, one limitation of this study is that only one academic was involved in the writing of the current paper. Future collective autoethnographies related to virtual writing retreats as well as other foci should encourage the entire group to be involved in all aspects of the collaborative process, including the analysis and writing phase of the study.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1.

The Intended Structured Virtual Retreat Programme

<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30%; margin: 0 auto; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Retreat Programme</div>	
<p>Day 1 09 May 2022</p>	
09:00-09:05	Welcome – Prof FM
09:05-09:15	Workshop expectations - Planning, writing warm up, setting goals: Dr HM
09:15-11:00	Presentation of feedback from reviewers – what do they look for in an article?
11:00-13:00	Shut-up and write
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-14:30	Where are you stuck? How can we help?
14:30-16:30	Shut-up and write
16:30-17:00	Review targets
<p>End</p>	
<p>Day 2 10 May 2022</p>	
09:00-09:05	Welcome - Prof FM
09:05-09:15	Reflect on some difficult reviewers – what should we look out for? – Dr HM (All)
09:15-11:00	Shut-up and write
11:00-13:00	Shut-up and write
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-15:00	Review targets: presentations of draft papers, how can we help? – Dr HM (All)
15:00-16:00	Shut-up and write
16:00-16:30	Identification or confirmation of journals: Dr HM to confirm the credibility of the journals
<p>End</p>	
<p>Day 3 11 May 2022 (Final Day Wednesday)</p>	
09:00-09:05	Welcome - Prof FM
09:05-09:15	What are some of the experiences from the past two days?
09:15-11:00	Shut-up and write
11:00-13:00	Wrap-up writing
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-14:30	Submission of papers to journals and sending of confirmations to Prof FM
14:30-15:00	Vote of thanks – Prof JD
<p>End</p>	