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Writing retreats for Japanese second-language graduate students: Beyond the language deficit model

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The requirement for second-language graduate students to publish in English demands a pedagogical response. Where those graduate students are using English as a second language, the focus has been on addressing presumed language deficiencies rather than developing the act of writing. This paper reports on an intervention that we led in a Japanese research university with graduate students aimed at developing writing practice that would support academic publication in English. We report here on the intervention, students' feedback, follow-up discussions and a survey after eight months. We use containment theory to provide a theorized account of how the intervention supported participation in writing for publication in English. This work provides direction for pedagogy for second-language graduate students.

Key Words: researcher development; second-language settings; writing retreat; containment theory, doctoral education.

1. Introduction

For second-language speakers, the requirement to produce a high standard of academic writing in English is a challenge. It can cause acute anxiety among PhD students. Indeed, academic writing is associated with anxiety in many higher education (HE) cultures (Grant & Knowles, 2000; Holligan, Wilson, & Humes, 2010; Moore, 2003). In Japan, the challenge is even greater because writing in English is likely to be filtered through negative experiences with the language and poor self-perceptions (Holligan, 2013). International students may experience anxieties about writing in English (Li, 2014, p. 151), but Japanese graduate students are exposed to, and many internalise, negative views about Japanese people's English language competency:

The ... widespread conviction that Japanese people are somehow congenitally bad at learning foreign languages lurks in the background of both the current very strong push for improved English teaching and the general lack of interest in teaching other foreign languages in the school system. (Gottlieb, 2012, p. 19)

In our country, there exists an obsession about or ... complex towards English, almost as if it were part of our ethnic DNA ... freeing ourselves from this has to be the starting point of English education. (translated from original Japanese by author, Osako, 2010, p. 22)

These two contributions – from an outsider looking in (Gottlieb) and a Japanese educator (Osako) – convey how pervasive this perception of inferior English ability is in Japan. One consequence is that even those with a degree of language competency equal to the task of writing for international publication may not be publishing in English¹. The issue we focus on in this paper is not how to improve language proficiency, but writing practices that enable participation in writing for publication in English.

Writing has been theorized in research degree programmes generally (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Lee & Murray, 2015), but there is little research on effective ways to support second-language doctoral students who face this specific issue. Moreover, in HE environments globally, although there has been work on doctoral pedagogies (Aitchison, Kamler, & Lee, 2010; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Kamler, 2008), this research has not focused on graduate students' writing-related anxiety.

In addition, there is a growing literature on academic writing retreats, providing observational studies, descriptive accounts and case studies, but there is a need for ongoing theorising of this approach (Grant, 2003, 2006; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Li, 2014; Mewburn et al., 2014; Murray, 2015; Paltridge, 2016; Petrova & Coughlin, 2012). These show evidence of impact, but there is a need to develop understanding. Furthermore, if we are to understand writing-related anxiety, the focus may have to shift away from the technical aspects of writing competence. This is not to say that technical skills are not important – since they clearly are – but to shift the focus of research to the anxiety that may inhibit the performance of those skills.

To focus on the established problem of writing-related anxiety and associated low output of research in English-language journals in the Japanese HE context, we decided to try an approach to reducing writing-related anxiety that is effective in many western HE settings, a Structured Writing Retreat (SWR) (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012; Steckley & Murray, 2012). While we acknowledge that there are other reasons why researchers do not publish – such as lack of time, lack of motivation, frustration etc. – we focused on anxiety because it was a significant barrier for graduate students in this setting, and anxiety may be implicated in other barriers. In addition, this particular intervention responds to Straker's call for a shift from deficit models to participation (Straker, 2016). The SWR can also enable participants to engage constructively with these issues.

In the following sections, we introduce the SWR we ran in Kyoto (Japan), we explain the theoretical framework we used to analyse its impact on writing participation, and discuss the implications of our main findings. In general, we found that by focusing on the act of writing rather than language, some of our participants were able to overcome barriers to writing for publication in English. The positive effect was greater for doctoral rather than Masters students, and for Japanese rather than European students. We conclude by reflecting on implications for researcher development in other second-language contexts.

¹ The second author on this paper works in the Japanese setting, where the lack of English-medium output from colleagues in the humanities and social sciences, even those with an advanced level of English language proficiency, is a thorny issue in the top-tier universities competing for international and regional rankings.

2. Constructing a pedagogy for doctoral writing development

In the social sciences and humanities, writing is often constructed as a solitary activity, requiring separation and confinement (Mayrath, 2008; Murray, 2013). With the SWR model, practising writing as a social activity can support graduate students' writing development and output (Murray & Cunningham, 2011; Murray & Newton, 2009; Petrova & Coughlin, 2012; Wenger, 1998). During structured writing periods of sixty and ninety minutes, participants focus on the act of writing. This focus, and the presence of others writing, can contain writing-related anxiety and reduce displacement activity (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012). In a similar intervention, Aitchison (2009) noted that writing groups for doctoral education led to learning through the giving and receiving of feedback on writing, confirming Caffarella and Barnett's (2000) finding. Writing in such groupings creates space not only for writing, but also, during breaks in writing, for discussion and feedback on writing-in-progress among peers.

Boud and Lee (2005) noted that peer learning is an appropriate pedagogy for researcher development, and others have argued that it can be theorised as a community of practice (Murray, 2012; Wegner, 1998). There is, therefore, a case for integrating the discourse of peer learning and the discourse of research writing, and moreover there is evidence that a SWR can do this (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012; Murray, Steckley, & MacLeod, 2012).

This may also apply to second-language research writing. Curry and Lillis (2010, 2013) found that research networks are 'a key resource for publishing' (Curry & Lillis, 2010, p. 281). Their work emphasises the role of local networks as a base for participation in international research debates. This strengthened the case for the SWR, where local networks can be created by doctoral students.

In order to tackle the problem of anxiety related to writing in English, our findings in previous studies indicated that a social approach could have a positive effect (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012; Murray, 2012). Although it had not been used before in the Japanese setting, we felt that it might mitigate the acute levels of writing-related anxiety that were generally to be found among Japanese graduate students.

3. The Kyoto writing retreat

Beverley Yamamoto secured university funding from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to run a SWR for doctoral students in the Graduate School of Human Sciences at Osaka University. The retreat was advertised in an open call for participants and by direct communication with students who had previously attended an Academic Writing course, since we were conscious of the need to encourage students to attend (Petrova & Coughlin, 2012, p. 84). We advertised the SWR as 'an intensive writing camp' in Kyoto away from the university, in a supportive environment that would stimulate research-oriented discussions and provide writing strategies. We initially used this term because we were concerned that no one would understand the term 'retreat' in this setting. We also used the Japanese equivalent, *gasshuku*. The invitation was sent out by Beverley Yamamoto.

Participants were PhD (8) and Masters (2) students from the university and one early career academic. They were all second-language speakers of English; nine were Japanese and two European. Three of the participants had attended the Academic Writing intensive course run by the authors at Osaka University. Although the enrolled doctoral programme required one or two peer reviewed publications, depending on department, as a condition for award of degree, none of the graduate students had prior experience writing for publication in English.

Guidance notes were provided for the participants, explaining the underpinning principles of the SWR, the writing warm up, goal-setting, writing activities, progress reviews and the programme. The programme was adapted from an established SWR model, and the design, timescale and other details are covered elsewhere (Murray & Newton, 2009; MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012).

A key component is the fixed programme of 60- and 90-minute writing sessions, with regular breaks. Participants write from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm. They set writing goals for each session at the start of each day and review the extent to which they achieved them at the end of each day. The two-day SWR consists of ten hours of writing. Outputs and outcomes from such retreats are generally very positive (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012). At this SWR, the facilitator and participants spoke and wrote in English.

This intervention was initiated in order to create a space for second-language speakers of English to participate in writing for publication. We wanted to engage these students in a participatory pedagogy that would support their writing. In so doing, we would turn their attention away from concerns about language proficiency and towards the practice of writing. Since SWRs reduce writing-related anxiety for many participants (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012), we specifically looked for this effect in the students' feedback on and evaluations of the retreat. When examining their feedback, it became clear to us that containment theory (see Section 4) might be an effective tool to theorise what we were seeing.

4. Theoretical framework: Containment theory

The concept of containment has been used to describe processes that enable people to manage (contain) unmanageable (uncontainable) thoughts, feelings and experiences. Containment theory has been used to develop understanding in different settings, including social work (Toasland, 2007), business (Kahn, 2001) and higher education pedagogy (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012). Studies have shown that SWRs can reduce anxiety triggered by academic writing through containment (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012; Murray, Steckley, & MacLeod, 2012). What has not been explored is whether the SWR approach benefits second-language speakers who are likely to have levels of anxiety heightened by self-perception of English language deficiency. For our analysis, we adapted the three components of containment (Ruch, 2005) used in earlier studies of academic writing:

- *Emotional containment* – making unmanageable feelings manageable;
- *Organisational containment* – developing day-to-day practices that improve organisational and professional clarity;
- *Epistemological containment* – creating settings where individuals can make sense of complexity, manage uncertainty, and achieve clarity in their work.

5. Evaluation

The aim of our post-retreat evaluation of participants' responses was to assess the extent to which this SWR contained anxiety about writing and enabled their participation in writing. In line with good ethical practice, we gained informed consent from participants at each stage.

In the following sections, we present extracts from participants' accounts of their responses to the SWR, collected at three points in time:

1. Immediately after the SWR;
2. During seven Structured Writing Days (SWD) after the SWR;
3. In a follow-up survey eight months after the SWR.

We wanted to capture not only the short-term impact of the SWR, but also we wanted to find out if it shaped writing practices over the longer term. It was decided to collect additional data at each of the seven SWD's held monthly after the SWR, and also in the form of a formal questionnaire at the end of this cycle.

5.1. Immediate post-retreat feedback

An open-ended survey questionnaire was administered at the end of the SWR. It included ten questions about the experience of attending the SWR, writing in a contained social setting (i.e. writing with other people in the room), goal setting and achievement during the SWR, the venue and length of the retreat, the likely impact of the SWR on future writing practices, desire to attend another retreat, and future writing plans. All SWR participants responded to this survey.

Post-retreat feedback contained many strongly positive statements. They suggested that, for eight participants, the SWR had similar short-term benefits to those reported for SWRs in other HE settings (Grant, 2006; MacLeod, Steckley & Murray, 2012; Moore, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2009). For example, students said that their concentration was supported by the presence of others writing, and that this was motivating. M-san,² a 2nd-year PhD student, said, “All of the participants had a clear vision for their study and worked hard, so I was really stimulated by their eagerness and concentrated on my study”. Another 3rd-year PhD student, K-san said, “Group members are highly motivated and cheerful, so it was a very exciting writing time and private time”.

Many comments suggested that the SWR provided both organizational and emotional containment, helping participants to develop their writing practices and making feelings about their writing more manageable. For students raised in a Japanese culture of *gaman* – which means pushing yourself to the limit and not giving in to fatigue – it came as a revelation to them that taking breaks could increase their writing productivity. S-san, 2nd-year PhD student, said “to take a break every hour or two was new for me, and I found that I could work harder in the programme than I could when writing incessantly”. Similarly, M-san, the early career academic noted,

I feel that the Writing Retreat will keep influencing my writing practice. ... I used to prefer to write all day long without taking breaks. I was doing that because I was afraid to lose my concentration by taking breaks. Through the Writing Retreat, I learned that I can go back to writing if I set the goals for the next time slot before taking a break. (M-san, early career academic)

Many responses suggested that the SWR also provided epistemological containment, in the sense that participants found ways to make sense of the complexity of writing in English:

I have never had this kind of experience, so I was not so conscious about my efficiency in writing. After the retreat I realized the importance of organizing my writing practice. It is the best way. I realized keenly the importance of setting short term goals and preparing well before writing. (M-san, 2nd-year PhD student)

In addition, although instructions and guidance about how to write at the SWR were translated into Japanese, students were hearing English spoken around them as well. Many of them said that this made the transition to writing in English much easier. D-san, 1st year PhD student said, “I could concentrate on just writing, and I was encouraged by the sound of other people’s typing. Listening to English conversations made the switch into writing in English very easy”. In this case, a student’s anxiety about writing in English was contained by the presence of others writing.

However, one student, a Japanese male, gave feedback that was less positive than that of other participants. He appears to have felt uncomfortable about being the only male in the group. In addition, he also felt his English ability was lower than that of other participants, which left him feeling ‘inferior’. However, he was also able to note the benefits of his minority gender status, which was that he did not have to share lodging. The female students were all in shared rooms.

² In order to protect identity, we assigned a letter to each participant and added the honorific ‘san’ to this as if it were a name, as is conventional in Japan.

I have two kinds of thought. First, I wished there had been other male participants, but [being the only male], I had a room to myself where I could relax. Second, almost all the participants could speak English fluently, so I felt inferior about my ability in English. (E-san, 3rd-year PhD student)

For this student, the SWR not only increased his sense of the inferiority of his English-language skills, but also, he felt, made it visible to others in the discussions. This feeling of being alone on two levels, as the only male and as the student with ‘inferior’ English-language ability, resulted in increased rather than contained anxiety in this setting. The SWR did not provide emotional, organisational or epistemological containment for this student, and it is understandable that he did not attend any of the follow-up workshops. This perhaps points to the importance of structure and group make-up when organizing a SWR.

5.2. Follow-up structured writing days

We then decided to explore with participants the medium-term impact of the Kyoto SWR and to see how we could build on their strongly positive initial responses to it. We did so at follow-up writers’ group meetings on the Osaka University campus. Following the SWR, we organised seven writing workshops at monthly intervals, which participants called Structured Writing Days (SWD). These were facilitated by the author who had organised the retreat or, when she was unavailable, by one of the SWR participants who volunteered to run them. The SWDs used the same process of goal-setting as in the SWR, and the day was divided into the same 90- and 60-minute sessions with scheduled breaks. Students were encouraged to come to these sessions prepared to write and not to use the Internet during writing sessions. At the end of the day there was a de-briefing, when participants reported and reflected on what they had achieved.

We asked participants to record what they had achieved and to add any comments they had about the day. From this we began to see the on-going impact of this approach. Seven of the eleven SWR participants (six Japanese and one European) were regular members of the SWDs. We also gained new members (but we do not include their data here).

Feedback from these meetings confirmed the positive impact of the Kyoto SWR and also pointed to a snowball effect, whereby the ability to contain anxiety, concentrate and work productively on writing increased. J-san, 3rd-year PhD student said, “I was able to get rid of the stress and tensions that are not useful. I would like to have a writing day every month”, while A-san, 1st-year PhD student said, “It is great to force myself to be in an environment where I can work with peers with a clear goal”. Similarly, X-san, 2nd-year PhD student said, “No internet, working in group, talking with other PhD students made me concentrate on writing”. Also, R-san, 1st year Masters student said, “I really work productively when other people are around also working quietly”, while S-san, 2nd-year PhD student said, “I felt so relaxed... I was not able to reach the targets I set, but I could concentrate much more than I usually do when working alone”.

These comments show that the impact of the SWR was sustained in and through the SWDs, which provided emotional containment for these participants, in the sense of reducing stress and tension and increasing a sense of relaxation related to writing. The participants also saw the SWDs as regularly creating a space where writing became the primary task, and saw the shared nature of this mode as a key factor in this effect – writing with others was completely different from writing alone.

In addition, participants’ comments showed that relationships of trust grew between students who would not otherwise usually have met on a day-to-day basis. During breaks it was common to see students huddled around a computer, exchanging information and experiences about their research. Sometimes it would extend to tips about referencing software or some other relevant knowledge that was circulated in the group, which are signs of epistemological containment.

Participants' comments strongly suggested that, like the SWR, the SWDs provided emotional, organisational and epistemological containment which reduced anxiety related to writing and thereby facilitated their participation in academic writing.

5.3. Follow-up survey

We explored the potential for a long-term impact of the Kyoto SWR and SWDs in a survey eight months after the retreat (Appendix A), focusing on self-reported writing practices, written outputs (e.g. journal articles written and/or submitted) and other outcomes. Six of the nine original Japanese SWR participants and both Europeans responded to this questionnaire. Of the six Japanese, five were regular SWD participants, as was one of the European students.

Table 1 shows the self-reported outcomes of eight of the original 11 SWR participants after 8 months. While it was not clear in the base of one category (dissertation/thesis chapters, research proposals and reports) whether the outputs were in English or Japanese, we did see a significant level of output in English. Given that none of the students had published in English before, these results are very promising. Participants' responses to the 'other outcomes' section suggest that they feel that they have become more productive as a result of the SWR and regular SWDs.

Table 1. Writing outputs of participants 8 months after the Structured Writing Retreat.

	Articles		Conference – English		Applications, Proposals		Dissertation/thesis	Book chapter-English
	Eng	Jpn	Abstracts	Proceedings	Grant	Research		
<i>R-san, 1st year MA student</i>							20,000 words	
<i>Y-san, 1st year MA student</i>						1 SB	3 chapters	
<i>A-san, 1st year PhD student</i>	1 IP		4 AC					
<i>D-san, 1st year PhD student</i>	1 RV						7 chapters	
<i>X-san, 1st year PhD student</i>		2 SB				1 SB		
<i>W-san, 2nd year PhD student</i>							2 chapters	
<i>K-san, 3rd year PhD student</i>			1 AC	1 IP	1 AC			
<i>M-san, early career academic</i>			3 SB		1 SB	2 SB		2 IP

SB: Submitted. IP: In progress. AC: Accepted. RV: Revisions

We noticed that, as in their responses to the previous questionnaire and feedback, the follow-up survey responses showed that they felt the SWR and SWDs had made writing the primary task by containing their writing anxiety, and that this, again, was seen as enabling them to be more productive in their writing. Part of this effect was achieved through goal setting and monitoring, and there were some indications that this, in turn, had begun to develop their self-efficacy in writing (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1992). Because they were not to use the internet in the writing space and were cut off from other distractions, they had to think in advance about their writing, which we saw in the following response:

I believe the process of preparation before writing is the main difference for me. I used to do research (or reading articles/books) and write at the same time. I spent many hours preparing to write after attending the retreat. I learned

the importance of preparation for speeding up writing. (M-san, early career academic)

This response also points to organisational containment of writing. Most participants said that the brief goal-setting and stock-taking discussions about writing at the SWR and SWDs were instrumental in developing a practice of writing and having insights into effective writing practices, which in turn reduced displacement activities.

There were also signs of epistemological containment in many responses:

WR [Writing retreat] is very productive. Because I was not used to writing an article in English, it took a lot of time before I started writing. But when I joined the WR, the atmosphere of the place forced me to write [so] that during WR I succeeded in writing several pages. WR gave me confidence in writing in English. (D-san, 1st-year doctoral student³)

Before joining the SWR, this particular student reported using what could be seen as typical displacement activities, such as checking things on the Internet rather than writing, which created barriers to writing in English. At SWR, she felt that she could not use these displacement activities. In her own words, she 'succeeded' in writing several pages in English, which in turn gave her the confidence that she could write in English.

Table 2 shows participants' perceptions of other outcomes from participation in the SWR and, for all but one student, regular attendance at the SWDs. A-san did not attend the SWDs, but even she reported an increase in confidence⁴, productivity, networking capability and improved research and writing practices. While this discussion relates to a small number of students, we felt that it was important to note such positive responses.

Only two students disagreed with the statement that their confidence had increased as a result of attending the SWR. Both were Masters students, highly proficient second-language speakers of English and had specifically asked to join the SWE despite funding for accommodation and travel being limited to doctoral students. One of the students, R-san, already had issues around time management that do not appear to have been resolved by the SWR and SWDs. This perhaps points to the limits of the SWR and SWDs in overcoming more serious issues around time management and focusing. For this student, knowing some of the issues, a psychological approach might have been worth trying. Nevertheless, R-san did report improved concentration and awareness of how to be productive in writing, and continued to attend the SWDs, which could have had a positive impact over the longer term.

The other Masters student only attended the first day of the SWR and seemed to be negatively disposed to it from the start, due to the fact that we had not been able to fund her travel and accommodation. This student's comments point to the possibility that SWRs may not be appropriate for all students, or the timing might have been wrong for this student. Y-san, 1st-year Masters student said, "I feel it is really disturbing to do small talk in writing retreat with strangers who have no idea about my research and give comments that are not relevant".

For a student in the first year of a Masters degree, having to interact with PhD students and an early career researcher could have reinforced any anxieties she might have had about her research and/or writing. An alternative explanation is that with only limited time in graduate studies, she would have had less exposure to and been less comfortable with this kind of peer feedback. Both

³ We refer to the doctoral level at the time of the SWR in this analysis, even though eight months later students were now in a year above this.

⁴ The way the question was worded, anything other than a 1 showed a degree of agreement with each of the statements.

explanations are speculation. A key lesson for us was that the retreat worked better for PhD students than Masters students, although a dedicated SWR for students at the Masters level might be worth exploring.

Table 2. Participants' ranking of other outcomes from the SWR and SWDs.

	Increased confidence in your academic writing in English	Reduced anxiety related to academic writing	Increased confidence in your research	Improved time management	Reduced displacement activity	Better networking with other researchers	Increased efficiency in your research	More focused thinking around your research and writing	Increased awareness of how to be productive
<i>R-san, 1st year MA student</i>	1	4	4	2	4	4	3	4	5
<i>Y-san, 1st year MA student</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3
<i>A-san, 1st year PhD student</i>	3	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5
<i>D-san, 1st year PhD student</i>	5	4	5	4	4	3	5	4	4
<i>X-san, 1st year PhD student</i>	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4
<i>W-san, 2nd year PhD student</i>	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
<i>K-san, 3rd year PhD student</i>	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	5	4
<i>M-san, early career academic</i>	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

*Items were ranked 1–5, with 5 'strongly agree' and 1 'disagree'.

Although the Kyoto SWR and the subsequent SWDs did not focus on the reduction of anxiety related to writing in English specifically, our reflections suggested that this was an outcome for most of these students. Some of the components of the SWR and SWDs may relate to anxiety management, such as developing self-worth and self-efficacy as a writer, enjoyment and reduced stress of writing, and feedback and support from peers. These could be seen as directly or indirectly helping participants to manage writing-related anxiety. In the same way, the Kyoto SWR did not focus on improving participants' writing in English skill specifically, but rather the process of writing in English. However, it seems that improved writing was also an outcome, to some degree, for most participants. We concluded that such improvements were achieved through the focus on participation in writing at the SWR and SWDs rather than on addressing language deficiencies.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Our reflections on this intervention show that a SWR, especially when combined with SWDs, can provide containment, and that containment can reduce many second-language students' anxiety about research writing in English. Using the theoretical framework of containment to analyse students' responses was not about finding ways to control student behaviours; instead, it was about theorising our findings.

It could be argued that the SWR was successful for most participants because these attendees simply lacked knowledge about productive writing strategies. Nevertheless, the SWR and SWD had a similar effect on the early career researcher, who had already successfully completed a doctoral dissertation. From past experience, we would counter-claim that the SWR and follow-up SWDs worked by creating a supportive space where students could participate in productive writing.

Even if the debate about second-language students is moving on from a ‘deficit’ to a ‘participation’ discourse (Straker, 2016, p. 299), students, and academics, may still feel anxiety about writing for publication in English, and this may impinge on their output and progress in degrees and careers. Moreover, Japanese students are likely still to self-perceive in the deficit model and focus on their self-perception of lack of language competence. Therefore, this work answers the call for interventions that address these issues by promoting participation in academic writing.

With the increase globally of English-taught degree programs in non-English speaking countries, this work has important implications for doctoral supervisors/thesis advisors in a variety of settings where second-language speakers are required to write academically in English. The SWR and SWD can function as forums for developing publications and sharing ideas about research. Through this participation, early career researchers and academics can generate successful writing practices. What is most important is to put in place support structures for participation to occur. This suggests that the role of the doctoral supervisor/thesis advisor could include enabling students by developing such structures (Carter & Laurs, 2018).

The aim of the Kyoto retreat was to enable second-language PhD students’ participation in writing for publication in English by being immersed in good writing practice. The outcomes of this intervention are very promising. They suggest that the SWR, particularly combined with SWDs, works very well in a non-English setting with second-language students. It allowed participation in writing for most students. It enabled them to turn their attention away from difficulties they have with writing, and, for some, a potentially debilitating sense of language deficit. Our outcomes compare well with those of other studies in English language settings (MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012; Moore, 2003; Murray & Cunningham, 2011; Murray, Steckley, & MacLeod, 2012).

What is new is that this is the first time that the SWR has been shown to work in a non-western setting, where it reduced, for most participants, second-language PhD students’ anxieties about writing for publication and thesis writing in English, thereby removing a major obstacle to their participation in international research debates. The SWDs perhaps met the need, identified by Petrova and Coughlin (2012), for post-retreat activity to sustain the impact of the SWR, which may be eroded when people return to a mass of emails, for example.

This study shows that SWR can overcome a general barrier to graduate students’ writing for publication in English – anxiety – that may have specific impact in some settings – e.g. Japan. This is important because anxiety, in relation to writing for publication in English, is arguably, potentially, more serious for Japanese graduate students than many other second-language students due to the internalization of a sense of inferiority around proficiency. They not only have the writing-related anxiety experienced by graduate students in other settings, but also an arguably more acute writing-in-English-related anxiety because of their self-perception as deficient in this specific competency. It was not the purpose of this study to make judgements of the ‘quality’ of participants’ writing; instead, we wanted to address an important factor that might inhibit their writing. Establishing whether or not they were as deficient in writing for publication in English as they thought they were was not the point; instead, we provided a pedagogy for them to write in spite of this self-perception.

We conclude that where international publication is a ‘crucial outcome of doctoral education’ (Kamler, 2008, p. 292), a pedagogy for enabling PhD students to write for publication in English

should be a component of doctoral curricula. This study has shown that incorporating SWRs and SWDs is an effective pedagogical response.

For graduate schools, Directors of Research, research supervisors, thesis advisors and others with responsibility for supporting graduate students' development, the recommendations emerging from this study are that regular structured writing retreats or structured writing days, residential and non-residential, on-campus and off-campus, be provided for all students; that graduate students be encouraged to attend and supported during retreats, and that half-day sessions be dedicated to writing. We emphasise, and they can also emphasise, that it is this focus on privileging writing over other tasks that seems to work. Finally, we recommend that others use the same timings that were used in the Kyoto retreat, and that participants are encouraged to stop writing for the regular breaks in that retreat programme. This is easier said than done. When graduate students are in the flow of writing, they may be reluctant to stop. They may not know how to build regular stops into their regular writing. To help with this, the literature on SWRs provides strategies for those who want to start running writing retreats, including suggestions on how to help students find ways to keep writing throughout a SWR. We end with a reminder that SWRs are a valuable resource for those who run retreats: this is time for them to do their own writing.

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Appendix A. 8-month follow-up questionnaire

You attended the writing retreat in Kyoto in March. We would be really grateful if you would answer the following questions for our research about the impact of writing retreats. Please fill in the information below as best you can and use as much space as needed.

1. Your outputs since the writing retreat in March 2013
Number of chapters drafted/completed? Journal article submitted/accepted? Other outputs (books, book reviews, dissertations, research proposals, research grant applications, abstracts for call for papers etc.) Please give details.
2. Impact of retreat on your productivity
Since the writing retreat have you been more or less productive in your writing than you were before? Please explain your answer.
3. Impact of retreat on your writing practices
Please describe any changes in your writing practices that you think might be the result of attending the retreat.
4. Other outcomes
Have you experienced any of the following outcomes since attending the retreat? Please rank each 1-5, with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being disagree.
 - Increased confidence in your research
 - Increased confidence in your academic writing in English
 - Better networking with other researchers

- Increased efficiency in your research
- Improved time management
- Reduced anxiety related to academic writing
- Reduced displacement activity (doing other things when you should be writing)
- More focused thinking around your research and writing
- Increased awareness of how to be productive
- Other outcomes (please list)

Thanks so much.

Authors

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