



FACILITATING INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The Use of Focus/Writing Retreats at a Programme Level



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CONTEXT

- Challenges of leading large programmes (over 1000 students)
- Community: Building cohort identity & a learning community
- Outcomes: Student engagement in learning and at programme level
- Support: Effective communication, personalisation, inclusion & support

FOCUS/WRITING RETREATS:

- Traditional writing retreats are structured writing sessions, normally off campus. People will work in the same room but focus on their own work and towards the goals they have set for the session.
- A form of Body Doubling: In the neurodiversity community, body doubling is any activity where a group of people get together to work in the same space. This supports keeping each other from getting distracted and provides positive external peer pressure for working and accountability.



MY ADHD BRAIN



MY ADHD BRAIN WHEN BODY DOUBLING (MOSTLY)

RESEARCH SAYS:

- Inclusive for Neurodivergent people - supports getting tasks done
- Creates a community of practice/learning
- Builds learning through participation
- Increased output and productivity
- Positively impacts wellbeing
- Increased sense of support
- Supports self-regulation with goal setting and time management

(Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., 2023; Cunningham, 2022; Eagle et al., 2023; Eardley et al., 2021; French, 2018; Kornhaber et al., 2016; Murray and Newton, 2009; Tremblay-Wrogn et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2023)

FACILITATION OF SESSIONS

- Meet in person on campus
- Students and staff set their own goal for the two hour session
- Work on that work individually & quietly in focus slots (2 x 45 minutes)
- Reflect on their goal at the end
- Have free lunch - eat & make friends
- Come back next time for more productive work in a friendly community

MAKING IT INCLUSIVE

- Open to all students - useful for all
- Positive and productive atmosphere - ask for quiet to minimise distractions
- Give options to make the session inclusive/work for individuals e.g. use of headphones/earplugs & taking extra breaks
- Staff work alongside students on their own work

WE BELIEVED THAT FOCUS/WRITING RETREATS WOULD:

- Build an inclusive learning community that would support students' sense of belonging to their cohort & more widely at the University
- And that they, as an individual, matter, to staff and peers - creating meaningful relationships, and giving direct access to support, both from the programme team and peers
- All of this would lead to improved well-being as well as educational outcomes & satisfaction

STUDENT FEEDBACK

They were enjoyable, motivating and an encouraging quiet space

Provided a different atmosphere to other methods of study, a more formal and motivating atmosphere for focused work

Use of a break with peers to socialise

Provided space for intentional focused work, goal setting and reflection

Minimising the possibility of distractions

Allowed for good progress on assignments and exam prep

Positive impacts on productivity in and out of sessions

Sharing advice and experience, making new friends with peers

Feeling less alone with deadlines

Feeling like they are looked out for and cared for by staff as an individual

OUTCOMES:

- Community - Supported to build a community that included both staff and students - all with the same productive focus
- Outcomes - Gave students the space to be productive and supported developing skills in time management
- Support - Built a sense of support from staff and also as a community with their peers
- Overall - Worked well as a learning intervention at a programme level for both neurotypical and neurodivergent students

WHAT NEXT:

- Programme Level - Testing this further and gathering more data through both questionnaires and focus groups
- Module Level - Embed & test timetabled bi-weekly sessions in a PG module - to work on their assignment
- Explore co-facilitation of sessions with students - potentially through a Student Campus Partnership role

