

# **Siyaphumelela Conference 2024**

## **Fostering Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking among undergraduate students through Writing Centre group tutorials**

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# The DUT Writing Centres



- Established in 2013
- Six Writing Centre Sites – Four - Durban Campuses and Two in the Midlands
- Staff – Writing Centre Manager and four practitioners
- Approximately 40 tutors, senior students, all disciplines
- Nine months contract (15 hours a week)
- Core work – One-on-one and group consultations



# INTRODUCTION

- University students need supportive spaces to navigate the university environment.
- The complexity of under-performance in higher education in South Africa strongly suggests that attaining student success requires efforts on many fronts.
- Writing centres have long been regarded as free spaces.
- View writing as a process.
- The DUT writing centre aims to offer student support through collaborative writing consultations through one-on-one and group consultations.

# Background

- Academic support interventions are critical in socialising students to discipline discourse.
- The affective domain of teaching and learning is valued in writing centre work.
- Communities of Practice (CoP) as the underpinning theory.
- Collaborative engagement is an integral part of writing centre pedagogy and is focused solely on the student's diverse learning abilities and needs.
- This study explores *Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking among undergraduate students through Writing Centre group tutorials*

# Aim and Objectives of the study

## ❑ Research aim

The study aims to explore the influence of Writing Centre group consultations on students' learning and success.

## ❑ Research objectives

- ✓ To analyse the role of a writing centre tutor during a WrC consultation.
- ✓ To explore strategies used to encourage dialogue when engaging with students during WrC consultations.
- ✓ To examine factors that contribute to effective group consultation and encourage participation from all group members.



## Writing centre's pedagogical intervention in facilitating group tutorials

- Tutors facilitate dialogue around students' writing needs and offer a free space for students to reflect and participate in the discussion.
- Explores the importance of social interactions and relationships in the learning process.
- Writing centres as a space of engagement.
- Learning is influenced not only by individual characteristics and experiences but also by engagements and relationships.
- Since writing is a social construct, writing centres play an important role in fostering academic socialization between disciplines through student engagements.

# Group Tutorials



- Embedded in students' disciplines.
- WC Online System
- Writing as a process
- Using various pedagogical strategies to facilitate learning.
- Student-centred and acknowledge students' experiences and the knowledge they bring to the writing activity.
- Non-directive where tutors ask open-ended questions and attentively listen to students.
- Focus is on students' experiences and perceptions of the writing centre group tutorials and their influences on writing development., both perceived and actual.



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## Methodology

- Mixed-methods research design.
- This study draws data from the writing centre tutor participants using semi-structured interviews (qualitative) and surveys (quantitative) with students.

## Participants and setting

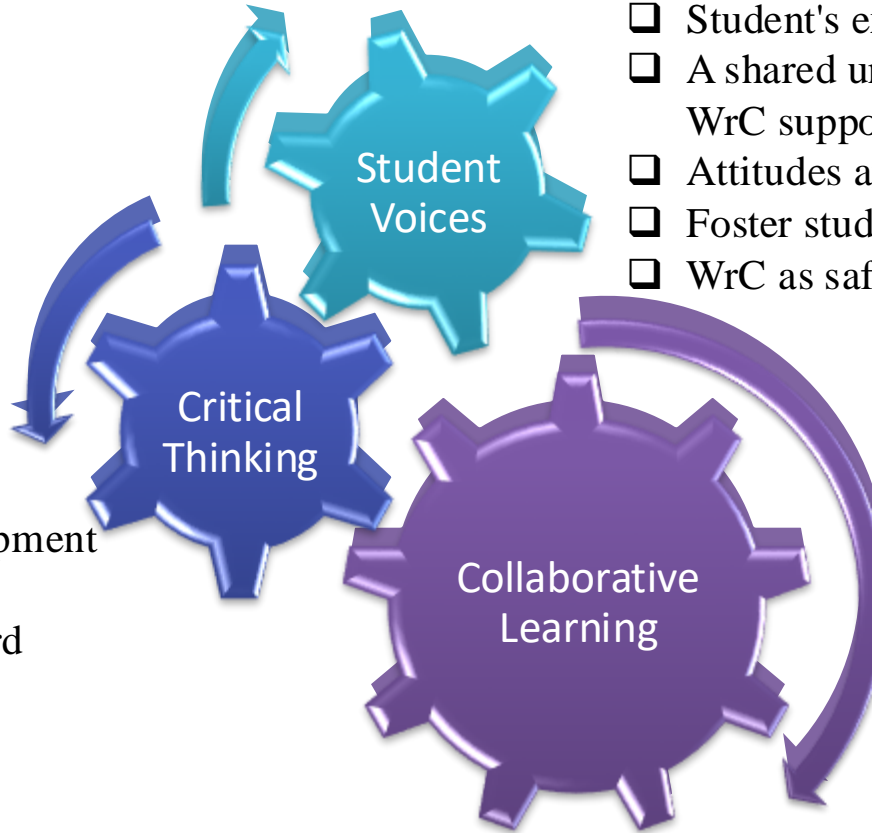
- Data was collected from two of the six DUT writing centres, one in the Durban campus and one in the Midlands.
- Twenty tutors participated
- 93 students who booked and consulted in group sessions during the first semester of 2024 (\*study is ongoing)

## Procedure

- Semi-structured interviews and surveys were used to collect data from tutors and students. The gathered data were analysed using an inductive analytic technique by detecting common themes in the tutors' and students' responses. Additional organisational categories derived from participant responses (e.g., 'degree of proficiency') were employed.

# Analysis and Discussion

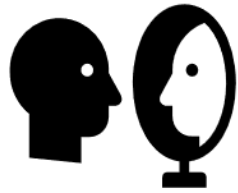
## Common Themes



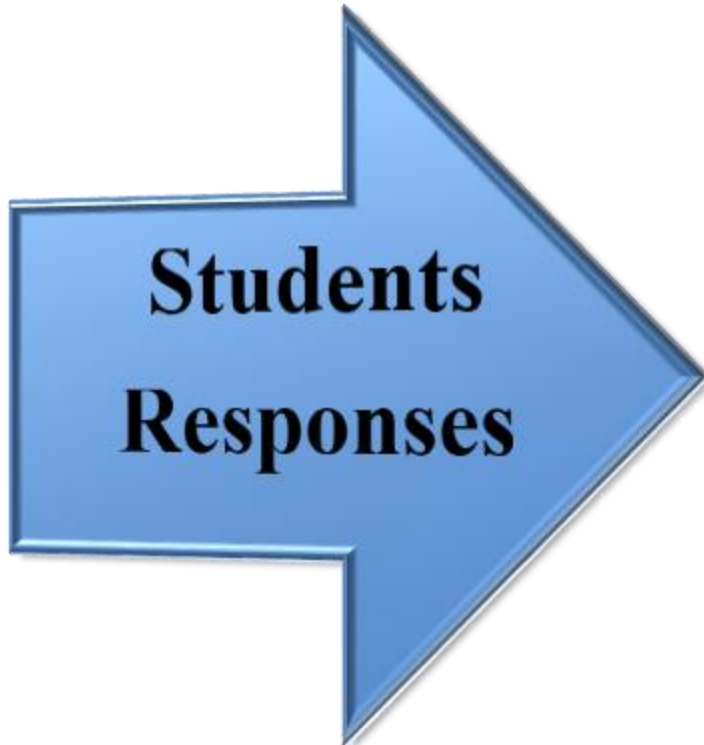
- Holistic Approach
- Academic writing development
- Research skills
- Feedback and Feedforward
- Communication

- Student's experiences
- A shared understanding of WrC support
- Attitudes and perceptions
- Foster student success
- WrC as safe spaces

- Integrated support
- Lecturer involvement
- Academic & Support Departments
- Tutor-Student Engagements



## Students' perceptions of group consultations



I like group work because we all have to work together and we get to bounce ideas off each other

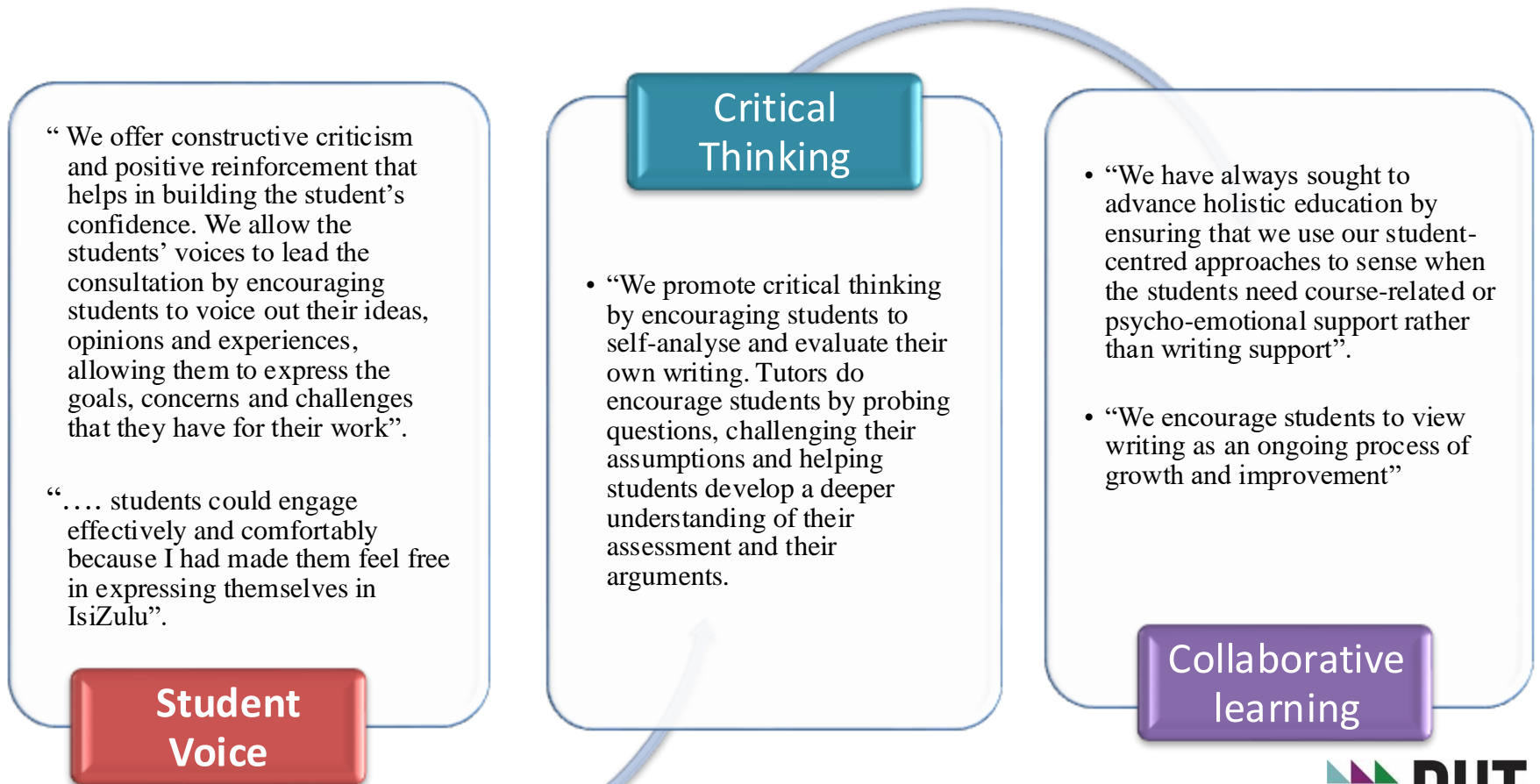
Sometimes tutors are not helpful, they want us to do all the work.  
Lecturers want proof that we have consulted the Writing Centre

I enjoy group sessions because we share ideas and that helps us submit good assignments. The tutors are so calm and friendly and encourage us to participate.

I prefer individual assignments  
girls are bossy and annoying.  
I don't have time to keep going to the WrC ..... No extra marks

# Tutors Responses

Can you think of and describe a particular group consultation that you conducted, **what went well or didn't go well and why?**



# A way forward for writing centres



- Writing Centres need to be agile to changes and responsive to students' academic needs
- Tutor training specific to group tutorials with an emphasis on student engagement is essential
- The opportunity for WrC to disrupt the traditional ways of engaging by offering an alternative learning environment that embraces students' diversity.
- Creating transformational learning spaces for students
- Build communities of practice and think very deliberately about how we are engaging in deeper learning.
- Reinforcement of collaborative engagement to foster integrated discipline-specific writing development.
- Tutors to reflect on their practice

THANK  
YOU

