



## **The Pink Palace experiment: How a writing club assists in the retention of first year Youth Work students**

### **Abstract**

Presenters: Dr Gabriella Pretto and Mr Paul Russell. Many students attracted to youth work come with passion and maturity, poor academic writing skills and low self-esteem. Often they have had unsuccessful school experiences or a disrupted education. Generally, youth work students do not readily engage with university support services, they prefer the Pink Palace in the Youth Work area to be a one-stop shop. As literature suggests that student engagement and retention is linked to academic self-efficacy, it was decided to trial a writing club, Youth Work Writing Club (YWWC); a forum for individual students to build confidence, reduce assessment anxiety and participate in peer collaboration, within a discipline specific learning and discourse community. Its key commitment is as a first year retention tool to assist in the transition to university life. The YWWC welcomes students with varying levels of ability and meets weekly to give students an opportunity to give and receive feedback on their writing as well as provide support and motivation. It is facilitated by three mentors: two lecturers and a student, as part of her third year research project. It is a Participatory Action Research project drawing on interviews, observation and survey data. At VU, writing groups like this usually support HDR candidates, not undergraduates. The YWWC writing model is embedded within a discipline and does not follow traditional approaches and methods. It has an evolving format, student-directed, and does not fit easily into existing university paradigms for writing groups or academic support. The number of students attending the writing club is increasing, and early indications are it is having a significant impact. Although primarily targeted at the first year Bachelor of Youth Work, it is attracting students from the second and third year of the program. It might be a model that other disciplines might use to enhance student engagement and retention.