

# **‘The books don’t talk to me!’: Postgraduate student groups and research student identity formation**

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This paper explores alternative spaces for learning amongst postgraduate research (PGR) students in the form of research-related groups such as reading and discussion groups, writing groups, seminar series or social groups. Our research with PGR students and academics explores the pedagogy and role of such groups in student learning and identity formation. In this paper, we discuss our findings related to PGR student needs and the factors prompting the formation of research-related groups. A survey of 36 PGR students revealed that students were reasonably satisfied with the formal components of their research degrees such as supervision and mandatory units of study. Yet general dissatisfaction with other opportunities for intellectual engagement, and feelings of isolation, were also prevalent. We hypothesise that though a majority of students might feel supported to complete their higher research degree, they are not necessarily feeling supported in the transition to becoming scholars or in developing broader scholarly interests and networks. As other academic literature has opined, research-related student groups can fulfil a dual function, assisting students towards completion of their research degree but also socialising students into academia. This paper discusses the role that higher education institutions and faculties might play in supporting research-related groups. In particular, there is a balance to be achieved between facilitating groups and enabling sustainability while ensuring that PGR students maintain autonomy and a reciprocal degree of responsibility in governance of such groups, which are key to developing an academic identity.