Student Partners

Student Partners: The Write Idea for Scholarly Collaboration

Janice E. Hawkins

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By collaborating with students for publication, nursing faculty can foster professional writing skills while simultaneously increasing personal scholarship. An independent study elective for undergraduate nursing students to promote scholarly writing and guide manuscript development provides a forum to formalize collaborative partnerships and organize the writing process. Doing so saves time, leads to better manuscripts, and assists in avoiding misunderstandings and unethical practices with student co-authors. This manuscript offers tips for designing a writing elective
independent study to encourage productive and rewarding partnership experiences.

Writing for publication is a skill that requires development and guidance for success. Mentoring is a proven strategy to promote effective writing and increase success in publishing (Cleary et al., 2014; Martz et al., 2009). Nurse educators recognize mentoring future scholars as important to the profession but are often too busy to provide mentorships due to their own scholarly activities and institutional pressures to publish (Martin & Hodge, 2011). By sharing success stories and lessons learned in the development of an independent study for writing, I hope to encourage fellow educators and authors to consider opportunities to mentor student writers while collaborating on potential manuscripts.

Partnering with students to mentor scholarly writing while simultaneously increasing my own productivity is a work smart approach that I discovered while attending a writing workshop with Dr. Kathleen (Kathy) T. Heinrich. At the workshop, faculty identified the lack of time to write as the biggest obstacle to producing manuscripts for publication. Dr. Heinrich encourages working smarter by finding writing opportunities from activities that are already a part of everyday practice. Working smarter is now part of my overall strategy to turn my everyday practice into scholarly activity.

For example, students at my institution are required to complete a nursing elective. In lieu of the required elective, students may enroll in an independent study. To fulfill the independent study, students have historically completed community service projects or externships and written reflective summaries of their experiences. Monitoring the
independent studies and grading the reflective summaries are part of my everyday practice and teaching workload. To work smarter and encourage student scholarly writing projects, I created a writing option for the independent study to allow students to work collaboratively on a manuscript for publication. This has proven to be a work smart success. The manuscript development option has already resulted in four published articles co-written with student authors.

SUCCESS STORIES

One success story, an article published in *Nursing 2012*, highlights the accomplishments of recent RN-BSN graduates and documents personal gains in returning to school for the BSN (Hawkins & Shell, 2012). The manuscript stemmed from another part of my everyday practice, the capstone presentations in our RN-BSN program. Inspired by the presentations, I offered to collaborate with a student on a manuscript to share student perceptions of educational outcomes related to BSN completion. She eagerly accepted the offer. I have found that students are enthusiastic about writing for publication. They view writing for publication as “real life” projects rather than simply school assignments.

The second successful article produced in partnership with a student shares reflections of an international service learning experience (Hawkins & Vialet, 2012). Both the student and I participated in the international experience and developed a manuscript from our written reflections. Two additional manuscripts, co-written with students enrolled in externships at local hospitals, were published in student journals (Hawkins, O’Connor, & Santo Domingo, 2012; Quinn, & Hawkins, 2012). These articles focused on
some of the benefits of participating in nursing externships. Of course, not every manuscript written as part of the independent study course is published but students learn about writing for publication by systematically going through the process of preparing a manuscript.

AN INTERDEPENDENT STUDY COURSE

Writing partnerships more accurately require interdependent relationships rather than independent study. The “interdependent” study course is designed to provide mentorship of scholarly writing and encourage ethical collaborations while producing manuscripts for submission to professional journals. Course objectives are aimed at writing skills such as identifying the target audience, selecting the appropriate format for the intended venue, writing clearly and effectively within the nursing community, utilizing supporting literature and writing grammatically correct, diverse manuscripts for potential submission. A formal partnership agreement facilitates a positive collaborative experience by establishing mutual expectations, determining appropriate authorship order, and developing a timeline for project completion (Heinrich, 2008b).

To assist students in deciding between developing a manuscript or completing the traditional reflective writing assignment for the independent study, we meet at the beginning of the semester to discuss potential writing topics. I provide an overview of writing for publication and briefly review writing tools that may be unfamiliar to undergraduate students such as author guidelines and query letters. Students have the option to develop a manuscript independently or as co-authors. Independent student authors receive guidance, mentoring and editing assistance but are responsible for
the full content and submission, if desired, of manuscripts. Authorship responsibilities and contributions to content are shared with students who opt to partner for the manuscript development.

Writing partnerships should be “conscious, committed and contracted” to avoid misunderstandings and increase productivity (Heinrich, 2011, p. 3). Following Heinrich’s suggestions, I meet with student authors to create a partnership contract and covenant. At the first meeting, we discuss our own and each other’s wishes, fears, and concerns, which is an essential component of a partnership contract (Heinrich, 2011). The opportunity to express individual goals as well as worries and reservations allows each partner to negotiate a mutually beneficial working relationship. Our covenant is a conscientious agreement to safeguard the fears and concerns of each partner. From the faculty viewpoint, my fears usually include concerns that students will not be responsible and committed writing partners.

Students may feel particularly vulnerable in a collaborative partnership with faculty. Writing for publication is often a new and intimidating endeavor for them. Faculty experts are uniquely equipped to mentor and guide students through this process but hold power over course grades. One suggestion to minimize the power differential between students and faculty is to establish the elective as a pass/fail course and allow students to negotiate a contract for successful course completion. Some nurse educators recommend that manuscripts co-authored with faculty should not be completed as part of a course (Nishikawa et al., 2014). For our purposes, students participate in the independent study electively and substitute the course to fulfill a nursing elective requirement. Submission to a journal or acceptance for publication...
is not a requirement.

After discussing our partnership covenant and brainstorming potential writing topics, the first written requirement is the Publication Worksheet (Heinrich 2008a, p. 246), which serves as a planning tool and provides direction to guide the manuscript. Together, we determine the focus of the article and craft a working title. We identify the target audience and possible venues for publication and then review the author guidelines for our targeted journals. Completion of the Publication Worksheet is a guided process through face-to-face meetings and email communication.

Next, we develop a proposed outline and timeline for completion of the planned manuscript (Heinrich, 2008a). We organize the content and determine the contributing author for each section. We agree upon the authorship responsibilities and the order of authors for the final submission. The author who contributes the greatest percentage of the content and assumes responsibility for submitting the manuscript is the first author. Nurse educators should model and encourage ethical practices in writing for publication. Authorship rules require that all authors make significant contributions to be included on published articles (Kennedy, Roush, & Barnsteiner, 2012). Students are given the option to assume the lead author role. A written draft of our outline, timeline, authorship agreement, and expected means of communication serves as the contract for our partnership agreement.

To familiarize students with common steps in writing for publication, they draft a query letter as an assignment for the course. I provide examples and resources to assist in writing this letter. Depending on the journal
guidelines, finalized queries are submitted to journal editors as required or recommended. Our next step is to produce a draft of the manuscript. After agreeing on our assigned sections, drafts are typically written asynchronously. Following the author guidelines, students submit appropriately formatted electronic copies of their drafts. This allows me to monitor the progress of the manuscript, insert content for my assigned sections and provide feedback and direction for revisions. Based on my comments and suggestions, the students revise and submit subsequent drafts of their sections for further feedback. Students review my content and make comments and suggestions for improvement. This process continues until we determine that the manuscript is ready for submission. We conclude the interdependent study with the final draft of the manuscript. Submission to a journal, if completed, often extends into the next semester.

LESSONS LEARNED

Collaborating with students for publication has been a learning process with a number of lessons learned. My initial attempts to partner with students for publication were enthusiastic but poorly planned. Due to the lack of planning and direction, my first student partners submitted writing samples that were disorganized. It was burdensome to craft a logically flowing manuscript that included their contributions. Ultimately, students contributed minimally to the final product. When entering into collaborative writing partnerships, it is important to plan ahead and clearly define expectations for the product. It was a missed opportunity to mentor a systematic writing process and improve student writing skills.

Another lesson learned is that students are not accustomed to the revision
process. Undergraduate students typically submit written assignments that are graded and returned without the opportunity to revise. It is a culture shift to complete several revisions of a single written product. Students need to be aware from the beginning of the partnership that writing for publication often includes numerous revisions. Faculty mentors will need to provide encouragement and coaching to facilitate the revision process. The good news, since improving writing skills is a primary objective, is that students report writing assignments that include faculty feedback and revisions is extremely helpful to improving their writing (Troxler, Vann & Oermann, 2011).

Partnering with students for manuscript development will not always result in a publication. To reward students for their efforts, I have learned to look for other venues to publish final products. Students have successfully authored and co-authored articles that have been published in newspapers, newsletters, blogs and university websites. Students enjoy seeing their writing “in print” even if the venue is not a scholarly journal. Alternate publication venues still contribute to student confidence and reflect positively on the nursing program.

CONCLUSION

Co-authoring manuscripts with student writers has been a positive experience. Strong writing skills are essential for nursing graduates. Writing partnerships offer one mechanism to improve student writing while increasing faculty scholarly productivity through everyday practices. Educators who partner with students work smart by utilizing a systematized and evidence-based approach for scholarly writing to mentor student writers
and increase their own productivity.

REFERENCES


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janice E. Hawkins, MSN, RN is an educator and advisor in the School of Nursing at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. She teaches in the undergraduate program and serves as the Chief Departmental Advisor for nursing.

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