Challenges of Collaborative Writing  
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Introduction
The number of research and development projects between nursing education and employment has increased due to developments in vocational higher education. These projects focus on the development of nursing teaching and learning, as well as nursing practice. The crucial question is how innovations implemented in projects transfer to nursing education, to other organisations, and especially to the employment sector. As a result, collaborative writing has become a current topic in nursing education.

Teachers have several roles in these projects: as supervisors, project coordinators, researchers or project leaders. The documentation and reporting of the projects is often done by teachers even though students, practitioners and researchers have also been involved in the projects. What kinds of advantages could be achieved if writing could take place in the same collaborative spirit as the developmental work?

In this article, I focus on collaborative writing with a nursing teacher, researcher and nursing administrator writing together. As a writing team, they wrote about a project in which nursing documentation of stroke survivors' care was developed in collaboration between nursing education and the local hospital. The project took place at a time when documentation at the hospital was moving from a paper-based to an electronic system.

Approaches to collaborative writing
Researchers have studied collaborative writing from several interdisciplinary perspectives and in several professional environments (Van Waes 2004). Lowry et al (2004, 72) define collaborative writing as an “iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates and communicates during the creation of a common document.” However, collaborative writing in the context of nursing education-nursing practice-developmental projects has not been the focus of research.

Collaborative writing as shared learning
In collaborative research and development projects, it is common for papers also to be written together. The background for this is in distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995), where learning can be the result of shared learning and collaboration (Cronin 2004). Writing a publication in a team is “visible” collaborative writing, but collaborative writing can also be understood in a wider sense, as the effects a community has on the development of what is written and the actual text production. Although a text is produced by an individual author, it has been created by several people or by communities, e.g. research groups, and work and research communities (Cronin 2004).

Collaborative writing as a writing strategy
Collaborative writing is a process that includes pre- and post-task activities, team formation and planning (Lowryn et al. 2004). In preparation for collaborative writing, the goals are set, the team is
defined, suitable writing tools are chosen and the work is started. Structured collaboration includes team-building, planning the teamwork, document production and formation of the product, which includes final document review, group approval, process documentation and external approval process. The ‘post-collaborative writing’ tasks are created by documentation, sharing and evaluation of the process and planning the next phases.

Lowry et al (2004) have described the strategies of collaborative writing as follows: group single-author writing, sequential single writing, parallel writing and reactive writing. In the group single-author writing strategy, one person writes on behalf of the whole group. In sequential single writing, each author writes their own share of the text, after which it is given to others to be edited. In parallel writing, each author has their own limited area of responsibility: the text is divided into parts or the authors have different roles, where one is author, one is editor and one is responsible for evaluating the text. Parallel writing can be done horizontally (i.e. at the same time) or sequentially. In reactive writing, authors work simultaneously and incorporate their own texts into the others’ writing.

**Collaborative writing as a way of crossing the work-education gap in nursing**

However, the problems that people trained and working in different professions and institutions face when attempting to write collaboratively may be linked to issues such as power relations or differing assumptions about writing and knowledge-making (Forman 2004, Palmeri 2004, Gardner 2005). This problem becomes evident when people in an educational setting, such as nursing education, write together with people from workplaces (Dias et al. 1999).

In nursing education, a work-education/practice-theory gap has been reported. According to Gallagher (2004), the metaphor of a gap may also have inhibited creativity in the design and delivery of programmes, and leading to missed opportunities for nursing students to learn from practical contexts. As well as the performance of student nurses serving as evidence of integration, many of the initiatives to bridge the gap have focused on the role of the nurse teacher (Landers 2000). Research and developmental projects in which nursing education, research and practice staff work in collaboration can be seen as opportunities to cross the gap via collaborative actions that also include practitioners in the process.

Collaborative writing can be seen as a tool for promoting developmental transfer (Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström 2003), based on collective activity in different social organizations. To create developmental transfer, teams and groups cooperate to find solutions to problems with no previous answers. Multi-voiced solutions, involving different kinds of expertise, are seen as more efficient than uni-voiced problem-solving.

**Case Study**

The writing team had three members: a nursing teacher, a nursing administrator and a researcher. They were carrying out a project in which nursing documentation was developed in the area of stroke survivor care, and were writing an article for an academic nursing journal in the field of evidence-based nursing. The goals of the article were: 1) to define common concepts for use in different professions when describing stroke survivors’ capacities and changes in those capacities, 2) to build and clarify the framework for collaborative research and development between the polytechnic and the hospital.

I wanted to investigate:

1) How does the team construct the manuscript?

2) What kinds of collaborative tools are used in writing?
3) How does the writing process reflect the collaboration across the boundaries between education, work and research?

To answer these questions, the team tape-recorded their discussion of the writing process and I also tape-recorded a seminar where their paper was discussed. The seminar was part of a writing course for people working in polytechnic-employment projects, in which the team participated. Additionally, the paper produced in the writing process was used as data. I used thematic content analysis to identify themes relevant to the research questions.

**Constructing the Manuscript**

The team drew up a preliminary design for the manuscript, which included the following sections:

1. **Summary:** developing nursing practices,
2. **Background and goals of the project,**
3. **Purpose of the project,**
4. **Methods used in the project,**
5. **Developing the expertise of participants,**
6. **Project resources and**
7. **Discussion.**

During the seminar, the text was thoroughly discussed and the team stressed that they were writing in order to model and develop the methods of documentation, and that the text was addressed to practitioners, i.e. nurses:

*It would have been easier to write for teachers in a teaching journal, but in this case, we want nurses to be the readers.* (Teacher)

In summary of the seminar discussion, the team saw the preliminary manuscript as a shortened project report rather than an article, even though the big picture of the project was missing:

*It would have been easier if you had written about the documentation, because it is what is done in the project. Now it is difficult to understand from this paper what you exactly want to write about.* (Seminar participant)

In the second version of the manuscript, the emphasis was on theoretical analysis of the method, but the practical application was missing from the text. In the team discussion, they considered this omission and this led to a dilemma: the purpose was to write a ‘practice-oriented text’ for nurses but, on the other hand, the journal and writing guidelines represented the traditions of academic writing. The team tried to solve the dilemma and considered whether to continue writing or to give up:

Nursing teacher:

*Anyway, our employer prefers participation in seminars rather than writing. Therefore what is the point of writing? By speaking, you can spread "the word" quicker, you get into contact with several people.*

The researcher agreed with the teacher:

*There is no point in writing if there is not a suitable publication forum...There are no journals for this kind of practice-oriented research. Besides that, nurses do not read!*

However, after the “crisis of not having a proper publication forum”, the new objective of writing appeared to be writing as a means to promote developmental work:

*We write this in order to develop practices. We have to consider the perspective of work, all the time.* (Nurse researcher)
Collaborative tools in writing
The timetables of the project and the writing course that the team attended defined the timing of the collaborative writing. Additionally, different occasions, e.g. seminars at the school hospital, as well as the project meetings, were opportunities for reflecting on the content of the article:

We present this paper in several places at school and in the hospital, and get feedback, what is good and what is not… (Nursing teacher)

We have presented this to the students, and when we have applied for grants, and then there is the advisory board in the project ... (Nursing researcher)

The team planned and conducted writing in team meetings and via e-mail between meetings. The periods between meetings were time for homework: reading, preparing and writing. The meetings were described as places for dialogue, negotiation and reflection as well as for information exchange:

Collaborative meetings have opened up the theoretical background of the study to me. (Nursing administrator)

How does the writing process reflect the collaboration across the boundaries between education, work and Research?
In the developmental project, the team had different roles connected to their roles in their own organisations, and these transferred into the writing collaboration: the teacher was the writing coordinator, a secretary who organised the innovations implemented by the researcher, and an administrator both on practical and theoretical levels:

She (the teacher) draws up the timetables and takes care of the material, copies, etc, which we need in our meetings. (Researcher)

The researcher was the theorist who had the idea and was responsible for the whole content of the article. The nursing administrator represented nursing practice, but also decision-making:

If she (the nurse administrator) were in the position of a nurse, it would be totally different. (Teacher)

The administrator at the hospital knows what is happening there. Via this collaboration she also is aware of what is needed to make the developmental work achieve results and not fail because of objections. The reason why we now write together, is to make the ”everyday work” work. This is important to us in these developmental projects. (Teacher)

Working in collaboration made it possible to cross the boundaries between education, work and research both on a practical level and to producing a new model of collaborative working between the settings:

We do not need to go there (the hospital) with papers and try to explain what we have and are doing, because we work here together. (Researcher)

We are building a common view about this. (Teacher)

We are using this team and this writing as a tool to promote developmental work in the project. (Researcher)

Conclusion
Research and developmental work has made writing a new element in nursing education. This is changing the work of nursing teachers and is giving them new opportunities to solve the problems caused by the theory-practice gap. However, collaborative writing in these projects is not yet common, and at this point it is important to analyse the possibilities for collaborative writing and to
discuss the tools and strategies.

I conclude that collaborative writing is a means to promote developmental work, and to mediate between and across the boundaries of education, work and research (cf Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström 2003). The team was simultaneously doing the developmental work and writing about it. Writing was ‘nourished’ by the discussions on various occasions in the project, and the project was developed via the texts the team produced. This multi-voiced process can also lead to deeper understanding of practice-oriented writing and of using writing as a tool in collaboration between schools and workplaces.

Based on the experiences in this case, I define practice-oriented collaborative writing in education-work collaboration as writing together in teams which have members from both settings. In addition, via collaborative writing the needs and perspectives of work can be made visible and the texts can be used as mediators and tools for developmental work in such projects.

It emerged that the object of writing was determined by the journal rather than by the aims of the study. The writing process highlighted the role of the text as a means of developmental work between education, research and work.

References

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