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Self-Reflection Along the Path to Writing, Reviewing, and Editing

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Recently I read a guest editorial by Dr. Kathy Oman (2009) encouraging our emergency nursing colleagues to professionally engage one another as peer reviewers. For me, this one page explanation of the duties of a reviewer and the benefits of peer review was a timely publication.

Approximately 18 months ago I decided that I would contribute to my profession of nursing by being involved in nursing publication. I had published one book review for the *Journal of Emergency Nursing* six years ago (Harding, 2003). I had a clinical story published within a medical center where I was working five years ago. In 2004, I applied and was selected to be a reviewer for the *Journal of Emergency Nursing*. I was nervous about acting in this role, but with each review I became more confident. However, I really was not sure about what my role really entailed or what feedback I should be providing to the authors.

I reflected upon my experience when I submitted that first book review. I wrote a short review trying to summarize a book into a few paragraphs that emergency nurses like me would take the time to read. Truly, I did not think of myself as a "writer" (Heinrich, 2008a). My only real experience writing was in my educational preparation, but I never received excellent grades related to my writing at that time. Why would I even bother now?

When I thought about why I should write before starting the article, I believed it would be 'impressive', 'a resume builder', and a way 'to be noticed' in the Emergency Nurses Association, the society that owns the *Journal of Emergency Nursing*. I knew that none of these were good reasons to publish; I did not even think they were good reasons to act at all. However, as I started to write, I enjoyed reflecting on the book I had read. I enjoyed thinking about how to write and the strategy of how to format the review. I got to a point where I felt I could submit the article I had written and emailed it to the editor.

A few weeks later I received an email back about my submission. The editor had taken time to respond to me! I was ecstatic, but nervous to see what the editor had to tell me about what I had written. In this response the editor provided me with encouraging feedback and suggestions for modification. The editor wanted me to make sure 'my voice' was heard clearly by the reader before it was published. This was a similar experience to those practices described by Hawkins (2009). Reflecting on the comments I was provided, I made corrections and submitted the revised article back to the editor. I received my response from the editor approximately one week later stating that the book review was going to be published. It felt remarkable to have achieved this accomplishment. I reflect on that positive experience each time I think that what I or my team is doing is not worth publishing.

I have received a group of different rejection notices since my first successful submission. Some have been heart-breaking, like one I received that had most of the paper sent back deleted in red ink with a reviewer comment stating, "This should never be published, especially in MY journal". That type of review is the antithesis to the best practices described by Heinrich (2008b). In her article Heinrich describes the role of the reviewers as encouraging authors with 'compassionate critique'. Red ink, whole paragraph deletions, and demeaning comments are not encouraging or professional.

I mentioned that the Oman article I read was timely for me. In December of 2008, I was selected to act on a conditional basis as a section editor for the *Journal of Emergency Nursing*. Since 2003 I have come to realize that nursing publication has a tremendous value for the profession. I have also become a reviewer for a host of varied publications. Contributing in this manner to professional nursing has allowed me to remain current with recent research and current practices. Contributing to nursing's professional body of work helps to define and deepen the profession. Nursing scientists who bring their work to publication refine our processes and expand our knowledge to better care for patients. Nurse authors share our collective voice, not just to document and describe the effects, efforts and emotions of our work, but to declare our vocation as meaningful, inspiring and autonomous.

As I seek to improve my skills as an author, reviewer and editor, I hope to have a positive impact on each member of the publishing process with whom I interact. I hope to provide novice nurse authors with the ability to see that their individual contributions add to our collective professional voice. I hope that for each reviewer I work with, I can provide a sound method for reviewing and guidance for providing every author with constructive compassionate critique. I hope that I can be open to feedback and take time to self reflect with humility. In my self reflection I hope to improve.

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