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Criteria for Defining Authorship: Equally Important for Textbooks and Educational Resources

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Strict criteria to determine entitlement to authorship of manuscripts submitted to peer reviewed journals is a hallmark of quality. To date this expectation has not been applied to the authorship of textbooks and other educational resources. This paper discusses criteria for authorship and applicability to the textbook and educational resource market. Failure to apply criteria in this domain could weaken the academic status of these contributions to learning and teaching for the health professions, particularly nursing.

AUTHORSHIP CRITERIA

Authorship in relation to peer reviewed journal articles is the subject of much debate and perhaps ironically is also vigorously discussed in an increasing number of peer reviewed publications (Brand 2012, Butler & Ginn 1998, Marusi, Bosnjak & Jeroni 2011, Street, Rogers, Israel & Braunack-Mayer 2010). Commonly these publications refer to what constitutes an entitlement to authorship (Marusi et al 2011, Street et al 2010) and ways to determine the order of authors (Cleary, Jackson, Walter, Watson & Hunt 2012). Who should be included as an author has been defined by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2014). They outline three criteria that must be met for an individual to be included as an author:

Authorship credit should be based only on substantial contributions to 1) conception and design or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. All three criteria must be met.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has added a fourth criteria: "In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work he or she has done, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work" (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 2013, p 2).

AUTHORSHIP CRITERIA AND QUALITY OF PUBLICATIONS

Authorship criteria are intended to protect against the inappropriate attribution of authorship. The two most commonly identified are ghost authorship (Feeser & Simon 2008), where an individual has made a substantial contribution to writing a manuscript and is not attributed as an author, often a student or junior researcher, and gift authorship (Brand 2012). The latter is where an individual is included as an author despite not having made a substantial contribution, usually because of seniority or a sense of indebtedness. These practices reward authors and researchers who develop

their publication and track record through unfair means, which undermines the value and integrity of academic track records (Street et al 2010).

AUTHORSHIP OF TEXTBOOKS AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

While publication in refereed journals might be regarded as the gold standard in publication, textbooks and other educational resources are regarded as important components of the quality teaching required to produce graduate professionals with the skills, expertise, and enthusiasm to contribute to a high standard of care in health services (Baldwin, Conger, Maycock & Abegglen 2002). Unfortunately, the importance of these works is not readily appreciated within academic circles. This represents a considerable departure from the historical value of texts, which in the past were considered a valuable scholarly endeavor and undertaken by faculty at prestigious institutions (Text and Academic Authors Association 1994). If expert scholars do not write textbooks and educational resources due to the perceived inferiority of these resources, then an inherent danger that those without demonstrable expertise in the relevant field may be co-opted into the writing of educational resources well outside their areas of content expertise. This will ultimately have an impact on the quality of the work produced, and the integrity of the discipline it represents.

Interestingly no mention of criteria for authorship for textbooks could be found in the published literature. It is likely that this reflects, at least in part, the different processes in authorship for these two mediums. When publishing a manuscript in a peer-reviewed journal, the authors submit the work for scrutiny and review by the journal editor and peer reviewers (Happell 2012). Generally this means at least two to three independent people with expertise in the content area or methodology provide feedback and determine whether the work is worthy of publication. This scrutiny is important for the work to be taken seriously and for the work to be considered influential (Cleary, Walter, Jackson & Daly 2013, Fisher & Powers 2004).

As books are commissioned works, they are not always subject to rigorous or thorough peer review, and the quality may vary depending on the authors, editors and the publisher (Cleary et al 2013). Another challenge is that books do not contribute to the assessment of a researcher's scientific output using databases such as Web of Science or Scopus; only Google Scholar includes books, but it is non-refereed and considered unreliable (Hunt, Cleary & Walter 2010).

CRITERIA FOR THE AUTHORSHIP OF TEXTBOOKS AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

In the case of textbooks and educational resources, it is generally the publisher who contacts potential authors on the basis of their academic standing and reputation in the field. A review of publishers' websites and conversations with representatives from publishing companies suggest they look for:

- Academics who have strong track records in the area they propose to publish not only in teaching but in the research, evaluation, and service to the profession. Essentially they seek people recognised as leaders in the content area.
- Congruence between the authors' credentials, experience and their teaching area. The discipline

strengths and reputation of their institution can also be a persuasive factor.

- How they present their material at the earliest stages, ie, at the proposal stage. It is important they have a sense of how the subject is being taught, not only in their own institution, but across the board. Their writing must be accessible to students.
- Their motivation for publishing: often academics want to publish a book because they have not found a suitable text on the market and want to fill the gap, or to develop a text that is conceptually different to those currently available.

While publishers have their own mechanisms for review, their role is quite different than that of a journal editor. Book publishers are motivated by profit, meaning that quality, while important, is insufficient in and of itself; the text or resources must be marketable.

Quality scholarly journals, on the other hand, reflect principles of editorial independence (World Association of Medical Editors 2000), enabling the journal editor to focus on the quality of manuscripts submitted, rather than actively supporting the objectives, including monetary goals, of the professional body that owns the journal or the publishing company that produces it.

Nevertheless, textbooks and other educational resources play an important role in professional education, and students and the broader profession are entitled to be confident that they meet an appropriate standard of professional and scholarly scholarship. Ensuring they are written by academics or clinicians with expertise in the field is an essential component in reaching this standard. The criteria for authorship described previously (with modifications to number one to describe content areas rather than research) should be applied rigorously.

Each author should play a role that is clearly identifiable and defensible. For example, one would expect a text or resource on mental health nursing to be written by appropriately qualified and experienced mental health nurses or person(s) with lived experience of mental illness, mental health challenges, or mental health service use. Depending on the broader focus of the book, it might be appropriate to include a specialist from another field. For example, a section on postpartum depression might benefit from the input of a midwife in relation to the impact of childbirth on motherhood. Depending on the scope and depth of involvement, this person may be identified as a contributor rather than an author. Either way, the specific contribution that person has made needs to be clearly articulated, to avoid confusion or worse, the impression that a midwife is qualified to educate students on mental health nursing.

Stating succinctly but clearly the expertise each author brings and the contribution they make to the text is therefore crucial in ensuring the production of quality educational resources. Not only can this assist publishers in determining the quality and credibility of an authorship team, it can also assure the academic prescribing the text, and the student purchasing it, that the authors have the credentials one should expect for a discipline based text.

CONCLUSION

Following of authorship criteria strictly is considered the hallmark of credibility in the publication of scholarly work in peer reviewed journals. To date no similar standards have been developed or adopted for the publication of textbooks and other educational resources. The lesser importance attributed to publications primarily related to learning and teaching, rather than the dissemination of research findings, may lead to compromising the standard of authorship. The establishment of guidelines to ensure authors have a clear and defensible role in the production of the scholarly work represents an important starting point in promoting the value of texts and educational resources and the integrity of the disciplines they represent.

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