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Writing for Publication: A Scholars' Group Approach

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Effective pedagogical strategies in nursing must be readily available and accessible to peers in order to incorporate them into nursing education practices. However, nurses in both clinical and academic practice tend not to publish their work (Happell, 2008a; Happell 2008c; Wollin & Fairweathers, 2007). Evidence of this can be easily recognized when examining the plethora of conference presentations taking place annually compared with the small number of journal articles existing in the literature (Happell, 2008a). A lack of self-confidence, role formation, experience, and support are among the reasons writing for publication is viewed as onerous and intimidating to nurses (Happell, 2008a; Happell, 2008c; Benner et al, 2010; Wollin & Fairweather, 2007). This article outlines the process that a group of nurse educators/scholars experienced when writing an article for submission to a journal. We hope that sharing this journey will encourage more nurses to write for publication.

From Expert Clinician to Novice Author

Students become professional licensed nurses only after a considerable progression of indispensable academic and clinical experiences that prepare them for their role in practice. This progression does not occur in isolation; it unquestionably requires support and guidance both during identity formation and after becoming a registered nurse. Support and experience, then, allow nurses to gain self-confidence throughout their transformation (Benner et al, 2010). Through a similar process, expert nurses can become expert writers capable of creating and sharing nursing knowledge and disseminating that knowledge through publication. To begin, the expert nurse internalizes the role of the novice writer, and must continue life-long learning to be a writer.

Scholar Group as Support in the Transformation of Novice Writers

As a novice writer, the expert nurse must reach out and discover available support while gaining writing experience. Forming or joining a team of scholars consisting of expert nurse educators, researchers, and experienced published authors, as well as a few novice writers can offer camaraderie and provide opportunities to gain ongoing experience (Ulrich, 2007). For example, scholars' groups formed by nurses in academia aid the blossoming academician in meeting requirements for tenure while more experienced members serve as mentors in support of novice nurse writers.

For our group, writing individually felt a little intimidating so we looked for support in a like-minded group. Recognizing a need to support each other through this process, a scholar's group was formed at our school of nursing. Our group, which is comprised of only novice writers, banded together to meet the changing expectations at a regional university. While we were all new at writing for publication, two of the group had completed their dissertation research within the last several years

and two other group members were in process. Additionally, we had the support and mentorship from a veteran writer who held an endowed chair at our university.

Formation of the scholar's group occurred naturally among colleagues because we shared similar interests, motivation, sense of humor, and worked well together on other projects. Moreover, we felt comfortable offering and accepting feedback from each other. We admit that writing in community kept us from feeling isolated in the process of writing our first manuscript. Even though there was a strong commitment to working as a scholar's group, a major feat was the coordination of our calendars. We established and blocked one four hour work period per week. This time became a high priority and was designated as group and/or individual scholarship time. Meeting weekly was important to ignite and maintain our momentum, thus spurring us on to writing our first manuscript for publication.

Choosing a Topic for Publication

Before a novice nurse begins to look for a journal to disseminate original work, that work must be created. The first step in creating original work is choosing a topic that springs from experiences, passions, and expertise (Ulrich, 2007; Wollin & Fairweather, 2007). Our scholar's group brainstormed ideas and found one such topic of interest and commonality among the members. The topic chosen was evidenced-based pedagogical strategies that develop clinical reasoning skills in baccalaureate nursing students. This topic evoked our passions secondary to the experiences and expertise gained in both clinical and educational practice with student nurses and new nurse graduates. The target audience identified was other nurse educators seeking methods to further develop students' clinical reasoning skills. Once we identified the topic and audience that would find value in this publication we next selected an appropriate journal and set a timeline for completion.

Choosing an Appropriate Journal

Choosing an appropriate journal should be completed early-on in the writing process (Bellack, 2010). There are "hundreds of nursing journals and multidisciplinary publications" available for submission consideration with varying requirements (Ulrich, 2007, p. 506). With the assistance of our librarian, the group obtained a list of appropriate peer-reviewed, scholarly journals. The scholar's group reviewed, discussed and debated the list narrowing down the selection to four journals. As a group, we read the journal's mission statement and analyzed the manuscript types accepted by each journal under consideration. Important elements that we considered were matching the journal's and author's target audience, matching author's topic with journal's scope and purpose, easily accessible and clear guidelines, reasonable acceptance rates, and five year impact factors (Harper, 2008b; Ulrich, 2007). With at least four good peer-reviewed journals evaluated, the scholars' group members made an informed choice.

The members decided to submit to the Journal of Nursing Education for a number of reasons: a) the clear organization of the online website, b) the readability of the submission requirements found in the information to authors, c) encouragement by the editor for submission by novice writers to the journal, as well as d) immediate access to free recent publications allowing for a review of article styles and topics. In spite of the 20% acceptance rate (Bellack, 2010), the group chose to submit a

manuscript for review to the Journal of Nursing Education.

Mapping Out a Timeline

Time is of the essence with multiple members' schedules and we wanted our time to be productive. The group decided on a submission date and then worked backwards in deciding when the first, second, and subsequent drafts for revisions were due and time allotted for final editing. We wanted to set realistic goals but yet push ourselves in accomplishing those goals, knowing that if the due dates were missed a little, we were still moving forward, baby step by baby step.

Involvement in the Writing Process

As novice writers, we realized that production of a quality manuscript could be daunting and overwhelming. From a group perspective, we appreciated that each member undertook different roles in the process of writing as well as bringing different strengths to the table to further the writing process. For example, one person was an excellent editor; another kept the group focused, on task and attempted to keep us on a schedule; yet another member kept the group focused on seeing the forest amongst all the little trees; and another was a grammatical maestro. We used these strengths to our benefit as a group for both dividing the tasks and meeting our aspirations.

Since this was a new endeavor, the group discussed how best to move forward. An outline was drafted, forming the scaffolding for the writing project. At this stage the lead author for the first draft was chosen. During the following weeks as we met, each member had individual "homework" to read the drafts and bring forth ideas and suggestions for revisions at the next meeting. We understand that learning the art of writing is not in writing the first draft but rather in the revision and editing process where the manuscript was massaged and scrubbed multiple times until it conveyed our purpose and intent. These meetings were a valuable time to discuss, dialogue, and actively engage in the creative and mentoring process of writing. The energy was synergistic! Matching members' strengths with the task at hand was critical to a successful outcome.

Submitting a manuscript for publication for the first time is a journey of discovery where the expert nurse becomes the novice writer. Now it was time to give wings to our project. We had done all the preparation and our brainchild was ready to go. With a certain amount of trepidation, we attached all the required additional pieces: a cover letter, authors' credentials and affiliation, and contact person. As of this writing, the group is awaiting word of the outcome of our endeavor. No matter the decision, the group has grown and learned and that produces a win-win outcome for all. What a journey it has been -- and will continue to be!

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