



Academic Publishing and the Doctoral Student

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Academic publishing and the doctoral student: Lessons from Sweden

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The journey from doctoral student to published author is, for the majority of students, a transition that requires careful mentoring and support. I was reminded last week at the University of Gothenburg of the many questions that doctoral students typically raise, when they set out on their publishing careers. Staffan Höjer had organised a two-day symposium (17–18 June 2014), inviting the editors of four international journals to address an audience of doctoral social work students drawn from across Sweden. Students asked: ‘do I aim for the top or lower ranking?’ and ‘how do I make a study of the Swedish social insurance system internationally relevant?’. Students also wanted advice about the translation of manuscripts into English, as well as guidance about how to condense qualitative data for publication. It is if no surprise, that in an international climate of ‘publish or perish’, students listened eagerly to tips from the editors, interjecting with further questions and queries. First up to speak was Sven Hessle, long-serving editor of the *International Journal of Social Welfare*. Sven offered tips on understanding journal rankings, the range of potential publishing formats, as well as the important topic of self and other plagiarism. Suzy Braye, editor of the *European Journal of Social Work*, then followed and provided advice about how to link local concerns to global themes. Students scribbled furiously in their notebooks (or iPads) as Suzy provided a thoroughly engaging account of *context*. Suzy returned to the topic of the special issue raised by Sven, commending these themed volumes to students. She challenged Sven’s notion that journals resort to making calls for special issues because they are short of papers and argued that, for authors, themed issues can increase the visibility of their research.

Addressing what is probably one of the thorniest issues for both authors and editors whose first language is not English, Tarja Pösö, editor of *Nordic Social Work Research*, rose admirably to the challenge of dealing with the topic of language and translation in academic writing. Concepts do not always readily translate or travel across national boundaries – yet authors may perish if they shy away from publishing in the international currency of English. Students and academic staff attending the symposium described what felt like an increasing pressure to publish in English, which then raised questions about the relative value of work published in the plethora of other European languages. Tarja gave the example of

the Finnish language which is spoken and understood by a relative minority of Europeans. However, Tarja also commented that writing in English should not preclude authors from consulting and citing papers written in other languages – where reviewers object to this, surely this is an imperialist step too far! We were all agreed on the latter point. In my own contribution as co-editor of *Qualitative Social Work* (QSW), I was asked to consider how qualitative data could be condensed for publication without losing the integrity of the data. I advised students that they must convince their readers of a robust and systematic approach to data collection and analysis within the methods section of their articles – this then supports the presentation of selected qualitative excerpts. Journals vary in terms of the word length allowed for full articles, but even so, readers do not want to read an excessive list of one qualitative verbatim excerpt after another. I urged students to ensure a balance between the presentation of data and analytic commentary – excessive description will dissuade even the most sympathetic reviewer that a paper is worth publishing. I considered how students might also condense data in narrative research. The paradox of digging deep is acutely felt by the narrative researcher, who elicits rich subjective accounts from participants, to then cut stories short for publication. Doctoral students Linda Mossberg and Veronica Svärd illustrated the process of data condensation using examples from their own doctoral work and greatly assisted my presentation through real time examples. Both students (registered for PhD by publication) had already published papers on the topics of inter-professional practice (Mossberg, 2014) and hospital social workers' assessments of children at risk (Svärd, 2014).

The symposium raised an interesting debate about the relative benefits of PhD *by* publication or PhD *and* publication. The question of whether the traditional lengthy monograph or thesis is the best form of 'apprenticeship' for the would be academic is important – can students readily write short articles for journal publication having been steeped in the production of a far lengthier work for much of their doctoral study? PhD by publication allows the student to submit for the higher degree based on published work, rather than the original bound thesis. In the UK, the majority of doctoral students will continue to gain a PhD through the writing of a monograph although PhD by publication and the taught doctorate are becoming much more popular. It was noteworthy that an almost equal number of students were pursuing the respective routes in this Swedish symposium.

Critics have argued that PhD by publication is a back-door route for those unable to earn the higher degree through the more conventional route, pointing to the lack of consistent regulations (Boud and Lee, 2009; Bradley, 2009) – but are these fair comments?

The regulations for submission by publication are generally, that the student must submit between five and seven peer-reviewed articles and evidence a clear contribution to knowledge. The submission must be organised around a clear and coherent theme, supported by a narrative or statement from the student that enables coherence and methodological consistency to be appraised. Regulations concerning the student's narrative appear to be becoming more rigorous, with

some institutions in the UK requiring statements of up to 25,000 words. Arguments in favour of the PhD publication in the UK are that this route provides a pathway to the higher degree for those already employed in a higher education institution, who can gain recognition for published work but without the need to almost 'start again' with a monograph. This is sometimes referred to as a *retrospective* route to a doctoral award. It has also been argued that students who actually register the outset for PhD by *prospective* publication are better prepared than their more traditional counterparts because they are practiced in producing articles for publication (Boud and Lee, 2009). It can be very difficult to begin to publish having produced a monograph, whilst simultaneously facing the demands of looking for or starting a full-time post in a higher education environment. In my experience, students do not always appear able to readily turn the monograph into journal articles upon graduation, which means that some excellent work sits on a shelf. Certainly, the more the doctoral student is exposed to publishing through co-authoring with experienced academics or through serving as a reviewer for academic journals, the easier that transition will be to a confident author following graduation. Drawing on the rather limited literature on this topic, Gray and Drew (2008) argue that the student who appears to seize opportunities for publishing during the production of his/her thesis, holds out the promise of continuing to publish once he or she has graduated. There is no doubt that employers in higher education institutions are not only looking for students who have gained a doctorate but also those who can evidence their ability to publish. Here Linda and Veronica, the two Swedish students, were ahead of the game, having worked in print prior to the completion of their studies.

So, is academic writing hard work and why? Here I am reminded of a colleague at my former work place Dr. Chris Grover (University of Lancaster), who loved nothing better than working on a new paper, extolling the virtues of extended retreat to the library. However, for other academics, writing for publication is just plain hard work – an unfortunate performance demand that somehow has to be fitted into a challenging schedule of teaching and administration. In Social Work, the number of academics who do write for publication is relatively small across the globe, which may reflect the fact that the delivery of social work education is teaching intensive and can significantly curtail time available for academic publishing. This means that the available pool of mentors for early career academics is also small. Such scarcity threatens the discipline of social work going forward.

In this issue

As readers of QSW have come to expect, issue 13:5 contains a selection of highly engaging papers. Given the theme of this editorial, I have selected articles reporting on doctoral and postdoctoral work as the 'front runners'. The lead article is by Monika Wilinska, based on her innovative doctoral study of old age in Japan.

Central to Wilinska's account is Emiko, described as an 80+ woman living in a three generation household in rural Japan. Emiko agreed to take photographs of her own life and through those photographs, narrate a story of her experience of old age in this rural context. In reading Wilinska's paper, I was reminded of Suzy Braye's presentation at the University of Gothenburg and reflected on the value of visual imagery to convey *local* contexts to a global readership. Wilinska elaborates a discussion of shame and old age, suggesting that in Japanese culture, shame is regarded as an important feeling because it indicates individual regard for public opinion. The second article is authored by Pooja Sawrikar and reports research work undertaken as part of a three-year postdoctoral fellowship funded by the New South Wales Department of Human Services in Australia. The paper is concerned with cultural competence in respect of referral and assessment of 'inadequate supervision' as a category of child neglect. This article makes an important contribution to the literature concerned with cultural diversity and the representation/overrepresentation of minority ethnic families within child protection services. The work of the fellowship included, *inter alia*, a review of 120 case files of children from six cultural groups and in-depth interviews with 29 'ethnic minority families'. This paper reports both descriptive statistics as well as qualitative findings (readers should note that QSW is receptive to mixed methods papers). Of particular salience is Sawrikar's recommendation that far more needs to be done to educate caseworkers about collectivist parenting. The author writes that 'Caseworkers may incorrectly report some ethnic minority families as neglectful, failing to provide their children with adequate supervision because they are unaware of community-based ways of parenting in collectivist cultures' (p. 11).

Turning to the other articles in this issue, I was very interested to read Krista Drescher-Burke's work on contraceptive risk-taking among substance-using women, a topic that dovetails with my own work on mothers caught in a cycle of repeat family law proceedings who lose children to state care (Broadhurst and Mason, 2013; Broadhurst et al., 2014). Drescher-Burke takes an interesting approach to this topic, drawing on the Theory of Contraceptive Risk Taking (TCRT, Luker, 1975). Based on a purposive sample of 26 drug-using women, the author draws important observations about the reasons why the women do not consistently use contraception. Many of the participants indicated that when they were actively using, drugs became their primary focus, to the exclusion of all other aspects of their lives. Drescher-Burke reports that women described an 'overwhelming feeling of apathy toward anything other than obtaining more drugs' (p. 7). Fourteen out of the 26 women also believed that their drug use had made them infertile. Drescher-Burke's final discussion makes a number of recommendations for practice. She suggests that mobile contraceptive services, perhaps offered in cooperation with a mobile needle exchange, might increase the uptake of contraception. The author underscores the importance of the social work role stating that social workers are 'critical in the process of drug treatment and are therefore in an ideal position to advocate for the integration of contraception services as part of a holistic approach to recovery' (p. 14). Writing on an equally difficult topic, the fourth article in this

issue is by Amy Myers and is titled: *A Call to Child Welfare: Protect Children from Sibling Abuse*. Myers argues that sibling abuse is relatively underexplored topic, but the effects of this form of abuse may be 'devastating and long-lasting' (p. 2). The study is based on a purposive sample of adults aged 21 years and over, who were victims of sibling abuse as children and through adolescence. On sampling, Myers writes that having conducted 19 in-depth interviews to garner retrospective accounts, she felt that 'saturation' was achieved for the purposes of her study. She usefully presents the characteristics of participants within her sample as well as her topic guide for the interviews. The findings take the reader into the complexity of family relationships, and suggests that in a family environment characterised by parental emotional unavailability, conflict between siblings can arise and 'set a precedent for sibling abuse' (p. 13). I would also add that research has also found that sibling relationships can be very protective in the context of child maltreatment, so this topic probably needs further exploration to understand such differences (Glass et al., 2007).

Amber Clough and colleagues write on the important topic of housing and domestic violence. In the title of the paper: *Having Housing made Everything else Possible: Affordable, Safe and Stable Housing For Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence*, they capture the absolute necessity of housing to women's escape from the entrapment of violence. This is a methodologically robust study funded by the Centers for Disease and Prevention in the US, that takes the reader into women's experiences of accessing, securing and maintaining affordable housing. The variation in women's experiences of professional help provided is an important and concerning finding – some women felt re-victimised rather than helped by services. It is particularly noteworthy that the authors describe the women in their study as demonstrating 'creativity, resourcefulness and incredible persistence to assure the safety and well-being of themselves and their children' (p. 14). The final critical discussion provides an important context for the consideration of key findings, noting the impact of recession on the availability of stable and affordable housing.

Last but not least are two articles that I have grouped together that provide contrasting, but equally important insights into collaborative research and practice. I learned much from reading an article written by Wei-he Guo and Ming-sum Tsui concerning the Qing Hong Program, sponsored by the China Red Cross, that aimed to work with local communities following the Sichuan earthquake to stimulate a range of community-based self-help initiatives. Operating in the Han Wang Town, Mian Zhu County, Sichuan Province, an area which was almost completely destroyed in the earthquake, the authors described collaborative community-based initiatives that resulted during the course of the programme. In reading this paper, I was reminded of Tarja Poso's paper on language and translation described above. The authors referred to a 'livelihood model' for practice (p. 7) drawing on what they describe as an international framework for the development of sustainable livelihoods (Bebbington, 1999; Lont and Hospes, 2004). The authors indicate that this model provides a useful framework for thinking about the transformation that

the Quing Hong Program aimed to achieve, but application of the model was limited due to the constraints of local context and culture. Describing a different, but equally innovative approach, to collaboration in social care research, Jennie Fleming and her co-authors discuss a UK-based research project, *Standards We Expect*. This project brought together disabled people, practitioners and academics to design and undertake a research project exploring person-centred support in adult social care. The authors make the important point that 'Receiving excellent social care is a human right but debate and policy has focused primarily on centralized responses, frustrating service users whose voice has been left on the margins' (p. 2). Here, the nuance of language is again raised by the authors who tease out important differences between working in 'partnership' and 'collaborative practice'. The authors also raise the issue of interpretation in respect of concepts of power and control, but conclude from their experience of collaborative research that a diverse group of people and organisations (people with and without impairments and service users, non-service users, practitioner and academics) can effectively share power to high quality, cutting-edge research that progresses service-user interests. They conclude with the important observation that collaboration is not spontaneous and requires constant attention throughout the process.

Turning finally to book reviews, Debbie Gioia introduces this section of volume 13.5 with her usual verve, and I would urge readers to follow her recommendation to return to classic texts, to grasp foundational ideas and themes that have over time, connected social work scholars and practitioners.

I would like to remind readers that we are inviting submissions to the special issue: 'Teaching Qualitative Social Work Research and Inquiry' with abstracts in the first instance to James Drisko: jdrisko@smith.edu. Full details of the call can be found at: http://qsw.sagepub.com/site/cfp/Call_for_Papers_Teaching.pdf

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