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Facing Publishing Paralysis in Teacher Education: Book Critique of Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks (2nd ed.)

Donna Zerr
Pittsburg State University, dzerr@pittstate.edu

Carissa Gober
cgober@pittstate.edu

David Wolff
david.wolff@mnstate.edu

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Carissa Gober
Pittsburg State University, cgober@pittstate.edu

David Wolff
Minnesota State University Moorhead, david.wolff@mnstate.edu

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Introduction

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a body of literature centered on pedagogy and student learning experiences. Scholars in the field of SoTL focus on *how* students learn and less on *what* they learn. (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012). It is imperative that faculty in Teacher Education continuously research current best practices in pedagogy; however, they face challenges when researching and publishing scholarship. They may struggle finding time for scholarship while balancing their overall teaching and advising workload and serving the institution and community. Additionally, reduced budgets, and lack of professional development and training in academic research compound the challenges (Boshier, 2009; McKinney, 2006). Houdyshell et al., (2022) supported this idea when they stated, "faculty members struggle to meet all the demands placed on them and, as a result, have difficulties setting priorities" (p. 119).

As full-time professors in Teacher Education at a teaching institution, we engaged with each other in new faculty induction, mentorship meetings, water cooler conversations, and an academic writing camp. Through these interactions, we discovered we encountered similar challenges of time management, resources, and expertise in research endeavors. Moreover, a resounding theme of our discussions was the imposter phenomena; that our expertise, experience, and scholarship ideas are inadequate for academic publication. Addison's et al., (2022) and Hutchins (2015) research supports this claim that the impostor phenomena is alive and well on college campuses. Thankfully, two colleagues introduced us to Belcher's (2019) book, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* (2nd ed.). As we delved into the workbook, we discovered a section devoted to using the workbook in a writing group. Due to the aforementioned obstacles teacher education faculty face, the accountability of a collaborative approach appealed to us; therefore, we chose to utilize a professional learning community (PLC) to complete the workbook. According to Belcher (2019), "research shows that writing groups help you stay motivated because they provide support and friendly pressure" (p.7), which we found to be true in our experience. Through completing the exercises in the workbook, and our weekly PLC meetings, we confronted our own perceptions of deficiencies in scholarship, set goals, and established timelines for academic writing.

Summary of Argument

Initially, Belcher designed the workbook to be used as a specialized text for graduate students with little to no publishing experience (Belcher, 2019). However, due to the book's wide popularity and responses, it is now in its 2nd edition and has undergone revisions based on

feedback and beta testing from various fields of academic writers to appeal to a broader audience (Belcher, 2019). The text outlined and scaffolded the process of academic writing into twelve manageable weeks based on the author's experiences and feedback working with published authors at varied levels of expertise. Although the original concept outlined "12 weeks," Belcher acknowledged the term "weeks" may be adjusted based on the reader's discipline-field demands and be better stated as time frames (Belcher, 2019)

We discovered through our PLC discussions that we do not lack research ideas, moreover we struggled to transfer them into a manuscript which could be acceptable for publication in an appropriate academic journal. Belcher's end goal was for every potential writer to get published (Belcher, 2019). The workbook's weekly tasks motivated us to overcome our self-doubt and fears of academic writing and provided meaningful guidance to produce publishable manuscripts.

Summary of Content

This workbook was designed for readers who already composed a research draft copy and were ready for the revision process (Belcher, 2019). Each chapter focused on components of the revision process, and the weekly assignments helped the reader refine their work by clarifying and improving the existing manuscript. The author emphasized the importance of setting a time for writing and establishing a habit of writing continuously, whether in small, or substantial amounts by including fillable calendars, schedules, logs, and checklists. Belcher provided steps and examples for completing a manuscript including introductions, conclusions, content, and structure. Editing and refining guidelines for novice and expert writers were a theme throughout the text.

Several of the chapters focused on strengthening the significance of the article, the proposed argument, and the evidence to support it. The author reiterated the importance of these components and provided detailed instructions for composing them. Novice writers may be hesitant to write if they are unsure how to strengthen their work; however, the steps and techniques Belcher provided were intended to develop the argument, significance, and evidence into publishable works for all levels of writers.

Some of the final chapters of the workbook outlined the article submission process with methods to determine a suitable publication and the revision and resubmission process. Belcher reiterates the importance of resilience and perseverance and next steps if the article is rejected.

Scholarly Opinion

Strengths

A noted design of the workbook involved the explanation of two tracks for publication including one for humanities and interpretive social science (HumInt) scholars, and the other track for scholars of social, health, behavior, and natural sciences (SciQua). The two-track format

supported researchers in various disciplines and provided a unified approach for all academic fields.

If the reader did not have an existing draft article to edit, the workbook included a chapter that focused on starting the article from scratch (Week 0: Writing Your Article from Scratch). This chapter was a great foundation for novice writers to conceptualize thoughts into written words.

The text is engaging and conversational in tone. Each week is further divided into daily tasks with estimated task time in minutes. The workbook is designed for interactive reading through provided space for fillable responses to many tasks including thought-provoking questions, checklists, logs, and goal-setting tables.

Opportunities for Improvement

Week 0: Writing Your Article from Scratch was included at the end of the book. Since the outset of a research draft may be a major battle for many professionals, the placement of the Week 0 chapter at the beginning of the book could provide a starting point and support authors dealing with the imposter phenomena in the first pages.

Belcher systematically organized each chapter into manageable tasks. Although one might be compelled to read and complete the workbook from beginning to end, others may want to focus on certain chapters. In the 2nd edition, Belcher reordered some of the chapters' sequence and justifies the order as one approach to scholarly writing (Belcher, 2019). Readers may want to utilize the chapters in a different order depending on their progress in the writing process.

Conclusion

Each chapter sparked rich discussions and debates in our PLC about writing styles, ethics, processes, and individual experiences. As a result, some of our key takeaways are:

- "The only thing that improves writing is writing" (p. 18).
- "...irregular practice is what produces the painfulness" (p. 26)
- "If you didn't get as much writing done last week as you hoped, join the club . . . start this new week afresh." (p.91)
- "While procrastinating is perfectly normal and doesn't make you an evil human being, it's not going to help you send a finished article to a journal at the end of twelve weeks," (p.111)
- "Many journals need you more than you need them." (p.111)

Belcher's workbook encouraged us to set weekly goals and moved us from paralysis to publication. Through our PLC meetings centered around the chapter readings, we discovered we were not alone in our perceived inadequacies, which helped reduce the imposter phenomena. Additionally, we realized we faced many of the same challenges as other published authors and were thus able to celebrate accomplishments each week. In Belcher's words we, "... have joined

the ranks of those brave souls who've had the courage to send their writing to an actual publisher" (p. 356).

Specifications

Title: *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* (2nd ed.)

Author: Wendy Laura Belcher

Publisher: The University of Chicago Press

Year Published: 2019; first edition of this book was published in 2009 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

ISBN: 978-0-226-49991-8

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