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# Writing for Scholarly Publication as "Tacit Knowledge": A Qualitative Focus Group Study of Doctoral Students in Education

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**Abstract** Expectations for academic writing and publication have intensified in Academia. Doctoral students in colleges of education are advised to publish even before they graduate and evidence of successful publication is influential in hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. The purpose of this research was to study the process of writing for professional publication from the perspective of a diverse group of 30 doctoral students in colleges of education in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The group ranged in experience from those enrolled in their first doctoral-level courses to students who had very recently defended their dissertations. Interview data from the participants provided strong support for: (1) providing at least one doctoral-level course on writing for professional publication, (2) beginning instruction in scholarly publication earlier and continuing it across all stages of the program, (3) designing class assignments that are better aligned with the expectations for scholarly publication, and (4) providing extensive opportunities for peer and instructor review of manuscripts. From the perspectives of these 30 doctoral students, acquiring the constellation of knowledge, skills, habits, attitudes and values associated with successful publication of scholarly work requires both formal and informal networks of validation and support.

**Keywords** Academic writing · Scholarly writing · Publication · Doctoral students · Doctoral programs

## Introduction

There is little question that scholarly works subjected to anonymous peer review play a pivotal role in tenure and promotion decisions affecting college/university faculty members (Luey 2007; Rocco and Hatcher 2011). In 1988, sociologist Meaghan Morris (1998) cautioned graduate students, "your prospects later in life may depend on having a convincing number of refereed publications on your CV…sooner or later the moment will come when a selection committee will start counting your refereed articles and comparing them to those of other candidates" (p. 501). Mastery of academic writing has become a hallmark of scholarship to the extent that university faculty from many Asian countries are expected to publish their work in journals written in English in order to advance professionally (Kwan 2010). The growing pressure to publish not only affects faculty members but also has trickled down to doctoral students who are urged to publish during doctoral study (McDougall and Stoilescu 2010). Indeed, some doctoral degree-granting institutions have begun to use publication in top-tier scholarly journals in lieu of the traditional dissertation as a condition for program completion, both in the United States and internationally (Badley 2009; European University Association 2005; Francis et al. 2009). One explanation for this trend is international survey data suggesting that publication during

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doctoral candidature may be the single most powerful predictor of later scholarly productivity among college/university faculty members (Dinham and Scott 2001). Thus doctoral program alumni frequently find that, upon entrance to the higher education job market, search committees give hiring preference to applicants with some evidence of academic publication (Kamler 2008).

Despite the obvious importance of academic publishing for contemporary doctoral students, acquiring the skills of scholarly writing presents an interesting paradox. Although a record of successful publication is widely recognized as a survival skill in Academia, most doctoral programs neglect this learning in their established curriculum (Lovitts 2008; Nolan and Rocco 2009). As such, publishing scholarly work remains a form of "tacit knowledge" (Polayni 1966) that is acquired through a combination of informal mentoring experiences and the individual doctoral candidate's initiative, diligence, and persistence at publication. The four main features of tacit knowledge accurately describe most college faculty members seeking to publish their work because tacit knowledge: (1) is not learned through direct instruction, (2) emphasizes a procedure, (3) is goal directed, and (4) has value for people in a particular social context (Polayni 1966; Sternberg 2004).

If faculty responsible for delivering doctoral programs fail to teach the skills of writing for professional publication in an inclusive and systematic way, "then we help to foster an *invisible* elitism, charisma based, favouring those who 'just know' what the right thing to do might be—or who have family, friends and experienced or influential advisers to help them" (Morris 1998, p. 499). Upon graduation this line of demarcation between the "haves" and the "have nots" tends to persist. The research suggests that, after becoming employed as college/university faculty members, a very small minority of doctoral program alumni publish a great deal (Boice 1990) while the majority of faculty members publish comparatively little—a situation the latter attribute to inadequate time, insufficient motivation/momentum, lack of confidence in writing skills, low expectations for success, and absence of institutional structures that sustain and support scholarly writing and publication (McGrail et al. 2006).

Success with scholarly writing is a constellation of skills, understandings, and dispositions too important to be left to chance. As it now stands, many published doctoral candidates and college/university faculty members attribute their success to good fortune, powerful mentors, and/or individual initiative at learning about publication through trial and error (Engestrom 1999; Swales and Feak 2004). The problem with this "ad hoc" approach is that it is not sufficiently inclusive and systematic. Writing for publication needs to become an integral part of the doctoral curriculum for every student (Kamler and Thomson 2006; Lee and Kamler 2008) because "doctoral publication is not a given. It flourishes when it receives serious institutional attention, and skilled support from knowledgeable supervisors and others who understand academic writing as complex disciplinary and identity work…Emerging scholars need to be supported in more explicit, strategic and generous ways than currently happens, so that we produce more confident graduates who know how to publish in a wide variety of contexts, including international refereed journals" (Kamler 2008, p. 284, 292).

## Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was to study the process of writing for professional publication from the perspective of a diverse group of 30 doctoral students pursuing degrees in Australia, Canada, and the United States. The four research questions for this qualitative focus group interview study were framed around the elements of tacit knowledge; namely: (1) informal instructional methods, (2) a focus on procedures, (3) goal-directed behavior, and (4) value within a particular context (Polayni 1966).

1. What are all the ways in which doctoral students at various stages of program completion report having learned about writing for publication, both formal and informal?
2. How do doctoral students at different points in degree completion regard the procedures and processes associated with publishing scholarly work?
3. What are the perspectives of this diverse group of doctoral students regarding the constellation of skills, understandings, habits, attitudes, and values necessary to achieve their academic writing goals as higher education faculty members?
4. What perceptions do they hold for the value of scholarly publication—both now and in the future—and how do they describe the contexts in which those values are/were shaped?

## Participants

All of the interviewees were affiliated with a college of education at one of the three institutions represented by the authors. The great majority of them had varied backgrounds as teachers and administrators in basic education across the developmental spectrum; however, the majority had specialized in early childhood education and/or elementary and special education. Some were already employed as college/university faculty members and were seeking a doctorate as a condition of continued

employment or as a route to professional advancement (e.g., tenure, promotion). Across the 30 focus group participants, there were seven international students whose first language was not English. Participants were recruited by announcing the time, date, and location of the focus group during a regularly scheduled class. While the instructor was out of the room, a research assistant distributed a slip of paper that asked each student to respond with yes, maybe, or no to the invitation to participate. Every student placed a slip of paper in the back of the room so that it was not apparent who had agreed to participate and to avoid any hint of coercion. The research assistant collected the envelope and tallied the responses to get an estimate of the group's size. All students were fully informed about the study's purpose and ways of handling the data.

## Methods and Procedures

The three participating universities were located in Australia (with doctoral students from Singapore and Hong Kong), Canada, and the United States. As a first step, Institutional Review Board approval of the research protocol was secured at the three different sites. The authors identified a graduate student/research assistant willing to (1) distribute the cover letters/consent forms and collect them, (2) make the local arrangements for the focus group (i.e., reserve and set up the recording equipment, make a poster of the interview questions, purchase the refreshments with a small stipend supplied by the principal investigator), (3) become familiar with the focus group interview procedures and script, and (4) video/audio record the focus group as they led the discussion. The faculty member at each site oriented the research assistant to his/her role by reserving a space where the focus group interviews could take place, reviewing the focus group script and a checklist of procedures, and arranging for two methods of recording the interviews. In order to permit doctoral students to respond candidly, the interviews were conducted by research assistants identified by the authors. The questions used during the focus group interviews are in the "Appendix".

To further protect confidentiality, each respondent had a name tent and name tag displayed during the video recording that identified her or him by a letter of the alphabet (e.g., A, B, C, etc.). None of the faculty contacts at the research sites viewed the videos or listened to the tapes; rather, the recordings were placed into sealed envelopes by the research assistant and delivered to the principal investigator's secretary (who had no knowledge of anyone's identity or institutional affiliation) to produce a typed transcript of all the discussions. In the transcript produced, all participants were identified by a letter code to further protect their identity.

## Data Collection

The focus group was introduced with some ground rules for participation. First, participants were advised that the conversation about to take place was confidential information and second, that no faculty members were to be mentioned by name during the discussion. The focus group sessions were videotaped and audiotaped. Although videotaping is more intrusive, there were three reasons for deciding to use both audio and video recordings. The first was that, by using two methods, it would address the problem of equipment malfunction that could lose the data. The second reason was that audio recording is old technology and nowadays video recording equipment is more widely available and relatively inexpensive. The third reason was that, without a video recording, it would be difficult to attribute comments to the correct person and errors could creep into the data as the transcripts were typed by a professional secretary. If audio recording was used exclusively, respondents would need to be reminded to preface their remarks with the pseudonym (a letter of the alphabet) assigned to them and this would tend to disrupt the flow and interpersonal dynamics of the discussion, thereby compromising the particular strengths of the focus group interview method (Liamputtong 2010; Vaughn et al. 1996).

## Data Analysis

A verbatim transcript of the focus group dialogue formed the data set for the research. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative content analysis techniques (Creswell 2012). When the study was first conceptualized, it was expected that there might be greater differences among the three geographic regions; however, after reviewing the data numerous times, it was evident that students' level of experience in their doctoral programs was more influential than geographic location in shaping ideas about academic writing behavior. Therefore, the focus group transcripts were analyzed by level of experience (e.g., first semester, second year, Ph.D. completer) rather than institutional affiliation. The unit of analysis for coding purposes was all of the responses to each of the eight questions (see the Appendix). The transcripts were read many times and then coded and annotated using *NVivo10* (QSR International 2011) qualitative data analysis software to identify nodes. These nodes were reviewed multiple times and categorized into four themes.

### Theme 1: Writing for Publication as Integral to the Curriculum

The most frequently mentioned issue was that intentional, focused instruction on academic writing should permeate the program. Reading widely was mentioned by several respondents with comments such as "Just the opportunity to read many, many different types of publications…has helped us a great deal…[we] know what it looks like, what it should sound like…typically, I wouldn't have read those things on a daily basis." Specific assignments that extended students' thinking beyond their immediate experience were also credited with contributing to their academic writing skills: "The position papers that we have to complete—where we have to give two different perspectives without letting our own personal feelings into it—have been very challenging, rewarding, and educational."

There was widespread agreement across the groups that there should be at least one course dedicated to writing for publication and that instruction in scholarly writing should begin early:

> scholarly writing is definitely different from anything that you have done before. And so when you come into a doctoral program, just understanding what scholarly writing is, how it is different from writing a research paper or something that you have done before and what the elements are to be effective, I think those are really important early on.
>
> a dedicated course on professional writing was a huge turning point for me.
>
> having a course on writing for professional publication was very, very helpful…[it] showed the process and broke it down into a simplified, easy-to-use approach; it really took hold overall to actually write and get an article published.
>
> even though I had written scholarly work the year prior to coming to the program and being published, I still felt that the [writing for publication] class in particular and all of the things they incorporated into the other classes, helped me learn more about writing for professional publication.
>
> It's really important that you get started early…Because if you wait too long it gets scarier and it doesn't happen later when you don't have the support that you have when you first come into a doctoral program.

The issue of offering more than one course in writing for publication was discussed at length among the participants. Several doctoral candidates at the midpoint of program completion endorsed having two writing for publication courses. The first one could teach them the basics: "Maybe a preview course on how to get an article ready to turn into something for publication. I think that would be in our best interest…". Another student underscored the need for early instruction in academic writing by saying, "I know that there may be some that say that they come in and they already have that experience and maybe they can't gain from that but, for some of us, it was such a high, steep learning curve because it had been so many years since my master's."

Most doctoral candidates described the need for an advanced writing for publication course as well, a course that would walk them through publication: "we could spend more time actually working on getting an article published after we learn some of those secrets that we didn't know until we were taking the writing for publication course." Other students with 21–34 credits completed in a 60-credit program echoed the need for more systematic support at the stage of sending manuscripts out for review, with comments such as, "maybe there should be a greater focus on actually being able to publish that type of writing, I know that's our own responsibility, but sometimes it kind of hard to do that because you don't know where to go or what to do and maybe a little bit more help with that, and direction in that area." Likewise, a student who had completed a writing course at the master's level stated, **"**my focus would be more on 'How do I get this published?' rather than 'How do I write my manuscript?' because I sort of knew how to do that before." A third-year student summarized the tenor of the discussion with the metaphor of "killing two birds with one stone" through class assignments that transitioned smoothly into published manuscripts because it "really helps you to do both together in a supportive environment."

When asked how much writing for publication should be emphasized in their doctoral program curriculum overall, a focus group of doctoral students enrolled in their first semester debated the meaning of the question and several seemed to be searching for the right answer. One student asked, "Can you give an example? Like what does it mean? Emphasis, do you mean in focus as far as a subject goes? Or in assessment?"

In stark contrast to this confusion, a student who had just defended the dissertation was abundantly clear about what should be emphasized:

> Students should be helped to understand the importance of scholarly writing and publication. They should learn to write scholarly papers, supported by a mentor, who can advise the student on the writing style, and direction of the paper. They should read widely in more publications of journals, both peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed, to understand the difference of standards in journals. They should know the different types and list of journals. Before submission, they should

> know the publication requirements and guidelines, and understand the whole review process, timeline and expectations. After receiving comments from reviewers, they should learn how to respond to the reviewers and to learn from this experience.

Overall, there was widespread support for varied writing experiences as well as one or more courses focused on the skills of writing for publication. Some doctoral candidates expected nearly every major class assignment to have publication potential and, if it did not "sometimes it's a missed opportunity when we spend hours and hours and hours on something and have it be a dead end." Another student agreed with this, saying "I think we produce so much content during this program, you write so much, that I think it's useful to kind of align what we do to try to get a lot of that published or as much of that as possible…that may be helpful as a way to improve what we do here."

Some students objected to the idea that every class assignment should be an exercise in publication; otherwise, as one candidate stated, "the purpose of us coming here would just to be little writing machines." The student further explained, "because that's part of being a doctoral student—that, no matter how busy you are, you have to find the time…" Still others suggested that the emphasis on writing permeate the entire curriculum because "part of the purpose of going for your doctoral study is to have some scholarly work to share. And it would be nice to embed it in more than one class."

### Theme 2: The Importance of Peer and Faculty Review

Even though interviewees at all stages of program completion were in favor of intentional, formal, and focused instruction in writing for publication, they continued to value the informal support network of Academe, particularly as it related to peer review of manuscripts. A new student observed, "we've learned so much by reading research and working together, working in groups and also as we work in groups reading and writing and sharing with one another, that's how we're learning." Students at the midpoint of program completion reported, "I found it was particularly helpful to have peer reviews. To give my articles to someone in my class to look at first and that kind of built my confidence and made me feel that I was a better writer and I got feedback from someone that I was close to and could really trust as a launching point" and "it was also beneficial, after we looked at each other's, to have the professor look and give us some guidance. And it was very influential for me because you have to write and then rewrite and then rewrite and that's a process I wasn't used to. So, going through that process was really valuable." An international student agreed that peer review was essential in making the transition to forms of scholarly discourse "it was very important to know the other classmates' perspectives and their way of thinking and their way of writing things professionally and natively."

Students also recognized that the process of peer review had reciprocal benefits. A student who had completed 36 credits said, "I agree that having the peer conversation and critique of our articles was valuable on both ends—not just to have somebody critique mine but also to see somebody else's writing" while an international student and Ph.D. program completer remarked, "Writing research reports or research proposals…as a research assistant and reading research papers by peers have been very influential in teaching me the process of scholarly writing and publication."

Instructors for the various courses and faculty mentors also played a pivotal role in manuscript review:

> one of the things that helped early on in the program was having a professor that encouraged publication and asked our class to think about publication and then to also have it be personal and say, maybe during a conference, 'This was really great. You have potential. You should publish this.' I think that goes a long way.

An international student who had just defended the dissertation successfully said that "Finding a supportive and responsible supervisor is the most crucial factor in my doctoral study. This role should not end with the completion of the study"; the student went on to say that the two of them had forged a lifelong bond as research and publishing partners. Another international student who had just completed the program also relied on the dissertation chairperson to get scholarly work accepted in professional journals: "Publication has not been easy, and I do need a good mentor to support me on this road. I am fortunate to have found an excellent mentor and supervisor."

### Theme 3: Acquiring the Constellation of Abilities Associated with Successful Publication

One of the interview questions asked the participants to consider what helped or hindered them from submitting a work for publication. Students who were new to doctoral studies assumed they weren't "far enough along in the process" to be concerned about publication. One even expected that the reviewers' role was to coach the writer in how to succeed at publication: "something else that encourages me is the fact that when you do sent it in to be peer reviewed you can get reviewer comments back. And then you have that opportunity to change anything or fix anything."

Time to write was viewed very differently by different respondents, even those at similar stages in program completion. A novice in the program regarded the variable of time as asset for her personally "I would consider writing as one of my strengths in literacy…because I can take the time to do the research and formulate the ideas and argument, but then synthesizing it…I think time is something that is needed." For most interviewees, however, time was considered to be a huge impediment to successfully publishing their work. It should be noted that the great majority of the 30 students were pursuing part-time study and retained full-time jobs simultaneously. D'Andrea's (2002) research found that doctoral candidates in education have the longest time-to-degree completion rate among the disciplines, 8.2 years. Interestingly, this exceeds the excess of the traditional 7 year time limit, suggesting that education students often request—and are granted—extensions. Another perspective on the time necessary to write and publish was that "it really doesn't take place until after the dissertation is complete…a lot of us don't pursue that because as a student, because working at my job and classwork, we don't have enough time to do that"; as a result, this student thought that time should be given within the curriculum to pursue publication "so we get used to that prior to graduating." Another doctoral student took issue with this approach: "I disagree…you have to make time to write. It has to be something you want to do. It's a mindset." Still, the first student maintained the opinion that most of the students would not publish while still enrolled in doctoral study "because of time factors. Not all of us, just most of us. And, you are right. You do have to want it but…some of us need the time to do other things first." Another doctoral candidate imagined that time would be in greater supply after exiting basic education and moving into higher education, that there would be a newfound freedom "once the reins come off, once we are in positions, and we can really devote more of our time to scholarship and writing and exploration and inquiry, that will be really a kind of liberating feeling."

In some instances, reservations about pursuing publication that were attributed to a lack of time started to sound like something else as the students elaborated on their responses—possibly as a fear of failure and lack of confidence that the work would come to fruition. Two doctoral candidates expressed concern that, after time had been invested in a manuscript, it still would fail to be accepted: "It definitely takes a long time to write it. And then you do get rejected or it comes back and you have to have time again to resubmit it" and another said, "I feel so time starved and know it's not a 100 % sure thing. I can't devote time to it [it takes away time from work or family]." With respect to a disappointing outcome, a doctoral candidate noted "I'm glad that they warned us that not all of our articles are accepted, but that to persist in giving our articles to other publications, other magazines or other journals for consideration, not to be deterred, just because we were rejected one time, you know that our work was not a waste of time."

This fear of harsh judgment of a manuscript and need for support was evident, even among the new doctoral students. One said, "I think it's easy to question whether what you've done is valuable or good enough to be published…what helps is when someone who is in a position that you respect, such as one of your professors, encourages you to continue with your work and have it published." More experienced students realized that deficiencies in originality might be the basis for rejection; "If I'm going to submit my work and it's going to be peer reviewed anonymously…my biggest concern is that my work will fall into the category of borrowing too much." Students who were ready to graduate also harbored fears associated with subjecting their work to anonymous peer review:

> As I don't know who will be reviewing the work, I do not know what to expect as an outcome, and possibly, this fear of the unknown is a hurdle. Another issue is my confidence in my own work, and even though the supervisor may have given me sufficient support, submitting the work to a stranger is somewhat daunting. The encouragement from the supervisor is a most important factor that encourages me to attempt to publish my work. After getting through the first publication, this self-confidence is greatly enhanced.

Even a student who reported several successes with publishing research experienced some self-doubt that was tempered by a measure of confidence in the ability to revise and resubmit:

> I feel quite comfortable submitting my work to anonymous peer review, and this does not prevent me from trying; however, there is always a concern as to whether my paper is acceptable or not. With comments received from reviewers, I find them most helpful in refining my paper, and each time, I do learn from such comments. I come to learn of more writing styles and requirements through this process.

In general, the deterrents to publication mentioned by doctoral students related to those found in the research literature on doctoral students' perceptions of deterrents to completion of the dissertation, such as the demands of outside employment, loss of motivation to complete, and stressors in personal life (D'Andrea 2002).

### Theme 4: The Value of Publication Now and in the Future

In some ways, discussions of the value of publication reflected a developmental progression that has been

researched extensively with teacher candidates and in various educational institutions seeking to implement an innovation (Hord 1987). Referred to as the "concerns-based adoption model" or CBAM, this line of research examines themes in the prevailing concerns of educators as they adapt to change (Hord et al. 2006). In this model, concerns about adapting to an innovation begin with a focus on *self* (i.e., Can I fulfill the expectations for this role?), next to a focus on *task* (i.e., How, exactly, do I accomplish the task in question?), and finally, to a focus on *impact* (i.e., What are the long-term consequences of having performed this task?). Applying this progression to doctoral students seeking to write and publish their scholarly work, the *self* question might be, "Am I doctoral material? Can I succeed as a doctoral candidate?"; the *task* question might be, "Am I capable of getting my work written, reviewed, and successfully published?" and the *impact* question might be, "After I publish my work, will it have an effect on the readers? On the field? Will it be cited respectfully in others' work? Used as a resource by students?"

In general, the new students regarded writing as a way to establish their credentials in the program and to demonstrate that they were equal to the task of pursuing the degree. Writing was seen as a tool "to complete our assignments at this point," and instructors were expected to offer "both good examples and poor examples of work so that we can better structure our own." With respect to the long-term value, written work—both the assigned reading and their class assignments–were considered to be a form of rehearsal for "what we'll be doing in the future and how challenging it can be."

Doctoral candidates who had completed a significant portion of the required coursework spoke more about the role that publication would play in hiring decisions and professional advancement:

> I would hope that it [publication] would help those of us that aren't currently in higher ed. get hired into those positions…that's [not] necessarily why we are doing it, but it's definitely an incentive for after we complete our doctoral degree.
> the education outlook is very competitive and without being able to be published, you probably won't get a job.
> I need to have those skills in order to, in some way, move my career in a different path. Because I don't think I would go to get a position at a college without having published.

Concerns about accomplishing the task of publishing work in peer reviewed outlets dominated the discussion of experienced doctoral students. For those already employed as faculty who were required to earn the doctorate as a condition of their continued employment, a publication track record was seen as "a large part of our scholarly position in our department" and essential "if you want advancement." Another college faculty member planned to "use this time as a time to hone my skills and get as much published as I can."

Doctoral candidates nearing program completion emphasized the impact of their work, with comments such as:

> I would expect that scholarly writing would be valued by members of the community …[and] I think there will be personal value to me… I don't necessarily see it as a monetary reward, so even if I am able to get some books published I think it will just be for expressing my ideas and maybe helping to solve some problems. One of the things that puts value on the work is that you know your peers and people you work with are influenced somehow by how/what we write.

Even though students nearing or at completion of the degree appreciated the personal satisfactions associated with knowing that one's work "is up to academic publication standards" and adding "to status and profile as a researcher and scholar," they had larger aspirations than breaking into print. As one stated, the most rewarding part of scholarly publication was the possibility that "it may become an interesting and useful resource for researchers, and may be quoted by policy makers or educators in their academic teaching." A new program graduate and international student also recognized the potential of published work as a tool for mentoring the next generation of scholars:

> Presently I am teaching in the university, and having scholarly publication is an important asset to my work. I often share my publication with students, as they begin their study path as young researchers. I aim at being a scholar, with publications being quoted in others' research and used by students, both locally and internationally.

Qualitative research often uses metaphors and images to capture the very essence of an experience from the "emic" (i.e., insider's) perspective (Merriam 2009). Although there was a focus group question designed to elicit this, not everyone was able to quickly arrive at a metaphor or single word that described their experience of writing for publication. Nevertheless, twelve participants identified a metaphor, word, or phrase that captured the essence of their experiences with writing for publication thus far, as described in Table 1.

Several of the descriptors chosen by doctoral students were growth and development concepts, a finding that was influential in the decision to study the transcripts

**Table 1** Metaphors and single words that capture the essence of academic publication

| Metaphor or one word descriptor | Explanation | Experience level |
|---|---|---|
| A circle | It is something that is continuous and you keep learning from it; you often revisit work…and improve on it | First semester student A |
| A brick wall | in that you're putting it together and building it up…adding your ideas. But you're also taking it down because you're deconstructing something… | First semester student C |
| A tree | I figure I first need some really good strong roots before I can continue to grow | First semester student L |
| Like choosing what you want to be when you grow up | One of the best things [is] actual examples of writing and the range of writing that we could do [and] good examples from professors that showed the range of writing that you could engage in | Second year student F |
| An egg hatching | It's a new life being created, and it's a painful process, but the result would be good | Second year student I |
| Struggle | It's not something that you are familiar with and so there is that learning curve…[it's] something that you certainly want to do and move toward…having something worthwhile to present for publication or review in your field | Second year student A |
| Perserverance | Writing is a process of learning…often times you start out writing with an idea and by the time you are finished…you learned so much more than you've ever thought possible | Second year student E |
| Groundbreaking | Because really any piece of research can be utilized and has potential to be groundbreaking and exciting | Second year A |
| Milestone | Because it really does change the course of your career path | Second year C |
| Gardening | This process requires me to plow the soil, plant the seedlings, water and weed the young plant until it grows and blooms. Similarly, writing for publication is a time-consuming process, but yet a most productive and rewarding one | Ph.D. completer A |
| A prestigious membership awarded | It is both exciting and an honour to be able to share my research and study with others | Ph.D. completer B |

holistically rather than by geographic region and institutional affiliation.

## Discussion

Focus groups share a major limitation of self-report data, namely, that the respondents may not answer candidly. As a response to this issue, students were assured that the recordings would be transcribed at the principal investigator's site by a professional secretary so that none of their comments could be attributed to them by name. In addition, they understood that no one, other than the secretary, would use the recorded information, that the data would be kept in a secure location in compliance with federal regulations, and that any publications emanating from the research would preserve confidentiality.

When the interview commenced, students introduced themselves by stating where they were in terms of program completion. In a future study, it might be interesting to have each participant provide some information about her or his prior experience specific to writing for publication and it probably would be best to have this written down individually so that those without much experience would not feel intimidated about venturing an opinion. If this study were repeated, it might be preferable to ask that members of the group respond to the question about a metaphor, word, or phrase to capture the essence of scholarly writing on paper to allow more time to generate an idea and explain the concept selected.

This study, while exploratory in nature, contributes to the literature on writing for publication in two important ways. First of all, it is unique in examining scholarly writing and publishing of doctoral students pursuing degrees in three different geographic contexts and doctoral student cultures. Secondly, it examines the growing pressure to publish scholarly work from an emic, insider's perspective—that of the doctoral candidate in education, including international students whose first language is not English. Finally, the study findings can provide direction to those faculty members responsible for designing, delivering, and revising doctoral program curricula. Lovitts (2005, 2008) has been a spokesperson for doctoral programs that offer students "an apprenticeship and socialization experience" that enables them to make a smooth transition from "an adviser's direction to collaboration, from dependence to independence" (p. 18). From their earliest days of study, doctoral students fully appreciated that, as one new doctoral student observed, "For us moving forward, having things published, that's going to be what sets us apart from folks who have similar credentials in the future." Collectively these new doctoral students, candidates, and very recent graduates endorsed not only the time-honored forms

of mentoring and tacit learning of scholarly writing that are well-established in Academia but also intentional, focused, direct instruction on scholarly writing and publication. Students sought both types of support; they wanted it to commence early; and they thought it should be sustained across various courses and assignments. As one student who was well into doctoral study put it, "The required writing component in this doctoral program has provided me with useful feedback and provided me with opportunities to publish with the direction of my professors."

Doctoral faculty responsible for doctoral curricula should give serious consideration to the recommendations of these focus group participants as they revise programs and work with students pursuing the D.Ed. or Ph.D. Given the ever-escalating demands for scholarly work from college/university faculty—and, by default, doctoral students—we can no longer afford to rely on tacit knowledge as the major mechanism for acquiring the competence and the dispositions associated with successful publication in scholarly outlets. As we prepare the next generation of teachers/scholars in education, we have an obligation to keep the primary purpose of doctoral education in mind as a guiding principle. That purpose, according to the Council of Graduate Schools (1977) is to prepare a student for lifelong intellectual inquiry and to contribute creative scholarship and research that serves to advance the field.

## Appendix

Interview Questions

(1) Where scholarly writing and publication are concerned, what do you consider to be an appropriate emphasis during a doctoral students' program? Why?
(2) Please describe the writing experiences you have acquired thus far in your doctoral studies that have been influential in teaching you the process of scholarly writing and publication.
(3) Do you consider writing to be one of your strengths? Why or why not? If English is your second language, what are the challenges you have faced with academic writing and publishing and how have you attempted to overcome these challenges?
(4) How does a student go about make the transition from class assignments or writing the dissertation to publishing scholarly work in professional outlets?
(5) When you think about submitting your work to anonymous peer review, what prevents you from trying? Conversely, what encourages you to attempt to publish your work?
(6) If you could characterize your feelings about writing for publication in the field of education using a symbol, a metaphor, or a single word, what would it be? Why?
(7) What is the value of published academic writing for you now, as a doctoral student?
(8) After successfully completing your doctoral degree, how do you expect your scholarly writing and publishing to be valued in your future?

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