Action Learning Sets
An Innovative Way to Facilitate Writing for Publication

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Research Fellow (Information)
Where is the University of Salford?

- North West of England
- 1.5 miles from Manchester city centre
- Manchester United Football Club
Expectation to Publish


Decided I wanted to write but wasn’t sure how to get started

In 2006, an external speaker came to talk about ‘Getting Published’ at the University of Salford

Lots of reasons not to write

What can we do to address these problem?
What Did the Evidence Suggest?

Four options were identified to support writing activity within the university.

• Writing courses run by experts
• Writing retreats to avoid distractions
• “How to” guides on writing for publication
• Writing groups
Writers Groups

Dominant model of writing support
May, or may not, be led by a facilitator
Provide a collegiate and supportive environment in which writing is seen as a social activity that benefits from discussion between peers
Cross Disciplinary Writers
Group Structure

- Activity facilitator
- Chair

Agenda
- Introduction 10 - 15 minutes
- Update from members on writing progress
- Writing feedback session 20 minutes
  Member receives feedback on a piece of work circulated prior to the meeting
- Open item 30 - 40 minutes
  Group discussion or activity facilitated by a member of the group
- Action planning 5 - 10 minutes
  Members identify writing plans for the following month

- Participants in activity and providing feedback
- Member receiving feedback
Cross Disciplinary Writers Group

Books and book chapters
Conferences
  • Oral presentations
  • Poster presentations
Journal articles
  • Non-peer reviewed articles
  • Peer-reviewed articles
Reports
  • Internally funded
  • Externally funded
Others
  • Editorship
  • Peer reviewing
  • Writing for publication workshops
International Writers Group

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• Poster presentations
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School Operational Plan

• To achieve national standing for research performance…
• To substantially extend the University's engagement and influence…
• Recruiting, retaining, developing and supporting a workforce…

MANY

Origins of the Group


http://bit.ly/19Nh6m
Open Meeting
September 2011

• Was a writers group wanted?
• How regularly we would meet?
• How long we would meet for
• Structure of meeting

Peer Support Writers Group
*October 2011*

- Monthly
- Writing for feedback
- Discussion Topic

What is the Underlying Andragogy?

... the activities of educating or instructing

... the activities that impart knowledge or skill

http://bit.ly/184i1AA
What Did the Evidence Suggest?

Writing for Publication: LIS Settings

• Advocates creating a “community of writers” in the library (Gannon-Leary et al, 2010)
• Supporting publication once written e.g. open access, institutional repositories, impact factors, bibliometrics (Hansson et al, 2013)

Writing for Publication: Non-LIS Settings

• Publication syndicates in nursing (McVeigh et al, 2002)
• Physician peer support writers group (Grzybowski et al, 2003)
• Systematic review of interventions (McGrail et al, 2006)
• Cross disciplinary writers groups (Grant et al, 2010)
What is Action Learning?

“Action learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection that happens with the support of a group or ‘set’ of colleagues, working on real issues, with the intention of getting things done.”

(McGill et al, 2004 p11)
What Did the Evidence Suggest?

**Action Learning**
- Flexibility in the timing of meeting a project teams training needs *(Booth et al, 2003)*
- Change management *(Bennet et al, 2008)*
- Competence development/improving professional practice *(Herd, 2008; Cronholm et al, 2010)*
- Second life *(Wagner et al, 2009)*
- Knowledge management *(Radu, 2012)*

**Blended Action Learning**
- Leadership development *(Thornton et al, 2011)*

What is Action Learning?

“Action learning builds on the relationship between reflection and action. Learning by experience involves reflection, i.e. reconsidering past events, making sense of our actions, and possibly finding new ways of behaving at future events.”

(McGill et al, 2004 p13)
Reflection

“[The] greatest personal and professional benefit is reported from analytical reflection, that is, when time is given to considering the implications of past events on future practice.”

The role of reflection in the library and information sector: a systematic review

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Abstract

Objective: To systematically review published literature on the role of reflection in the library and information science sector. To identify examples of good practice and to investigate the reported contributions, if any, of reflection by library and information workers as part of their professional practice.

Method: Free text searches (retrospective or reflection or reflective) were conducted for English language papers on the Library and Information Science Abstracts database in two phases; in March 2004 for literature dating from 1980 to 2003 and between 2004 and 2006 in January 2006. Thirteen papers met the inclusion criteria and were coded and analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Two categories of reflection exist: analytical and non-analytical. Those that focus on events in the recent and distant past. Non-analytical reflective accounts generally adopt a retrospective tone in reporting on multiple events over a number of decades. In contrast, analytical accounts of reflection focused on single events and attempts to understand the relationship between past experiences and how this might impact on future practice.

Conclusion: From the samples of reflective practice identified, greatest personal and professional benefit is reported when time is given to considering the implications of past events on future practice, that is, analytical reflection.
What are Action Learning Sets?

- Provide the time and space for reflection and learning
- Deliberate and intentional provision of time and space for set members to engage in reflective learning
- Legitimises the allocation of time and space for reflection
- Enable the individual to take responsibility, decide on action, and move on
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Time and Space for Reflection

“The frequency of set meetings is negotiated and agreed at the start of the cycle, and set meeting dates are decided and diaried in advance.” *(McGill et al, 2004 p15)*

“An interval of one month or six weeks between set meetings is usual; any longer affects the momentum and work of the set.” *(McGill et al, 2004 p15)*

*On the second Wednesday of the month…*
Peer Support Writers Group

Structure

- Monthly
- Discussion Topic
- Writing for feedback
Consider…

“Learning to talk about writing is an important key to becoming a productive writer.” (Belcher, 2009 p2)

http://amzn.to/16aNxth
Reflective Learning

“[Action learning sets capitalise on] the idea of individuals being resources of abundance that can be drawn upon to further learning.”

(McGill et al, 2004 p21)

http://bit.ly/1bbDPws
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Personal Engagement is Key

“Participants in action learning engage in the process voluntarily. That is, they make a positive conscious decision to join an action learning set… Voluntary implies a willingness to engage with the process.”

(McGill et al, 2004 p18)
Personal Engagement is Key

“Action learning does not work when it is imposed on the person… resistance to the process may result in negative outcomes, leading to behaviour that militates against constructive learning.”
(McGill et al, 2004 p18)
Consider…

“Even if we do manage to talk about writing, we are more likely to talk about content rather than process.”

(Belcher, 2009 p2)
Content as a Facilitator of Process…

- Defining our terms of reference
- Structuring our writing
- Our potential readership
- Presentation of information
- Types of writing
- Peer review
Writing for Feedback

“all really helpful”

“stimulated [me] into action”

“safe and helpful”

“getting some nice feedback”
Not Just the Meetings...

School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work
Peer Support Writers Group
10th April 2013
Amy@2urn

The peer support writers' group revisited the discussion topic of "Why Do We Write? Sources of inspiration and motivation" while working on our latest pieces being edited from larger manuscripts written into a more accessible practice-based article.

Discussion Topic Relating to Writing

The recent discussion focused on "Why Do We Write? Sources of inspiration and motivation." The discussion identified three main elements of motivation:

Motivation 1: Internal Drive

Involves a core of motivation located in the following themes:

- Enhancing one’s current knowledge
- Clarifying one’s thinking
- Refining one’s ideas by sharing and writing (possibly through informal peer review and meeting feedback)
- The process of reviewing one’s learning and knowledge with others
- Writing to address questions, ideas, or concerns

Writing with colleagues was also seen as a positive way to build our confidence and a setting for professional development:

1. Sharing ideas within a writing team helps develop writing skills, helping to clarify the writing of clear themes and focusing on clear and concise writing.
2. Writing with others provides a common forum for discussion, a writing project not wanting to be bogged down by indecision.

Motivation 2: External Drivers

External reasons of motivation included in the following themes:

- Camera is higher education combining multiple complementary elements including teaching, research, scholarship and writing, enabling us to develop our "individual excellence.

“so useful”

“inspired [me to write]”
Evaluation is Important

“For individuals coming to set work it is necessary to justify, given the importance of the time devoted to such personal and management development.”

(McGill et al, 2004 p18)
From My Experience…

Experienced Writers

The action learning set is used to stimulate completing and submitting papers or reengaging with papers which have received referee feedback and/or been rejected.

http://bit.ly/1b2SdlF
From My Experience…

Early Career Writers

View the action learning set as a ‘safe’ place in which to develop their writing skills and realise what skills they already possess

http://bit.ly/12oJVWX
The (Action) Learning Conference

What are your experiences of facilitating writing?
What is your preferred method of facilitation?
What is your underlying pedagogy?
References

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References

**Action Learning**


**Blended Action Learning**

References


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