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### Reflections of a Novice Academic Writer

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#### Abstract

This article is a narrative account of my experiences as an emerging writer engaged in the process of writing an article for submission to an academic journal. As a novice academic writer, I was supported by my doctoral supervisor and another senior lecturer who has published several articles. I draw on this first experience of writing an article to disseminate findings of research done at undergraduate level as material for this article. The reflective journal written when I was an undergraduate student, the drafts of the article, as well as my supervisor's comments were used as data, which I analysed. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory with the categories of challenges, learning, and emotions was used as a theoretical lens for analysis. The findings point to the process of scholarly writing, the challenges that I faced, the academic learning I experienced, as well as the emotional development on my journey towards becoming a scholarly writer. I conclude that deep reflection on the process and the action of writing enhanced my own development as scholar. This has implications for other novice writers who are forging their way in academia.

Keywords: Academic writing, narrative, reflection, Mezirow

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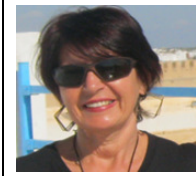
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## Introduction

How does a novice academic writer learn to write a scholarly article? This is a question confronting many emerging scholars who want to establish themselves as academics. I am a teacher, a novice writer, and an emerging researcher who wants to immerse myself in research and publication and in so doing establish myself in academia. As a third-year undergraduate student teacher several years ago, I conducted research on teenage pregnancy as part of a research and service learning module in the Faculty of Education,<sup>7</sup> University of KwaZulu-Natal. In this module, we were expected to research the service learning projects that we conducted in various communities. I was engaged in a service learning project with pregnant teenage schoolchildren at a rural high school. I thought the project warranted writing an article to disseminate the findings. It was during this process, as well, that I was exploring what is expected when writing a research article. Because the article writing process was new to me, I made notes reflecting on my experiences of writing the article. These reflections provided the impetus for writing an article about learning to write an article in collaboration with my supervisor—contributing to the body of knowledge of writing for publication. I am the participant in this research.<sup>8</sup>

As an aspiring academic, the notion of “publish or perish” is at the fore of my mind. They are powerful words because they describe the expectation that academics should conduct and disseminate research, alongside teaching and community engagement. Publishing research is essential to an academic career—for recognition in the academic field, in my case, education. In the absence of such publications, one’s academic standing and consequently, prospects for promotion, applications for grants, and National Research Foundation rating is impacted. Being an academic at a university clearly requires research and the production of new knowledge that is useful to society. Neem (2014, para. 2) wrote that a university is the “critical conscience of a democratic society. It houses experts in various spheres of life who must use their knowledge to enhance the public’s understanding of vital issues.” It is evident that knowledge production is critical to all higher education institutions in South Africa. It is for this reason that in the *National Development Plan: Vision for 2030* it is stated that, “Higher education is the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development. However, higher education is much more than a simple instrument of economic development. Education is important for good citizenship and enriching and diversifying life” (National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 262). According to Mouton (2010, pg. 8), in South Africa “knowledge output (as measured in terms of article production) may have reached a plateau at around 7 500 article equivalents per year (which constitutes about 0.4% of total world science production).” The current ranking of universities as research-focused institutions places an added expectation on academics to increase the number of publications, and for these to be published in high profile accredited journals.

Nationally and internationally, there has been an increase in published journal articles by postgraduate students coauthored with their supervisors (Nethsinghe & Southcott, 2015; Nyika, 2015). Postgraduate students are encouraged to publish in scholarly journals in order to disseminate

<sup>7</sup> The Faculty of Education is currently called the School of Education.

<sup>8</sup> The second author is my supervisor of the project and the third author has published many articles, both people supported the writing of this article.

their research—during, as well as after completion of the study—as an introduction into publishing and the academic community. The requirement in many South African universities is for postgraduate students to provide evidence of submission of an article to an accredited peer-reviewed journal when submitting a doctoral thesis for examination. The student who is a novice writer of articles is to be supported by her or his supervisor who often serves as coauthor of the article. The coauthoring approach to writing is beneficial because both student and supervisor “benefit by internalising each other’s cognitive processes, arrived at by communicating socially” (Dale, 1996, p. 65). This “apprenticeship learning perspective sheds light on how the process of getting published is a way of gaining access and entering into the academic community. This is a process of both learning the craft and developing researcher identity” (Wegener & Tanggaard, 2013, para. 43).

Shah, Shah, and Pietrobani (2009) confirmed the view that writing a scholarly article is a daunting task for many novice researchers, because they experience difficulties with “distinguishing between content and structure, and backward design of manuscript” (p. 511). Further difficulties are experienced in the writing of an article according to a particular format, deciding on the appropriate content, the choice of words, and the time needed for writing and consulting with a mentor. Novice researchers therefore need to acquire knowledge and skills of how to write a scholarly article, and to then use them to develop an article that could be accepted upon peer review. The reporting on one’s research, structuring and designing the manuscript, and producing the final copy is enhanced by the input of experienced scholars.

At the outset of writing for publication, excitement is experienced. However, the enthusiasm to write for publication may be rudely halted when the novice researcher begins the writing process and encounters challenges. The focus of this article is, therefore, on a novice researcher’s learning to write for publication. The following critical questions are asked:

How did I as novice writer, with the support of supervisors, experience learning to write an article?  
How did this experience affect my development as a scholarly writer?

## Scholarly Writing

In this section of the article, I position my work as a novice academic writer in the body of knowledge on writing for publication. The notion of publish or perish, which “is actually an implicit or explicit requirement” (Derntl, 2014, p. 107), is one that haunts many academics (and novice researchers) as to the outcome they could expect should they not be successful in publishing scholarly articles. This may have a negative effect on academic work because “the growing competition and ‘publish or perish’ culture in academia might conflict with the objectivity and integrity of research, because it forces [researchers] to produce ‘publishable’ results at all costs” (Fanelli, 2010, p. 1). The novice researcher could experience this as positive pressure to add to the research field. This pressure, however, could have a negative effect if the novice researcher has an unsettling and even painful experience of the writing process.

The word *novice* is used to refer to “someone who is just beginning to learn a skill or subject” (“novice,” n. d.), in this instance, a beginning researcher such as a graduate student who, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), is challenged by the intricacies of the diverse aspects of research and also writing up the research. Novice researchers are thus in the process of developing both the knowledge and skills of research and writing for publication, which includes academic writing. These are best developed when working with a mentor who supports the novice in her or his induction into the practice of scholarly writing.

The knowledge and skill required by the novice writer is to turn the research into a manuscript of an appropriate scholarly standard. However, novice writers experience “academic writing as inherently difficult” (Blicblau, 2011, p. 215) because there are so many aspects of writing that need to be considered simultaneously: the structure of the research article; guarding against plagiarising; and accessing, interpreting, and integrating previous research that has been done in the field. In the context of South Africa, the difficulty of writing is intensified by having to describe and explain your research in a language that is not necessarily your mother tongue. These difficulties are experienced by many postgraduate students (Wegener & Tanggaard, 2013). Nash (2004) and Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) also referred to the difficulty of making a choice to write in the third person when reporting on quantitative research, or using the first person when reporting on qualitative research.

According to Jalilifar (2010), the key to a good publication lies in the title because it is “the proof of identity of any academic piece of work without which it would find no space in the intended discourse community” (p. 30). The formulation of a clear title can add to the woes of the novice writer; Jalilifar (2010) suggest that its formulation should be seen as a process where the writer includes three aspects: the what (focus of the research), the who (people researched), and the where (site of the research). Landrum (2007), though, interestingly pointed out that experienced writers do not necessarily follow the rules of writing, including the structuring of their titles.

A seemingly simple way to learn how to structure an article and improve writing is to study the format and writing style of different publications (Cho, Schunn, & Kwon, 2007). The structure of a research article is inclusive of a literature review. A diverse set of skills are expected when constructing a literature review: read, interpret and cite other researchers’ work in the field, and present it in a coherent and integrated way. Doing a literature review or drawing on relevant literature presents a challenge for novice researchers in terms of plagiarism. Plagiarism, according to Pecorari (2008), is “recognised in academia as ‘common,’ as a ubiquitous practice not only of international students, but of all students at university campuses” (p. 325). Many students struggle to develop the skill to paraphrase or cite accurately, and resort to copying material directly from the original source. Although there are programmes such as Turnitin and iThenticate that use text matching software that pulls up the original sources of matching text, the programmes cannot detect plagiarism where the writer has paraphrased and not cited the author. Learning how to ensure that “the words used [are] one’s own and . . . properly acknowledged with the original source” (Chowhan, Nandyala, Patnayak, & Phaneendra, 2013, para. 5), is a skill that must be acquired.

Accessing relevant and recent publications and interpreting the research findings reported in them are further skills that novice writers are expected to develop. Initially, the writer may be confused and uncertain about how to access a journal but for a registered university student, support is available. The action of consulting with librarians and accessing the internet facilities provides good guidelines on how to access journal articles. However, it is essential that the writer understands that a journal article is a dated record of an author’s research questions, methods, findings, and conclusion (Shotton, 2012). The process of sifting through the articles to extract the relevant information requires skill and practice, the development of which is enhanced by increased practice. Besides the skill of writing, there are also social dynamics to be considered: ability to work cooperatively and collaborate with a supervisor, and the personal attitude of the writer.

Writing an article may be a solitary or collaborative process. Working cooperatively and collaboratively with a supervisor is a necessary action, which should be beneficial for both individuals. However, this is not always the case because learning a style of writing from a supervisor may disrupt the novice writer’s own flow of ideas, and this could frustrate and impede progress. Hence, the “role of mentors in guiding, encouraging, and supporting novice researchers” (Shah et al.,

2009, p. 514) is an essential aspect to be considered when negotiating this relationship from the outset. While this relationship is viewed by some as hierarchical, this is challenged by other researchers (Colbran, 2004). The essential point to consider is that writing is a fundamental skill that all research students need to develop (Colbran, 2004) and, considering the messiness of writing (Cole & Knowles, 2001), novice writers require support from mentors. This can be in the “form of encouragement” (Shah et al., 2009, p. 514) and may include the evaluation of the soundness of the written piece and its use by other authors (Shah et al., 2009). Furthermore, the support should focus on the advice that clear communication of research is of utmost importance and “those who reported research must attend to the soundness of the subject matter, the nature of the intended audience, and to questions of clarity, style, structure, precision, and accuracy” (Shah et al., 2009, p. 511).

For a novice writer, having one’s work judged (reviewed) by experienced scholars in the field instils fear and anxiety. The fear is that the information researched and reported on may not be accepted as contributing to new knowledge in that particular field and that the reviewer may not find the article acceptable for publication. Also, if the article is accepted, the novice writer experiences anxiety due to further scrutiny by readers who, most likely, comprise of other experts in the field and this “audience does not read to be entertained, informed, or persuaded; the audience reads to evaluate” (Landrum, 2007, p. 2). So, the thought of being evaluated by peers can be a daunting one for a novice writer.

Healey (2005) described the research experiences of novice writers as students becoming active participants in research: “It is suggested that undergraduate students are likely to gain most benefit from research in terms of depth of learning and understanding when they are involved actively, particularly through various forms of inquiry-based learning” (p. 183). Likewise, the novice writer is likely to gain most benefit from the act of writing. The novice writer moves from being an active participant in her or his own research to producing a narrative account of the research. During this process, the writer’s learning about writing is being transformed.

### **Theoretical Framework: Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning theory as described by Cranton (2002) and Mezirow (1997) was used to make meaning of my own experiences, my reflective writing, and the comments of my supervisors on my article. Mezirow (1997) viewed transformative learning as a change process that transforms a person’s frame of reference. His theory defines frames of reference as “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings” (1997, p. 5). The process of writing, getting critique, rewriting, and emotional upheavals leads to greater transparency of the writing process, thereby leading to the change required (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow 1991). The mechanisms for transformational learning include experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. The starting point for this learning is a person’s experience, the critical reflection on one’s experience (the vehicle by which one questions the validity of one’s worldview), and the rational discourse functioning as a catalyst for transformation as it induces the various participants to explore the depth and meaning of their various worldviews (Mezirow, 1991).

In order to use transformational learning as a lens, I needed to elicit and question the concepts of novice writing from a perspective of the challenges, learning, and emotions I experienced. I had to comprehend these, recognise, and expound on them during the writing process. During the process I was, as described by Mezirow (1997), in a transformative learning environment in that I was free from coercion because I had initiated the idea to write the article, and had assumed the various roles

of writer, critical reader, and reflective student who was willing to search for a synthesis of different points of view. However, my previously undisclosed and uncritically held assumptions and beliefs that learning to write is an easy and automatic process, and that I would be able to structure my ideas in a scholarly manner the first time that I wrote them down, were challenged.

## **Methodology**

I had conducted research on teenage pregnancy where the participants were teenage girls and boys, and I decided to use the data to write a journal article. In writing the article, I used an interpretive paradigm to frame the research because I interpreted the data at a particular time and in a particular context. An interpretive paradigm requires qualitative research and therefore the data I collected were mostly descriptive and comprised an in-depth description of my particular experiences (Creswell, 2008). This approach was used to explore my first experience of writing an article for a journal, and what it means to write for publication. My intention was to develop a deep understanding of my experience of learning how to write—as a novice researcher. The research design was a case study because data were collected about one case—my case—as I attempted to gain in-depth understanding about a particular phenomenon (Punch, 2009).

The methods of data generation included writing a reflective journal while in the process of writing the article, writing the drafts of the article, and the supervisor and mentor writing comments on the submitted drafts. The data thus consisted of a reflective journal, the draft articles, and supervisor and mentor's comments and suggestions. The reflective journal served as a means to record my experiences of writing, to keep track of the progress I was making (or not making), and to record my thinking throughout the writing process. The draft articles also showed the progress I was making and were a good way of checking how my writing had transformed from the start to the final product. The supervisor comments showed my progress in developing as a scholarly writer and, also, whether I had learned from previous mistakes. I chose to work with the drafts because I saw them as evidence of my emerging writing.

When analysing the data I used a priori coding, where the categories were established prior to the analysis and based upon theory. The a priori coding involved me making meaning of the data in response to the research questions posed, whereby I fitted the analysis into Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning as an analytic framework. The experiences recorded in my reflective journal provided data with regard to my emotions while experiencing the process of writing. The changes in the different drafts, as well as my supervisors' comments and suggestions, provided evidence of my learning with regard to academic writing. All data sources produced evidence of the challenges I faced and needed to overcome in the process of learning to write in academic style.

Trustworthiness was established by ensuring credibility, dependability, and conformability with the triangulation of the data generation methods: using a reflective journal, draft articles, and supervisor comments and suggestions. Transferability was ensured where a dense description of data, including verbatim direct quotes, are presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Findings**

In this section, I present the findings as analysed using Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, which serves as a system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience (Cranton, 2002). However, before I discuss the findings, I offer a descriptive narrative of turning my research into a publishable article.

## Turning my research into a publishable article.

The undertaking of writing for publication was not as easy as it initially seemed. There were many aspects of academic writing that I had to consider before writing the article. For the undergraduate research study, I had designed an interpretative, mixed methods project to provide a deep analysis of why the birth rate among teenage girls was increasing in the Inchanga area in KwaZulu-Natal. A convenient sample of eight pregnant teenage girls was used and they were asked to complete questionnaires for me to get an overview of the ideas that teenage girls in that area had about pregnancy. This was then triangulated by my second instrument of a semi-structured interview to validate the data from the questionnaire and gain an in-depth understanding of the social factors that contributed to the experience of being pregnant. Since my research design involved both qualitative and quantitative data, triangulation of the data was of utmost importance to make the research reliable, and I needed to carefully justify any conclusion I reached.

I knew I had to locate a journal in which to publish my article. Looking at the notes to contributors of some journals, I realised I needed a journal that focused on publishing research in the area of my study. I chose a journal that seemed best suited to my research because it included similar articles and involved topics that affect education in South Africa. A treatise of approximately 100 pages had to be reduced and presented as a coherent article. Reading carefully through my treatise, I selected what I thought would be relevant and then collated a shorter version of the study in an article format. This I promptly sent off, as e-mail attachment, to my supervisor for her comment. Anticipating a positive response to my first draft of the article from my supervisor, I waited for her e-mail to arrive with the feedback. I was located in Pretoria and she was in Durban, so our exchanges were done mainly electronically, via e-mail. When the e-mail did arrive, I was dismayed and alarmed by the feedback I received. My supervisor had used the Track Changes function, and so the article was filled with red inserts, comments, and questions. She raised aspects that I had not even thought about, and made suggestions of what I needed to do to enhance the scholarly level of the article. While this was helpful, I felt discouraged because I realised that apart from the many mistakes I had let slip through, I had not taken into consideration that 6 years had passed since I had completed my study, and that the literature needed to be updated. This meant that a considerable amount of reading was required to update the literature on the topic. This was time consuming but for publication purposes it had to be done. To update the literature invoked mixed feelings as I realised that the research conducted on this topic was vast, and that most of the previous reading I had done was outdated and no longer applicable. Many hours of reading, rereading, paraphrasing, quoting, and writing brought me to condensed literature that I could use in the article.

I was alarmed when my supervisor inquired about the theoretical framework for the article. “What is that?” was my first reaction. Having completed an honours degree, I was sort of familiar with the term, but I did not have a true understanding of what the concept meant. I also knew about the confusion amongst researchers and students alike around what the constructs *theoretical framework* and *conceptual framework* mean, because we had debated this extensively. Trying to understand, I read more, but found that every article or textbook I read confused me further. It seemed that most researchers decide on a theoretical framework and then analyse their data using their framework as a lens through which to view the data. In this case, I had data but no framework. I felt I was working backwards. At this point, I considered whether writing for publication was worth it. Being ambitious, I persevered and continued searching and reading. After much reading and discussion with my supervisor and other postgraduate students, I decided that a sociocultural framework was the most suitable theoretical framework, and I used it to analyse the data.

When I was satisfied—and impressed—with my second draft, having updated the literature and written about a theoretical framework, I decided to scan the chosen journal again to check the

requirements for submission. My supervisor had advised me to read the notes to contributors in preparation for submission to the journal, but she did not provide detail as what to do with these. I had to work with them myself. Having chosen a journal I wanted to publish in meant that I needed to structure my article according to the stipulations prescribed by the journal. The process of rewriting started again. Academic writing, where sentence construction and flow (even the choice of every word is important), was required and this was clearly daunting to me as a novice writer. I finally sent the second draft of my article to my supervisor.

Anticipating that there would be fewer changes needed to the second draft, I was more at ease waiting for the feedback from my supervisor. Once again, the draft came back with many red inserts and comments, but I could see some progress. She pointed out issues with my referencing, the need to explain certain matters in more detail, and to provide evidence to support the statements I had made. The format of the article had to be altered because the data needed to be presented in a manner that would reflect the findings more clearly and be easier for the reader to understand. I did the required revisions and sent off the third draft to my supervisor.

This time I was sure that the revisions would be few because I had written and rewritten the article so many times, changing and adding, rephrasing, and refining it. When the feedback came, I was rather disappointed to see that there were still further revisions required. The literature review, for example, was still not satisfactory, and it was beginning to frustrate me. I had read so much on the topic yet it still seemed as if it was not enough. I revised the article much faster this time and focused on exactly what the comments asked for. Hoping that my supervisor would be satisfied and that I had managed to improve the scholarliness sufficiently, I sent the fourth draft to her. I expected that the article would have a few minor errors that could be easily corrected and the article could be submitted to the journal of my choice, ready for review and, hopefully, for publication.

We collaboratively developed the article and after several drafts and much time (I was studying and my supervisor was engaged in many projects and teaching) it was at a point where it could be submitted to a journal. On submission of the article, I realised that this had been a daunting experience and that in spite of my efforts, I had no idea whether my article would be considered favourably by the reviewers. It was at this point that I realised I needed to write about the experience. The article was reviewed but the editor suggested that it should rather be sent to a health sciences journal and not a science education journal. This action is in process.

Using Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning, I offer my findings in the following three themes: challenges, learning, and emotional experiences.

## **Challenges**

While there were several challenges that I experienced during the writing process—making me realise that I was underprepared for academic writing—each of them became an opportunity to learn. The challenges pertained to making a coherent argument, aspects of writing such as the use of scientific terminology, reading, and paraphrasing to avoid plagiarism and referencing—all necessary in writing a coherent argument. Time to work on the article also presented as a challenge.

The main challenge was clearly learning how to present a cohesive argument based on the findings of my research. It is not enough to simply report on what the data presented. I was challenged by the idea that I have to show that my findings answered my research questions. My supervisor advised me to be clear and concise about any claim that I made, and to support each claim with relevant



data. She also time and again said, “re-visit your research questions often to make sure that you are sticking to your study and not going off on a tangent” (Supervisor, comment from draft). This proved difficult because I had to constantly weigh up whether what I was saying was necessary, and I needed to support my argument.

Of course, academic writing requires the writer to use the tools of the trade such as research terminology. Understanding and using appropriate terminology for academic writing was not easy. The knowledge that I had from postgraduate studies clearly was not enough and I still needed to read more on terminology used in research. Clear examples of this were the distinctions between methodology and method, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, different types of learning theories, and the validity or trustworthiness of data. Only if I understood these could I use them appropriately. My supervisor advised me: “We speak of validity in quantitative research but the trustworthiness of qualitative research” (Reflective journal).

The vast area of literature generated by researchers required me to understand what was said, and to paraphrase it in a clear way for use in supporting my writing. Paraphrasing was something I worked very hard on because I did not want any problems with plagiarism at a later stage. Yet again, this was difficult because sometimes I felt that the way it was written by the author was best and that my paraphrasing would not do justice to the point. My supervisor suggested I try to say what I needed to as if I was telling it to someone else, like a story: “You need to find a way to get the words across by using your own words” (Supervisor, comment from draft). This required writing and rewriting until I felt I had the right words in the right place and that the paraphrasing was accurate.

In support of my argument, I drew on and referred to other researchers’ work, which necessitated proper referencing. Every journal, of course, has specific requirements for referencing, as did the one I was writing for. While getting into the APA referencing style was not difficult, it was tedious and made me procrastinate many times. Not referencing meticulously invited comments such as “stick to the same referencing style” and “take note of the use of full stops and commas” from my supervisor. Every time I wrote, I had to ensure that I was adhering to the notes to contributors stipulated by the journal. I was constantly reminded to “check if what you have done is within the journal requirements” (Supervisor, comment from draft).

Besides these challenges, making time to work on the article was limited because I had a full-time job and was simultaneously studying towards a master’s degree. This added to the frustration that I experienced because I wanted to work on it but felt I could not find enough time to do so. “It is important to try and develop some type of routine, so that you find time to work on your article” was a recurring plea from my supervisor. So I set aside time by dedicating an hour before I started the day’s work to focus on the article.

## **Learning**

Each of the mentioned challenges provided opportunities for learning. The knowledge and skills I acquired during the writing process were beneficial in writing the article and also for future work, indeed, contributing to my learning and transformation.

In searching for literature to support my argument I learned to skim read articles, sifting out irrelevant information and finding that which was relevant. This sounds easy but I was worried that I would miss relevant information in the process. I learned to summarise and then sift through the information and extract the relevant data.

As I read and discussed with my supervisor the different terminologies I grappled with, I became more familiar with what they meant and how to use them in the article. I also noticed that as I kept writing and rewriting, the use of terminologies flowed better—as I wrote I was clarifying my thinking and as I was thinking, my writing became more clear: “This paragraph is well written and you have made use of some good research terminology” (Supervisor, comment from draft). One of the most important aspects of learning was understanding the value of a conceptual and a theoretical framework. I remember asking my supervisor, “What is the difference between the two and why do we need this?” After reading many articles and trying to understand the purpose and need for a framework, I was happy to find that it allowed my work to have some logical structure so all aspects of data could link and be presented more meaningfully. It allowed me to learn how to think critically and give responses, avoiding assumptions and personal opinions.

Learning the intricacies of referencing according to APA referencing style was a necessary learning curve—I thought I knew how to reference when I did my undergraduate and honours research modules—because it is a critical tool in ensuring that other authors’ work is properly acknowledged. Each time my drafts came back, I found fewer referencing errors and my supervisor commented that I was referencing and citing my work much better: “Your referencing is improving, keep checking as you work” (Supervisor, comment from draft).

In spite of feeling overwhelmed when the draft—filled with red tracked changes—came back from my supervisor, the use of Track Changes in Microsoft Word opened up another possibility for working with my own students’ work. My supervisor used the function to suggest changes to my work, and comment on how I could correct or change what I had written to be more clear. Working on the document in Microsoft Word also facilitated writing and editing, enabling me to find suitable words or synonyms to improve the sentences.

My ability to summarise, paraphrase, quote, and cite—used in writing my article—has improved and I am able to write in a more coherent, academic style. This was developed by interaction with my supervisor and mentor, the reflections in my journal, and consulting relevant literature. I have learned, through all my reading, how to structure my paragraphs and create a flowing argument. My supervisor often asked me to read through my paragraphs after completing them to “check that it flows” and when she finally, in the last draft, pointed out that “this paragraph flows very well, good!” (Supervisor, comment in draft), I was elated!

A researcher does not make sweeping statements but supports argument with data and literature. This required critical reading and analysing which quotes would be best to use in creating a sound argument or justifying a claim. Soon I found myself wanting to use this in other aspects of my life, which has allowed for personal development as I changed the way in which I communicate—making sure I have a reason for my opinion or view.

### **Emotional experience.**

I have learned to recognise that work (and life) does not come without challenges, and in my enthusiasm to write an article I had anticipated challenges. My reflections, however, brought me to a deeper awareness of what it takes to write a scholarly article, and that I had learned valuable knowledge and skills needed for the process. However, the most important transition I made in my journey of scholarly writing was an emotional one.

Anxiety was the feeling I experienced almost every time I sent a draft for review to my supervisor because I was unsure of the nature of the feedback and the extent of the changes (the work) that might be required. Mezirow's theory points out that in being human our urgent need is to "understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos" (2000, p. 3). Although I expected to feel these emotions, I had no idea how severe the emotions would be. When I received my first draft back from my supervisor, I was devastated and convinced that I would never be able to develop academic writing skills. I put the draft away and tried not to think about my disappointment. Some time passed before I could bring myself to think about the possibility of trying again.

I went into article writing with confidence that I knew exactly what needed to be done, and I was sure that I could complete the task easily and effectively. I remember reassuring my supervisor that I was confident that the article would be "published in no time." This only lasted until I received my first draft back. I felt discouraged and demotivated and realised very quickly that this was not going to be as easy as I'd thought it would be. To help encourage me, my supervisor reassured me that "this is a learning process and you should see every comment as positive criticism to better your article and your writing skills" (Supervisor, comment in draft).

Eventually, I read my supervisor's comments and tried to address each comment—one at a time. This proved to be frustrating because at times I was not sure how to express what I wanted to say in a more academic, clear, concise, and relevant way whilst still managing to reference, have flow throughout the article, and avoid sweeping statements. It seemed like so many things to focus on at once. As I worked through the article, I realised that this process had strengthened me and prepared me for the next round of comments.

This time I was more open to suggestions and changes because I was sure there would be a few because I had addressed all the previous comments. Again the draft came back with many changes and comments; I was becoming annoyed because making the changes was a very time consuming process and required my full attention to focus on all the many things I needed to in order to create an academically strong article. My supervisor advised: "It doesn't help to become angry or upset about the comments. See it as a learning process. You are getting better each time" (Supervisor, comment on draft).

By the time my third draft was returned to me, I was more in control of my emotions. This experience prepared me for the day when my first manuscript submitted to an accredited peer-reviewed journal will be returned to me. I have learned not to succumb to self-pity, and will accept it as a positive learning experience.

## Discussion

Looking back at the article writing process, I have found that it ties in with Mezirow's (1991) transformation theory. Mezirow (1991) emphasised the importance of change brought about by experiences. Through my experiences of challenges, learning, and emotional experiences in writing the article, I have grown and developed my academic writing skills. This has brought about change in the way I think about, understand, and interpret information. By receiving what seemed to me a negative response to my writing the first few times, I was able to fully experience challenges, learning, and emotions related to writing an article. My expectation and anticipation of an instant positive reaction was rudely halted, but the comments proved to be beneficial in the transformation of my academic skills development. These challenges, emotions, and learning during the writing process enabled me to construct knowledge that I would not have otherwise gained from my

postgraduate studies. Learning through these experiences has helped shape my understanding of developing as a scholar.

## Conclusion

As postgraduate students and teachers, we are expected to be lifelong learners—in this article, learning how to write a scholarly article. In the article, I focused particularly on responses to the research questions posed earlier: How did I as novice writer, with the support of supervisors, experience the coauthoring of an article? How did these experiences affect my development as a scholarly writer? In responding to the questions, I explained the challenges, the learning emerging from the challenges, and how it made me feel. Nash (2004, p. 64) succinctly stated that, “writing is both a craft and an art.” This craft and art, for me, was certainly developed by my reflections on the process itself. It is through reflection that novice writers may be enabled to not only learn the process of writing for publication, but to work through the challenges that confront them as well.

While transformational learning has taken place through this process, the biggest transformation occurred with regard to my emotional development. This was made possible by constant interaction with my supervisor and a more experienced author, and also the actions of writing and reflecting. Emotional maturity enables the writer to be able to respond positively to comments and criticisms. I am of the view that the novice writer should create an environment where such emotional maturity can develop by accepting that every comment or criticism is actually a learning that furthers one’s development.

By sharing my reflections, I enable present and future graduates to take on the challenge of writing for publication, to pen their first articles with the full knowledge that the process is not easy but that eventual success is eminently fulfilling. My experience has paid off because I am now developing the required skills and knowledge. This process is possible under the mentorship of more seasoned writers. Much work needs to be done by higher education institutions to successfully empower novice writers to write for academic publication. This critical narrative of my experience of learning how to write an article under the supervision of a supervisor and mentor contributes to the body of knowledge on writing for publication—an activity that should be an integral part of postgraduate study. For the quality of education to transform and improve in South Africa, educational research is needed so that more informed decisions and actions can be taken. This article could contribute to an increase in educational researchers who publish their work, thereby contributing to a transformation.

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