On Becoming a Researcher: The Value of Writing Throughout the research process

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ABSTRACT

This article presents my reflections on becoming a researcher and explores the usefulness of writing throughout the research process. Having work published is a key performance indicator in academia, and writing is an essential skill needed to get work published. However, writing in research is more than using this skill to achieve publication and disseminate findings; writing about research offers opportunities to ensure methodological congruence and professional growth. I explore how reflective writing throughout my PhD process in Australia strengthened my reflections about the impact of my own assumptions and ideas in the research process. Moreover, a cyclic process of data analysis and dissemination of the findings via conference and peer-reviewed publications contributed to engagement with the data, the formulation of ideas and the exploration of new data with a fresh mind and curiosity. I propose that writing throughout the research process assisted me in staying within my methodological framework, engaged me with the participants and a wider audience, helped me consider voice in research, enabled an early submission of the PhD and facilitated my growth as a novice researcher.

Keywords: *Social work education; Field education; Qualitative research; Writing; Phenomenological research; Bridling; Reflection; Doctoral writing*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important skill for research. Writing can achieve an outcome, often a culminating point in the research process, a publication of the research findings. Writing is also a process that creates and discovers, and facilitates the dissemination of findings to expose the data and the researcher's insights and ideas to further research and discussion. For a novice researcher, the dissertation by thesis is a rite of passage into academia (Noy, 2003), however, I have come to understand writing in research to be more than that. In this article I reflect on the usefulness of writing as part of the PhD research process. My reflections explore the impact of writing during the research process in a procedure that is described by Lee and Roth (2003, np) as "on becoming a researcher".

Writing throughout the research process facilitated my understanding of, and knowledge about, research. It helped me develop my abilities as a writer, assisted me to critically reflect on my own voice in the research and engaged me with participants and peers. In this article I use the context of my PhD research to explore how this writing has assisted me in learning about myself as a researcher, my field of research and the approach I have taken. I explore lessons learnt from writing throughout the research process and suggest that writing for publication during the process assisted me in submitting my PhD thesis in a timely manner. I highlight five points: writing throughout the research process can facilitate methodological congruence; it allows for the exploration of ideas; it facilitates the growth of a novice researcher; it can engage the researcher with the research community; and it can allow for exploration of the voice foregrounded in the research. I recommend that novice researchers are encouraged and supported early on in the research process to start writing and expose their writing to critique and feedback from others.

The value of writing in academia and research

For me, writing in academia is associated with writing for publication and dissemination of findings, but also to considerations of how writing is influenced by the methodological framework. Research and publishing from the research are seen as important in academia. Funding incentives for universities encourage the publication and research output of their staff; the pressure in academia is to "publish or perish" (Brischoux & Cook, 2009, p.628, citing Cherubini, 2008). Academic promotion and performance reviews are linked to the publication record of the staff member (McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). Research and scholarly publications are thus key concerns for academics. Yet, for social work researchers, the application of research, the relevance of what is being researched, how it is researched and how the findings are relevant to ensuring better outcomes for people and communities need to be in the foreground. While social work academics might look to advance their position in academia, a key aspect of social work research would seem to be embracing the promotion of social justice and human rights (Pease, 2009). However, Biswas and Kirchner (2015) argue that practitioners, communities, policy-makers or business leaders rarely read peer-reviewed articles. They suggest that research published in peer-reviewed journals rarely results in citations and that even of those articles cited, only about 20% have actually been read (Biswas & Kirchner, 2015). Thus publishing just for the sake of the advancement of an academic career might be irrelevant to social work if the research has no application.

Dissemination of research findings is an essential aspect of the research process as it allows others to benefit from what was learned in the study and is prerequisite for the research to have any significance (Merriam, 2009). Writing to disseminate findings can be seen as a way to progress the validity of the research, ensure the usefulness of the outcomes and engage peers and the community (Dennis, 2013). For some researchers it is a way of checking the congruency of the findings with 'reality' and whether the results can be generalised (Merriam, 2009). In general, writing in research is a way to expose the findings to the critique and discussion of others (Maher, Feldon, Timmerman, & Chao, 2013). It exposes the ideas of the researcher and their professional identity to peer review (Maher et al., 2013), "….it is in the textual representation of their work that identities are forged and disseminated internationally" (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012, p. 437). Writing to disseminate findings is a vehicle for verification and can facilitate the co-existence of reliable scholarship with the passion and interest for the subject matter (Lee & Roth, 2003).

Writing about the research involves considering the author's own voice. It is needs to be recognised that:

> …researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study… Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry. (Creswell, 2007, p. 15)

It can be argued that all writing is positioned, as it is influenced by the author's "interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class and the personal politics" (Creswell, 2007, p. 179). Writing about findings thus needs to consider identified tentative manifestations, the philosophical discussions of the particular field, and reflect the researcher's post-reflexive work (Vagle, 2014).

Through engaging in writing during the doctoral research process I came to understand it as a vehicle for crystallising meaning and understandings, and recognising the depth, yet partial and complex understanding of the topic that this crystallisation can reflect (Richardson, 1994). More than a tool to disseminate ideas, writing helps clarify and crystallise thoughts, concepts and ideas. For example, as I was writing my first manuscript from my PhD based on the literature review, I reflected on how the process could be useful in crystallising my understandings of the literature and drawing conclusions:

> … writing the book chapter, it can help me define parts of the topic, but also I can access and revaluate the literature that is already here. Bring it together. Including the information about the different approaches from different professions might be useful for this…. (October 2010)

Reflective writing is a tool for the discovery and understanding of self (Chinnery & Beddoe, 2011), and can thus assist the research process. Through writing throughout the research process I realised that writing is dynamic, facilitating discovery and exploration; in the process of

putting words on paper the researcher gains new insights. Words and arguments are organising the points that I want to make, and thus writing can provide new learning (Richardson, 1994). For example, I set the agendas for the regular PhD supervision meetings and wrote thoughts down to explore and formulate ideas:

> '[D]o … I believe that reality exists independently of people's beliefs' about it?' I guess I do, but also belief.... what is important is people's perception of it as the perceptions form their experience and thus lived experience/ reality. (July 2011)

Writing to publish from my PhD, got me to grapple with what I could say about the research and what learning that can be drawn from it:

> Interesting thought, so external supervision for graduate social workers is about having safe and perhaps confidential spaces to explore their learning proactivity and grow and develop their practice framework, yet the responsibility of assessing the student placement sits at least partially with the external supervisors, creating a hierarchical and authoritative relationship (Humphrey, 2007)… So, how is this power, position recognised? What does this mean for building relationships? For learning and assessment? Supervisors in this research have talked about learning and assessment, and have also focused on the development of the practice framework – how difficult is it to combine all of this when the contact is limited and context a step removed? (Author, June 2013)

The language of the written text shapes the research and aims to impact the readers of the writing (Creswell, 2007) and thus also needs methodological congruence. Working to apply a phenomenological framework to the PhD, I considered how writing was influenced by my own experience and thinking and worked to limit (or at least acknowledge) my own voice. For instance, as part of the research process I engaged in reflective writing in order to explore my assumptions and recorded insights about my personal attributes and characteristics and my world view. I undertook qualitative research to explore field education with external supervision. The aim of the research was to explore what was known about field education with external supervision, the experiences of key stakeholders in placements with external supervision and the four-way relationship between the key players. As part of my written reflection I examined how my own placement experiences, experiences in supporting placements and my overall viewpoints could potentially impact on the research. The aim was to engage in what is termed *bridling* (Dahlberg, 2006) or, in other words, rein in or curb our own assumptions, experiences and histories, in post-intentional phenomenology (LeVasseur, 2003; Vagle, 2014). And I came to appreciate that writing can be a process of exploring those realities, "it is a way of finding out about yourself and your topic" (Richardson, 1994, p. 516). For example, at one point is was useful to reflect on how much my reading of the concept of power was influenced by my own work history and world view and to then bring this reflection to supervision for further examination. The examination got me to look back over the data, review my thinking and formulate a finding.

My written reflections revealed my ideas about what was important in supervision. The reflective writing process highlighted to me that, in supervision, I aim for students to critically engage with their learning and work, looking through a critical lens that seeks

social justice and equity and works towards change. This is in line with social work theories (see for example McCashen, 2005; Noble, 2004; Pease, 2009) and core professional social work values (Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), 2010); however, it was important to take note that this was the lens that I would consider in examining my own research process. Hearing stories about people's experiences in field education and with supervision would thus always be filtered to some extent through my own critical lens, but also shaped by the intention and focus of the participants at the time of sharing and through their own lens and reflection back on their experience. Engaging in a process of reflective writing helped me to review my research methodology. I changed my initial idea of using phenomenology to applying post-intentional phenomenology as this recognises that phenomena or experiences that are explored are not experienced in isolation, but in the social context of the experience (Vagle, 2014). Meanings in the research framework are seen as generative, multiple, partial and fleeting (Vagle, 2014).

My own reflective writing highlighted to me how my own experiences in social work education influenced my interest in research about field education, and particularly field education with external supervision. Valuing supervision in field education made me wonder about people's experience in field education after my professional role in tertiary education required me to provide external supervision – a requirement questioned by some students. A review of the literature identified the potential benefit of supervision away from the placement site (Witte, 2009), but also raised concerns about student learning (see for example, Plath, 2003). Reflective writing got me to engage with the literature, and explore my own position and experiences.

Writing and the research methodology

The congruency of research ontology, epistemology and methodology is important in order to achieve quality research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, writing about research needs to be informed by the research framework. My research was framed by post-intentional phenomenology and social constructivism and I experienced that writing for publication throughout the research process was facilitating essential aspects of the applied research framework. I propose that, when there are multiple groups of participants, analysing the data from each group of participants separately and then writing about the findings emerging from the analysis before moving to exploring the data from the next group, can be a way of engaging in the phenomenological process of bridling (Vagle, 2014).

In my reflections I recognised that, as the researcher, I play a significant role in the creation of knowledge emerging from the research process and that research is not value-free (Powell & Ramos, 2009). I agree with Creswell, who maintained that the researcher's "… interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings" (2009, p. 176). However, in applying a post-intentional phenomenological approach to research, I worked to rein in my own assumptions, experiences and histories (Vagle, 2014). I engaged in the process of bridling through engaging in reflective writings or journals as discussed above but, in the research process, I discovered that writing for dissemination or publishing also assisted my process of bridling. Post-intentional phenomenological research embraces phenomena as social and those that need to be explored in the social context of the experience (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology in the pure sense requires the researcher to

'bracket' their own experiences as part of the research process, as a prerequisite for being able to understand the experiences of another from the other's point of view (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher works to bracket (or put aside) their own viewpoints, assumptions and prejudices in order to be able understand the essence of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The aim is to put one's own subjectivity aside. To achieve this step in the research process, as a researcher I wrote about and reflected on my own experience, and the context and situations that have influenced my experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014).

However, LeVasseur (2003) argued that is not possible to fully bracket one's own experiences. This author suggested that, rather, the aim should be to bracket with the purpose of bringing the unconscious to the consciousness in order to suspend our natural attitude (LeVasseur, 2003). Similarly, Dahlberg (2006) proposed that a researcher should restrain their own assumptions. Thus, I attempted to "to get beyond the ordinary assumptions of understanding and stay persistently curious about new phenomena" (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 419). I actively worked to bridle my own assumptions (Vagle, 2014). Challenges included making my own assumption conscious. Strategies to put my own assumptions and experiences aside included reflective writing in order to bridle them. Moreover, though, writing for scholarly publication emerged as a useful tool to bridle understandings, assumptions and ideas. It assisted me to question "[my] connections/discussions, assumptions of what [I] take to be normal, bottom lines, and moments [I am] … shocked" (Vagle, 2014, p. 132).

My research involved two phases of data analysis. The primary data analysis involved a cyclic process of thematic analysis of the data of each group separately and writing for publication before moving on to the next group. The secondary data analysis involved analysing the data as a whole to identify overall themes. I applied NVivo™ software to capture the themes identified in the interviews as nodes, but I was cautious in the way I utilised it – using it to store, categorise and work with the data. I avoided the use of the analytical functions of the software for the analysis while using it more for an audit trail and for easy access to the text (Goble, Austin, Larsen, Kreitzer, & Brintnell, 2012). I reduced the data into themes, condensing the nodes and expressed the data in the form of findings and discussions (Creswell, 2007). Utilising the original words in the nodes, I worked to remain within the phenomenological intent by staying close to the data (Goble et al., 2012).

In line with post-intentional phenomenological research, I aimed to approach the research with fresh eyes (Vagle, 2014). I considered the transcripts of each group of participants separately in order to focus on the voice of only one group of participants at a time in order to gain an understanding of the essence of their experience (Merriam, 2009). I intended to be intentionally conscious of my own thinking, experiences and understandings. I aimed to explore the participants' information from *their* perspective, and in the process, be reflexive on the context of their experiences. Reflections in the process helped me identify tensions between my understandings of the world, such as ideas about the limited power of students in placement and the various presentation of students' positioning by participants. I worked to present the text describing the findings from the various positions of the participants and to consider the social context and positioning of the experiences in the discussion sections of manuscripts for peer review.

I presented the views of one participant group at a time. In practice this meant solely exploring the data of student participants initially, using thematic analysis to identify what students shared about their experiences in placements with external supervision. I then presented the outcomes of the analysis at a conference and submitted a manuscript based on the prominent elements in the discussions of the student participants to a peer-reviewed journal (Zuchowski, 2013a). I repeated this pattern for each participant group before moving on to the next group. My reflections about this process suggest that it assisted the process of bridling as, in the process of finalising a manuscript for one group, I would put my thinking about this group aside. I had reflected on and summarised the insights, thoughts and ideas that I was now consciously aware of through the writing process and I would be able to curb their impact as I embarked on exploring the data of a new group of participants. I recall my excitement as I opened the first transcript of the new group to start immersing myself in this new dataset. This was accompanied with a sense of relief, as grappling with the previous set of data and finding words to put down on paper about what this data all meant, was not easy, and I could leave this work behind me for the moment.

Lessons learned from writing throughout the research process

I commenced the journey of becoming a researcher as a social work practitioner newly arrived in tertiary teaching and field education support; this was not an unusual journey for social work educators. My initial reflections about who I was as a researcher were steeped in my significant professional experience as a social work practitioner and field educator. My interest in the research and my path for the inquiry were linked to my professional experience.

In the process of researching and writing I have learned much about myself as a researcher, including strengths, values, and potential pitfalls to watch out for. For instance, my reflection on hearing participants identified what had been added to my understanding.

> Doing this research is shaping how I think about the topic area constantly, it's like a jigsaw puzzle, though, it seems more that I am adding things to it, rather than totally reshaping my thinking. This could have to do with two thing[s]: Firstly, I am filtering what I am seeing to fit in my understanding, secondly, the years of my experience in this area [are] significant, thus while I am reflecting on stuff, change is slight… (August 2011)

The process of learning about the research, and myself in research, meant that I was in the process of starting to "belong somewhere or differently than we do at the moment" (Lee & Roth, 2003, n.p.). In becoming a researcher I have come to understand research and writing as closely linked.

Writing for publication throughout the research meant that I was able to hand in my PhD significantly before the due date. Writing the thesis in the end did not feel like an impossible task; I had already faced the challenge of putting my findings and ideas into words and on to paper a number of times. I stood in front of smaller mountains that, each time, eventually I managed to conquer; I had six published peer-reviewed articles and one manuscript under review by the time I submitted my PhD. This gave me confidence, skills and words that helped in writing the PhD thesis.

There are five important insights about writing throughout the research process that I would like to emphasise. Firstly, I believe that the applied research process can be an exercise of bridling prior knowledge and assumptions, facilitating exploration of new data with a fresh mind and with curiosity. Secondly, writing things down means that I can review, reject or accept ideas – writing can change direction. Thirdly, writing as part of the research process can facilitate the growth of a novice researcher as a writer. Fourthly, writing in research can be an engagement with an audience and the participants. Finally, writing throughout the research can help consider which voice is to be foregrounded.

I experienced that writing can become a form of bridling prior knowledge and assumptions in the research process. Writing for publication throughout, focusing on the findings for one group of participants, helped me to put thoughts aside at times. Writing up each phase for scholarly publication helped me to rein in my thinking; once I had written down the ideas I could put them aside (Vagle, 2014). For example, a point made in writing about the students' experience was about field education in itself being a struggle (Zuchowski, 2013a) and once this was written down, I felt I could let go – I was free to move to the next set of data. My initial aim in starting to disseminate findings throughout the research process had been to ensure that the multiple voices of research participants were heard in the research process and not absorbed by others. What I found was that this process allowed me to explore and immerse myself in the experiences of the next group with fresh eyes and a newly curious mind. The process of putting thoughts into words, mulling them over and, at times, agonising over them, helped to clarify them for myself. Writing leads to discovery and thinking about the material in new ways (Phillips & Pugh, 1994).

Secondly, writing things down allows the exploration of ideas, concepts and assumptions. Until the point where the word is on the paper it might be just part of a fleeting idea or it might be an assumption that needs to be checked. In becoming a researcher I realised the importance of using the written language to explore ideas and arguments in research. Writing allows me to probe inside myself and explore my own positioning (Noy, 2003). It helps me explore what I am thinking and whether what is emerging from the findings can be argued. Writing my initial research proposal and reviewing this meant that the direction of my research changed. At the time it raised lots of questions for me about how the focus on one participant group would be enough to answer the research question as I had originally envisaged, and led me to include other key stakeholder groups. It identified for me that I wanted to know more, and that just talking to students would give me just one angle from which to view what was happening and may not give justice to the complexity of relationships in field education. Subsequent reflections on the research suggest intensively looking at one group of participants might have been relevant, however, the point I am highlighting here is that writing allows probing, exploration and advancing ideas; it is a process of creation.

My third point is that writing can be improved with practice. Through feedback and the review process I was able to fine tune what I was trying to share with the reader. Receiving critical feedback about writing is not always easy, and the gentle guidance of my supervisors and their support helped when there was harshly expressed reviewer feedback. The process of exposing my writing to the critical review of others sharpened my writing skills, provided

new insights, helped me to be less precious about every word that I have written and assisted me to learn to be resilient and creative.

As a PhD candidate writing early in the research process assisted me in developing the skill to write effectively for my discipline (Phillips & Pugh, 1994) although it is not always encouraged for candidates in all disciplines (Aitchison et al., 2012). Writing for scholarly publication can also be an emotionally draining and challenging process (Aitchison et al., 2012) as the conventions of the discipline are learned (Phillips & Pugh, 1994). Writing multiple articles, receiving feedback and reviewing ideas has facilitated my development as a writer. I learnt to recognise the fluidity of the text under production and to be able to let go, develop writing further and not become too attached to specific wordings (Maher et al., 2013). I am highlighting this point as publishing throughout your PhD research seems uncommon in social work academia; in fact some colleagues advised against it, suggesting that, at the end, I would have more refined things to say and would express my ideas better. I would suggest otherwise – writing developed my skills and helped my PhD progress.

Feedback about my writing by my supervisors and the reviewers of manuscripts helped me to understand the important aspects of academic writing that I needed to develop further. There are three areas of, sometimes repeated, feedback that were particularly use-ful for me. Firstly, the importance of telling a concise, yet clear narrative and how to do this. In the feedback this was often highlighted by questions about details in my description, identification of missing links in the background information or more detail about why what I have presented was relevant. The feedback helped me to understand the assumptions I was making about the understanding of the reader and identified ways of closing gaps in the narratives. Secondly, I understood theoretically that "… it is usually not appropriate to discuss the implications of the results in the results section" (Cozby, 2009, p. 295), but it took feedback and practice not to jam my findings section with literature in the process of being excited of having findings that confirm, augment or challenge the existing literature. Thirdly, and the area that needs most continual development, is developing a more critical focus on the theoretical framework or argument. This is an ongoing journey as I often include too much detail about the findings in a paper, and am asked to review sections that are not central to the core arguments in an article. Feedback from the reviewers such as the article needs 'to be much more tightly focused around two or three key research aims', or needs 'a more critical focus on the theoretical framework for learning in practice' or 'telling the reader more of your concerns' helped me learn to polish the central arguments and to go beyond summarising findings.

Fourthly, writing throughout the research process resulted in an engagement with an audience and the participants. I emailed the references of the published manuscripts emerging from the research to the participants. I thanked them for their participation and enquired whether they wanted copies of the articles: of 32 participants, 17 emailed back asking for copies. One participant contacted me after reading several of the articles. She indicated the usefulness of reading different perspectives:

Thanks for sending these articles. I really enjoyed reading the ones I have managed so far. I don't think I had characterised the arrangements we have as a triad or a four way process of assessment

before reading these. I thought the Asia Pacific one made some really good points. After reading it I started to wonder what role I could have in capacity building for Indigenous students. I enjoyed the Space, Time and Relationships paper, it was very reflective and helped me be reflective about the content. …I am still getting on with the rest and enjoying the reading and thinking they bring up, thank you. (Participant)

I was able to write about the experiences of people in field education with external supervision because of the participants' generous sharing of their experiences. Qualitative research involves accessing people's voices and ideas, exploring these and using words to represent the ideas that then can be shared with others. Writing is an engagement with the audience that shapes how the information is understood. Our own conceptual understandings shape the research process and sometimes we are not even aware about the extent of this. This became evident when I delivered an oral presentation at a conference based on my thinking and writing about the experiences of external supervisors in field education (Zuchowski, 2013b). I referred to 'key stakeholders' during a conference presentation in London and members of the audience highlighted that I did not name clients in that group. In many ways this is relating to the context of my professional work in Australian tertiary social work education. The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (AWEAS) and the Practice Standards require that social workers are equipped to work appropriately with clients (AASW, 2012, 2013). AWEAS suggest that clients should be engaged to plan social work education programs; however, there is no suggestion that clients are to be involved in the assessment of students' performance in field education (AASW, 2012). Yet, in a different context, clients as key stakeholders in field education might have been in the forefront of my thinking. In England, for instance, the university, the organisation and service users and carers form a partnership to assess the performance of students in placements (The College of Social Work, 2014). This feedback helped me reflect on the contextual setting of my research, and utilise this in my writing about the findings. Writing the PowerPoint for the presentation and engaging with the audience helped me to explore the issue raised further in my thesis and subsequent peer-reviewed publications.

Finally, writing can help explore whose voice is heard in the research. Two aspects that have been present in reflective writings throughout the research process have been reflections on 'research context' and the idea of 'foregrounding the voices of participants'. My own reflections on the idea of foregrounding the voices of specific groups of participants identified the complexity, ambiguousness and multi-dimensional nature of the concept of 'voice' (Holloway & Biley, 2011). On the one hand, as a writer, I needed to be able to take a position, have a voice, leading the reader to understand the various perspectives and ideas that I present to them as the writer (Hutchings, 2013). On the other hand, there is potential for distortion, that some voices are given more weight than others and that I, as a researcher, in my interpretations move to a "different level of abstraction from the participants" (Holloway & Biley, 2011, p. 972). I tried to ensure that I reflected what participants had shared and returned the transcribed interviews to them and sent them the articles. I worked to develop themes based on their words and findings staying as close as possible to what had been shared through use of participants' words. Yet, I recognise that my own voice was never fully removed from the process. Throughout the research process I was committed to reflexivity in the research process in order to understand how I position myself in that process and my impact upon it

(Powell & Ramos, 2009). Writing has assisted the process of reflexivity as a way to develop some objective distance between myself and the research, and facilitating an exploration of the connection between myself, the participants and the information shared (Angen, 2000).

Yet, the writing in the research process is not without struggle. Engaging with findings and text identifies multiple perspectives and world views (Lee & Roth, 2003). It, moreover, reflects the phenomenological explorations that grapple to manifest the meaning and significance of the phenomena under scrutiny in the research (Jurema, Correia Pimentel, Cordeiro, & Austregésilo Nepomuceno, 2006). Writing in research involves reflecting on what is shared and making choices about which words can best represent the information. While I worked to stay close to the participants' words and views, these were multiple and, in choosing the words of one participant to express a theme, I reflected and considered how and why this would be significant and would reflect the meanings of the participant group more so than the view of the specific contributor. Engaging in the struggle to put into writing what was manifested contributed to my growth as a researcher (Lee & Roth, 2003); however, it also allowed me to continuously reflect on whose voice I was trying to foreground, how to minimise my own voice but still have something meaningful to say.

It is important to acknowledge that writing throughout the research process has not been a lonely journey for me, contrary to ideas that research happens in 'ivory towers', "removed from reality and from social contact with others" (Phillips & Pugh, 1994, p. 11). As Phillips and Pugh (1994) stress, the interaction with the academic is an important part of the PhD process, and I strongly suggest that supervision, feedback and support are essential as one engages in becoming a researcher and writer. My PhD supervisors, Associate Professor Debra Miles and Associate Professor Susan Gair, have worked jointly to support, guide, teach and encourage me through this journey of becoming a researcher. They have generously provided time and wisdom to facilitate my understanding of research and writing. Moreover, the feedback and encouragement by the many reviewers and editors of my submitted manuscripts has facilitated growth and given encouragement to keep going. It is useful to hear that the topic, the themes or discussions might be highly relevant, timely or useful, amongst other feedback that might highlight all the things that still need to change to make the manuscript publishable.

CONCLUSION

Writing throughout the research process is valuable for both the research and the researcher. Hearing and reporting on each participant group separately can be valuable to the chosen research framework when there are multiple participant groups. Writing scholarly articles throughout the research process, reporting on the separate groups or data, can be a useful tool to then bridle (Dahlberg, 2006) the understanding and insights from the reported-on group. This can facilitate fresh enthusiasm and curiosity in exploring the data of the next group of participants. Moreover, writing for publication throughout research is particularly useful for novice researchers. It assists in honing skills, understanding research and in becoming a researcher. I recommend that PhD students be encouraged and supported early on in the research process to start writing and expose their writing to the critique of, and feedback from, others.

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