Chapter 31

Publishing:
A beginner's account

Stephen Crump

Most students of educational administration, as they enter the final stages of their studies, may begin to wonder how the results of their research can be disseminated. While a range of possibilities certainly exist, some are more feasible than others and some are more suited to specific types of graduate study than are others. This paper provides a first-hand description, based on real life experience, of how the transition from post-graduate study and research to educational publishing may occur.

Let me begin my paper with reference to a recent news headline. The date was Tuesday August 13th, 1991 and the item appeared on page 22 of The Australian. The headline was titled 'Star born in image of the Golden Bear'. Under the byline 'By Tom Ramsay in Carmel, Indiana' was the telegram-like statement: 'US PGA Championship at Crooked Stick, Indiana: Winner John Daly at 12-under par'.

The greatest names of golf heard the thunder of a young man who seeks to walk in their footsteps when John Daly blasted his way into the record books in the $US1.5 million ($1.91m) US PGA Championship yesterday. In an extraordinary reversal of fortune, Daly has emerged in four days from obscurity to someone whose name is on the lips of a vast world-wide army of fans.

The moral of the story, as you may already know, is that John Daly was a reserve 'emergency' player in the PGA championship and only got his chance when Nick Price withdrew to be with his wife when she had their baby. Daly even used Nick's caddy.
My point is that I do not think it is stretching things too far to suggest that there exists an analogy to the fate of the John Dalys who do not get their lucky break and a large cohort of hopeful authors in educational administra-
tion (as elsewhere) who find it very hard to break into the publications
clique, regardless of their potential. As you may have guessed by now, my
purpose in this paper is to give you the underdog's view.

The caddy who handed me the right clubs was, fortunately, Dr David
Smith, the President of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association. As
editor for the ACSA publication of leading papers presented at the 1987
conference, he selected my paper and my name went into print, however
marginally, for the first time. To be honest, I have to admit that at the time
David was closely involved with my emerging PhD work so he was not a
disinterested by-stander. My conference paper was basically a run-down
of the PhD proposal and a presentation of some early data. Nonetheless,
it was a crucial stage in giving my ideas a public hearing and some critical
exposure.

The next major event in this, my personal publication history, was
attendance at the First Joint Conference of the New Zealand Association for
Research in Education and the Australian Association for Research in
Education (AARE) held at Christchurch at the end of 1987. I was encour-
aged by my PhD supervisor, Professor J.C. Walker (now at the University
of Canberra) to attend this conference and test my research in this type of
context. The conference theme focused on education and politics and I
presented a paper titled Pragmatism and Politics in Curriculum Develop-
ment. This paper was the first coherent attempt I had made to present an
analysis of my PhD data and the response I received from a good size
audience – and in follow-up discussions – was positive and constructive.
This is a form of 'publication' I recommend to postgraduates. As well as
receiving a boost to my morale, I was encouraged to publish the paper and
I chose Curriculum Perspectives as first port of call. I saw Curriculum Per-
spectives as the best vehicle because it usually contained a high proportion
of Australian material, because it was likely to be receptive to my theoretical
and methodological approaches and because it had a good target audience:
educators, administrators, teachers and policy-makers.

I sent a slightly amended copy of that paper to the editor, early in 1988.
After a few months I received a reply suggesting changes to the format and
structure of the paper. The reply was not particularly encouraging and I
thought I read between the lines that the editor did not really want to
proceed. However, I did, so I made the changes and put the paper back in
the post to Western Australia. This time the paper went out to referees.
Luckily, they recommended publication but also suggested further amend-
ments to the format and structure. By now I had cut the title down to
Pragmatic Curriculum Development which was the main title for my PhD. I
updated the analysis, added some new data and put it back in the post. I
then received a letter saying that the paper would be published, indicating
a possible issue. However, some further changes were requested and, at this stage, I did get very close to pulling out. Only the thought of beginning the tortuous process with another editor kept me going and so the changes were made and I added to Australia Post's already substantial profit. Over two years after my first approach the paper was published in May 1990 (Vol. 10, No. 2).

In the meantime, I had published some other details of my PhD research in *English in Australia* (No. 86, December, 1988). This had been a much easier procedure. I received a prompt reply from the editor. I was asked for a few revisions and was promised early publication. I believe that journals and publications by professional associations, while of a good standard, are less competitive than academic journal. Even though a publication in this level of journal, without blind refereeing, is less credible it does offer a starting point and achieves the very worthy aim of seeking to get your ideas to those who will use them. The article gave me credibility with my students as I was now lecturing at the University of Newcastle.

In a sense, my most important publication came out in 1989. It was my PhD thesis and something that had consumed incalculable hours of my time and deprived me of my family for two years. My examiners recommended publication. For example, two stated:

There is no doubt that the substance, scope, originality and nature of both the investigation and the account of the research is commensurate with the expectations of the award of the PhD. The study is competently undertaken, significant and a scholarly piece of work that *lends itself to publication* (my emphasis); and

This is for me without a shadow of doubt a passing thesis and unusually (and welcomed) in the writing it has already had a major effect on its site. *I hope that some publication will spread its influence* (my emphasis), particularly the conclusion regarding the application of the concept 'cultural touchstone' to curriculum development.

Now maybe they all say this! Whatever the case, I wrote off to Allen and Unwin with a book proposal and, having received a qualified acceptance, sat down and converted a 400 page thesis into a 120 page book. (Incidentally, I think it was much better for the culling.) Yet this is where my problems began. I had not made it clear enough to Allen and Unwin that the book was based on a thesis. This is usually the death knell of any proposal, though, in my case, I had reason to believe that the practical nature of the content made the book as sellable as comparable existing texts. I proudly posted the completed book and headed off to the country for a well-earned rest. The rest, as they say, is history. The book was rejected by Allen and Unwin after considering the referee's comments. These included:

1. The study quality
2. Few of the plenary listed merit would apply
3. monc While th remains th
The book is best described as a supplementary text for postgraduate students. Any unit that revolves around educational change and/or qualitative methodology would find this a useful reference work... Few examples can be found of directly competing texts. In a supplementary role the book may challenge (a number of books are listed)... The issue of publication is difficult as the book has value and merit. As to who would purchase it, it has to be said that the market would probably be rather small. I see this as the work of a researcher who wishes to share his research experience and this is to be applauded and encouraged. Perhaps the most appropriate setting for such a book would be with a university publisher or as a research monograph.

While the general nature of the comments was encouraging the point remains that only a small local market exists for post-graduate publications. Even at the undergraduate level the market in Australia is limited. A colleague at Sydney University recently received little encouragement from a major publisher over a proposal for a first year education text that could guarantee six hundred sales a year! In my case, what Allen and Unwin were looking for was a follow-up to the highly successful Making the Difference (Connell, Ashenden, Dowset, Kessler, 1982). In hindsight I can see that my proposal was a little too high-brow. However, there are limits to the extent to which one can compromise one’s principles. I had already cut the thesis down to book size, mainly by reducing the literature review, background, theory and methodology chapters by 75 per cent. This wasn’t enough for Allen and Unwin.

I understand that they made similar demands on Jim Walker (1988) over his drafts of Louts and Legends: male youth culture in an inner city school. While this book was very well received, some reviewers took Jim to task for failing to present his theoretical and methodological position adequately. Those who know the background know how unfair that is. But it may be a fair criticism of the publisher, in my view. While reviewers and readers can easily find highly sophisticated accounts of Jim’s theory in a number of international publications, there surely should have been room for a reasonable account of this aspect of his research in the book. The dilemma is that while case studies frequently suffer from the complaint that they are not theoretically and methodologically sound, it is difficult to present such complex details in a publication that is intended for a broad audience.

This was the problem with my next attempt at publication. In 1989 I sent a paper based on a chapter of my PhD, strongly praised by the examiners, titled ‘Leadership and Curriculum Development’ to the Journal of Educational Administration. I received a polite and fairly prompt reply from the editor declining publication and attaching the referee’s report. While agreeing that the topic ‘would be of interest to many educators in Australia’ the referee stated that the research had little use as it was, as s/he saw it.
'a one-off study'. The report noted what it saw as a major flaw: '(what) I would expect is details about the research design and data collection'. Yet I had deliberately left these out, sensitive to earlier experience! A much shorter article sent to The Practising Administrator was returned without much ado and I began to despair about my academic future.

Yet I knew my material was of interest. A paper given to the ACSA Conference in Canberra in July 1989 had stirred some interest and was built into the Curriculum Development and School Course run by Dr Shirley Grundy at the University of New England. A paper I gave, with one of my students, at the AARE conference in Sydney in 1990 was requested for consideration by the editor of The Australian Journal of Teacher Education. I have a chapter in Ian McKay and Brian Caldwell's edited collection of the 1990 Hobart Postgraduate and Lecturers ACEA conference. This annual event I believe to be an excellent format for getting ideas of postgraduate students into print as well as reaching those who will respond. More recently, I have been sent books for review by a major publisher and for Discourse, though my review for Discourse is scheduled for publication over a year from now!

If a book review can take more than a year to get into print, even after it has been accepted, then surely something is wrong in the system. In tandem with a colleague in the same boat, we started a journal of our own, Education Action [ISSN: 1034-6740]. For quite some time we had in mind producing a series of monographs, mainly to get around the delays in publishing and, of course, around the rejections. We believed there was a market for our type of research, for our theoretical perspective and for young, untried authors. In effect, we tried to create a situation similar to that which allowed John Daly to break into the PGA.

Starting one's own journal is quite a big step and one that is difficult to recommend. In our case, we sought and gained a seeding grant from the Head of the School of Education at Newcastle University. That was the easy bit. We canvassed support for papers but not much was forthcoming so we muddled together the first copy from our own backlog and those of a few close colleagues. This all seemed very incestuous but it set the tone and provided a model for future issues. The second issue included papers from two highly eminent American scholars and we now had a long list of professors from leading international universities who had agreed to act as editorial consultants. We partly offset the cost, and the small subscription list, by selling the journal to our undergraduate students. This caused a major problem for the university administration and legal advice was sought. The continuing difficulty is in attracting papers. While there is a pool of potential authors and there is a market for this type of publication, it is a difficult task to bring them all into contact at the same time.

The most significant publishing event for me so far occurred when I had a paper on gender and curriculum accepted by the prestigious British Journal of Sociology of Education. However, there is a long story I could tell...
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about how to resolve the totally contradictory advice proffered by referees! The key to publication in a journal of this stature is the exposure your receive. Some of the more interesting requests for offprints that I have received include: the Instituto Professional De Osorno, Casila, Chile; the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India; the Psychology Department of the Czechoslovak Institute of Sciences: the Department of Kinesiology, University of Illinois, USA; the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham, UK; the Department of Biology, University of Pennsylvania; the Youth Sports Institute, Michigan State University; and, the Department of Psychology/Sociology, Northwest Missouri State University.

I currently have a book proposal being considered by Thomas Nelson. It is titled School-centred leadership: Putting organisational policy into practice in the 1990s. I have received an encouraging reply. If nothing else, this proposal has helped me sort out what I want to publish. I would be the first to admit that a lot of my publishing problems have stemmed from not focussing my energies towards a fairly specific field. While I still believe that knowledge should not be compartmentalised, I now recognise that there are certain market forces that have to be taken into account. Even if one is not well known, there appear to be opportunities for general undergraduate texts that are not specific to institutions and that are not limited to an Australian context. Colleagues sold out the first edition of a book of this nature in less than twelve months (Smith and Lovat, 1990). I have three chapters in Lovat’s next book to be released in February 1992. But my current goal is publication in quality journals.

Many of us have reached the stage that John Daly was at before he was catapulted into the PGA championship by extraordinary circumstances. Few of us will achieve a world-wide army of fans in four days, but we are champions of a different cause and surely deserve to be heard.

References

