WRITERS' FORUM

Writing Across Power Lines: Authorship in Scholarly Collaborations

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Considering the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education has been around since the 1920s and American Educational Research Association (AERA) was founded in 1916, we should expect to have well established professional practice in our academic institutions. Yet, issues around collaborative authorship are unsettled and the potential for misunderstandings is great. A few examples may illustrate.

A week before AERA's national conference, a professor commented to a colleague that he must be very busy getting ready for the conference with three lead author presentations. The senior professor responded that he was not really busy because all three were his students' dissertations. Over lunch the next day a conversation ensued about whether this order of authorship was appropriate with students' dissertations. While he also considered his mentorship during the dissertation and presentation development, his primary reason for assigning himself first authorship was because he wrote the conference proposals. A colleague thought that any publication arising from a dissertation should have the student listed as first author. Even when a student asks for assistance, this colleague believes it is his professional responsibility to act as a reviewer without authorship recognition and only asks for second authorship when writing more than 50% of the texts.

Another colleague shared that a condition of his chairing a doctoral candidate's dissertation is that the student agrees to submit a journal article from the dissertation research before the dissertation defense. It is assumed the professor is listed as the second author. The professor believes because he makes this clear before the dissertation begins and because it helps the student publish, it is mutually beneficial. The student is free to pick a different chair, but if the student wants to work with this nationally recognized scholar, this is the condition.

At a different institution, urban legend among the graduate students is that one professor is known for rewording his graduate assistants' literature reviews and using the text without giving the student co-authorship. The story goes that students never complain because due to his leadership position, they are afraid he might retaliate. For me as a graduate student, this scenario seemed quite clearly a violation of ethical standards. While I never pursued the truth of this story at the end of grading a stack of course papers of varying writing quality, my view of this legend becomes more complicated; I wonder more about the quality of those student drafts, but still question the appropriateness.

Finally, a full time employee on a grant was surprised to see the principle investigator on the grant submit materials she helped write in his book proposal. When she asked about co-

authorship, she was informed that as an employee, her writing belonged to the project. When she contacted the intellectual property office for advice, she was informed that her situation was probably challengeable, but would be more so if she were a graduate student rather than a full time employee.

Why, considering the maturity of our profession and published guiding principles from both the AERA and American Psychological Association (APA), do we still have confusion and disagreement about what is proper? What makes the above examples particularly concerning is the nature of the power relationships between collaborators. In each example, the relationship between professor and student or professor and employee makes joint authorship more delicate. My goal here is to review the standards of our profession on authorship and to explore how the power relationships between students and professors require extra care in assuring justice. Finally, it is important to discuss how our profession and our institutions provide incentives for exploitation of junior colleagues or students.

Background

Collaboration is becoming more common in scholarly research with more authors per article and more researchers collaborating (Sobel & Taylor, 2004). This is stronger in the natural sciences than the social sciences and education (Acedo, Barroso, Casanueva, & Galán, 2006). We are now seeing more collaboration across discipline traditions. Acedo and colleagues did an interesting analysis of why management researchers collaborate and how collaboration relates to social research networks. They concluded the motivations for collaboration are both enhanced quality of research and quantity of publications. Quality is improved when colleagues with different training collaborate. Quantity functions both in the number that can be produced and in the probability of acceptance because of social networks. In several academic fields, it has been documented that social networks between researchers, editors, and co-editors affect the probability of manuscripts being published (McDowell & Amacher, 1986).

Ethical Standards

The AERA standards for intellectual ownership include this key concept on authorship,

> First authorship and order of authorship should be the consequence of relative creative leadership and creative contribution. Examples of creative contributions are: writing first drafts or substantial portions; significant rewriting or substantive editing; and contributing generative ideas or basic conceptual schemes or analytic categories, collecting data which require significant interpretation or judgment, and interpreting data. (AERA, B.1.b.)

The standards also make clear that authorship should not be ordered based on hierarchical status, grant ownership, project leadership, or time spent but on creative contribution. In reference to time, even when working substantially more hours than the creative leader, research team members are neither assured authorship or first authorship based strictly on time if they were simply carrying out tasks under someone else's intellectual leadership, such as data analysis or

routine editing. The standards appear clear, if a researcher regardless of level made an intellectual contribution, the person should have shared authorship.

Fine and Kurdek (1993) provide some further suggestions using the principles of beneficence, justice, and parentalism. Most useful, they suggest that collaborators clearly discuss order of authorship and responsibilities before work begins so that expectations and rewards are very clear. This avoids possible misunderstandings and allows all scholars to determine before beginning whether their effort will be adequately rewarded. Fine and Kurdek also acknowledge that authorship may need to be renegotiated, for example when journal reviewers require extensive revisions or collaborators fail to meet expectations.

Problems with the Standards

One problem is that AERA asserts that it is the senior researchers' responsibility to protect the subordinate, "In hierarchical relationships, educational researchers should take care to ensure that those in subordinate positions receive fair and appropriate authorship credit" (AERA, 2004, B.1.h.). While this is an admirable standard, it reminds me of the old cliché of the fox guarding the hen house. Much of what we know about power relationships suggests a self-monitoring system has greater potential for abuse and the imbalance of power makes challenging the more senior individual difficult. I want to clearly state that I believe the benefits of collaboration far outweigh the potential for abuse. Yet, while the junior scholar can fail the senior, we must acknowledge that the senior scholar has more power to take advantage and therefore bears more responsibility for justice.

Faculty Student Collaboration as a Special Case

Collaboration between professors and graduate students is common on research projects and should be encouraged. Senior academics often secure funding to financially support graduate students. Senior scholars have much to offer that new researchers do not learn through coursework. In my own training, there was a gap between my statistical coursework and conducting actual research. This socialization into the profession is essential and should be encouraged and rewarded.

Considering that difficulties around authorship are more frequent between faculty and students, it is useful to look outside of education to close disciplines that have specifically addressed this relationship. The American Psychological Association Ethical Principles make the following statement,

> Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. … Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's doctoral dissertation. Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate. (APA, 2002, p. 12)

When it comes to discussions of students' dissertations, the AERA standards are less clear,

> Theses and dissertations are special cases in which authorship is not determined strictly by the criteria elaborated in these standards. Authorship in the publication of work arising from theses and dissertations is determined by creative intellectual contributions as in other cases. (AERA, 2004, B.1.i.)

AERA does not assert that first authorship defaults to the student as do the APA standards. In one sense, the structure of the dissertation chair student relationship assures intellectual guidance from the chair and committee, guaranteeing that it is not independent work. Yet, faculty need to acknowledge a professional responsibility to students that is part of being a scholar. Providing recommendations for potential journals, editing, and providing feedback typical of an external reviewer do not merit authorship. Writing substantial portions of text, research design, or other substantial intellectual contributions is necessary for authorship.

Our students experience the dissertation as their own work. While common in the hard sciences, in educational research graduate students frequently do not join a research team and build their dissertation in their chair's research project. Therefore, the dissertation idea is usually the student's. In fact, most of my colleagues do not want to take on a student until the student has developed a solid research idea.

From the student perspective, dissertations are experienced as very much their own work. Even though I had a fantastic mentor and committee, at the time, I thought the product was *my* dissertation, not the committee's. Now that I am on the other side, I see how much of a collaborative process it is to write a dissertation, and I am even more grateful to my mentors. Yet as faculty, we must be careful because students experience the dissertation as their work. From their perspective, they read every article, they conducted the interviews or wrote the statistical code, and they wrote it, no matter how many times we made them rewrite it. They can feel exploited when we want to claim co-authorship on a publication from the dissertation. I am not saying it is inappropriate, just that we must be aware of this perspective.

Professional Habit Verses Standards

I believe much of our practice as faculty regarding authorship or co-authorship related to our students is established not on the standards of our national associations, but rather on the practice of our mentors and colleagues. We learn through our professional socialization what is expected regarding authorship, not through explicit coursework. Often faculty and graduate students become aware of the AERA or APA standards informally or only when a misunderstanding arises.

Because my chair encouraged me to publish from my dissertation as a solo author, I encourage my students to do so as well. Yet, the culture of my current institution is different. In discussions regarding my process toward tenure, several caring senior colleagues bring up my students' dissertations and are surprised when I say that I have encouraged my students to publish alone. Without necessarily saying one practice is automatically wrong and the other

right, it is clear that "everyone does it" is not the appropriate criteria for an ethical standard. As faculty we need to occasionally ask ourselves if our practices are ethical according to a set of principles rather than the practices of our peers.

Institutional Policies as Incentives for Abuse

Numbers matter. We have a faculty reward system that provides incentives for abuse. When faculty employment, promotion, and grant acquisition is contingent to some extent on quantity of publications (McDowell & Amachur, 1986), the system provides incentives for faculty members to take advantage of students. One way to avoid this is in the tenure and promotion process when institutions reward secondary authorship with graduate student first authors as equivalent to a first-authored publication for the faculty member. This rewards faculty for mentoring students through a first publication and avoids the incentives for claiming first authorship or claiming students' work as one's own. There is talk at my own institution that this will be the practice.

If we are in an institutional culture where co-authorship for the chair is expected, faculty who do not publish off their students' dissertations will be disadvantaged in the promotion process. This provides an incentive for faculty who would normally encourage students to publish alone to subtly or overtly pressure students into sharing authorship.

At some institutions, faculty promotion policies evaluate faculty on whether their students publish from their dissertations with or without the faculty member as co-author. What happens then when the student does not pursue publication? Many students have met their goals with a defended dissertation and may not have the internal motivation to pursue journal articles or their organizations may not reward publications. While in some instances this might be a lack of faculty mentoring, for other students not in academia, the incentives may not be enough. We can introduce students to the value of publishing, yet we have little control short of coercion whether they follow through with a journal publication from their dissertation. In some disciplines, few doctoral students ever publish after their dissertation. In two studies of public administration students, White (1986) found only about one quarter of doctoral students ever published, and White, Adams, and Forrester (1996) found only 12% of doctoral recipients had published in the 26 key refereed, academic journals in public policy and administration within 6 years of earning their doctorate. Long, Bowers, Barnett, and White (1998), in a study of management doctorates, found only a little more than one third published in one of the 21 higher status management journals within 6 years, even those graduates from prestigious programs. Clearly, our motivation may not be our students' motivation.

Academics of peer status are reluctant to confront a colleague unless the abuse is indisputable, which is the rare case. This leaves it to the students to live with the problem or make their own challenges. Yet the power differential makes it difficult for a student to challenge a mentor. Further, the professional standards are ambiguous with terms like intellectual or creative contribution, leaving scholars to judge themselves by their peers and with no third-party arbitration process for settling disputes, students or junior scholars are left with little recourse.

When there is an increased likelihood of a manuscript being published if collaborating with a recognized scholar (McDowell & Amacher, 1986), there are strong incentives for students to publish with their professors no matter what the terms. It may be this patronage that makes the potential for abuse greatest. Rejecting the terms of the senior scholar increases the risks of not being published.

Finally there is often one clear professor at an institution who is recognized as sharing the students' expertise and interests, pushing the students toward working with that professor whatever the professor's terms. Students who do not work with the established expert would have to explain this discrepancy in job interviews both for academia and professional positions. These pressures push a student to accept the senior scholar's offer, even if unfair, rather than to have to explain why they did not work with the expert.

When the mentor has the potential for retribution (e.g., delaying graduation or weak letters of recommendation), we cannot leave it to students to bring abuse or disputes to our attention. I wonder if we would have as many abuses and urban legends if there were random checks of co-authors about perceived intellectual contribution built into our system. I do not advocate taking a police approach, but one less adversarial way to do this is for all journals to require all authors to sign a common statement assigning percentages of responsibility to co-authors. Some journals already do this. This would force a discussion between authors, but it would not solve the problems associated with the power differential in that relationship.

My Recommendations

I advocate for a principle like the right of first refusal or call option. Determining authorship on publications arising from a dissertation should be at the discretion of the doctoral candidate. If they wish to publish alone, that should be their right. If they would like to collaborate, they can open the door. It is our professional responsibility to provide feedback as a journal reviewer would without expecting authorship.

The right of first refusal principle also allows for a discussion between the faculty member and student if the student has little or no interest in further publishing from the dissertation research. The faculty member can discuss co-authorship with the faculty member carrying the load. When an unmotivated student is presented with the choice of no publication or secondary authorship with minimal time investment, most students would probably be pleased to be given the publication. This allows the professor to bring recognition to good work and protect their own promotion process.

We should consider establishing review processes regarding co-authorship. The presence of a college or institutional review board makes public our concern for justice and makes clear that discussions of authorship will also be public. More routine review processes would encourage greater caution

As others have suggested, collaborators should agree on authorship before beginning, which allows the student to evaluate the cost-benefit analysis for his or her effort. That agreement should include who completes any potential reviewer recommended revisions. While

revisions usually require collaboration, students new to the process may not even be aware of this phase of publishing. There should also be discussion of what will happen if one collaborator fails to meet their agreed upon contribution. The senior scholar needs to initiate this conversation. We should build habits into our practice. Carrying out these discussions across status and hierarchical lines is problematic enough that anything we can do to make it easier for both parties is helpful.

Faculty need to acknowledge a professional responsibility to students that is part of being a scholar. Providing recommendations for potential journals, editing, and providing feedback typical of an external reviewer do not merit authorship. Writing substantial portions of text, research design, or other intellectual contributions are necessary for authorship.

Anyone listed as an author should be able to intellectually defend the text. Although less problematic, senior faculty can also ere on the side of generosity by giving students co-authorship when they only carried out basic tasks. While this has little potential for abuse, it does risk that the reader or potential employer overestimates the scholarly development of the student.

Deciding authorship alphabetically or randomly is not a solution. Whereas it may avoid disputes and be easiest, the public perception of an author's contribution should not be based on something as random as the spelling of their last name. Alphabetical authorship demonstrates little about the intellectual contribution of participants.

Although there are no easy answers, it is important for the authors and readers that the authors of publications represent the intellectual contributors. They should be listed in descending order for their intellectual contribution. While any author should be able to speak for the text, the first author should be the primary contact to defend the intellectual content of a paper. In relationships with our students, I believe the error of giving credit to students when it is not deserved is much less than the error of taking advantage of those with less power or minimizing their contribution.

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