**CLT writing retreat 13th-14th July 2017: Sally Brown and Phil Race**

**Co-authoring pros and cons**

**Why it’s good to co-author:**

* Brainstorming the first ideas together can be really powerful and can generate more ideas than you could on your own.
* A writing partner (or two) can provide incentives to stay on task (you might not want to let them down, or you might be frightened of their reaction if you don’t deliver!).
* It’s great to have a second pair of eyes looking at something, because they can spot gaps that you might have missed.
* Two people often have a better data set to draw on than one, and each is likely to bring a different knowledge base and variety of reference sources to the partnership.
* Often each co-author brings different strengths to the task (e.g. one might be better at fine detail, the other at creative ways of tackling things, or one might be a great originator of ideas, the other a ‘finisher’). Longstanding friendships (and even marriages) can result.

**Some disadvantages of co-authoring:**

* Sometimes you find that you have really different ideas of what you are trying to achieve, paradigms, intentions, work rates, attitudes to deadlines, standards etc., and you may end up ‘splitting up for artistic reasons’ as musicians say!
* If you fall out badly, it can harm extant relationships with one another.
* Your institution may not like or value your work if you co-author with someone from a different HEI or country, particularly if it is a REF-able output.
* Some co-authors are ungenerous and want to hog the limelight, gain lead author status when they don’t deserve it and even steal your ideas. Be cautious about people who eye up your data set or findings, as presented at conferences, in a predatory way and seek to co-author with you.
* Always weigh up the benefits of working with a more established co-author: are they genuinely trying to help you on your way, or are they ‘harvesting’ material selfishly?

**So, some guidelines for potential co-authors:**

* Sort out ground rules well in advance, including sharing of work, order of authors, how you allocate percentages of input for REF or other reasons, and so on.
* Agree before you start writing, (but after extensive discussion) which journal or publisher you are targeting, whether you will use footnotes, what referencing style you will use, what kind of language/tone/ register you will jointly write in;
* Be realistic about timelines and what you can achieve, and have contingency plans when things go wrong (as they inevitably will);
* Have in place an exit strategy for if you do abort the publication (i.e. who owns what for use separately in other publications);
* Don’t try to co-author with too many people: it just becomes unmanageable if you have too many others to consult;
* However the writing goes, do plan an end of publication celebration!

**Multi-purposing**

1. Always ask with any data set ‘How can I use this in more than one way to maximise impact?’
2. Think about different outlets, e.g. a conference workshop, poster or keynote, an educational development journal (e.g. Innovations in Education and Teaching International), a quality journal (e.g. Quality Assurance in Education), a book chapter, a trade magazine (e.g. Nursing Times’ or SEDA’s Educational Developments), a newspaper feature (e.g. for the Times Higher or the Guardian Education pages), an electronic publication (including blogs and a Tweetchat such as #lthechat).
3. In each case, be clear about your rationale for choosing that outlet. Obviously, some have higher status but low readership and vice versa, and some might make you (a little) money, but most won’t!
4. Don’t just cut and paste blocks of text: the tone and register for one of these outlets will be very different from another, and you don’t want to be seen as self-plagiarising.
5. In every case, keep asking yourself: What are my key messages? Who is the audience? How can I make what I’m writing interesting and attractive to them?
6. Consider if any aspects of your work would lend themselves to co-authoring with another writer who might be able to put a fresh spin on your ideas.

**Networking**

* **Go to conferences and meet people:** talk to publishers on book stands who may be the commissioning editor for one of the series they are showing, talk to people over dinner and in the lunch queue, go to workshops on related themes to yours and actively look for co-authors or project collaborators.
* **Use electronic networks to find out what people are doing:** (my favourite lists are the SEDA, NTF and PF Jiscmail lists: what are yours?), and also join in with Tweetchats, and review research fora like Researchgate or ORCID.
* **Try to achieve a balance between productive networking and hassling:** don’t be afraid to contact your heroines/heroes to discuss productive collaboration, but don’t stalk them live or virtually.
* **Use your mentors to help you find the people you need to talk to:** ask them to be generous in sharing their networks with you or at least to make initial contacts for you. Often an introduction really helps and is easy for a ‘guru’ to do.
* **Use your professional body and subject-related networks to seek publication opportunities**: frequently that’s how book chapters are sought.
* **Commit to helping your newcomer colleagues join in with networks:** paying forward the help you’ve got from colleagues is a professional obligation in our view.