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Special Issue: Stories of Beginning Professors
Guest Editors: Andrew Kemp and Joe Norris

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Editorial

Stories of Beginning Professors

Joe Norris and Andrew Kemp
Guest Editors


The term preparation is problematic as each day is a step into the unknown for beginning professors. Preparation presupposes we know what will happen. We may and do bring acquired knowledge and skills to address that which we are about to face. However, as we embark on new adventures there will be many unanticipated events that will challenge and stretch our existing limits. They are stepping-stones to yet other adventures in an unfolding and uncertain universe. To be fully prepared means to have had that knowledge and experience prior to the event, an impossibility, a “wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey” (Moffatt, 2007) time paradox.

But we can do the next best thing. We can listen to the stories of those who have gone before us. While they won’t be exact, they can provide us with blurred glimpses of possibilities that we may not otherwise have been aware. Through them we can pre-live possibilities, asking what we might have done and recall them when we find ourselves in similar situations.

This special issue is a collection of stories about early career faculty members. Originally framed under “Dignity of the Calling” (Kemp, in press), numerous faculty members explored how they were “called” to be academics. This set specifically examines the lived-worlds of beginning professors describing a landscape of unknowns and the challenges they faced. While there are some similarities in content, especially the feeling of being unprepared, their paths are quite different. There are also vast differences in the styles of reporting. The first four are individually authored with the last four coauthored. Statistics, tables, fictionalized letters, composites and conversations are used to report, convey and portray. As Richardson (1990) claims,

Whenever we write science, we are telling some kind of story, or some part of a larger narrative. Some of our stories are more complex, more densely described, and offer greater opportunities as emancipatory documents; others are more abstract, distanced from lived experience, and reinscribe existent hegemonies. Even when we think we are not telling a story, we are, at the very least, embedding our research in a metanarrative, about, for example, how science progresses or how art is accomplished (p. 13).

This special issue of Brock Education is rich and diverse in both form and content.
It opens with Susan Adams framing her story with Pinar’s (1994) concept of *currere*. She takes regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical stances providing multiple perspectives of her life-history. Through a combination of descriptions, abstractions and a table, complete with a prediction by a former professor, Adams charts her non-lineal journey to and within the academy.

Raina León begins her piece with a playful thick-description (Geertz, 1973) about a day during the first week of her appointment. Documenting the percentage of her time spent on teaching, service, scholarship and personal activities with a chart, she provides an overview of her first year. While not strictly mixed-methods (Creswell, 2014), the interplay of two diverse styles of storytelling, both epistemologically and ontologically, reveal how one can conceptualize one’s lived-experiences.

Rich in theory, Kate E. O’Hara weaves the stories of her daily practices with the words of Giroux, Freire, Kincheloe and Shor. Underpinning this article is a deep desire to enable voice in her students, their students and herself as she walks the tightrope of developing her own style and what is expected by the academy. She claims, “My research is a lived experience; I cannot separate who I am, from what I do.”

Scott Richardson fictionalizes his piece. He reports a series of meetings with Daniel Myers, who “may be” himself in real life. Banks and Banks (1998) claim, “The opposite of fiction isn’t truth but something like objectivity or actuality. Any genre or piece of writing that claims to be objective, to represent the actual, is a writing that denies its own existence” (p. 13). There are *truths* in this piece that reveal some of the tensions of trying to place into practice axiological principles that were professed and accepted during graduate school.

Employing their co-created methodology (Norris, Sawyer and Lund, 2012 and Sawyer and Norris, 2013), Joe Norris and Rick Sawyer enter into a conversation about their early university employment situations. Through juxtaposition they reinform and reinscribe each other’s histories examining how coming from years of classroom teaching experiences placed additional responsibilities and expectations on them. Finding balance among competing expectations, common to many articles in this issue, was a reoccurring experience.

Jerine M. Pegg, Anne E. Adams, Hilary Smith Risser, SueAnn I. Bottoms, Anne L. Kern, and Ke Wu recognized the need of “FRiENDs, (Female Researchers in Education Networking and Dialogue)” not only in their beginning years but also throughout one’s academic life as one becomes a mentor to others. They advocate “informal peer mentoring” with “a group of colleagues” across institutions “that were not vested” in the relationship. The article provides not only direction but hope as people are considered the strongest resource in navigating the academy.

Laureen McIntyre and Laurie-Ann Hellsten, two tenured faculty members at the same institution, had no formal or informal mentoring experiences in their early years. They worked independently and learned through trial and error. One strength of their piece is, at times, they make their voices distinct with readers witnessing different experiences of the phenomenon. Rather than just looking for commonalities, they also articulate differences, making the article robust. Like Pegg et al and Norris and Sawyer, they emphasis the importance of collaborative relationships.

Heather McLeod and Cecile Badenhorst recount a project involving a special edition of *The Morning Watch: Educational and Social Analysis*, a non-peer-reviewed
journal published at Memorial University’s Faculty of Education, in which academic research and discussion papers by faculty and students was paired with a collaborative writing process to help create a community of researchers. The collaborative writing process involved collegial discussions around proposed submissions, a workshop on narrative writing, and a review process that was developmental rather than critical. They report in-depth interviews with four submitters and advocate nurturing environments that enable beginning academics to engage in research as a process of becoming.

The above stories illustrate but a few of the many challenges that beginning faculty face and the formal and informal infrastructures of support that seem to be seldom discussed during the rush to finish one’s degree. It is only after one finds oneself in the new role of faculty member does a tidal wave of new expectations wash in to replace the demand of the doctorate. This special issue, through stories, has the potential to bridge some of this transition. By providing such stories of beginning academics’ lived-experiences we hope that those entering the academy may have some more information on what to expect and possibilities for action. While little can prepare one for the emotions that one may experience, like Inukshuks, we hope that these stories bring comfort with the knowledge that others have travelled here before.

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Currere, Unexpected Journeys, and Unplanned Destinations in Academia

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Abstract

A sudden change of teaching placements forced my return to graduate school at the age of 40. Transformative graduate school learning resulted in the completion of a Ph.D. and earning a tenure track position in teacher education. This essay uses Pinar’s four steps of currere provide a lens to examine the past, look toward the future, take opportunity to look backward to the past while examining the present, and then re-enter the present. Mezirow’s transformative adult learning theory lends guidance for understanding why older adults may be uniquely poised to navigate successfully the complex maze of academia.

Keywords: transformative adult learning theory; currere; doctoral studies

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Introduction

In this essay, Pinar’s (2004) four steps of currere (the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical) provide a lens through which I:

- Examine my own past as a rich data source (the regressive)
- Look toward the future, toward what is possible (the progressive)
- Take opportunity to look backward to the past while examining the present (the analytical), and then
- Re-enter the present (the synthetical).

In addition, Mezirow’s (1991) transformative adult learning theory lends guidance for a “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2004) with myself as “an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action” (p. 37) toward understanding how and why older adults may be uniquely poised to navigate successfully, the complex maze and rigors of academia as they hearken to the call to teaching in midlife.

My Story: The Regressive Glance Backward

In 1985, I graduated with a BA in Spanish and a secondary teaching license. I entered the teaching force zealously committed to honing my pedagogy and to deepening my language skills as I shaped young lives. Teaching high school students excited and energized me. Although each was shaped with familiar high school rituals and rhythms, they were also spiced by the energy adolescent learners exude from their very pores. In those early years, my husband’s law school friends condescended to me, bending from their imagined lofty heights, and sympathetically cooing, “Oh, you teach. Isn’t that special?” but I could imagine no more important work and no higher calling.

In those days, teachers were required to earn a master’s degree within the first five years of licensure, so almost immediately I enrolled in a graduate program at my alma mater in education courses which allowed me to study once again with professors I had much admired and respected in my undergraduate days. Although it meant driving 70 miles each way several nights a week, I was overjoyed to return to Indiana State to engage with Dr. Chris Buethe and the other grad students to connect educational theory to our daily practice of teaching.

At the end of an intense year of teaching and graduate studies, I lingered after class on the last night, hoping for a quiet moment alone with Dr. Buethe. I shared with him the news that I was expecting my first child in the fall, which would necessitate pushing the pause button on completing my master’s degree. Dr. Buethe congratulated me warmly but stopped me as I turned to go. As he gripped my shoulder, he leaned down and emphatically uttered a statement which lodged permanently in my brain and completely rocked my world for years to come. “Listen,” he said, “I think you are a pretty good teacher right now, and I believe you will grow to become a great teacher one day. But some day, I think you are going to want to do what I do: teach new teachers.” I was speechless with astonishment in that moment and even more deeply touched when I received a letter in the mail a few days later in which he reiterated in writing his conviction that I would find my way into teacher education. I tucked the letter away, left the master’s degree unfinished for the moment, and spend the next ten years raising my children.

I have no regrets whatsoever for choosing to focus on my own kids and am grateful to have been able to cobble together odd part-time teaching jobs that allowed me to be available, involved and closely engaged with them while they were young. During those years I told myself
and anyone who asked that I was at peace with having completed 30 hours toward the masters’ degree without finishing, but in the back of my mind, a vague sense of unfinished business haunted me. However changing circumstances required a new plan: as I turned 40 and as my kids entered middle school, the tragic end of my marriage forced me to seek a new full time teaching position-a tricky proposition given that my teaching license was expired at the time. When I was offered a teaching position outside my licensure expertise in a high school English as Second language (ESL) classroom, I headed back to graduate school-first to renew my teaching license, and then to earn an add-on license in ESL.

If I wanted to keep my new ESL teaching position, I had to complete 18 hours of graduate courses to earn the ESL license, and I had to do it quickly. I enrolled in the School of Education at Indiana University at Indianapolis, where I knew no one. I was at first a bit queasy as I enrolled in my first two courses, Sociopsycholinguistics in the K-12 Classroom and Second Language Acquisition Theory. These titles were intimidating, and it seemed like a long time since I had been asked to read, write, think, and talk about such lofty concepts at the grad school level. How was I going to manage these academic demands while I simultaneously raised three middle-school aged kids, mourned the death of my marriage, and began a new job in a struggling high school, which in itself felt like being flung into the deep end of the pool? I took a deep breath and headed to my first class.

The group of students I met there astonished me. The educators in my classes-nearly all women-covered the spectrum, from nervous, newly minted beginning teachers to confident looking thirty-somethings to middle aged women like me. Nearly all of us had risen at 5AM, cared for our families, and taught a full day of school before heading to this intensive class meeting twice a week for three hours at a time. Several of us were enrolled in two courses like this simultaneously, meaning we were there four nights a week for six weeks while our schools were still in session. Occasionally one of us arrived with a child in tow when childcare fell through. Our professors and classmates were sympathetic and patient, understanding what a distraction it was to wonder what my 12-year-old might be up to in the hallway outside our classroom.

What should have been a miserable time of overload was instead for me a joyous awakening. After having taught beginning Spanish for many years, it was refreshing to see language learning from a completely different perspective. Being in the classroom each day with language learners provided me with rich schematic connections to the research and theoretical texts we read and discussed each night in class. I began to observe carefully my English language learners’ reading and writing progress each day, making mental notes of scenarios I could share later in class as my conceptual understandings of their learning deepened. Inexorably, my teaching began to change, reflecting my shifting pedagogical stance. When I completed the ESL licensure program, I decided I needed to keep going and finish the master’s degree, which I imagined would provide a sense of closure and satisfaction.

In addition to seeing rich connections between grad school theories and my classroom practice, I was gratified to find my professors welcomed my exuberant classroom contributions, valued my thinking, and believed my writing was strong. Honestly, at first I really thought they were simply nice, perhaps kindly trying to encourage me so I could finish the program. But to my amazement, at the end of my final master’s course, one professor, who had coincidently also taught my very first class, suggested I try to get my final paper published in a scholarly journal. And even more surprising, she asked if I had ever considered earning a Ph.D. I gasped, “Of course I have! But what am I supposed to do? Quit my teaching job, uproot my three kids, and move to Bloomington to live on a meager grad assistanceship?!” Beth, the professor, understood and agreed that this was an unlikely and unrealistic scenario for someone like me.
While Dr. Buethe had confidently predicted when I was only 24 that I would end up as an assistant professor in a teacher education program, at the time, though flattered by his encouragement, I could see no way for that prophecy to come true. In addition, I was still excited to be a teacher and felt I still had new depths of my practice to explore and to discover. My professional life was neatly bound, shaped and defined by the predictable and comforting course set by the assumptions, rhythms, and rituals the currere (Pinar, 2004) of school provides, or so I thought until Beth emailed a group of women a few months later with an intriguing invitation: she believed she had negotiated approval for a special Ph.D. program for a cohort of practicing teachers in our city-one that would not require us to quit our jobs or drive relentlessly to Bloomington. Though in retrospect, I realize that we did not remotely understand the personal or professional implications of the decision, a group of about 10 women, mostly middle aged, experienced educators took the leap of innocence and faith together and started down the doctoral degree path just as I turned 46.

The Progressive View from the Doctoral Pathway

In an interesting turn of coincidence, as I began my doctoral program, I also simultaneously left my K-12 instructional coaching job to begin a new role at Butler University, a nearby liberal arts university, in a grant-funded, temporary position. This new opportunity allowed me to delve into my newly discovered interest in supporting mainstream teachers to improve access and outcomes for K-12 English language learners in urban secondary schools. I also was suddenly working amongst tenured and tenure-track teacher education faculty members. My original plan at the conclusion of the temporary job was to return eventually to my school district, perhaps as a curriculum director. Gradually what eluded my understanding in the early months of my studies suddenly dawned on me clearly; a Ph.D. in education was preparing me for one thing, and one thing only: a permanent, tenure track position in a teacher education program. And just as suddenly, I remembered Dr. Buethe’s prediction and realized that teacher education was my new goal, just as he had foreseen.

This is the moment in which my “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2004) with myself as “an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action” (p. 37) consciously began. Whereas the masters’ courses deepened my conceptual and theoretical understandings, and prepared me for leadership roles in my K-12 schooling, in the doctoral program, I was so enamored by the joyous sensation of digging into theory and practice I gave little consideration to the degree’s intended purposes. Ignorantly and innocently, I jumped into my doctoral studies for the pure pleasure of discovery and of vigorous, rigorous academic work with little thought for how it would change me. Slowly I grew to understand I was being trained to listen, read, write, speak, think, and respond in new, mostly critical ways of seeing myself and the world. I was being shaped into an academic, a member of the academy, an identity I never expected to claim.

The Analytical: Looking Forward, Looking Backward

Understanding my emerging identity as an academic pushed me to set my sights on a permanent, tenure-track position I hoped would be available at just the right time at Butler University. I realized, too, that being a middle-aged person was now a massive advantage, rather than the disability it sometimes seems to be elsewhere. Wherever I went, people assumed I already was a seasoned, experienced, gainfully employed academic; no one expected someone my age to be a doctoral student. Though I always stated my status clearly to others, I decided to act as if I
already had the identity and the job I wanted. Seeing my new goal clearly allowed me early to become a functioning member of the academic discourse community (Gee, 2000), to begin to do the research, writing, and scholarly presentation work that academics do, and to give my colleagues a reason to imagine my future alongside them in that tenure-track position I hoped to earn. The increased workload and self-imposed expectations were stressful, constituting a staggering demand on top of my doctoral studies and dissertation writing; I recursively returned in memory to that crystalized moment with Dr. Buethe to inspire me and to give me confidence as I reached forward to the future identity I envisioned earning and taking on.

The Synthetical: Back to the Present Moment

I am grateful to find myself now in that tenure track position I had visualized though just as before, few university colleagues expect a woman of my age (51) to be a third-year assistant professor. The reality is that being middle aged with young adult children who are (mostly) taking care of themselves is yet again an unexpected advantage over my younger colleagues. I am less distracted and exhausted by the demands of parenting, free to focus my energies on my teaching, scholarship and service as I pursue tenure. Conference travel and long bouts of writing do not pose difficulties for my family these days. And perhaps most importantly, what I have learned about myself along the way gives me immense confidence to take risks, to take on new challenges, and best of all, to do the scholarly work I want to do, rather than to meekly and timidly do whatever is most likely to win me the approval of others just to earn tenure.

Conclusion

As Tisdell and Tolliver (2009) state eloquently in their retrospective of Mezirow’s (1991) work, “New knowledge cannot ‘become you’ simply through engaging rationality. It has to get into our hearts, souls, and bodies and into our interactions with others in the world” (p. 93). Mezirow’s (1991; 2000) work on transformative learning theory provides language and structure for me to make meaning of my journey. In the table below (Figure 1), Mezirow’s (2000) ten phases of learning inherent in the transformative process are shown in the first column; my own life connections and experiences are identified and aligned in the second column:

The recursive push and pull process of currere (Pinar, 2004) creates opportunity to retrospectively examine my experiences and my actions in light of my new learning, thereby changing my sense of self in the present, as well as pushing the boundaries of my imagination for my future. Transformative learning in the middle years of my life has kept my mind, and my heart feeling much younger than I expected to feel at this stage in my life. Unlike many of my age mates, I believe I am handling the transitions of this middle life stage with little trepidation because I am armed with new work, fresh perspectives, intellectual energy, and an evolving personal and professional identity. As O’Sullivan and O’Conner (2002) have stated,

[Transformative Learning] involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and the natural world; our understanding of the relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (p. 17).
I continue to find that attending to my own learning and to the joys inherent in transformative learning are their own reward and pay big dividends personally and professionally. Rather than resignedly settling for the way things are, or worse, descending into a mid-life crisis, middle age is the perfect time to embrace new learning and to see what journeys await us when we are open to new possibilities and transformative learning.

Figure 1: *Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning* (2000, p. 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mezirow’s 10 Phases of Transformative Learning</th>
<th>Life Events and Actions that Correspond to the 10 Phases of Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A disorienting dilemma</td>
<td>Failure of the marriage; new teaching job; new field of study for licensure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-examination</td>
<td>New learning provokes consciousness of prior teacher identity and commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
<td>Reading, class discussions, and writing from critical perspectives pushed me to notice and name my own assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recognition of a connection between one’s discontent and the process of transformation</td>
<td>Awareness of misalignment between my assumptions and teaching commitments created a desire for integrity and wholeness, sparking changes in my thinking, my approaches, and my commitments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action</td>
<td>I shifted away from a compliant teacher identity, now seeing myself as an advocate, a critical thinker, and a critical theorist. I asserted myself more in conversations, meetings, and decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Planning a course of action</td>
<td>I became aware that the doctoral degree was preparing me for work in higher education and for an identity as a scholar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan</td>
<td>I made a conscious decision to work closely with a mentor who took an active role in preparing me for academia through discussions, shared readings, conference presentations, career counseling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Provisional trying of new roles</td>
<td>I made a conscious decision to act as if I already had the job I hoped to earn later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
<td>Taking risks, accepting new leadership responsibilities, and participating in scholarly writing and reviewing gave me experience and confidence. Positive feedback from others reinforced this decision, allowing me to do more and to go deeper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

| Applying for, earning, and beginning the full-time, tenure-track position were relatively easy transitions given the years of gradual integration I had already experienced, allowing me to carry my new learning perspectives into my work immediately, rather than waiting for tenure. |

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**References**


Traveling the Road of Research: Stories of Teaching and Technology

Kate E. O’Hara
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Abstract

This autobiographical account relates the journey of becoming a critical teacher researcher. Through critical reflection and analysis, the cultural, historical, and social contexts of research, teaching, and technology use are described as lived experience. Rich narrative accounts exemplify personal and professional experiences before and during the professoriate in a tenure track position.

Keywords:
professoriate, critical theory, technology, urban education, autoethnography, narrative, qualitative

Kate E. O’Hara, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the School of Education at New York Institute of Technology. Her research, which employs the use of narrative and autoethnographic studies couched within a sociocultural framework, focuses on the effective use of technology to empower users to become agents of social change and also teacher education within contexts of power, oppression, and social justice.
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It is a Sunday evening in March and I am watching the first segment of a four part series entitled, *The Irish in America: The Long Journey Home*. The scene opens with the music of a Celtic flute, the camera panning the rocky, yet lush country-side of Ireland. The camera then focuses in on an elderly gentleman. He stands directly in front of the camera, the fog-covered mountains behind him. He is speaking Gaelic. The voice-over of the narrator translates, “The Irish are old hands at telling stories. They like talk. They’re word hungry. Their oldest stories in Gaelic can take days in the telling.” My husband, David Majewski, sitting next to me on the couch, turns to me and says, “I wish someone had told me that before I got married…”

I enjoy listening to a good story perhaps more so than telling one. Apart from the shared experience, I find myself drawn into the telling itself; the tone of the speaker’s voice, the cadence, the sound of particular words, certain expressions, analogies, metaphors, and alliterations. There is a scene I love from the movie *Harvey*, in which Jimmy Stewart, as Elwood P. Dowd, explains, “At first Dr. Chumley seemed a little frightened of Harvey, but that gave way to admiration as the evening wore on. The evening wore on. That’s a very nice expression, isn’t it? With your permission I’ll say it again. The evening wore on.” Like Elwood, I savor words. And in hindsight, I realize that many of the stories I listened to, the words I savored, were through music.

As a teenager, I immersed myself in songs from British bands, American folk rock, country, blues, jazz, and the “oldies” of the fifties. One of my greatest joys was discovering that the record album I had just purchased included lyrics. With lyrics printed in stanzas on the album’s jacket, I no longer had to painstakingly drop the needle, over and over again, in certain spots on the vinyl, attempting to discover words that I failed to uncover from listening to the vocalist; words that ultimately represented a moment in my life or a moment yet to come. Words like a screenplay, interspersed with pictures, making movies in my mind.

*The soundtrack of urban schools*

The line for those waiting to pass through the high school metal detector spills out onto the sidewalk. It is half past nine and the heat of the morning sun is strong. “I bet ya it’s going to be 100 today,” I hear one of my students say as I walk along the curb, balancing with one step in front of the other, passing by the crowd. Many of the students waiting to enter the building are holding Smartphones, iPods, or Mp3 players. As I walk, I can hear music reverberating through their ear phones. Some students dance in place while others sing aloud. A few simply mouth words into the steamy air. Still others stand against scaffolding poles or street sign posts, with eyes closed, listening to the melodies, to the stories, perhaps making movies in their mind.

In a 1971 debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault on the origins of human nature, Chomsky states:

A fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work, for creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effect of coercive institutions, then, of course, it will follow that a decent society should maximize the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realized. That means trying to overcome the elements of repression and oppression and destruction and coercion that exist in any existing society, ours for example... (Cook, 2010)
The urban classrooms in which I have taught and the schools in which I now work, possibilities for creative work and creative inquiry are rarely maximized. Budget cuts have removed art and music from the curriculum. Engaging in interdisciplinary aspects of the arts rarely occurs inside secondary classrooms. In fact, the physical makeup of the rooms themselves lacks the colorful displays of student work, or the inviting décor of drawings, reproduced prints or photographs. In reality, many urban classrooms are even void of basic resources; working electrical outlets, window shades and chairs. The creative experiences found within New York City schools are starkly different from what we experience in our lives outside of schools.

Outside of school, music is played from radios in the home or in the car and on personal players while on the train and the bus. The walls and shelves of homes are often speckled with images. I think about my own home; in addition to framed photographs or prints, I have areas in which I have taped photographs alongside quotes and snippets of text from newspapers or magazines; even printed email messages. Not a traditionally decorated space but the mixed media collage is comforting to me; small representations of my life.

As a middle and high school teacher, technology enabled me to bring music and photography into my classroom. I would create music montages on cassette tapes to be used as a prompt for students’ personal narratives. I would bring in personal photographs, photocopies of pictures, and magazine clippings to inspire the start of stories in creative writing journals. And, I would videotape students’ original interpretations of “classic” novels, poems, and plays. This type of teaching enabled me to know my students, learn from them, and help create a learning community in which sharing of knowledge was encouraged and valued. The community created then directly gave way to sharing and discovery. Semali & Kincheloe (1999) speak of encouraging teachers to seek out and analyze indigenous knowledge that may be salient to students. I was blessed with students that were brave enough to share information about their families, the way they acquire knowledge, and the various traditions that they practice in their lives.

In my current position as an assistant professor, I guide teachers in the design of curriculum that integrates technology in a way that positively impacts their instruction, and their students’ learning. This positive impact underlies the term “effective use.” I draw from Chomsky’s concept and urge teachers to use technology as a way to maximize possibilities for inquiry, thus overcoming the elements of repression and oppression through a fundamental human characteristic; the need for creative work. I believe that effective technology use, grounded in criticality, can be just the vehicle for our liberation.

**Teaching with technology**

Technology as a tool for teaching and learning offers users opportunities for creative work. Although access was limited, technology in my Bronx middle and high school classrooms offered me and my students a means for creative expression through digital pictures, video, interactive applications, multimedia presentations, and hyperlinked text that opened new possibilities and clarifications.

My graduate students that are teaching in urban schools also use technology, the Internet in particular, to build creative fields, online communities for knowledge sharing. Through web pages, blogs wikis, digital flyers, and shared presentation applications, collaboration, creativity, their students’ learning flourishes.
However, despite the positive potential of technology use, technology itself is not the panacea for the ills plaguing urban schools. The way in which we use the technology, and view technology, is fundamental. Technology in schools can be used as means of repression and surveillance. It can be used to perpetuate the status quo; an aid in scripted and narrowed curriculum, and the deskilling of teachers. Conversely, technology such as digital stories, blogs, and interactive presentations, can also serve as an alternative medium of knowledge production, offering students an opportunity for collaboration, critical reflection and creative inquiry about issues that are often left out of current classroom dialogue or accounts that have been typically silenced or marginalized.

And, even though the use of filtering in school buildings may impact the possibilities for knowledge sharing and production (O’Hara, 2014) an awareness of the greater power structures which have negatively impacted classroom practice is essential. The power laden layers are thick and concealing; they need to be stripped away so that we can undo what the culture of schooling has created. In school we are trained to be a “student.” Likewise, the culture of schooling trains teachers in dominant discourses and practices. Shor (1992) suggests, "Teachers and students alike need to desocialize from the dominant influences on their development" (p. 203).

Effective use of the Internet and web based applications can challenge the status quo, changing the unjust social context, and move present understandings to a more complex view that includes transformation and cultivating of the intellect.

Reflection, action, transformation

It was my doctoral advisor, Joe Kincheloe at the Graduate Center, CUNY, who introduced me to the work of Paulo Freire. Joe helped me put into words my own work as a teacher. He helped me give voice to my lived experience (van Menen, 1990). With Joe as my mentor, I began to look at my teaching in a different light. I began researching instructional technology beyond my personal experiences. I began to make sense of the overlapping and interconnectedness of teaching and learning with technology use as well as the positionality of technology at the micro, meso, and macro levels. In particular, finding correlations and contradictions with what happens at the classroom level, in the world of the teacher and student. Through my research, I began to make parallels and contrasts between what I read and what I did.

Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000) talk of text as what is interpreted, not necessarily facts or data. The facts emerge as a process of interpretation, as meaningful signs that influence the pattern of interpretation. The text itself must be placed in a “con-text” (p. 62), or an external weave of connections, with author’s work being read within. I began to interpret my teaching with technology and also literature related to instructional technology. And, I began to use critical and social theory to explain the “facts” and concepts I uncovered and discovered.

Teacher as researcher

My research employs Joe Kincheloe’s critical notion of “bricolage” which, in the context of teacher as researcher and knowledge worker (Kincheloe, 2003) draws from a multilogicality that values diverse perspectives and insights. Moving beyond a unidisciplinary approach, I use Kincheloe’s overarching concept as a rigorous interdisciplinary approach, and incorporate the theoretical and philosophical with sociocultural theory, critical theory, and critical pedagogy. I
make use of differing methods of inquiry such as autoethnography, hermeneutics and phenomenology, in addition to narrative inquiry.

Although my scholarly writing is narrative, my narrative is more than story recording. My narrative accounts serve a significant means for the sharing and the construction of knowledge. As a critical teacher researcher I feel it is imperative that I create multiple dialogues reflecting diverse truths.

Drawing from autoethnography, a cultural accounting of my experiences as well as the experiences of others, I reflect with an awareness of the non-neutrality of my words and aim at engaging “with suppressed aspects of history” (Pratt, 1991, p.40).

**Critical qualitative research**

My qualitative research is a story; a journey unto itself. As my story unfolds, I have uncovered more than I originally anticipated. When I began my doctoral work, telling a story about the classroom was my comfort zone but I was naïve to think that is was where the narrative would rest. The process of teaching with technology, the process of learning with technology, the relationships that exist within that locality, the resources used for instruction and the decisions intermingled within educational structures are complex and fluid.

As I enter my tenure year in the professoriate, I reflect on how my research has evolved. My phenomenological approach begins a dialogue that discounts “one truth” about the act of using technology as a learning tool. Through hermeneutical analysis, I continue to tell stories that reflect multidimensional act(s) within cultural, historical, and social contexts. My research has moved me beyond the urban classroom to societal frameworks and neoliberal educational policies. And, in the process of making sense of technology use at the micro, meso, and macro levels, not only has the story of instructional technology evolved, but my personal story has as well.

As a critical teacher researcher and more specifically through the research and the writing I have accomplished as an assistant professor, I have gained insight into the forces that have shaped my identity and consciousness. Through personal transformation, I continually develop a critical ontology; new forms of self awareness, the recognition of power’s complexity in ideologies and discourses and the conceptualizing of my emergent self as ever changing as I interact with others and the world. My scholarly writing has helped me gain new levels of consciousness and new ways of being. Similar to technology use, this process did not occur in isolation. In this journey I have joined a network of scholars that have introduced me to their own work, as well as the work of others. A new awareness of philosophical and critical perspectives have broadened my perspective and helped to inform my construction of self. I have been introduced, informed, and urged to question issues and concepts that, for lack of a better term, never occurred to me. With Joe as the forerunner, the guidance of others has helped me to develop and exercise critical agency. My sense of agency permeates my research and writing. However, my ongoing development of critical scholarship in the professoriate has not been without challenges.
**Publishing critical qualitative research-or perishing**

As untenured faculty, one continually walks a tightrope, yielding to what is valued and accepted by colleagues, even if it is in direct contrast to one’s own personal and professional beliefs.

As well known, the life of a professor revolves around teaching, scholarship and service. But balance is difficult, if not impossible at times, when focusing on meeting the expectations for yearly reappointment in a tenure track line and attempting to maintain any semblance of a personal life. Of the three areas, the coined phrase “publish or perish” rings the loudest. Writing for me has always been a creative endeavor and multiple administrative responsibilities, the mentoring of students, and the continual stream of ominous deadlines, kill the muse.

Writing within a qualitative framework further complicates things when working with colleagues that draw from a positivistic mindset. My second year in the professorate, a tenured colleague offered me words of ignorance when advising me about my research and publication acceptance rate: “You see your ‘n value’ is too small…the field will not respond to that…you’re not really doing anything.” As the words “n value” and “not really doing anything” hung in the air, they furiously collided with autoethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, hermeneutics, bricolage and critical theory. And, with my untenured faculty balancing act center stage, I nodded, feigned acceptance, and drew from a new stronger need to be true to myself and my scholarship. I developed a clear and distinct focus on developing and exercising critical agency—taking a risk by pushing back against the threat of perishing, engaging in reflexive dialogue, and acknowledging my responsibility to the field of qualitative scholarship.

I realized what I was teaching my own graduate students, I needed to practice myself. “Pedagogy is not about training; it is about educating people to be self-reflective, critical and self-conscious about their relationship with others and to know something about their relationship with the larger world” (Giroux, 2011, para.30).

My critical reflection allowed me room for hope in an academic environment that felt in conflict with my own professional and personal beliefs.

One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles will be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. (Freire, 1992, p. 3)

The narrative accounts related in my research in the professoriate continue. Like scenes from a movie, complete with a soundtrack, new releases continually emerge from the classroom to the national level, as educators feel the impact of the Race to the Top initiative, flawed measures of student achievement and teacher evaluation, and the impractical implementation of standardized testing. In all of the aforementioned, technology use for creative work and critical thought has been lost.

From here, where do we go when aiming to make sense of the implications of technology use for teaching and learning in the K-12 classroom? And equally as important, making sense of the implications of technology use for teaching and learning in higher education? An essential part of the professoriate needs to be the incorporation of technology as a means for generating creative fields, fostering knowledge production and critical thought—not only for our students, but ourselves as well.
For faculty in schools of education there are intriguing possibilities for helping our teachers understand the complex relationships related to the use of technology. For example, as educators how might we use the Internet as a transformed public sphere, a place for critical debate, leaving aside the bias and manipulation of the media?

Or how as teacher researchers can we think beyond traditional notions of literacy? What is it like to experience and engage with a text—or more specifically, hyperlinked text? How does the act of reading for information online evolve into an emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual experience?

As teacher researchers how might we begin to use video games as problem solving spaces? And again, what happens when we “read” these games or engage in online activities? What sociocultural situated discourses do we encounter in gaming experiences and how do they affect our notion of literacy?

And perhaps the most hopeful and fascinating are our ideas about “disruptive technologies,” a term which refers to innovations that improve a product or service in a way that was not expected by the market. What impact do these technologies have on the “business” of schooling? How can these technologies be used by students and teachers to empower both parties to be agents of educational and societal change? We need to explore the ways in which these disruptive technologies can serve as a conduit for developing a critical consciousness and critiquing the frameworks which impact our lived experiences.

With all of the above there are implications and ramifications but yet possibilities and positive potentials of technology use. The following is an email I received from one of my former graduate students, a New York City school teacher.

Subj: Technology update from your past student..
Date: 10/27/20__ 1:05:24 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Student.s.m.@yahoo.com
To: kohara@

Dear Dr. O'Hara,

I hope this finds you well. I took your course last semester. I was just emailing to express my gratitude for the lessons learned in that course. I never felt very connected to course work throughout my graduate studies. Your class however inspired me to really push for technology in my classroom. I squashed all the excuses I used to give for why my students didn't use any of the six computers in my classroom beyond simple Word processing and Internet keyword searches. Currently, I am working with a 30k grant from Adobe software for my students to use. They love it, and although it is a daily challenge, I find that the learning that is happening every moment is well worth the upkeep.

Keep inspiring, Teach.

Best,
s.m.
As Freire (1992, 2005) reminds us, transformative possibilities and opportunities can be achieved through praxis; action and reflection. We need to do this through dialogue, criticality, and in solidarity. Teachers need to share their successes, give hope to one another, and inspire one another as we move toward a critical awareness. Together we need to be “motivated by the power of ideas to reshape the world in which we operate, the notion that human beings can become far more than they presently are, and the belief that ultimately the fate of humanity is related to these ideas” (Kincheloe, 2009, p. 34).

The journey continues

My research is a lived experience; I cannot separate who I am, from what I do. I am a teacher and a teacher educator. I use technology when I teach and I teach teachers to use technology in their practice. And now, thorough the use of technology, my qualitative research can be disseminated in the spirit of knowledge sharing and critical thought.

The professoriate has now seen the emergence of digital, open access peer reviewed journals, online professional networks, and publishing houses that include full electronic production of a book to be purchased by libraries and individual for use on eBook readers. In the coming months I will be preparing my tenure portfolio. I am fortunate to work at a university that utilizes electronic portfolios. My work, once reflected in stacks of paper, tucked inside tabbed card stock folders, and bound by metal spiral rings of a plastic binder, is now digitized.

In this online space I will demonstrate excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service through uploaded documents, screenshots, and photographs, embedded video and hyperlink web resources and journal repositories. My online tenure portfolio serves as a creative field; one in which I share knowledge, my critical reflections, my lived experience—a technology integrated story of a critical teacher researcher.
References


Fight or Flight: 
An Account of a Professor’s First Year Obsession

Raina J. León
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Abstract

In this article, a junior faculty member explores her obsessions with the distribution of time in the areas of teaching, scholarship, service and personal life through an intensive analysis of an academic calendar, populated with data points in those areas. Through this analysis, she examines her first year and her own development as an academic.

Keywords: self study, first-year professor, education, inner life

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It's August 2011. I have been using my office for a little over a week.

I am absolutely terrified that someone will catch me. I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing. I am not even sure what I am supposed to be doing, but it is certainly not playing Bejewelled on my iPhone in my office. The door is partly closed, and perhaps that’s why I jump in my chair at the sound of a door suddenly being opened. It’s not mine; it’s probably the associate dean’s office. He’s just next door, and his office seems to always be buzzing with folks coming in and out. It is accreditation visit time.

It’s not my door, and still I find my heart racing. My head has focused on the knob. The phone rests in my hand, my playing finger still poised and ready to move another jewel into exploding glory. I am waiting to be caught tech-handed, and I realize that I have no excuse for what I assume is bad behavior for a professor.

I was a high school teacher. Now, I am a professor of education. I let that new identity unfold like a loosed red ribbon spool. Part of me wants to hold tight the end, follow until the spool can be captured and wound back to the beginning. Does one ever stop being a high school teacher? I wonder. Who is the professor in me?

In preparation for the first course I am teaching in my first appointment as an assistant professor, I have immersed myself in texts. That’s what I am taking a break from for a moment a la Pomodoro Technique. Now, I share with you what Parker Palmer describes in The Courage to Teach, a look into this academic’s inner life: (Palmer, 2010):

If identity and integrity are more fundamental to good teaching than technique – and if we want to grow as teachers – we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives – risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract (p. 12).

I was so recently panicked to the point of my heart racing, all rooted in the prospect of being proclaimed an academic fraud for play, as if play has no place in academia, as if I had no right to rest my mind in whatsoever way I found fit, as if I was bad, the bad professor long before I have even met my students.

* * *

It was a privileged position in which I found myself that August. A woman of color appointed as a tenure-track assistant professor in Education at a small, liberal arts college, I recognize now that I was and am something of an anomaly as the majority of faculty, particularly women faculty, if full-time, are not tenure-track (Banerji, 2006). Women are more likely to hold part-time positions at universities (Curtis, 2011). While the percentage of underrepresented minority faculty members is growing, it still remains low despite a growing commitment by universities to diversifying their campuses (Moreno, Smith, Clayton-Pedersen, Parker, & Teraguchi, 2006). In a 2006 Latina/o Education Summit Report (Pérez Huber, et al, 2006), I saw this clearly delineated by numbers relating the reality of the United States educational pipeline. If 100 African American female students started in elementary school, only .3% of them graduated with a doctorate. Of 100 Latinas, it was the same number: .3%. When Latinas were divided by sub-groups (Chicana, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and Salvadoran), that number
remained the same: .3%. As a comparison, the number for white women is .6% while the number for white men is 1.4%.

I also differ from many of my colleagues in that I am part of an academic legacy. While we do not work in the same discipline, my mother is also an academic, recently tenured at a small college. Throughout most of my life, I have heard first-hand accounts of the difficulties that my mother faced as she sought out and received tenure, first at one university and then later at another. Still, even with this up close and personal exposure to academic life, I still was unprepared for my own first year, particularly in determining what a professor's work really is and should be.

Still, nearly four years ago, I experienced a deep-seated, summer-heated fear. Someone was going to ask me how I spent my days, and I would have to report on all I had done. There might be an inquisition, I panicked. [I had just come from Bavaria where you throw a stone at the medieval torture museums available for tour.] The university was investing in me, and what did they have to show for that investment?

I decided to quantify my life. To reduce the anxiety, I started keeping a calendar that listed every act that I completed in the day: committee meetings, program meetings, class preparation, and teaching. It started with that, but it didn’t stop. At times even more obsessive, I would layer yellow Post-Its over my penned-in days that delineated the hours that I had spent on teaching, scholarship, and service that day. Sometimes, I listed how much time I had spent on watching television, generally my favorite mind-numbing shows. Face Off, Real Housewives of Atlanta, Bar Rescue, Chopped. Oh, there’s a marathon going on of [any zombie-fying show]? Yes, please. It helped shut off my brain from busy days. I kept my door open as I worked. I was in and out of the office, sometimes over 14 hours in a day. I worked five days a week and at least one weekend a month. In October 2011, I worked every day, including weekends.

Within a few months of beginning this recording practice – a practice I continued for my first three years as a professor – I started to ask myself questions. I was easing into the role, but I still felt this urge to record. What might I learn about myself? What might it reveal about negotiating a balance between teaching, scholarship, service, and a personal life? At the end of the first year – indeed in the summer after the academic year for three years – I conducted an analysis based on the calendar. To aid in my understanding of my development as an academic, I assigned value of one to each activity that could be filed under the aforementioned headings. In some cases, one activity received a value under multiple categories. For example, work on the creation of educational technology workshops was categorized under scholarship and service as it represented a presentation of my scholarship as well as a service to the local community of Catholic schools. I became obsessed with tallies and categories.

After assigning a value of one to each activity, the number of teaching, service and scholarship activities were counted. A total of activities per month and per category was then noted. With these values (see Table 1), the percentage of activities under the overall categories of teaching, service and scholarship during the academic year as well as the percentage of activities in those categories per month of the academic year were determined. In addition to the three categories most aligned to the academic life, I also developed a separate category, personal, to encompass specific notations of activities outside of academic life. Personal activities might include doctor appointments, poetry submissions, visits from out-of-town friends and family, lunch meetings with friends,
dinner parties, watching television, and dates. I determined that this would be valuable in my analysis so as to see how and if I had effectively managed to balance my professional goals with personal needs. With each tick and the analysis of its fit in the four categories, I gained control: *this was how I would show my value to the institution and how I would learn, too.*

**Table 1. 2011-2012 Analysis of First Year Professor’s Academic Calendar**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1341</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>148</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>194</td>
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*Not all percent values total to 100 due to rounding*

With scholarly distance, my anxiety reduced. In conducting an analysis of the 2011-2012 calendar, I expected that much of my time would have been devoted to service, but this was not the case. Service activities only comprised 24.7% of my work in the 2011-2012 academic year. Indeed, only two of the 10 months (September at 40.8% and May at 30.5%) saw service as a significant category in my professorial work. Looking back and comparing my service then to now, it makes perfect sense. I had no connections at the university. I had moved from Germany to the Bay Area, a large expanse of communities to which I had no connection. Those relationships took time to build. In my second year of this analysis, service was the strongest category. My conclusion is that it took me about a year to build the initial contacts to engage in service.

Teaching, it turned out, held the largest sway in my first year as a professor. In that fearsome August, 61% of my time was devoted to teaching, which makes sense. I was teaching totally new courses, learning new texts, working in a new role. I was preparing as quickly as I possibly could to meet the students who would, within a year, be high school teachers, a position that I had just left. Overall, teaching made up 32% of my time for that academic year.

Scholarship was the second highest category at 30% for that academic year. I was working on my second book, which was released in my third year of service. As I didn’t have as many service commitments, I had time then to develop scholarship plans and do a great deal of writing. I submitted widely to conferences and received a number of...
acceptances, which led to more scholarly opportunities in my second year of service. I was planting fruit trees in that first year that only began to shoot up in the second year. In the third year, I began to harvest. In this fourth year, I am planting a new orchard.

What was most surprising to me in that summer of 2012 when I looked at the calendar was how little of a personal life I had. There was one month, October, in which I noted no activities that would fit under this category. If following the preceding months, I went from devoting 25% of my time to personal development in August to 2% of my time in that same category in September to none of my time in that area in October. It follows that in August I may have given more time to establishing relationships in a new locale with friends that I had known from previous moves and that over time I became increasingly focused on my career. Following this category over time intrigued me in that it began to reverse as the personal became increasingly more important and more balanced in relation to the other categories. Indeed, by April, the four categories were most balanced.

Still, it makes sense that the personal made up only 13% of my time overall for the academic year. I had moved from one country back to my country of origin, changing careers in the field of education. I had to learn a new institution, new community, and new standards. I moved to California just as the Common Core State Standards were starting to be adopted. I had no previous work experience as a full time professor in education. My scholarship had primarily been as a poet, not as a teacher educator. I also was hired into a department that was not prepared, at the time, to mentor a new faculty member, being as many of the faculty were semi-retired within my program. I had to figure out a great deal on my own. I happened to have received a second position as a resident director; living on campus allowed me to attend undergraduate and graduate co-curricular programming. If there was a reading group, film, discussion, or event on campus, I was going. I learned about funding opportunities and outside supports early.

I had to learn quickly in that first year; I had to hustle. I found myself often thinking of my father’s lessons to me as a child: You are poor, a woman, African American, Puerto Rican. No one is going to help you; you have to help you. You have to be better, work ten times harder. And not just for you, for the family. You can’t dishonor us. He said those things to teach me to fight. In my first year as a professor, I started in fear. Instinctually, when situationally-prodded to fight or flight, I went to fight. It started with numbers. It went on to reflection. Since that first year, I have used the tables about my experience in rank and tenure documents, talking about my goals for the future based on my quantitative analysis of where I had been. In the first year, I emphasized teaching. In the second, the emphasis was service. In the third, scholarship had a primary place in my work.

In this fourth year, I am emphasizing balance. I no longer keep the calendar. I no longer fear, because I feel comfortable in who I am as professor in this place and in this time. It took a lot of reflection, support from other faculty of color peers and mentors as well as professional allies, and a lot of sense-making conversations with my mother (again, another academic of color with whom I can speak the real-real talk) to get there. I no longer play Bejewelled, though I still enjoy all of the television shows I listed.

I still work hard. I continue to risk, even in just telling this story. I will not fear. I look forward to August with joy.
References


My Position Comes with Privilege: I’m Going to Learn How to Use It

Scott Richardson
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Abstract

This composite nonfiction narrativizes the experiences of Daniel Meyers, an assistant professor of education. Specifically, it details his transition from a graduate program to working as a full-time tenure track faculty member at a public state university. Methodologically, this research relies on parallax as an important tool to understanding Meyers’s personal, intellectual, and political struggle in adjusting from a research institution to “performing” at a teaching institution. Teaching institutions, to Meyers, are significantly more customer service driven (read: making students happy) which can be problematic when faculty members have significant and different cultural understandings and interpretations than their students and the university as a whole. Meyers struggles to make adjustments, but ultimately realizes his duties as a teacher and that his contributions—though perceived alternative and conflicting with primary cultural and political narratives—provides him with an extraordinary and privileged opportunity to do important work.

Keywords: public post-secondary education, institutional politics, transitions, teacher student relationships, cultural dissonance, composite nonfiction, privilege

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Introduction

*Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter. The sitter is merely an accident, the occasion.*

- Oscar Wilde

I am sharing a story about Daniel Meyers.

I am Daniel Meyers. Believe that as much or as little as you would like. It does not matter to me one way or the other. I am unwilling to say much about the exact differences or similarities between us. I am also unwilling to parcel out the nitty-gritty details. It is partly because I really do not have a good measure of what is “true.” When it comes down to it, I do not even have a reasonable or defensible understanding of who I am. However, it is also because it does not really matter. I do not mean to say that the truth has no absolute value, because I think we need to believe in it. But what the truth is, I think, is slippery and even unreal.

Recently, I explored a bunch of old film cameras with my father in his basement. We came across my grandmother’s Ansco. I pressed the camera’s viewfinder against my eye and noted that I could see a portion of the lens. “It’s called, ‘parallax,’” my father explained. If the camera was operational, and I had taken a picture, the negative would have recorded an image different than what I saw. It would be close, but not completely accurate. This unnerved me a bit. I consider myself intentional when I produce pictures and especially when I use film. I began to wonder, “How could I be sure that the image would be accurate in other ways?” “What if the lens and the viewfinder were off-center by a simple centimeter?” This would alter the frame and composition altogether. And, “What if the images did not seem ‘true’?” I illogically reasoned it “unreliable.” Yet, everything is unreliable, inexact, and simply an impression. If I were to shoot a roll of film with grandma’s Ansco, the moments that I lived, emotions felt, process in which I framed these phenomena would never exactly translate. If I shared the images with others, their interpretations would be different than my own and I am not so sure I could, or would, want to control that.

We are constantly engaged in wondering about the truth at all times. Therefore, I am unapologetic about putting you in this position. In fact, I think for this story the method of imposing the unknown, or disruption of research as positivism, is healthy and serves us well. Some would call my methods “fiction-based,” but I am just as unsure about fiction as I am about truth. I prefer to sit on the fence; I call my work “composite non-fiction” (Sizer, 1984). I employ composite nonfiction to alter and blend details of people, places, and events in a way that allows me to write fairly and clearly (Richardson, 2012; Richardson, 2015). I write about things I know, which is different than what is true. What I know comes from the gut more than the head. The head is simply at work (un)tangling what is important to share and how. Clifford Geertz (1973) says, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun…the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 4). It is my head that must honor my gut, and so when I write I ask, “How
will what I know connect with the realities of others?” While this connection might help to collectively “make sense of data” to come to a mere approximation of the truth, more importantly it relies on parallax—y/our “multi-perspective as integral to the…transformative potential” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 284). In other words, it makes Daniel’s and Scott’s story/ies important.

Daniel Meyers

...in schools, particularly in secondary ones and those for higher learning, one observes countless persons playing at being a student, a professor, an intellectual, a radical, a bohemian, a freak, and so on, playing at being something other than themselves. They are not themselves; in Laingian terms, they are out of their minds; they are mad (Pinar, 2006, p. 11).

Daniel Meyers is an assistant professor of education at Oxbridge University (Woolf, 1928). He’s completing his fifth, and possibly last, year of teaching. I met Daniel over drinks in a hotel restaurant a few years back at a conference. As everyone socialized, we shared an electrical outlet. We bellied up to the bar and stuck our noses in our laptops. We were strangers, and so we spent the first couple of hours ignoring one another, working. Then, finally, we chatted about beer.

It started by Daniel asking, “What’s that you’re drinking?”

“It’s a Flemish red ale. It’s delicious,” I responded.

Daniel came off as kind, but wound tight. He seemed stressed. But to be fair, it was nearly 1 a.m., and we were both working tediously in a bar, so I suppose he might have made the same assessment of me.

We parted ways when the bar closed, but I ran into him several times over the next couple of days. Sometimes, we sat in conference sessions together, or passed one another in the hallways of the convention center. We exchanged business cards somewhere along the way, and said things like, “Yes, let’s definitely stay in touch,” and “I’d love to read that manuscript,” because we understood conference culture. But, of course, there was no real commitment to working with one another.

The following spring I happened to be invited to give a talk at Oxbridge. When I arrived on campus, I emailed him, wondering if he was available for lunch. I had spent the winter thinking about him, and I felt odd about that. I couldn’t situate my feelings, but there was something about Daniel that resonated with me.

We agreed on meeting at a small cafe in the heart of campus. I was early and he was late. I sat in a booth by the window and watched him hurriedly rush down the street, stuffing books and papers in his canvas side bag, scrambling, glancing at his watch. He looked older than I had remembered. He was disheveled. He wore jeans, a wrinkled dress shirt, a blazer, and muddy green sneakers. He burst through the door, winded.

“How are you?! Welcome! I’m so happy you’re here, and I get to see you!” he said, excitedly, grabbing my hand, as though we were old friends.
We settled in and talked about the campus, my lecture, and got deep into details of our work. It quickly turned into a therapy session. I lamented how much we were overworked by our respective institutions—which of course, is a trend everywhere—and he took to task the cultural and political difficulties he faced.

“I should tell you that I’m generally not a pessimistic, unnecessarily critical or paranoid kind of person.”
“But you’re becoming one?”
“Yes. I’m losing my mind…and my soul along the way.”
“What do you mean?” I asked.
“I just don’t know anything anymore. I’ve lost any sense of who I am. I’m a little paranoid. I’m a lot depressed. I’m just…I don’t know…,” Daniel paused, his eyes darted away, “I’m not me.”

After an awkward silence, Daniel continued, “Truthfully? Joining academia has brought me mostly frustration and heartache. Reflecting on why this is so, I have come to two primary conclusions: 1) universities are largely not the intellectual spaces they claim to be and 2) my graduate school experience set me up for failure.”

“I think I know what you mean,” I said, “but, tell me more.”
“Well, look at me,” he said, as he glanced around the room, then whispered:

I should have the right to talk about how I feel...about my work conditions. I should feel comfortable to offer a critique so that we, the university—me included—can become more functional...supportive of students. But I’m busy looking around, wondering who might overhear me and what consequences might ensue. Non-tenured faculty are policed so heavily. Joining the faculty at Oxbridge has been nothing short of a hazing.

“That sounds exhausting.”
“I bet you know what I’m talking about,” he said, smiling.
“It’s been tough,” I admitted. “I heard, from professors in my doc program, that the university was a political machine, but I had no real idea until I landed my own job.”
“Exactly!”

Daniel is a smart guy. He graduated from an Ivy League doctoral program, was nominated “doctoral student of the year,” was awarded a prestigious post-doc position, and spent a year traveling, researching international education, through multiple fellowships. Prior to that, he was a middle school English teacher.

He loved being an English teacher. He was devastated when he “had to” resign because of the weight of standardization, crippling, what he called, “the capacity to do right by students.” He never developed a professional life plan beyond teaching, so prior to going to graduate school he spent a year picking up odd jobs. He did some security work, fixed old cameras, and every once in a while photographed weddings and other events. All he knew was that he couldn’t return to public school teaching. Daniel shared:
Richardson

My Position Comes with Privilege

The way they [administrators] required me to teach...well, anyone could do that...why would I stay in a job, committing pedagogical violence, on a daily basis, and knowing that my insight means nothing? I had nothing to develop...to work for. Toward the end of my career as an English teacher, I felt like I was just working for a pay check. Which was true. I had a young family that I needed to support. What is haunting is that I’m starting to feel the same way with this job.

“What do you mean?”
“I love the job I was hired to do at Oxbridge. I hate the job I’m expected to do. I spend more energy doing the ridiculous than working with students, writing, participating in meaningful service.”

Our food came and our conversation changed to our children, but only briefly. While he talked, I had, again, the odd feeling that I understood Daniel. I had, so quickly, developed an affinity for him.

I wondered about the state of institutions. I wished my father-in-law, who attended college in the late 1960s, was sitting at the table next to us, overhearing our conversation. He romanticizes the work of the professor, probably recalling moments when faculty and students shared joints on the quad over philosophical conversations about war, communism, corporate greed, and so on. “You are so lucky,” he tells me from time to time, “To work in academia...you can do that forever...what a great profession.” My father-in-law remembers college as a place that was interested in social justice...a place where professors were employed to stoke the creative and intellectual capabilities of students. This was his experience. But, I wondered if universities were ever this, or if they are just less this, currently.

Regardless, at some point, university life was cast as privileged. Academics supposedly lived in ivory towers.

T. S. Eliot (1914) wrote, in a letter:

In Oxford, I have the feeling that I am not quite alive—that my body is walking about with a bit of my brain inside it, and nothing else...I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books and hideous pictures on the walls...Oxford is very pretty, but I don’t like to be dead (Seymour-Jones, 2009, p. 1).

“My doctoral program ruined me,” Daniel said, shoving a forkful of salad in his mouth, while a cherry tomato escaped and rolled around on the table leaving an oily streak of Italian dressing behind.

“How so?” I asked.
“This is turning into a rant. Is that okay?”
I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders. “Sure.”

Well...graduate school gave me the opportunity to mourn properly, giving up public school teaching, by letting me intellectualize everything about my life. I “failed” at being a middle school teacher, but reasoned that it
opened a new door so that I can make a different kind of contribution to the field of education. However, it’s important to note that I never, I mean *never*, think the work of an education professor is more important than the work of a teacher.

“Yes,” I agreed, “People have treated me so differently—with more respect since I’ve become a professor. I think it’s absurd. We are not on the front lines.”

My first semester in the doctoral program was filled with discussions about what it meant to be a professor. I remember learning that the professoriate was about living within ideas. That “the work” was to generate ideas that would lead to new inquiries and spaces that would impact the way schools might function. This was exciting. I began to feel “called” to the professorship. I could hardly wait to meet, or to construct, the future me.

“I guess this was an opportunity to reinvent yourself?”

Absolutely, but while continuing to work on the problems I faced in my public school teaching. How lucky is that?! I just needed to learn how to come at it differently…with research and new collaborations. I developed a research agenda, practiced teaching undergraduate classes, and observed professors in action. Students in my cohort would meet before and after class, over coffee or beers, and worked to challenge one another. This is how we showed our respect. I loved this life. My mentor, committee members, and others intently read in their offices and cordially argued with colleagues in hallways. I watched them conduct seminars where they shared important research that they were developing. They worked and learned alongside teachers and students in schools. In awe, I sat in small intimate classes with other students who were curious, bright, and were easily provoked by the questions our professors prepared in the margins of texts. My professors actively groomed me to understand their version of academia—which was, perhaps, a great injustice.

“Wow,” I said, “that’s interesting to think about…that your professors might have set you up for failure because they prepared you for the kind of academia they knew, or perhaps, the academic world they wanted.”

I’ll say this…my doctoral program was great for me, but it did not prepare me for the realities of the professorship—in particular, the work of a “teaching university.” So, when I accepted a position at Oxbridge, which is, by the way, my undergraduate alma mater and a state school known for its teacher education program, I experienced a deep sense of shock. I was unfamiliar with the heavy and complicated burden, but important work, that informal and formal advising of students would become. My doctoral program also did not prepare me to think about how I would ultimately
have to marry my scholarship and teaching if I wanted to be a semi-productive writer. There is simply no time to do both separately. I have taught, on average, thirteen courses each year since my hire. I am obligated to teach four courses in the fall and spring but find myself in the precarious situation of having to teach winter and summer courses to pay off the debt accrued while earning my doctorate. Also, students lobby me to teach these courses. They need them so that they graduate on time. I am always pressed into teaching more than necessary. Regardless, whether I am teaching eight or thirteen courses, this is a heavy load. I spend countless hours before and during the semester preparing for courses because they are so important. But I’d also like time to do things like sleep, eat a vegetable, go to the gym. Some weeks, I’m just a ghost to my family.

“I hear you. I struggle with this constantly.”

My doctoral program also protected me from the drudgery of “typical” duties found at any institution—for instance, committee work. Committee work has become the bane of my existence. I value some of the work, but committees are primarily a huge time suck. In my observation, committees seem to function as a space, or an opportunity, for faculty to argue with one another over issues that just do not matter. While stuck between bickering faculties, I have come to actively daydream of a committee free university.

I laughed, hard, almost spraying my drink across the table.

But perhaps the largest shock was to confront the largely conservative, fundamentalist, Christian mentalities most of my students would bring to my classes—homophobic, xenophobic, racist, and reportedly, “against diversity.” I remember the first few classes I ever taught. They were to sections of students who wanted to become elementary school teachers. White privilege was omnipresent. It was difficult for me and my few Black, Latino, and Asian students to know how to respond in productive ways to such antiquated ideas and contradictions like the belief that the U.S. is the land of opportunity for all…so in this meritocracy, anyone can “become someone”…and that “certain kinds” of people are just inherently smarter, lazier, more interested in getting an education, and generally capable. After my first full semester, my students’ teaching evaluations from my Democracy and Education course—one that requires the examination of culture and schooling—annonymously read:

“Dr. Meyers talks about gay stuff too much.”
“I can’t help I’m white, Dr. Meyers doesn’t seem to know this. He’s always trying to make me feel guilty.”
“He’s awful. This class has no values.”
“The worst class ever. I want to know how to teach. Dr. Meyers just wanted to talk about stuff that doesn’t matter. My aunt is a teacher, and she agrees with me that Black kids DO have the same opportunities, but they don’t take it. Hispanic families don’t try to learn English, so they are just lazy. He [Dr. Meyers] needs to get real.”

“Hold on,” I interrupted, “is all of this true? Your evaluations actually said stuff like this?”

“Yes! I was devastated. I mean, I hope I stretched students in new ways, but I didn’t know that I was probably just helping them to become more defensive and close-minded. And selfishly, I became concerned because evaluations like this might help to end my new career.”

“That’s true,” I agreed:

I constantly feel awful thinking in that way. Sometimes, it is important to make students uncomfortable. To make them challenge all they know. To take risks. Often, they hate you—in the moment—for this, even though it might pay off for them in the end. Regardless, there’s no professional ‘pay off’ as the professor. You’re just doomed to poor evaluations. You don’t have the luxury of measuring how students fared in the long run because of your courses. The opposite of that is just making easy and fun courses so your students like you, helping to improve your evaluations.

“Exactly. So what do we do?” Daniel asked.

“I don’t know,” I responded. We sat in silence, for the first time since our reunion. Using my knife, I pushed a few remaining fries around on my plate.

“So, look,” he finally said, “teaching at Oxbridge just isn’t what I expected. I tried to believe it was a calling, but I was fooling myself. For a moment, I thought it’d be different elsewhere. So, I interviewed other places, but they were all relatively the same.”

“So you stayed.”

“Yes, I stayed. Even though I was offered some great jobs, I stayed.”

Over the next hour, he rattled off other lessons learned:

…Universities function like the military. Rank and file. I have come to understand that faculty members and their voices are weighed according to rank, experience and other unreasonable measures: who plays bully best, who one should not upset, which faculty members are in bed with one another (politically, religiously, and so on), or literally sleeping with one another. A very kind colleague of mine once told me, “Daniel, just keep your head down, don’t say a word, and smile…just wait it out, and eventually you’ll be tenured.”

…Innovative pedagogical initiatives are confronted by students but are discouraged by other faculty members. I tried teaching my Democracy and Education course using a semi-open/democratic structure. Students who have been told what to do their entire lives, were disoriented…which was
fine. However, my colleagues literally told them that my approach was misguided. My mentor told me, “Daniel, students are too immature to make learning decisions,” and that I wasn’t doing my job by offering choice. She asked me, “Why do they need you if you aren’t going to tell them what to do?”

…The biggest piece of advice I’ve received, consistently, from my colleagues, regarding promotion and tenure is to “be visible.” I see other early career faculty yucking it up with administrators, tenured faculty, and people who serve on the P&T committee…that’s just not my style. I want my good work to stand on its own. I want to be rewarded if I’m deserving. But, I’m not so sure if I will be. I’ve known great teachers and scholars who got denied promotion and tenure because they weren’t in the cool kids’ club.

…Once I was interviewed for the university newsletter. They wanted to feature me in a column called “Oxford Faculty Feature.” They asked me questions about my work, thoughts about the university, and so on. I provided them with honest answers that critiqued the university’s need to support our marginalized students—those who are Black, Latino, Asian, and so on. I talked about the need for an open and affirming campus climate for our queer students. I mentioned that “straight” sexual and romantic minorities, such as myself felt unwelcomed. By the way, all of these statements were connected to my research. To my surprise, the interview was never printed. Instead, they featured a faculty member who talked about his involvement in the church. I saw my interview as an opportunity to talk about my research while raising some important issues. I was disappointed to be marginalized while I spoke about marginalization.

…Most recently, I’ve been fighting with an office that is charging Oxbridge students a hefty fee if they take summer courses at other institutions. Can you imagine that?! Several students that I advise were complaining about it, and so I began to investigate. And it turned out true! I’ve done just about everything possible short of contacting local media outlets. This office threatens students, saying that the university will disallow them to transfer in credits—which is false…I called the registrar—unless they pay a fee! I’ve asked the administration to produce the approved policy that justifies this fee and they haven’t produced one! They, however, just ask me to cooperate because it’s been common practice. So, yes, Oxbridge collects money for programs and services they don’t render.

My head was spinning, and Daniel began to sound like a lunatic. “Wait, wait, wait,” I interrupted. “I’m sorry…but this sounds...”
Daniel slowly put down his fork and leaned back against the large cushioned booth. His eyes went to the table and back to meet mine. He wiped his forehead with the palm of his hand. I think he felt stupid, maybe even hurt—like he should not have shared so much with a stranger. I imagined him thinking that even though he was descriptive about his experiences as a newer faculty member, detailed about the corruption at the university, and earnestly shared the cultural and political hardships he’d endured—I, just like everyone else, was just going to simplify him. I too was going to render him crazy. He dug into his bag and pulled out a printed email from an administrator and half-threw, half-dropped it in the middle of the table. It was worded cautiously but essentially warned Daniel to “back off” and to cease talking to students about their rights.

“Look,” I said, “I don’t mean to discredit your experiences. I’m sorry that…”

“No,” he cut me off:

Maybe…well…actually, I don’t really know you, but I have no reason to think you would. I just think I’ve been scarred and scared. As I said, I’m paranoid. I’m not who I am. I find myself thinking these past few years have traumatized me. I often feel like I’m suffering from PTSD…and then I feel guilty for even thinking that. I just never expected working at a university would be like this.

“So it’s been awful. Why are you sticking around? If you are ‘losing yourself,’ why be at Oxford, or any other university?”

“Because I’m a teacher,” Daniel responded. “I have to give this all I got first. And my sense is that good teaching is rarely ever about upholding the business or agenda of the institution, but rather it’s about honestly considering the lives of students.”

I believed Daniel’s words to be true. I have thought this throughout my own public school and university teaching. In fact, I could have said these same words millions of times before. But there was something about the moment, in the way that Daniel said it, that it sounded profoundly new.

We parted ways and later in the afternoon I gave my lecture in a large room with stadium seating. I saw Daniel slip in halfway through my talk, sitting in the very last row, then leave during Q&A. This was the last time I saw him.

When I returned home, I thought about Daniel often, particularly when I bumped up against the culture of my university, or in times that I recognized that the important and ethical road would result in more work and was politically hazardous for me. I, like Daniel, am non-tenured.

I’ve reasoned that Daniel and I don’t hate our institutions or believe that everything that occurs is unethical. But rather, the mechanics of the institution gets in the way of learning. It forces us to perform versions of ourselves. I was prompted to email Daniel about this. I applauded him for his work and tried to sound assuring that his feeling of coming unhinged was, perhaps, good. I quoted Pinar (2012), “when we sink, submerged in those roles conceived by others, we become aborted possibilities…” (p. 40).

Months later, Daniel responded:
Hi Scott,

You asked why I’ve stayed at Oxbridge. I said because I’m a teacher. But I didn’t really know what that meant. So, I’ve conceptualized it. To me, I think it means that I have an obligation to learn how to do this work—the important work with students—better within this institutionalized context. But, I’ve come to understand that this is just as much of a journey for me. I want all of my students to experience new freedoms, to be emancipated, to be happy, to be free to take risks...That means I have to learn about how to find resilience, freedom, become emancipated, build happiness into my professional and personal life, and how to take risks. I want, with my students, to be vulnerable and interested in our holistic development. bell hooks (1994) wrote, “When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered in the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (p. 21)” Scott, I want to be boldly vulnerable. This will take a lot of work, but as I’m finally beginning to see it...it’s good work. I imagine you asking something like, “What is your first step?” Well, at this moment, it’s to do the following things:

1. “Whatever your position on the food chain of American education, one of your primary obligations is to be a buffer – to absorb as much pressure as possible from those above you without passing it on to those below” (Kohn, 2001, p. 351). I’m older, wiser, and understand the politics of a university. I can see how the university unilaterally takes advantage of students. So that puts me in the position to be able to fight for them. It’s my responsibility. I am actively going to be the buffer.

2. I need to be a teacher to all of my students. Those who come into my classes, and want to be educators, but are close-minded and rail against a multicultural society...well, it’s my responsibility to be their teacher. I need to teach them differently. I know this sounds simple, but I’ve just realized that I need to meet them where they are. I can’t alienate them. I need to bring them along. I can’t squander the opportunity to help change their minds. It’s particularly important because they will be teachers long after I’m dead and gone.

3. I’m going to continue to seek out students on my campus who have a rough go—students that were like me. I’ve found some already...Gabrielle, Dylan, Edwin, Bray...and we’ve been busy building solidarity. I’ve supported them as much as they’ve supported me. I actually feel called to be part of this group. These kids are incredibly smart. They are extraordinary thinkers. They are real people. Because
they don’t fit the landscape of my traditional university doesn’t mean they don’t deserve chances. We’re in it together.

So, yes, I’ve come to understand my work at Oxbridge to be tough and complicated. And though I have felt alone and lost in the woods most of the time, I have come to recognize that my position comes with privilege. I’m going to learn how to use it.

Cheers,
Daniel

It might be cliché to suggest, but Daniel indirectly reminded me of something important—the impact of teachers, for good or bad, is truly immeasurable. Unfortunately, our standardized educational system seems to forget this. We try to quantify the work of the teacher—like with Daniel’s teaching evaluations—and these kinds of institutional mechanisms do nothing but impede progress—particularly if you are interested in education as a form of freedom and emancipation. “Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies” (Rancière, 1991, p. 18). Hopefully, Daniel has come to a new place of peace recognizing as Ayers (1993) reminds us:

Teaching is an act of hope for a better future. The rewards of teaching are neither ostentatious nor obvious—they are often internal, invisible, and of the moment. But paradoxically, they can be deeper, more lasting, and less illusory than the cut of your clothes or the size of your home… There is a particularly powerful satisfaction in caring in a time of carelessness, and of thinking for yourself in a time of thoughtlessness. The reward of teaching is knowing that your life makes a difference (p. 24).

As I’ve learned about Daniel’s disenfranchisement, and his recent sense of privilege, he is restoring my hope.
References


Finding a Researcher’s and a Teacher’s Voice in a Plethora of Responsibilities: A Duoethnography on Administrivia

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Abstract

“Some are born great; some achieve greatness; and some have greatness thrust upon them.”  
Twelfth Night, Act 3 Scene 4

This article examines the differences and similarities between two faculty members as they discuss their entry into the academy after successfully teaching in secondary schools. Both brought with them the “maturity” gained from a work hiatus prior to continuing their education. Joe taught English and drama in Canada for 12 years and completed his masters part-time before embarking full-time on doctoral work. Rick taught high school English in San Francisco for seven years prior to enrolling in his doctoral program.

Keywords: Duoethnography, Autoethnography, Sexual Orientation, Dialogic Inquiry, Qualitative Methodology

Joe Norris, recipient of the 2015 Tom Barone Award for Distinguished Contributions to Arts Based Educational Research from the Arts Based Educational Research SIG of AERA, teaches drama in education, applied theatre and research methods at Brock University. He has focused his teaching and research on fostering a playful, creative, participatory and socially aware stance toward self and other. His award winning book, “Playbuilding as Qualitative Research: A Participatory Arts-based Approach”, is based upon his extensive work with social issues theatre. Joe is also currently involved in performative inquiry projects that involve video dissemination through web links, <www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca>.  
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Richard Sawyer's scholarship focuses on qualitative research and curriculum theory. He is interested in reflexive and transformative curriculum within transnational contexts, especially those related to education and neo-liberalism and homo-normativity. Recent publications include: Understanding Qualitative Research: Duoethnography, Oxford University Press; and Duoethnography: Promoting Personal and Societal Change within Dialogic Self-Study, Left Coast Publications. He co-edited a special themed issue on duoethnography for the International Review of Qualitative Research. Upcoming publications include three co-edited books in 2016 with Palgrave Press. He and Joe received the AERA Division D Significant Contribution to Educational Measurement and Research Methodology Award for Understanding Qualitative Research: Duoethnography.  
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Joe: After completing my degree in three years, I expected to return to the classroom partially to pay back my sabbatical year and partially because I did not yet see myself as an academic. However, my dream job was posted, and I pulled my 12 years of pension (BIG MISTAKE), paid back my sabbatical leave and took a job at the University of Lethbridge as a drama teacher educator.

Rick: I delayed completing my degree in curriculum theory and research because I went to school in New York City, in fact, had a romantic “walk-up” apartment in Greenwich Village and enjoyed a semi-bohemian life. But graduate I did and then sought to begin researching and writing about curriculum change and imagination. Accepting a job to design and direct a small teacher preparation program at a large university on the West Coast, I thought that life was good.

Joe: Taking a temporally distant and reflective stance we now employ duoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013) to reconceptualize the past with present understandings and redefine the present with new perspectives on the past (Pinar, 1995). Focusing on our experiences as new faculty members we reflect on “service creep” as we tried to create new teaching and research selves while having, perhaps due to our wealth of previous experience, administrative duties “thrust upon us”.

Rick: In my case, I had to assume major responsibilities really of a senior faculty member (starting a new program in teacher preparation that combined theory and practice, developing community partnerships for the program, and in a way breathing life into a slightly deflated unit, being public and over-exposed). While this experience may have been more extreme than most beginning faculty members’ experience, in other ways it was similar: We are all thrown into environments that challenge our narratives and especially our nascent and possibly fragile research self.

Joe: I, too, was given the charge to coordinate the design for a third professional semester with an extended field experience component. In keeping with my collaborative beliefs, I polled faculty, determined their disparate views and presented my findings at a faculty meeting. I found that people were driven by pedagogy, philosophy and pragmatics, but the greatest of these was politics. More on that later…

I naively took my first university position to teach the teaching of drama and looked forward to a classroom of my own and putting my playful “tone” (Van Manen, 2002) on my style of instruction. The Faculty of Education prided themselves in their strong reputation as teacher educators and coming from the public school system, I share in this focus. Research was in the back of my mind and, at the time, I thought that service would be attending an annual retreat, a few faculty meetings and service to outside organizations like the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing and the Fine Arts Council of the Alberta Teachers Association. Not only was I not prepared for duties that would ensue; they were not even on my radar. My calling to be a teacher educator contained a major, behind-the-scenes dimension.

Rick: This was my first academic position following graduate school. I sat on the plane going to my job interview and thought of what I wrote in my application essay to graduate school six years earlier. When I applied for my program, I was still teaching English at a secondary high
school in San Francisco. The school was started by a federal court mandate that declared that the educational needs of the primarily African American students in this part of the city were being neglected. The school was established to offer an enriched educational environment to these students. In my application to my doctoral program, I said that I wanted to continue to work in a tradition of improving society by contributing to a sense of humanity in teaching as a calling.

The plane landed, and I eventually got the job. As a new faculty member, I was given the responsibility of starting a new secondary teacher preparation program and directing it. Even though the program hadn’t been designed yet, there were six students in the program, taking courses with current (in-service) teachers in another master’s program. I remember thinking that I got to design my life.

Joe, I think that it’s interesting that you use the word “people” to describe your coworkers when you could have used the work “colleagues.” In my case, I will use the word “colleague,” but only in the singular. From the beginning, I was lucky enough to start my career in higher education being mentored by a wonderful person. She was a literacy professor and believed in the co-construction of knowledge, both within a written and a lived text. Having to be focused as a new faculty member, I worked with her in the foreground, with the other people—and here I use that word, as well—more in the background.

- From my first day, I had to “hit the ground running.” Here are some of the service duties that I listed on my annual review for my first year:
  - Design a new program on one campus that links to similar programs of a multi-campus system
  - Establish a committee of area school superintendents and principals to inform the program design
  - Be on a cross-campus education committee
  - Be on a school district “workplace” committee
  - Be on a school grounded governance committee as a university representative
  - Work with students enrolled in an emerging program
  - Teach five courses, all new preps outside my own discipline (technically this is teaching, but the time to design these courses fell under service work)
  - Work with adjuncts and other faculty teaching courses in the new program
  - This is a partial list of my duties.

Fast backwards five years to 1993. I sat in an iconic restaurant in downtown Seattle called “The Dog House.” The restaurant had been open since the 1930 and the large mural of “all roads lead to the Dog House” was covered in decades of cigarette smoke. Sitting in my booth, I imagined a smoky vision of the future life I wanted as an academic. I began to visualize my new life, although at the time, I wasn’t aware of the importance of personal metaphors, as a guide for a future path. As a professor, I saw myself working in a “noble” profession, mentoring novice teachers to contribute to a more just and equitable society as they worked with their students. I formed this image in the dialect between the deep respect for the humanities that universities represent, which I gained from my family, and the prescriptive, behavioral teacher preparation program that I graduated from. It was this image that sustained me through my mix of stress and exhilaration as a graduate student and during my early days trying to survive in academia.
I have tried to stay true to this image and let it sustain me in my tumultuous world of academia.

**Joe:** I’m exhausted reading your list and your phrase “Be on…” gives me pause. Like my phrase “people” instead of “colleagues”, you could have used the phrase “Serve on…”. For me, these people were not colleagues. Coming out of a job interview, I regarded them more as my judges/bosses than those I could build meaningful relationships. For the most part, they were friendly enough but there was only one with whom I developed any sort of working relationship. She valued the manner in which I used improvisational drama as a form of inquiry and suggested a conference. In her other capacity, I had a working “for” relationship and here I had established a working “with” relationship. Could “Be on…” be a “for” experience and a “Serve on…” a “with” one? This ties into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with “with” being intrinsic and “for” being extrinsic.

Back then, I didn’t feel called to serve on committees that didn’t interest me. They became tasks that got in the way of things that I felt called to do. The politics of staffroom marks meeting at the end of the public school year paled to politics of university committees where conflicts induced by self-governance reigned. I found more arguing for entrenched beliefs that would influence policy and through that practice than collaborative discussions. Were the stakes too small?

The task, of designing the third professional semester, fell somewhere between the two. I had and have a passion for teacher education, underpinned by a strong belief in reflective practice. I agreed to serve based upon this belief but soon realized that not all shared this stance. I was lobbied by a number of sides, some wanting more theory, others little faculty involvement in the practicum and those that regarded it as building stronger school/university partnerships. While there were political and philosophical differences, the pragmatics of superimposing this on an already busy program for faculty was daunting. The Dean later publically announced that I was given an impossible task. I hear that this semester has functioned successfully for many years. I then saw a big difference between called and delegated.

**Rick:** What I began to experience—something I couldn’t initially put my finger on—was a sort of double standard. Amidst the camaraderie I was expected to do more work--often the challenging work—that others were not expected to do. In a way, I was actually flattered at first, being treated like a senior faculty member and being given the most challenging assignments. Later, after this became a clear pattern and other new faculty were mentored, given release time, and even initial start-up funds—none of which I received—I began to wonder if homophobia were at play. But then I noticed that a curtain of silence began to be closed around certain types of experience: It was a curtain of indifference to difference.

**Joe:** From your story I now ask, “Can inclusion be a form of assimilation, or coercion to comply?” Rather than adapting to and accommodating difference, by asking the new comer to be a team player, are we really accepting them or exploiting them? The specter of tenure and promotion can distort the authenticity in our calling to self and our calling to serve. While I personally, perhaps foolishly, gave little concern to the tenure process, I know that many colleagues did. The systemics of having “colleagues” determine one’s fate may replace certain aspects of calling with conformity.
Interlude: A major tenet of duoethnography is using the past to reconceptualize the present, the present to reconceptualize the past and both to envision future action. In this second part of this duoethnography, we will now deconstruction the present, asking, “What do these initial experiences provide us now as researchers, teachers, committee members and colleagues? How might our exploration actually contribute a renewed vigor to our present ways of attempting to keep our research-selves alive? How might coping mechanisms we used as a beginning faculty member when we had a different sort of energy than we have now, contribute to our current coping mechanisms? In telling our stories, we trust that they will resonate with others (Barone, 1990), assisting beginning academic in navigating their initial journeys.

Rick: As we examine our early and now more current workplace situations as text in this duoethnography, I am wondering about the performative nature of this text. Performative acts--unpredictable, contingent, and generative--work to destabilize discourses within settings (Rodriguez & Lahman, 2011). Joe, you are an extrovert and create performative acts. Have you considered that your recognition of the judgmental nature of your work environment might imply that you were placed on a stage with a “hostile audience”? I can see how this might have struck you in a profound way on many different levels.

I mention this possibility because this situation is different in my case, but raises an interesting line of inquiry into my own experience. As new faculty, I truly wanted to collaborate with a group of open-minded colleagues who would create a critical and generative space. I was so excited by this idea. Subconsciously I may even have considered this a performative space. I remember building a low deck in my back yard during my first year and thinking that it would actually double as a stage. Of course, the deck was never used as a formal stage. As an introvert, which I would say that I am, I found my own stage and let the curtain of indifference wound tightly around it. I burrowed deep into my metaphor and thoughts about the calling we chose. I then tried to create my own life working with students and developing as a scholar—almost always with colleagues outside my institution. The few work colleagues I began to develop meaning research collaborations with all found themselves employed elsewhere in a short period of time.

So I developed what became perhaps my primary coping method—the construction of the personal stage, on which to author my own sense of the meaning of the profession. In the difficult early years, I learned the importance of being positive. And, yes, I’ve been lucky in a number of ways in academia. I’ve worked in a beautiful location with exceptional students who’ve contributed a depth of new meanings to my image of working for social justice and societal change. Behind the curtain of indifference, I’ve been given more programs to develop, all of which I have tried to form around ideals of social justice and change.

I still refer to my teaching metaphor to keep my balance. But I also work with people in a range of countries—Canada, New Zealand, Italy, the United Kingdom—in order to develop a broader perspective about this work. I don’t do research or write directly about these reforms. My own scholarship has countered neoliberal reforms in more humanistic ways. My metaphor is firmly grounded now in this scholarship. This work keeps me balanced.

I have also become friends with and learned from a number of excellent colleagues and scholars. And I think that I’ve written a few pieces that have contributed to humanity and encouraged people to become more thoughtful, tolerant, and compassionate.

But I truly appreciate your passion, Joe. I’ve found that to survive in my setting, I’ve had to become more painfully dispassionate about many aspects of my work.
Joe:  Sad Rick, and I am certain that you are not alone. For me, I followed my passion regardless of whether it counted or not and was rewarded. That said, having taught both in Canada and the United States and spoken to many colleagues at institutions on either side of the 49th I do appreciate that for the most part, Canadian institutions create better spaces for academics to answer their unique callings. While in the United States, I found the degree of meritocracy to be oppressive and as an administrator, at the time, I could not align with the oppressor.

Two other themes that I resonate with your comments are choosing a) one’s cast and b) audience, to prolong the metaphor. In a recent review of my curriculum vitae, I have found that I have directed the devising of over fifty-five participatory social issues performance/workshops with students, faculty and members of the community. Like you, for the most part, I located my players outside of my academic units. At first, I found it lonely and unproductive, but over time, through conference attendance, I discovered kindred spirits who shared mutual interests and wanted to “play” and put on plays with me. Primarily my undergraduate and graduate students were my research colleagues.

Finding “legitimate” audiences proved more difficult. Such creative works as arts-based performance, while valued by audiences had little “currency” in the academy. These experiences later gave me something to write about. I fed my passion and let that be the substance of most of my scholarship. Once that was established, I turned my attention back to administrative and service duties. I felt a deep responsibility in creating/changing infrastructures to enable others who shared similar interests and beliefs, perhaps a new calling. I became political.

I was elected to Senate at two Canadian Universities, served on a faculty association, took on roles with major committees, including research ethics and program review and was an external reviewer for programs, dissertations and tenure and promotion. I did so with the intent of providing a counter-hegemonic voice to decision-making processes. Looking back I can still see my fingerprints on a number of policies including the acceptance of either MLA or APA style for an interdisciplinary journal that originally only accepted MLA. I regarded the previous policy as privileging one group over another. Criteria and processes for awards and admissions were also made more inclusive due to my participation. I came to recognize that service could assist myself and others’ diverse scholarship (Boyer, 1990) through fair and just policies. I started writing this duoethnography with the belief that administrative duties were obstacles to scholarship and while they can be, through this conversation I have come to believe that it is important to take a stand for self and others.

Joe (Aside): As I was writing this section, our faculty received an email requesting that if any of us were thinking of submitting a proposal for an infrastructure grant within the next three years to send an outline within four days. I dropped this and other things to semi-attend to it. Such administrative requests do disrupt the flow of my scholarship, further justifying the importance of a sabbatical.
Rick: I don’t think that I would have chosen the word “sad” to describe how I’ve arranged my work situation. I guess what I was trying to describe was how it’s important to find agency and to construct a personal infrastructure under less than ideal situations. This was not the situation that I had hoped to find, but seeking awareness in this situation has helped me to both work with and around inevitable limitations in my setting and to develop a personal contribution, including a scholarship focused on imagination and possibility, and a work profile focused on leadership, like you. Woody Allen’s movies sometimes depict New York as an interior city, with people looking inward. I now see that my own interior space has contributed to a generative balance, perhaps a dialectic between an individual space and a just collective space, both on and off my campus.

I also think that this focus has given me a certain “armor” in terms of deflecting criticism or trying to make improvements to my institutional work fabric. This duoethnography has been helpful to my understanding many of the pressures that have shaped my actions at work. But at the same time, these pressures have strengthened my commitment to social justice and my commitment to learn from alienating situations. In this passage, Greene (1971) is discussing curriculum. If we replace the word “curriculum” with the words “academic life,” new possibilities for the dignity of the calling appear:

The stage sets are always likely to collapse…Disorder…is continually breaking in; meaninglessness is recurrently overcoming landscapes which once were demarcated, meaningful. It is at moments like these that the individual reaches out to reconstitute meaning, to close the gaps, to make sense once again. It is at moments like these that he will be moved to pore over maps, to disclose or generate structures of knowledge which may provide him unifying perspectives and these enable him to restore order once again. His learning, I am saying, is a mode of orientation—or reorientation—in a place suddenly become unfamiliar…. The curriculum, the structures of knowledge, must be presented to such a consciousness as possibility. Like the work of literature in Sartre’s viewing, it requires a subject if it is to be disclosed; it can only be disclosed if the learner, himself engaged in generating the structures, lends the curriculum his life. (p. 262)

This duoethnography for me is framing a lived awareness of an academic life focused more on reorientation than orientation and disorder than order. It is interesting that we are both emphasizing a responsibility for acting towards social justice as central to the dignity of the calling. This interpretation of the dignity of the calling is further developed by Huckaby and Weinburgh’s view of duoethnography: “Duoethnography attends to the relations of differences as a heuristic form of analysis” (In press). It is not merely our interpretation of our academic narratives that is important here, but also our construction of a new call for action to deepen our awareness of the humanistic groundings of our calling and their implications for the improvement of society.

Joe: I attended a play this afternoon (October 5, 2014) and during the talk-back one actor commented that trust was not about trusting a person but trusting the unknown. What I enjoy about duoethnographies is such a trust. We restory ourselves in dialogue with the unknown or as Fulwiler (1982) claims, we write “to think with.” (p. 19). We write to learn, to make meaning. But we also write our way into action. Implicitly imbedded in this duoethnography is my emerging relationship with a new colleague who is team teaching a course with me. While I do
not want to impose my vision, I do want to share insights that can be rejected, accepted or modified. In one conversation I claimed that I am an anarchist at heart. Rather than legislate behaviour, I prefer to give individuals enough space so that they can be the best they can be. That should be the prime directive of tenure and promotion committees. This duoethnography and the emerging collegial relationship has reinforced such a stance, one that works hard at getting out of the way and lets another’s calling just be.

**Rick:** Yes—maybe the dignity of the calling is ultimately trust in and promotion of a humane ways of being together.

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**References**


Finding FRiENDs: Creating a Community of Support for Early Career Academics

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Abstract

Starting on an academic journey can be a stressful and isolating experience. Although some universities have formal mentoring structures to facilitate this transition for new faculty, these structures do not always provide the variety of supports that may be needed to navigate the complexities of transitioning to the world of academia. As we (the authors of this paper) began our academic journeys, we found ourselves searching for support that was not available within our institutions. By drawing on previous connections and building new connections to peers at other universities, we created an informal peer mentoring structure that has continued to support us through the early years of our careers in academia. In this paper we share our stories of the challenges we faced as early career academics, discuss the ways this informal peer mentoring community provided support for us at the beginnings of our academic journeys, and offer advice for other early career academics seeking non-traditional forms of support along the academic career path.

Keywords: Higher Education, Faculty Mentoring, Peer Mentoring

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Introduction

Starting on an academic journey can be a stressful and isolating experience (Sorcinelli, 1992). Although some universities have formal mentoring structures to facilitate this transition for new faculty, these structures do not always provide the variety of supports that may be needed to navigate the complexities of transitioning to the world of academia (Greene, O’Connor, Good, Ledford, Peel, & Zhang, 2008). Formal mentoring structures often follow traditional frameworks for mentoring which primarily involve one-to-one hierarchical interactions. However, new models of mentoring are emerging that incorporate multiple mentors in which networks of relationships provide a range of mentoring functions that are often less hierarchical and unidirectional (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). As we (the authors of this paper) began our academic journeys, we found ourselves searching for support that was not available within our institutions. By drawing on previous connections and building new connections to peers at other universities, we created an informal peer mentoring structure that has continued to support us through the early years of our careers in academia. In this paper we share our stories of the challenges we faced as early career academics, discuss the ways this informal peer mentoring community provided support for us at the beginnings of our academic journeys, and offer advice for other early career academics seeking non-traditional forms of support along the academic career path.

Creation and Evolution of Our Peer Network

The FRiENDs, Female Researchers in Education Networking and Dialogue, group was born in 2008 when three of the current members decided to meet for a three-day “writing retreat.” The initial members had known each other through a state science teacher association prior to or during our doctoral studies. Although we were in slightly different positions at different institutions; one of us just finishing her first six months as a tenure-track assistant professor, one just finishing her second year of her tenure track position, and one finishing her first year in a non-tenure track position as a department chair, we were all struggling to find the time and support to move forward in the research and writing aspects of our careers. The writing retreat started out as a simple solution to this problem and has led to the creation of a peer mentoring community that has become much more.

Over the past eight years, our initial group of three science educators has expanded to a group of six early career female science and mathematics educators all working on different university campuses. In expanding the group, we decided to invite other women who were in the same disciplinary areas and close enough geographically to attend the summer writing retreat. In some cases, the new members were colleagues, and in other cases, only acquaintances that worked at nearby universities. We meet annually for a week-long retreat where we write; read each others’ work; provide feedback; discuss our current ponderings regarding our research, teaching, and departmental issues; and share concerns and questions regarding the academic journey. After our first year, we also began to recognize the value that the writing retreat and the resulting peer-support community had for us and we began to record formally, our experiences and reflection on this, and share our learning through conference presentations and papers (Bottoms, Pegg, Adams, Wu, Smith Risser, & Kern, 2013). We hope by sharing some of our stories and the things we have learned through our experiences that other early career faculty will
be reassured that they are not alone, that it is OK to seek out support, and that support can be found beyond the walls of their institutions.

Our Stories: Supporting our Development as Academics

During the first few years, this group provided a space to address many of the issues that we were dealing with as new education faculty. In our previous careers and in graduate school our work had a clear focus, identified deadlines, and expectations we understood. In our academic positions the diversity of our job duties increased, expectations and deadlines were less clear, and balancing our various duties successfully became challenging.

As I entered the academy, I believe I was mentored well by my graduate advisor. I was given opportunities to write and submit journal manuscripts and grant proposals. I knew or thought I knew what I needed to do to find success. As early career faculty, new to an institution and colleagues, unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the organization, I was tempted to join every project asked and say yes to every invitation. This tendency to be productive can be a distraction, confusing, and at times counter-productive. Collaboration and conversations with colleagues, such as FRIE NDs, allowed me to discuss my options with a group of colleagues that were not vested in my participation in their projects or dependent on my contributions. The support and flexibility of FRIE NDs provided a space to be productive and yet uncommitted.

Since we all had been K-12 teachers, we were all fairly comfortable with the teaching aspects of being a professor, but not as comfortable with or knowledgeable about the expectations for research, publishing, and grant funding. And yet, this was the area that was critically important for promotion and tenure and also the one for which there was the least formal support at our institutions. Through our participation in the FRIE NDs group, we were able to share resources, learn from the knowledge that each of us brought from our specific areas, and provide support that allowed us to develop as researchers.

The following stories describe the experiences of three of the members of the group.

During my initial years as assistant professor, no formal mentoring was available in my college. Like many new faculty, I struggled with the publication process and with accepting and effectively using the feedback I received from reviewers. After hard work and submission of work I was proud of, it was demoralizing to receive critical reviews with many prompts for revision. Writing in collaboration with a member of the FRIE NDs group helped me learn to value this process, to participate in it effectively, and to even enjoy the process (sort of). I now often wait days after receiving reviews on a paper before I read them. Doing so allows me to prepare mentally to receive them positively, even when they are critical, to dive into revisions with a constructive attitude, and to feel excitement in anticipation that the paper will be strengthened. While it never feels wonderful to receive criticism, I know that even strong papers are made stronger through peer review.

My university did not offer formal mentoring to new faculty. Although that created an obstacle to finding a mentor, my biggest obstacle was that I didn’t have access to
informal mentors either. I was the only mathematics education researcher on campus. We are a primarily undergraduate STEM institution with no education department. I did not have a local group of colleagues to collaborate with on large research projects or to help me to apply for grants. The support I needed simply wasn’t available to me on my campus. The FRiENDs group has been able to supply me with access to resources I don’t have at my own institution. I have written grants, papers, and conference proposals with members of the group. My participation in the group is what has made my work as a researcher possible.

When I first started, the biggest struggle that I had was building my research agenda in addition to teaching new courses, advising undergraduate/graduate students, and serving on several committees. For example, the first paper I submitted from my dissertation resulted in an “accept with major revisions” response. By then I was so “tired” of it and stretched so thin by all the other duties that I put the paper away for over half a year. During the FRiENDs retreat, I found out other members of our group had similar experiences with publishing their dissertations. Through the experience of sharing our frustrations and struggles, finally, I got the strength to read the critiques and revise the paper. Then a couple of our group members read my paper and the reviewers’ comments and gave me feedback. By the end of the retreat I had re-submitted the paper, which was accepted later. Such a supportive informal peer mentoring environment was missing at my home institution and it played an important role in establishing my research agenda during the first few years of my career.

In addition to providing access to resources, collaborators, and support, our group also provides a “protected” space in which we can openly discuss a wide variety of concerns, challenges, choices, and possibilities. The location of group members at different university campuses provides an external perspective that is free of evaluative, competitive, or political motives.

In my first year as part of the FRiENDs group, I was very uncertain as to whether or not academia was the right path for me. I had not received strong mentoring during my Ph.D. study regarding how to publish and was therefore struggling with the transition to the research expectations of the job. The first paper I submitted had received some negative reviews and requested changes that I didn’t know how to address. I didn’t feel that I could share these questions and challenges with colleagues at my institution because I didn’t want them to think less of me. During that first summer writing retreat I broke down and shared with the group everything I had been struggling with and my questions regarding whether or not continuing in academia was something I could do or even wanted to do anymore. After talking through it and getting specific help with the revisions to the paper I was able to move forward, the paper was eventually published, and I stayed in academia.

Membership in the FRiENDs group has also helped us to navigate issues of professional identity. As we discussed our journeys in academia, it became clear that the majority of us are not “typical” academics. Each of us is in some way (e.g. age, ethnicity, gender, career path) different from the traditional image of a professor.
The following two stories from members of FRiENDs highlight the ways that participation in the group has helped us become confident as academic researchers and allowed us to see that there are others facing similar issues, that we are not alone.

Having entered my academic career through an atypical career path, I was initially reluctant to share my history with others as it lacked several traditional and key experiences. Conversations with FRiENDs helped me to see the value my atypical experiences bring to my career. My experiences with research and publication, bolstered by my peer mentors, have brought me knowledge and confidence and allow me to proudly see myself as an academic researcher and a teacher. These changes have been gradual, but were recently brought home to me when I was assigned an accomplished and well-known mentor who invited me to co-author a paper. When editing the paper I was surprised to find that there were many things I wanted to change. However, I trusted my mentor’s judgment. We discussed ideas and changed only a few. Later when the reviewers made many of the same suggestions that I had made, my mentor asked me to rewrite the paper to address the feedback, another validating experience. I realized that through my informal mentoring experiences within the FRiENDs community, I had gained skills and experiences that prepared me to take the lead on these revisions with skill and with confidence. Through my interactions with members of the FRiENDs group, I have come to see myself as a strong researcher in my field and to value my unconventional path.

Eleven months after earning my doctorate, I became a non-tenure-track Department Chair in a College of Education. Although this position allowed me to foster my leadership skills and to successfully lead the College through national accreditation it did little to support my development as an educational researcher. Without FRiENDs I think I would have lost sight of my potential as a researcher. In our time together we shared stories about our experiences in our different roles. It was through these conversations that I heard about the development of their scholarship and increasingly wondered about my own. It was not only the constant support and encouragement that I received from FRiENDs that supported my transition into a tenure track position but their brutal honesty about the challenges they faced in their positions that moved me forward, I had a very clear sense of what I was entering into as I had heard and watched FRiENDs members move forward in their positions. Their struggles became learning experiences for me and provided a roadmap as well as constant support that I can’t imagine I would have found anywhere else. I am the last member of the group to go up for tenure and promotion and feel that it is in no small part because of my relationship with FRiENDs that I am on this path.

Our interactions also supported the development of our academic identities as mentors. While each group member shared issues and concerns and received relevant ideas and support for these, each group member also provided ideas and support to others, sharing her experiences and expertise. Over time and through our interactions, each of us was informally mentored and served as a mentor to others. These interactions allowed each of us to grow in our understanding of the mentoring needs of early career faculty and learn to provide critical support.
I believe that my experiences with FRIENDs have strongly influenced my current work with graduate students. In addition to mentoring them in the skills that they will need to be successful teachers and researchers I also mentor them in the often unspoken components of the job. I share my personal experiences and challenges including discussions about how I have dealt with negative reviews, how I have negotiated the expectations for promotion and tenure while keeping a balance in my personal life, and how I have sought support from colleagues, peers, family and FRIENDs. My experiences in the FRIENDs group have shown me how to be a mentor.

The nature of our group and the ways we interact have provided the balance that we sought between structure and flexibility, and between personal, professional, and emotional support. The annual retreat provides a consistency that we can all rely on while not requiring too much time away from work and family. Additionally, throughout the year various members regularly communicate by Skype, sometimes as often as once a week, to work on projects or just check in. We alter our pattern of work together to suit the needs of everyone in the group. Even the timing and location of the summer meeting sometimes changes in response to both professional and personal needs. Unlike more formal mentoring structures, our work together tends to be more fluid, with discussions often interweaving the personal and professional.

The following two stories highlight the various ways that the structure that we have created acknowledges the complexities of the lives of faculty and the needs of women.

At the first summer retreat I attended, I was still breastfeeding my youngest daughter. Periodically that weekend, I would have to excuse myself to pump breastmilk. Even after my daughter was weaned, my ability to travel to conferences and summer retreats was frequently limited by the fact that I was a mother to two small children. The group has been extraordinarily accepting of my commitment to my family. I do not have to make excuses or apologize for making my family a priority in my life. I give as much time and effort to the group as I can without having to feel guilty about not giving more.

The FRIENDs group is like a good friend at a distance, who has always been there and been supportive, yet still gives me the space and time if needed. When I had to live outside the United States for over half a year to take care of my father, FRIENDs members “stepped up” to fulfill my part of the work for the project that our group was working on and used Skype and emails to keep me in touch with the progress. When I came back to the states and was ready to participate in the project again, the group welcomed me and helped me to transition back into it. The flexible structure and deep understanding and trust in this community really reduced the stress and pressure of participation and commitment to the group’s work.

Our Advice for Early Career Academics

In sharing our story, we hope that others might see possibilities for creating similar structures to support their own development as new academics. The following are some suggestions for new academics and for those interested in creating support networks that extend beyond the walls of their own institution.
(1) **Realize that you don’t have to do it alone.** In our first few years in the academy a number of us in the group struggled with the tension between feeling like we had so much to learn and feeling that we were supposed to be the “expert.” We had accomplished our dissertation studies and completed our Ph.D.’s, so we sometimes felt that we should know what we were doing, and we shouldn’t need help. The reality is that graduate school can never fully prepare candidates for a career in academia and seeking out support to grow professionally is helpful. Through our participation in the group, we were able to see that others were struggling with these issues and that it was OK to identify what we needed and seek it out.

(2) **Identify a few key things that you need to move your academic career forward.** Every person who enters academia brings different experiences and strengths, and no one model of mentoring will work for everyone since everyone’s needs are different. Before seeking out particular forms of mentoring it is helpful to spend time identifying your particular needs. For some people the needs may focus on teaching, for others it may be research, grant writing, or better understanding the structures and politics within their institution. In addition to identifying the areas in which support is needed it is also important to identify the types of support that would be most useful. For example, do you need research collaborators, knowledge about publishing or grant writing, someone to provide motivation and accountability to accomplish writing goals, feedback on works in progress, or just someone to listen and provide moral support when needed? Note that what you identify will change, and you may not know exactly what you need initially.

(3) **Identify the people or resources to support your professional needs.** Identify which of these needs can be supported by resources within your university, college, or department, and which of these might be better supported by other sources. Although our focus in this paper has been on the support that we received from our participation in the FRiENDs group, each of us also accessed mentoring support that was available to us from our institutions, our previous supervisors, and current colleagues. In determining your own professional needs consider both formal and informal mentoring supports. For example, are there formal mentoring programs at your university? If there are, are they structured in a way that will support the needs that you have identified? Are there colleagues within or outside your university that you can approach informally to discuss ideas for teaching, research, or just to learn more about the workings of the department, university, or academia in general?

(4) **Consider formalizing informal networks.** Through our participation in the FRiENDs group we have learned the value of finding ways of formalizing the informal support network that we had created. By specifying that we would meet every summer, having specific goals for our work together, and making conscious decisions about the group composition, the network that we created became one that we came to rely on. The structure we created evolved out of our work together and was negotiated and renegotiated as time progressed. The structure we describe in this paper was developed to fit our needs. Other groups with different members and different goals may find other structures more suitable. In general, here are some things to consider when determining what structure will work for you: (1) plan a regular meeting time, (2) set goals, (3) identify a consistent mechanism for meeting (i.e. face-to-face or online), (4) make conscious decisions about the size and composition of the group, and (5) if members of the group will engage in research together then agreements regarding authorship and use of data should be
discussed initially and renegotiated as work progresses. When structuring informal networks, it is also important to remain flexible in order to deal with unforeseen needs of those involved in the group.

Our involvement in the FRiENDs group has been critical to our development as academics. It has allowed us to access forms of support that were not available to us within the institutions we worked at. Through our involvement in the group, we have pushed each other to grow, provided an understanding ear when needed, and made the journey much more enjoyable. The greatest piece of advice that we can provide new faculty is, if you are not finding the support that you feel you need to develop professionally within your own institution, then seek out other forms of support. If the needed structures do not already exist, then create them. Building your own academic support structure takes time and effort, but the support it can provide is well worth it.

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Forging a Research Pathway: Perspectives of Two Post-Tenure Female Faculty Members

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Abstract

This paper presents an auto-ethnographic exploration of two post-tenure female faculty member’s experiences developing their programs of research. Self-reflection was used to explore the factors that have helped or hindered the development of their research program, and the continued challenges they faced as female faculty. Composite themes were generated, using resiliency theory as the framework for discussions. Results are discussed with reference to a multidimensional conceptual model of researcher development put forth by Evans (2011).

Key Words: female academics; research program; autoethnography; resilience

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Introduction

Research has shown the academic workplace, and the need to achieve tenure within the first six years, is designed in ways that work against women (e.g., Halpern, 2008; Park, 1996; Schultz, 2008). For example, factors contributing to difficulties for women in academic settings include networking that excludes women and work-family conflicts (Bassett, 2005; Foster et al., 2000). In addition, despite idealistic expectations (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000), faculty report unbalanced lives and feelings of loneliness, isolation, and rivalry between colleagues (Greene et al., 2008). Novice faculty also report becoming dissatisfied, overworked, stressed, and physically ill (Hellsten, Martin, & McIntyre, 2010; Hellsten, McIntyre, Martin, & Kinzel, 2011; Hill, 2004), as they attempt to meet the often unwieldy, vague, and increasing tenure and promotion requirements (Schuster & Finklestein, 2006). The resulting gender disparities (e.g., salary, merit pay) only grow when universities place more emphasis on research relative to teaching and service (Mason & Goulden, 2002). However, despite a growing body of literature examining the scholarship of researcher development (Evans, 2011), there is no peer reviewed research literature exploring the challenges female academics experience when working to establish a program of research in today’s academic environment. In order to address the existing shortfalls in academic institutions, we must first attempt to understand the challenges facing female academics as they work to establish a program of research and generate possible solutions to address these problems. It is important for novice faculty members to share their challenges and tribulations since it can be “therapeutic, healing, and affirming” (Kawailak & Groen, 2010, p. 6).

As post-tenure female faculty members, we have endeavoured to share some of our experiences in navigating the university work environment. In our first article, we presented an autoethnographic exploration of three women’s experiences of the journey to tenure. Individual stories and composite themes were generated through reflexive writing and focused conversations about our experiences as women navigating the challenges and rewards of the tenure and promotion process (Hellsten et al., 2010). In our second article, we expanded our autoethnographic exploration to create a composite story of experiences and included the reflections of a new faculty member. Using a resiliency framework—making positive adaptations in spite of serious threats or significant adversity to adaptation or development (Masten, 2001), we asked ourselves what factors in our lives have made it possible for us to navigate our tenure track journeys (Hellsten et al., 2011). One aspect of the tenure and promotion journey that can challenge faculty is developing and pursuing a program of research. We now wish to move our investigations to focus specifically on our research journeys. Reflecting on the factors that have helped or hindered the development of our research program, and the continued challenges we face as female faculty, will provide us the opportunity to build a case to improve the academic climate for current and future female faculty.

Methodology

We conducted an autoethnographic exploration of our research pathways as post-tenure females in university faculty positions. Authoethnography is a form of narrative inquiry legitimatizing the researcher’s use of her own experience and requires the researcher write herself into the account of a phenomenon. The defining feature of autoethnography is that it emphasizes subjectivity and requires the researcher to perform a narrative analysis pertaining to herself and intimately related to a particular social phenomenon. Therefore, the written outcomes are as individual as its authors, taking a variety of
different forms (Ellis, 1999). However, regardless of written form, the authoethnographic representation conveys meaning attached to an experience. The goal of authoethnography is “…to tell a story that readers can enter and feel a part of” (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). We used self-reflection to explore the factors that have helped or hindered the development of our research program, and the continued challenges we face as female faculty.

Our discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed. Following the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted by the researchers. Resiliency theory formed the framework for our discussions on the factors that have helped or hindered the development of our research program, and the continued challenges we face as female faculty. Resiliency is defined as the ability to make positive adaptations in spite of serious threats or significant adversity to adaptation or development (Masten, 2001). Resilience results from the operation of basic human adaptational systems including attachment, extended families, mastery motivation, and self-regulation (Masten, 2001). Development in the face of adversity is robust when these basic systems are functioning. Conversely, when these systems are weakened, the risk for developing problems is much greater. Using the resiliency framework, we can ask ourselves what factors have helped or hindered the development of our research program (e.g., how were you supported by college/faculty to initiate and focus your research program? what factors have helped/hindered you from engaging in your research endeavours?). Resiliency theory is appropriate to use to frame our discussions since it fits in with the perspective of promoting well-being and considering solutions to adversities rather than focusing on hardships and negative experiences. This framework allowed us to consider strategies we have used, or factors that have supported us, in successfully developing our programs of research.

Our reflections on the factors that have helped or hindered the development of our research program, and the continued challenges we face as female faculty, can help to inform others of possible solutions for improving the research journeys for female academics.

**Our Research Journeys Context**

We are two female University post-tenured faculty members, hired within the past ten years, who are both currently Associate Professors at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). Each of us brings different academic/professional experiences (hired without completed doctoral degree and with/without considerable professional experience, including professional licensure), areas of expertise (psychometrician, speech-language pathologist), work experiences (post-doctoral position, previous professional career), family situations (married/single, no/young children), and personal challenges to the process of acquiring tenure/promotion and developing a viable research program. When we started in our tenure track positions, there was no formal or informal research mentorship in our department or college. In addition, a high turnover of faculty members in the role of the department head in the early years of our careers contributed to a lack of consistent research mentorship in our department. We both had limited publishing and grant writing experience coming out of our doctoral training. Although we were both passionate about and had an interest in research, we were left to figure out how to focus and implement our research visions on our own.
**Limited Institutional Support**

In our discussions, we first considered how we were supported by college/faculty to initiate and focus our research programs. One theme emerging from these discussions was that our feelings of isolation, stress, and frustration were due to the limited institutional support initially available to develop our research programs. In comparison to the current environment where every new faculty member at the U of S is provided with the opportunity to take part in a personalized new Faculty Research mentorship program (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. a), our department and college did not have any type of formal supports in place to help new faculty with their research programs when we started as academics ten years ago (e.g., formal mentorship program). We were left to create our own informal support systems (e.g., partnering with other early career colleagues, seeking out our own research mentors). The mentorship program now in place at the U of S helps new faculty to better understand research culture and the expectations of the university, assists faculty with the development of their research vision/plan and subsequently, through the establishment of milestones, helps the new researcher to develop a timeline for how the research plan will be realized and sustained (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. a). In contrast, we had to take our interest and enthusiasm for research and figure out how to first articulate what we wanted to focus on in our research programs and then decide how to make it a reality.

**Laureen:** Grants? I had applied for research funding as a doctoral student, but my doctoral supervisor had supported me through that process. Starting as an Assistant Professor here, there was no one more senior to help. I had to talk to colleagues in the same position and figure it out myself by trial and error. And in the beginning it was mostly error. And figuring out how to focus my ideas into a viable research program? I’m still tweaking and refining my area of focus ten years later. It would have a much easier process if a more knowing faculty member or research officer were there to help me along.

**Laurie:** It was a challenge to formulate independently, our research plans. The idea of having a master plan for my research would have been so incredibly helpful. In the beginning, I heard the message loud and clear that I should pursue external research funding. I jumped on that and began chasing the money. I seriously considered every opportunity that came my way and rarely turned anything down. Although I have been successful and I can articulate how the different projects I have been involved in relate, looking back, I certainly took the road less travelled. It would have been nice to have someone remind me to consider whether a particular opportunity was the right one for me, at that point in my career. Having someone experienced to provide me with the support to turn down an opportunity would have really helped me.

These early career experiences shaped the way our research programs have, and have not, developed. We both have not maintained as focused a program of research as we had originally envisioned. Although we are both satisfied with our current programs of research, we definitely feel there were drawbacks from having to learn as we went along.

Now further into our academic careers, the academic context around us seems to be shifting yet again. Budget cuts and tenure-track faculty positions not being replaced after faculty retire, thereby increasing administrative, teaching, and research expectations, are all negatively influencing our health and well-being as female faculty members working in today’s academic institutions.
Laureen: Our workload seems to be increasing in recent months. So much for finding a better work-life balance following tenure. We have faculty members retiring in our department, yet they aren’t being replaced. Someone still has to do their work, that doesn’t seem to disappear. There are still committees we need to have representation on, I still need to teach my never decreasing number of assigned classes, and somehow I still have to find time to work on my ongoing research projects and apply for new research funding. I’m stressed, I’m tired, but I don’t have time to take a break.

Furthermore, the external research environment is becoming increasingly competitive. There are many more applications being submitted for funding now, but fewer researchers are being funded. In addition, there is an associated pressure to increase publication productivity and impact in order to compete against other researchers.

Laurie: There never seems to be enough time to do all that I want to with respect to research. I seem to have mastered (maybe through experience) the research funding cycle – my submissions are not always funded but I regularly submit quality applications. It’s the other research related work – especially writing manuscripts where I seem to experience more challenge. Finding the time to write has been difficult for me. I love the deadlines imposed by grants, and I meet those. But I consistently ignore self-imposed manuscript preparation deadlines. My list of manuscripts in progress never seems to decrease.

The new realities in academia are not lessening the workload for academics.

Factors Hindering or Helping Our Research

Second, we considered the factors that have hindered and helped our engagement in research endeavours. Three main themes emerged in our discussions of factors that have hindered or helped our research engagement: (1) having to seek out research resources and mentors on our own; (2) having difficulty finding reciprocally supportive research partners; and (3) needing to take advantage of research resources as they became available. Let’s first consider having to seek out research resources and mentors on our own, a factor that hindered our engagement in research activities.

Laurie: We were left to seek out our own research mentors to help us both define and narrow our program of research, and formulate a plan of how to best develop this research plan. We had several new or newer faculty around me – this was both helpful and posed challenges. Often I didn’t know the right questions to ask or where to look for support, and my colleagues were often in competition with myself for the same grants. So with a lack of transparency regarding what sources of funding were available, I often found out about funding opportunities too late.

Figuring out our next course of action to move our research programs forward was challenging.

Laureen: I knew what I wanted to focus on, but how do you concisely present that to others? Other than tri-agency research funding, where do you go to figure out what other grants and
funds are available to apply for? And when you do find grants to apply to, when do you have time to do it when you have teaching and administrative obligations you have to meet. I don’t know about you, but I like to be able to sleep for more than three hours a night. There aren’t enough hours in the day to do all of this and not be a worn out mess.

Reaching out and finding other researchers to work with could help further a person’s program of research. The external funding agencies also appear to be placing increasing value on collaboration with the development of additional collaborative funding programs (i.e., partnership grants). However, finding reliable, trustworthy research partners who are collegial has been a factor that hindered our research engagement

Laureen: I’ve had a few bad experiences trying to make connections with other faculty members to establish my program of research. Not everyone is collegial or willing to live up to agreements that have been made to do the research together and publish. So all the time I’ve invested to move these projects forward don’t benefit me or my research program. It makes you hesitant to engage in new research relationships when you are just waiting for someone to take advantage of you. Through this process I eventually found a research partner I could trust.

It was left up to us as junior faculty members to find someone to navigate us through the research process.

Laurie: I was able to find internal funds, but I wasn’t able to use the money as effectively as I would have liked because a structure or a plan was not in place. I found a faculty member in another college who became my research mentor. I worked to build research relationships across campus, which lead to lots of grant writing, but in hindsight these projects were not always with the strongest of co-applicants. I was too busy to take the time to be selective in whom I was working with… Looking back I wonder if they were taking advantage of my knowledge and abilities. And I eventually saw myself starting to help them more than they helped me. Not all working relationships were beneficial to establishing our program of research.

One factor that has helped us further our research endeavours in recent years, is taking advantage of research resources as they became available. Our college recently hired research facilitators to support and enhance the research programs and activities of all university faculty members. Specifically, “research facilitation promotes and supports research activities at the University of Saskatchewan through a network of skilled professionals who help researchers, colleges/schools, and the institution obtain funding and resources, build profiles, and develop research partnerships and collaborations” (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. b, para. 3). Faculty members could use this support to help foster their research programs.

Laureen: I was skeptical when I heard the college was going to hire research facilitators to help us to establish and further, our programs of research. I had been doing it on my own for so long I was less willing to ask for help. When I did go see them, I found their help to be extremely valuable. They not only helped me refine my program of research description, they also helped me find new grants to apply to and spent time editing my grant submissions. I was initially reluctant to ask for
help, but benefitted when I got over my fears and did seek them out. Taking the time to access new supports has benefited our research.

**Laurie:** Now I can’t imagine my research life without our research facilitators. Even though I have experience applying for external funding, the agencies are always changing the funding programs and increasing the complexity of the programs. It’s been a relief to hand-over that work to someone else. Now I can focus on applying for funding or doing the research rather than keeping up to date on all the nuances and changes. The facilitator takes on the task of locating funding opportunities, and I receive reminders of upcoming deadlines. All of this I used to have to do myself. The facilitators also act as a sounding board and it is nice to be able to double check things with them rather than having to do it all on my own.

Making use of the research supports offered by our university has strengthened our research programs and made us more confident in pursuing our research endeavours. As the external research environment becomes increasingly competitive, the supports we have taken advantage of have allowed us to continue to be successful.

**Lessons Learned on Our Research Journey**

In reflecting on our research journeys, we noted that many of the changes we, as academics and developing researchers, experienced demonstrated our abilities to make positive adaptations and succeed in spite of adverse circumstances (Masten, 2001). In addition, many of our changes also fit the multidimensional conceptual model of researcher development put forth by Evans (2011). We certainly experienced behavioural development where we changed *for the better* the way we did research (termed *processual change*). We *learned to play the research game* and decipher the institutional research requirements or *procedural change* (Evans, 2011). We also increased our research output (termed *productive change*), and became more competent researchers (termed *competential change*). In addition, we also experienced change in our attitudes and perceptions towards research as we developed our identities as researchers (termed *perceptual change*) and experienced changes to our base levels of motivation for research or *motivational change* (Evans, 2011).

What we may not have expected was the degree of change we experienced with respect to what research-related values were important to us (*evaluative change*). Looking back, neither of us would have predicted how important collaborative relationships would be to our research programs, and the dangers in not pursuing research with like-minded colleagues (e.g., failed relationships, projects not furthering our program of research). Although collaborative research relationships are important, it takes time to build trust. In an ideal world, every researcher would be collegial. In reality, you need to consider your best interests first but do not work to impede others’ productivity in the process.

We also experienced intellectual development in our journeys. We changed (for the better) what we know and understand about research (*epistemological, rationalistic, comprehensive, and analytical changes*). We believe it is important to consider your program of research as a work in progress (i.e., an evergreen plan) and to take advantage of opportunities that expand your focus with colleagues you trust. You will need to modify and refine your research program as you make connections with other researchers.
Research has been identified as the “single most important area in which individuals and groups need advice in the current academy, and where advice is most singularly lacking” (Delamont & Atkinson, 2004, p. 2). Thus, we recommend academics take advantage of any and all research resources as they became available to build capacity as a researcher. In order to stay competitive in the current external funding environment, researchers should commit to professional self-development throughout their career (Evans, 2009). As Evans (2011) stated, researcher development is not just about increasing external funding success rates or developing skills. Researcher development is also very much about changing attitudes and perceptions about research. The risk of institutions not providing sufficient support for research is a disengaged tenured academic who underperforms or does not contribute to research productivity or impact. Receiving support from your academic institution, and establishing trustworthy and supportive, collegial relationships can help to forge an academic’s research pathway.
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New Academics and Identities: Research as a Process of ‘Becoming’

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Abstract

We are new academics involved in the process of becoming researchers. We believe that gathering, reflecting, sharing and producing knowledge are important parts of constructing a strong identity as a researcher that we produce and own rather than being produced by the prevailing academic discourse. We decenter research as a product and bring into focus how as researchers we understand our selves, our work, and our processes. We interweave our stories with those of our research participants who are also new to the professoriate. Our experiences transcend our academic world and we believe that the narratives we discuss may help inform others.

Keywords: researcher development; researcher identity; new academics; publishing and female academics

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Our stories

Cecile: I’m considered a ‘new academic’ in this context. I’ve been ‘new’ several times in my career as I’ve moved between academia and professional practice. There have been times when research has been at the forefront and times when it has taken a back seat to teaching. Perhaps, in the early days, when I first received my doctorate, I might have considered myself a researcher. Then I moved into teaching adults in rural areas and research did not feature much. When I returned to work at a university my workplace identities still revolved around teaching. I saw myself as primarily a teacher. Moving from South Africa to a faculty position in Canada has changed that. It’s a novelty to be now contemplating an identity as a researcher. Yet, the idea of ‘researcher’ sits uncomfortably with me since it seems to contain images and values to which I have no connection being so practice oriented. I realized that others, mostly women, felt the same way when I joined the faculty.

Heather: I was already an experienced educator and had made my living as a writer for a period of time before entering the academy. However because I’m the only full-time faculty member in my field of art education I might have felt isolated as a new academic. Over the pre-tenure years I’ve cobbled together my researcher identity and I’ve found that collaborating with colleagues has been surprisingly important in that regard—it’s helped me develop and own my researcher identity. I’ve explored what collaboration can mean. It’s more than just cooperating with others while working in our separate roles for a common project; I’ve been involved with projects where we share roles or change roles and build on the work of each other.

Our context

We work at a mid-sized university and the only university in Newfoundland and Labrador. The vast distances needed to travel discourage regular interaction with other Canadian and international scholars, although in the age of technological connectivity we are not isolated. The Faculty of Education has in recent decades transitioned into a research-based body nevertheless its ethos remains rooted in teaching practice and the education of pre-service teachers. Many faculty members are drawn from the school system and consequently have less experience with applying for grants, conducting research, and publishing in scholarly journals than faculty members in non-professional disciplines. Because research productivity is a key area for assessment and evaluation for gaining tenure the pressure to publish and to secure research funding is enormous (Polster, 2007). We found that others, like ourselves, were struggling to come to terms with writing, publishing and producing required academic outcomes.

We know that the conditions in which academics write and publish are in a process of transition. For example with the corporatization of universities, increasing emphasis is placed on efficiency and productivity (Hartman & Darab, 2012). However, meaningful personal growth in academic careers suffers under such pressures. Focusing exclusively on the product rather than the process of conducting research reduces satisfaction and academics’ sense of fulfillment. In turn positive relationships between faculty members atrophy. Hartman and Darab (2012) go so far as to argue that in the face
of constant deadlines faculty members no longer have time for deep thinking and ‘slow scholarship’.

Indeed pressure to write and publish is felt across academic contexts. Most published articles are written by 15% of researchers (Stack, 2003) while the majority of academics experience difficulties in publishing their work (McGrail, Richard & Jones, 2006). In particular non-tenured faculty and women produce fewer publications (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Leahey, 2006).

It seems logical then that the literature is replete with calls for interventions to bolster faculty writing output (Campbell, Ellis, & Adebonojo, 2012; McGrail et al., 2006). There is no doubt that non-tenured faculty and women need help, however Akerlind (2008) adds that that development is necessary at a number of career stages due to changing research agendas and needs.

While products like journal articles and grants were important to our group of colleagues, larger questions continually surfaced: What does it mean to be a researcher? Is a researcher the same as a scholar? Do I see myself as a researcher? And the one key question that kept surfacing was: Do I belong here?

Our Faculty of Education hired several new faculty members in a short period of time. Both of us were part of this group. Most of the new hires had been educators in the K-12 school system and the move into academia was fraught with anxiety, lack of confidence, and apprehension about the often-invisible performance requirements. Since we formed an informal cohort, we created a writing group that became a space for us to talk about these issues. It was easy to see how difficult all of us found the transition into faculty positions, particularly the research requirements. We (Heather and Cecile), together with another colleague, Rhonda Joy, decided that these discussions were important enough to explore further.

Research project

Our Faculty has an in-house non-peer-reviewed journal called The Morning Watch: Educational and Social Analysis, which publishes academic research and discussion papers written by faculty and students. It plays a developmental role and provides a space for first papers for novice writers. We decided to use the journal to explore the idea of becoming a researcher. Research as a product exists, it is. We can see the product of research in book form or as a journal article. It appears quite stable. The researcher, by contrast, is much more elusive. University procedures for tenure and promotion, the discourses we work within and much of our own thinking pivots around the product. We wanted to move the product to the sidelines and explore the process of becoming a researcher. This is a more chaotic, troubled and messy engagement. We drew on post-structuralist thinking for inspiration, particularly about the instability of systems and the constant potential for chaos which seemed relevant for the way we perceived doing research. French philosophers and post-structuralists, Deleuze and Guattari portrayed how systems become in the open dynamism of thought. They argue that no vocabulary could adequately capture the chaos of life, thus, we interpreted, research (and writing) is not about representation, but invention. Life, research and writing are constantly in a state of change and renewing and always in contact with other influences. Like a rhizome, research “has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing,
intermezzo” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). Becoming is a series of actions, often repeated, but never in quite the same way. Just as we feel we have become, the process begins anew (Colebrook, 2002).

In 2012, we sent out a Call for Papers for a special edition of The Morning Watch. We asked potential participants to initiate conversations and to formalize thinking around the process of being a researcher. We emphasized issues of identities ‘becoming’, and framed the Call for Papers as Stories of Self (Arnold, 2011). We planned a collaborative writing process by initiating collegial discussions around proposed submissions, hosting a workshop on narrative writing, and by reviewing papers in a way that was developmental rather than critical. The response, particularly from our own colleagues in the faculty, was astounding. Twenty contributions from within our own faculty and graduate students and some from other faculties were published (Badenhorst, McLeod & Joy, 2012). Several of the papers were from our cohort of ‘new academics’ but other papers came from ‘experienced’ long-time researchers.

The papers range from poetry to more formal narratives but almost all were about individuals trying to understand their positionality as researchers and writers. Since there was such an overwhelming response and an obvious interest, we decided to apply for funding to conduct a research project to interview participants who had submitted papers. The key aim of this research was to explore the connections between researcher development and writing/researcher identities. For this, we drew on Akerland (2008) who finds that researcher development includes a focus on feelings about oneself (identity); one’s performance (collaboration, development of community, networking); and outcomes (productivity). Akerlind (2008) also outlines four phases in a researcher’s development. These include: 1) becoming confident (gaining the research and writing skills to publish); 2) becoming recognized (gaining expertise and becoming part of a research community); 3) becoming productive (gaining the skills to access grants, conduct research and publish regularly); and 4) becoming sophisticated (being a leading thinker in a field).

We wanted to bring into focus how researchers understand themselves, their work, and their processes in relation to Akerlind’s (2008) phases. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted and using narrative methods (Polkinghorne, 1995) were video-recorded. All participants who agreed to participate were women, despite the fact that the contributors to the special edition of The Morning Watch included both men and women. Using strategies of asking and listening (Spradley, 1979), we asked them to tell us their stories of ‘becoming a researcher’ by recalling stories about their research, and to examine their researcher identities. Additionally we interviewed participants to explore issues of researcher becomings including experiences of researcher development, meaningful collaboration, and writing identity. The open-ended questions and prompts took the form of a semi-structured interview. In analyzing the data, we read the transcripts numerous times and particularly noted individual participant’s self-declared stage of researcher development (Akerland, 2008). We also identified phrases that had to do with collegiality and collaboration such as, “my first project was a collaboration” and, “I want to be part of a research community”. As well we identified phrases related to identities as researcher, scholar or writer such as one participant’s question of how she could be a researcher, “in a way that’s consistent with who I am?”
The outcome of the research

We found that only one of the eight interviewed saw themselves as beyond Akerlind’s (2008) first phase: becoming confident (gaining the research and writing skills to publish). Yet, even this is hard to extract as a ‘theme’ because each person discussed times when they felt confident and other contexts when they did not. What emerged from the interviews was a sense that each did not identify with a single idea of ‘researcher’. What defined them and drove them on despite some quite difficult circumstances was a strong interest in the research they were doing and often, the people they worked alongside.

In this paper, we focus on four of the interviews. We selected these interviews because they are all new academics. Here, following the post-structural lead, we present ‘slices’ of the stories told to us by some of the participants that document the many ways that researchers unfold and emerge. We have cut the stories for the purpose of this paper and have also added summary sentences. There is always an element of re-contextualization when a text is altered. However, we believe that we have stayed ‘true’ to the stories and the voices they represent, and we have confirmed all quotes for publication with the participants. The participants’ names are pseudonyms.

Julia, a participant in our study, did not identify as a researcher in her previous employment as a psychologist, “I was a consumer of research versus being a researcher…I consumed it as in to look at what’s the best evidence, what’s the best approach.”

However, Olivia, previously a teacher, linked her evolving identity with research, “I’m a restless person and once I achieve what I think is the highest or close to the highest level in whatever I’m doing, then I’d like to move on to something more challenging… Research was something more challenging and I have a lot of questions to ask and to find answers for.” Olivia discussed how she moved from consuming the theories of others about research methods to coordinating her skills and enacting her own research, “You know reading books doesn’t help. I got books about how to interview, how to ask questions, it’s kind of like learning to swim, you get all the instructions, you got the manual, how to do it and move your arms and legs... And you learn everything; you even have a coach there showing you how to do it. The coach might jump into the water showing you, but if you don’t dip yourself in the water, you’ll never learn.”

Annette discussed developing as a researcher, “As I publish more and even further pursue my research interests, I think I will even better actualize and identify with that title.”

Rachel spoke of her researcher identity as a process of becoming, “I think of myself as an ethnographer, which has sort of been a process of becoming…I think it’s still evolving.” Using clothing as a metaphor Rachel believed that she could fashion her researcher identity to suit who she was and her agenda for change, “It’s been a process of alright how do I be a researcher in a way that’s consistent with who I am and what I’m interested in…and it doesn’t feel like…I would be wearing some sort of costume... that was really incongruent with who I am and how I think change should happen.”

Participants also reflected about how collaborating with others aided their process of becoming a researcher. Olivia connected collaboration to impressive productivity, “My

Brock Education, 24(1), Fall 2014, pp. 65-72.
first project was a collaboration with a peer, so that was very successful and we co-published and co-presented, that was pretty good.”

Rachel discussed how through collaborative work she was exposed to new points of view, “It’s totally different here because there’s way more female researchers...that I have been exposed to...this kind of feminist influence on research has been helpful.” Julia spoke of how through collaboration she found encouragement and support and developed long-term relationships, “The colleagues... and the relationships that I’ve developed keep me here.” She continued, “I think I want to be part of a research community.”

End thoughts

Heather: Looking back over my time as a new academic I see that collaboration, writing and becoming a researcher are intertwined. My ideas develop while I’m writing (St Pierre, 2007). Thus co-writing articles with others including editing their texts and puzzling out what they mean by their choice of words works in the same way. It moves me from just consuming the concepts of others to analyzing and working with them. Their images and ideas become partially mine. Colleagues have a variety of approaches to producing text and by co-authoring articles with them I’ve learned from their processes. This cross-fertilization of ideas and exposure to a variety of points of view and methods has worked against possible feelings of isolation. We’ve created our own supportive community within the faculty and my roots are nurtured by this fertile soil. As a researcher I’m developing towards maturity.

Cecile: Until recently, I’ve always been a loner when I conduct research and write. The reason for that has had to do with lack of time, multiple responsibilities (mostly revolving around childcare) and few resources. It was a complete joy to work with a group of colleagues who placed support ahead of competition. The interaction, dialogue and collaboration when analyzing data or writing joint papers has taught me much about myself and how I work as a researcher. I’ve definitely grown and developed much stronger identities. I see myself as much more of a researcher now but one that is supported by a community of researchers.

We have argued here that while publishing scholarly articles makes one a productive academic, sustainable productivity is dependent on the writer/researcher developing identities as such. A collaborative environment helps in the process of identity construction and nurtures researchers who not only produce but also find meaning in what they do. Research indicates that research and writing collaborations lead to greater levels of productivity (Walton et al, 2011; Zutshi, McDonald, & Kalejs, 2012) but we would argue that this is not because of the product, but because of the process of being part of a community, developing confidence and feeling supported (Synder, 2011). A writer/researcher identity that is more solidified leads to better quality research because the researcher is wholly invested, however those identities are defined. The gathering, reflecting, sharing and producing of knowledge is an important part of the process of constructing a strong identity as a researcher that is produced and owned by the researcher, rather than being produced by prevailing academic discourses.
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References


BOOK REVIEW

Title: Revisiting The Great White North? Reframing Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education (Second Edition)

Author: Lund, D. & Carr, P.

Publisher: Boston, MA: Sense

Year of Publication: 2015

Reviewed by: Kim Radershma, PhD Student

Having spent the majority of my formative years in the U.S., and having only recently returned to Canada to pursue my Ph.D. in Education with a focus on anti-racism and critical whiteness studies, I have found Lund and Carr’s books to be extremely useful in helping me detect the pulse of the Canadian heart-rate on race issues.

The editors, Darren Lund and Paul Carr, of both the original edition, The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education, and the new, second edition reviewed in this essay, Revisiting The Great White North? Reframing Whiteness, Privilege, and Identity in Education, refer to the topic of whiteness as “highly contested and problematic,” much like politics and religion; topics that “are not comfortably addressed openly in polite company” (p. 5). Indeed, to address such a misunderstood and contentious topic is not, as they admit, politically expedient. Yet approaching the topic of race from a deep structural level remains urgent. As an American critical whiteness scholar contends, “the problem of race relations is primarily--but not solely--a white problem” (Allen, 2004, p. 121). It is with this awareness and calling to expose whiteness that the editors undertake a second look at this topic from a Canadian vantage point.

This second edition, consisting of the original contributions from scholars and activists followed by their new responses, is once again organized into five thematic sections. The editors offer a new Forward once again contributed by Sefa Dei, and a new Introduction which addresses some of the changes that have occurred since the first edition eight years ago. The US elected its first Black president, the Canadian government issued a public, formal apology to the Aboriginal people of Canada, Ontario’s Ministry of Education released a comprehensive Equity and Inclusive Strategy, are among many other critical incidents that have propelled the national conversation about whiteness and race.

Lund and Carr introduce the purpose of this second edition as an opportunity for each contributing author to “reframe their chapters in light of new understandings and experiences since its original publication” (p. 1). In addition to the intent of the original publication, which was to examine “the multiple perspectives and vantage points on Whiteness in order to challenge the current complacency in the Canadian state and nation, particularly among educators, to address deep-seated inequities and injustice” (p. 3), the second volume asks each of the 20
scholars and activists who contributed to the first volume to again consider: “What does whiteness look like in general, and in Canada, in particular?” (p. 4), and respond to it in a new essay that follows their original contribution.

The editors and contributors tell of continued resistance among Canadians to notions of white privilege based on reactions to their first edition. Here in Ontario, we have seen similar resistance surface. For example, in the past year after the Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario (ETFO) offered an optional training session about white privilege for its members, the Toronto Sun published a piece entitled “ETFO ‘white privilege’ workshop dangerous” in which the columnist repeatedly insisted that white privilege does not exist (Blizzard, 2014). The commentary section of the online edition of the newspaper further iterated this denial.

Within the five themed sections of the second edition, the concept of whiteness is “framed with the notion that Whites are naturally superior over others” (p. 285). In the section “Conceptualizing Whiteness,” Frideres addresses this challenge as one that few teachers have wrestled with; he writes: “As White teachers, there is a tendency to shore up our sense of superiority” (p. 51). More specifically, the superiority that Canadians often perceive of themselves when compared to the US is interrogated as well. There seems to be a deeply seated belief in Canada of what one author calls “Canada the good” (p. 252), a sense that Canada has achieved a true cultural mosaic “versus the traditional American melting pot ideology” (p. 198). This veneer of goodness often neglects an accurate illumination of Canada’s “colonial heart” (p. 263). It seems evident that Canadians have suffered what Blundell (2010) calls “narrative anesthesia,” as the grand narratives told and re-told among us deny the painful history that has created vast privileges, particularly for white people here in the North. One contributor points to the classrooms as the culprit of anesthetizing the country, claiming “continued failure within Canadian classrooms to provide an integrated history of the different groups in our society in a manner that can truly engage and support the development of a thinking and critical citizenry” (p. 205), while Thésée laments that “there will always be astonishment that [the Black student] is ‘smart,’ like Whites.” (p. 288).

The chapters also examine the ideology of colourblindness evident in Canadian society that contributes to what Thésée calls the “veneer of Whiteness that filters society” (p. 290). Frideres calls this ideology a learned and nurtured refusal to address race that protects the status quo and privileges White people” (italics in original, p. 51). Two of the authors, Caouette and Taylor, reveal their findings about the misunderstandings among Canadians about what “egalitarian” means; they discovered that most interpret it as individualistic and profess a belief in meritocracy. In order to counter this deeply held ideology, another contributor, Lindo maintains that “we need to talk about race. We need to make these discussions explicit . . . It is only if we acknowledge that we are not colour-blind, but rather, far too colour conscious that we might have a chance to combat racism” (p. 237). In their combined contribution, Solomon and Daniel agree: “Canadian society continues to regard race as a discourse that should be closeted because of the assumption that the mere mention of the word retards human sensibilities and has the interesting repercussion of instituting feelings of guilt amongst minoritized candidates” (p. 200).

Most of the contributing authors are white, and many of them share their awareness of this fact with honest storytelling of early critical incidents in their lives related to race. The contributing authors who are not white, or “racialized,” provide challenging and insightful suggestions for doing work in the realm of antiracism. Charania contends in his reframing essay
that “advancing anti-racism requires the skills of sharp analysis alongside the ability to work with people from a variety of entry points and politics in the often-fraught conversations of racism and oppression” (p. 267). While James explores who can and should do anti-racism work, he reveals the paradox that whites can be dangerous allies if they do not fully understand how they are individually implicated in racism. Lindberg offers vulnerable, honest, and challenging “Theorums” (as she calls them) to caution and protect those who choose to do the work with advice like, “Institutional change starts with individuals who work in institutions” (p. 84). Donsky and Champion cite Sefa Dei’s (2003) work where the latter asserts: “the question today is not really to ask who can do anti-racist work. Rather it is for each of us to ask whether we are prepared to face the risks and consequences that come with doing such work” (p. 5, cited on p. 247).

The importance of exploring notions of whiteness and unveiling the collective amnesia of Canadians is further underscored by Frideres pointing out that the evidently growing work force of teachers in Canada is made up of mostly white teachers. Frideres notes the drastic “mismatch” between a predominantly white teacher work force and a student population that is increasing in its representation of students of colour and non-native English/French speakers (p. 47). This problematic relationship begs attention to the imagined superiority held by white teachers in Canada.

Ultimately, the authors voices heard once again in this second edition draw continued attention to the issue of whiteness in Canada, as they collectively call for a deep understanding—especially among educators—of what it truly means to be white in Canada.

References
