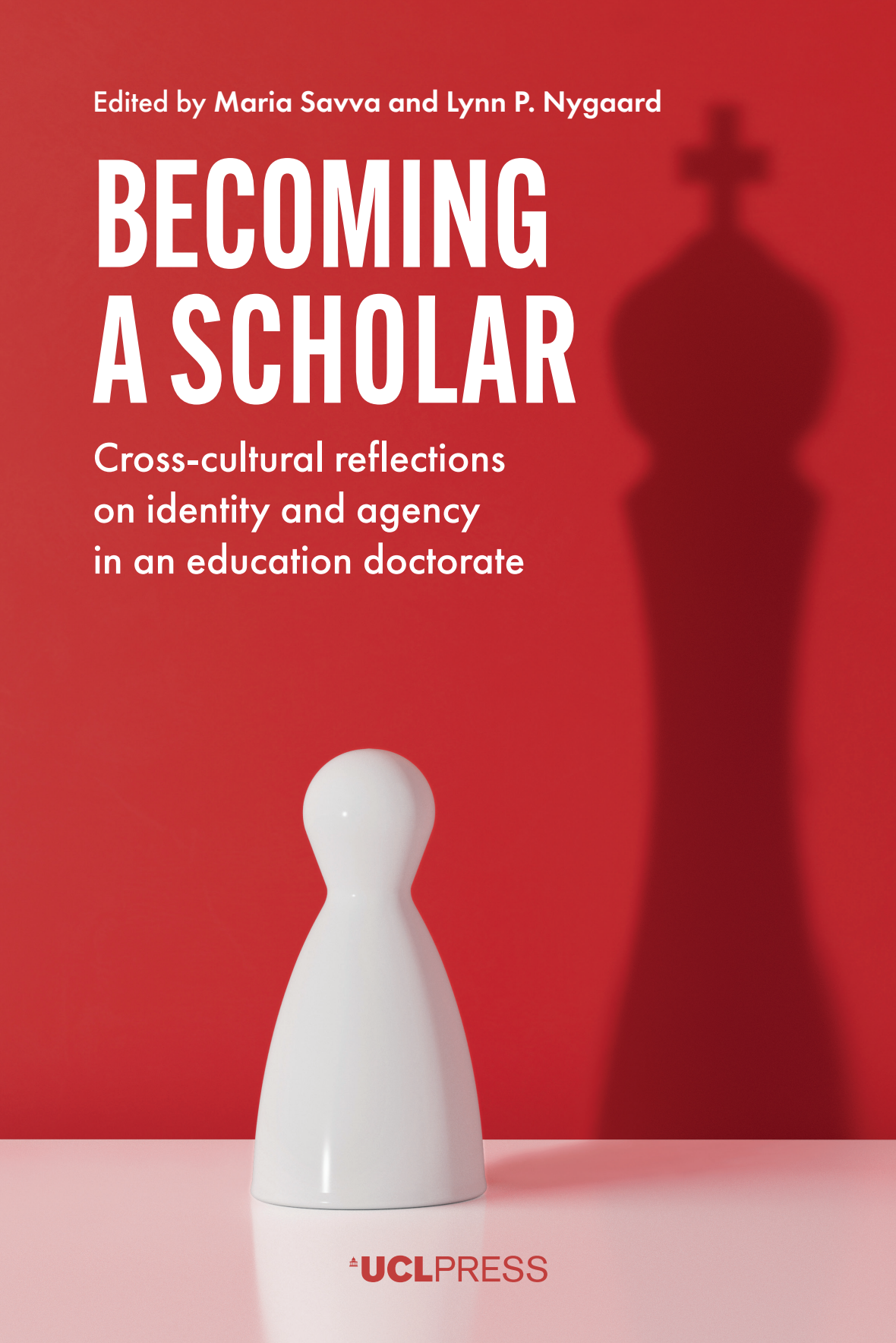
Edited by Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard

BECOMING A SCHOLAR

Cross-cultural reflections on identity and agency in an education doctorate



UCLPRESS

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Edited by
Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard

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David Channon, EdD, has been Teaching Fellow at the Centre for the Development of Academic Skills at Royal Holloway, University of London since 2015. His main area of responsibility is as programme leader for the pre-sessional course. Prior to this, he worked for 13 years as a teacher, a teacher-trainer and a project manager for the British Council in Myanmar. His research interests are in internationalisation, political education and teacher development. He is currently writing a book entitled *Metaphors for Academic Practice,* as well as leading a small environmental education project in the Caucasus.

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Rab Paterson, MEd, MA, MS, is Principal Instructor for the Business English Skills and Training programme at Toyo University's Center for Global Education and Exchange. He has lived in Japan since 2000 and has taught in multiple high-ranking Japanese universities including the University of Tokyo and Dokkyo, Rikkyo and Sophia universities. Additionally, he is Director of the Asia Association for Global Studies, serves on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), and is programme chair for the JALT Business Communications Special Interest Group. Rab is also a Fellow of the British Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, is a recipient of the prestigious Apple Distinguished Educator and Google Innovator awards, and is a Google Certified Trainer.

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Foreword

Bryan Cunningham, UCL Institute of Education

As someone who left school at 16 years of age, and with serial experience both of being an adult returner and subsequently, over many years, teaching this 'species' of student, I found a great deal in this book immensely resonant. A number of the syndromes described by its contributors are ones I know very well indeed; I have been personally affected by them, and have frequently supported, as best as I can, others being made anxious and unsettled by them: 'imposter syndrome' and lack of confidence come especially to mind. Their effects can be particularly concerning at the doctoral level, given the intellectual challenges of what is entailed in working towards a doctorate, and the very distinctive nature of the educational milieu in which individuals suddenly find themselves.

I believe, therefore, that what the editors and their collaborators have given us is a volume that, I will predict with confidence, is destined to become a highly significant resource in higher education. In saying so, I do not have in mind a readership consisting only of those individuals assessed as being 'international' as they embark on professional doctorates in education; in my view a number of other constituencies stand to benefit greatly from the book's publication. I do not want to distract attention away from the book's prime concern, the experience of international students on an education doctorate (EdD) offered by a UK university. However, I have been repeatedly struck by the relevance to other constituencies in many of the contributors' reflections.

I will, for example, firstly observe that a great many of the perspectives voiced by the book's contributors – as 'international' graduates of the particular Doctorate in Education (EdD) described by Savva and Nygaard – are ones that I can see would very clearly have strong messages for 'home' students. The highly engaging auto-ethnographical work to be found here very convincingly mirrors what I have read in the reflective writing produced by many of my 'home' supervisees: 'I have

made substantive progress in developing my thinking, analysis, reflection and understanding of both my professional practice and research questions I wanted to pursue' (Boorman, 2011: ii).

The perspectives, reflections (and often, informed recommendations) are also ones that could be of immense value to individuals who are simply at the stage of contemplating moving on from their master's studies to work at doctoral level. The very notion of a doctorate can, in my own professional experience, often be one that is not always immediately accessible to students even at master's level. It can be wrapped up in a whole world of arcane jargon and practices that are perplexing to the uninitiated but which the book's contributors have so engagingly illuminated, thus serving to demystify them.

I would suggest, however, that the group of individuals who above all others may well find their insights and professional practice enhanced comprises those of us who supervise doctoral level work. For example, I feel we ought to consider the proposition that any of the observations made here with regard to such desirable supervisory practices as empathy and cultural sensitivity will be just as valued by home students as they are described as being by their international peers. Further, if we should always be mindful of the need to clearly and supportively induct new doctoral candidates into the 'rules of engagement' applicable to the student–supervisor relationship, then surely it is misguided to do so only when we perceive (and possibly stereotype) someone as being in need of such an induction by virtue of their 'international' status.

I for one will readily acknowledge that on first becoming involved with doctoral supervision, over two decades ago, I would have greatly appreciated the kind of professional – and intellectual – activities that Savva and Nygaard point to in the concluding chapter. They write that the narratives in this volume suggest that supervisors could benefit from increased opportunities within their institutions to reflect on their roles, both in a context with other supervisors and with their students. Viewed through this kind of lens, we might well concede that the 'consciousness in transition' referred to by Andrews and Edwards (2008) is a process to be profitably experienced not only by doctoral candidates but by their supervisors as well.

The resilience and adaptability required when working towards an EdD come across strongly in many of the contributors' narratives. These attributes often entail the realisation that whereas in your own professional sphere you have been, and are, accorded expert status and due deference, by becoming a research student you are then challenged by the novice status of a beginning doctoral student. Elsewhere, Savva, in

recollecting her entry into the world of submitting papers for peer review, presenting at conferences and so on, draws attention to the important shifts whereby she was able to transition out of her role as a passive student to one of an active scholar. Such transitions call for coping strategies of a very particular kind; it is by no means an easy adjustment to make, after possibly years in a senior role in education, leading and managing others, to then find yourself in a position that must inevitably, in many regards, be experienced as a subservient one.

I wish this important book very well, and to express my hope that all of its contributing authors have discovered the truth of what Jeffrye Boakye has recently so eloquently expressed:

> We write to make sense of personal and public histories. To illuminate the complex intersections of self and context and expose ruptures in identity, for better or worse. We write to give shape to narratives that shift and sink, ebb and flow. We write to give ourselves ballast (Boakye, 2019: 91).

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Acknowledgements

When we first embarked on this project, none of us knew exactly what this book would become, or exactly where it would take us as individuals. We are thankful to the contributing authors who took the time to share very personal struggles, often exposing their own vulnerabilities in the process. This courageous contribution cannot be emphasised enough as their work not only adds to the traditional academic discourse, but also contributes towards an increased understanding of the deeply personal and emotional aspects of the doctoral journey. For these reasons, the stories shared by the authors have the unique potential of helping those who may come after them. We would like to also give thanks to the peer reviewers, whose valuable comments helped the authors lift and better situate their stories into the relevant academic discourses.

Institutionally, we would like to acknowledge the Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York, which provided valuable support in covering various expenses associated with both the effort and publication costs of this book. Finally, we are thankful to UCL Press for recognising the vision of our project and its unique contribution to the doctoral experiences of less traditional students. We are particularly excited that this book is open access, freely available to others online. Rejecting the requirement to pay in order to access knowledge is an important step to achieving equity and social justice and we are pleased to join this movement with UCL Press.

Introduction

Discussions about the direction of doctoral programmes and alarmingly high attrition rates in universities throughout the world often seem to presuppose that doctoral students are not only similar to one another, but also that they generally pursue a doctorate in the same discipline and country throughout their academic careers, and that this academic career is uninterrupted. However, internationalisation and globalisation are ensuring that growing numbers of students undertake a doctorate across national boundaries. Likewise, a sharp increase in distance-mode learning that is likely to endure in the post-COVID-19 era, along with the widening of the university to be more accessible to all, have meant that greater numbers of mature and part-time students are returning to the university after developing as professionals. In a university setting that is built primarily for full-time, physically present students, these international, part-time and mature students can thus be seen as being on the periphery of higher education. Does that make their doctoral journey different from that of other students?

The purpose of this book is to look more closely at how the personal, professional and academic dimensions of the doctoral journey come together to bring about identity transformation. By situating the personal narratives of international, part-time and mature doctoral students within various academic discourses, this book aims to gives a 'human face' to the process of academic identity development for this growing demographic. Each narrative provides a window into how academic identity develops over time and as a result of varied external and internal factors. To place these individual narratives more firmly in the context of larger discourses in academic research, they are framed by a theory chapter that outlines the key concepts, mechanisms and assumptions we draw from, and an analysis chapter that pulls together the main findings across chapters. Readers will find that many of the narratives support popular findings in academic research, while a few counter and challenge long-held assumptions. Still others expose gaps in

research that would benefit from further study. All the narratives, however, coalesce to foreground the complexity and nuances of the doctoral journey – and together give a voice to students who typically operate on the periphery of higher education.

Coming together as a cohort

Our story begins in a part-time Doctor in Education (EdD) programme offered at the UCL Institute of Education. It is the beginning of the academic year and a cohort of about 20 students has assembled in a classroom. The students, however, are not from London nor do they live anywhere in the United Kingdom. Instead, they have travelled to the opening session of a doctorate programme designed specifically for students living outside the United Kingdom. Combining mandatory week-long, in-person modules with distance work, the programme allows students to continue living in their home countries while they work on obtaining a doctorate in the United Kingdom. The students hail from countries as diverse as Cyprus, Ethiopia, Hungary, Pakistan, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Myanmar, Norway, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and New Zealand. They are also visibly older, many of them in their 40s or 50s, and as they go around the room introducing themselves it becomes evident that these are already well-established education professionals with many years of experience in their fields. Among the group are teachers (general, special education and English as an additional language), principals, research managers, education technology specialists, an academic writing coach, a nursery school owner and even a training director in an oil company.

This is the scenario that marked the beginning of our doctoral journey. For the next year and a half, as part-time doctoral students, we would meet each term in London to receive training in mandatory week-long modules. The lectures covered a wide range of research-related topics and were intensive, often running from nine in the morning until six in the evening. The intensive nature of the week-long modules meant that we spent a significant amount of time together. Not knowing anyone besides each other while in London, it was not uncommon for some of us to spend time together outside the classroom exploring the city. In time, we became familiar not only with each other's professional and academic interests, but also the personal circumstances that inspired each of us to enrol in the programme.

When we were not attending modules in London, many of us continued to provide support to one another through group chats and email correspondence. Indeed, the peer support and networks developed in those first years contributed positively towards our sense of belonging and general well-being. This remained the case even as some of our paths diverged later on. Some of us, for example, eventually decided to shift to a conventional PhD, while others took a formal break from studies for various personal reasons. Despite this divergence, the cohesiveness among many in the cohort remained strong, and close contact was maintained.

Milestones in the EdD

Once the mandatory taught modules were complete, we began what was called an Institution Focused Study (IFS). The IFS was a research assignment of approximately 20,000 words that involved the study of an institution or organisation that each student was professionally affiliated with. Its completion was followed by an upgrade interview, where the quality of each student's portfolio up until that point was evaluated. With supervisors looking on as observers, the upgrade interview was conducted by two readers (other faculty members, experienced in the subject matter), who not only evaluated the student's portfolio, but also approved the research proposal for the doctoral thesis. Approval at the upgrade interview was an important milestone for us because it meant that we could enter the final stage of our doctoral journey where, with the oversight of our supervisor(s), we could begin the planning of field research, the collection and analysis of data and the write-up of our final 45,000 word thesis.

This latter part of the EdD journey at UCL involved several important people and processes. Prior to submission, each thesis was reviewed by an internal reader, who in many instances was selected by the supervisor and student together. Although the role of the internal reader was non-binding (students were free to accept or reject the specific feedback provided), it was typically someone selected for their expertise in the area of research. For this reason, recommendations from the internal reader quite often involved some form of revision on the part of the student. Once submitted for examination, each doctoral thesis was then reviewed by two examiners, one who was internal and another who was external to the institution. Unlike the case with the internal reviewer,

examiner decisions were binding: they decided whether the Doctor in Education (EdD) degree would be awarded and under what conditions.

The culminating event, of course, was the viva itself. The viva process for the EdD allowed the candidate to make a short initial presentation of their research to the examiners, followed by a question and answer session (the defence). A moderator managed the technical aspects of the meeting, and while one student supervisor could be present, they could only serve as an observer. Examiner decisions could range from an outright fail to a pass with no corrections. In reality, an outright fail was highly unlikely due to the multiple people and screening processes in place (such as the supervisor, internal reader, the Institution Focused Study and upgrade interview). In most instances, decisions involved a pass with minor or major corrections/amendments. Doctoral candidates were also given a timeline within which changes were to be completed. This was yet another hurdle for students to overcome since a doctoral degree could not be formally conferred until corrections were submitted and deemed sufficient by the examiners.

Reflecting on the journey

It was shortly after the first few of us passed our viva examinations and received our degrees that we began to engage in discussions about the personal journey that inevitably paralleled our academic one. We noted that while our thesis provided evidence of our academic contribution, there was no equivalent artefact that documented the internal journey that intersected with our academic one. Nor was there anything that adequately addressed the relationship between our personal struggles and the further development of our scholarly or professional identities.

It was from these observations that the idea for this book first materialised. We used our new-found knowledge about scholarship to lift our casual conversations over email to more purposeful inquiry: What was it like for us as established professionals to find ourselves back in the role of novice students? How did members of the cohort cope with distance and dislocation? What were the challenges associated with culture, language and identity? How did the professional and personal aspects of our doctoral journey overlap and interact with academia? And how did the doctoral journey fundamentally change the way we came to see ourselves and the world around us? These were some of the questions we grappled with as we prepared to tell our stories. The result is this book you see before you. The stories are unique to each author and do not

necessarily represent the experiences and views of the editors or other authors. In combination with an introductory theory chapter and a concluding analysis chapter that lift these narratives from the anecdotal to frame them in a larger context, these narratives together represent a wide array of both well-known and lesser-known phenomena in academia. An overview of the individual chapters is provided below.

Chapter 1: Belonging and becoming in academia: a conceptual framework (Lynn P. Nygaard and Maria Savva)

Establishing the conceptual framework for this book as a whole, this chapter looks at the process of developing an academic identity through the lens of 'becoming' a scholar, with particular emphasis on the challenges facing international, part-time EdD students. This process involves not only an intellectual breakthrough, but also an emerging sense of belonging. The inner journey – which intersects with and shapes academic progress – comprises a complex set of interactions between the social groups to which we belong, our beliefs about ourselves that come about through experience, the various contexts in which we operate, the position we hold within those contexts, and the agency we exercise in responding to various pressures. In addition to exploring the relevance of this inner journey, the chapter also situates author experiences within broader educational trends facing universities and key elements of doctoral programmes.

Chapter 2: A tale of two languages: first-language attrition and second-language immersion (Barbora Necas and Susi Poli)

Necas and Poli explore how their linguistic background shaped their identities throughout their development as scholars, including how it allowed them, or kept them from, interacting with their peers and each other. Necas, a native English speaker who relocated to Italy where she lived for almost 30 years, returned to the UK only to face unexpected struggles with first-language attrition. Poli, a native Italian speaker who temporarily relocated to the UK, dealt with a variety of challenges when she immersed herself in, and tried to adapt to, the idiosyncrasies of the English culture. Their stories mirror each other in unexpected ways, highlighting how identifying as a native speaker – or not – changed the 'stories' they told to themselves and others, and ultimately shaped the way they saw themselves as students, professionals and scholars.

Chapter 3: I found my tribe online: belonging in the context of precarity (Muireann O'Keeffe)

As an e-learning specialist and academic developer, O'Keeffe's chapter illustrates how her professional identity shaped her growing academic identity, and how this was enabled by reaching beyond the confines of the classroom to find a virtual community of like-minded scholars. O'Keeffe reflects on how she embarked on a doctoral programme partly to secure future employment in a casualised higher education environment. When funding for her position ended, she entered a crisis period where she could no longer carry out research in her institution. Turning to an online community for support, she found a new direction for her research that was no longer dependent on her place of employment.

Chapter 4: A view of the Western university through the eyes of a non-Western student (Mohammad Abdrabboh)

As a seasoned professional in training and development in industrial settings in Saudi Arabia, Abdrabboh faced multiple unforeseen challenges throughout his doctoral journey. In this chapter, he describes how unprepared he was for the limited knowledge other students and faculty had about his region of the world, and how this translated into obstacles related to student–faculty relationships. One of the most problematic challenges he faced was applying Western-style ethical guidelines to a non-Western research context. He explains how university guidelines did not sufficiently account for important cultural differences in Saudi Arabia, and he offers strategies that can help increase cultural awareness and sensitivity among students and faculty.

Chapter 5: Navigating the pass: distance, dislocation and the viva (David Channon, with Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard)

Channon examines the challenges of completing a doctoral degree across different geographical locations and changing job roles. His experience illustrates how logistical challenges involved in carrying out research far removed from the research site, political turmoil and changes in employment status can all necessitate changes in the planned research trajectory. He reflects on an emotional journey, including a particularly challenging viva experience, where he struggled to maintain ownership of his work as a result of distance, dislocation and attempting to heed

conflicting sources of advice. Importantly, Channon's story brings to light a less-studied phenomenon: the role of faculty feedback, beyond the supervisor, and the effect of such feedback on the research trajectories of doctoral students.

Chapter 6: Understanding the personal significance of academic choices (Maria Savva)

Savva maps the intrapersonal journey that paralleled her academic journey as an international doctoral student based in Cyprus. She describes changes in her research question and how she used the solitude often associated with the doctoral journey to create a space whereby she looked inwards to better understand her academic choices and her relationship to those choices. Through critical examination, she was able to gain a deeper understanding of the extrinsic and intrinsic factors behind her decision to pursue a doctorate and her selection of research topic. This, in turn, allowed her to harness the qualities of agency and resilience that are so critical to completing the doctoral journey. Finally, she also describes the factors she considered when, midway through the EdD, she decided to switch to a PhD. Her narrative reveals how the research process is not merely an intellectual exercise but is one that both shapes and is shaped by personal life experiences and future aspirations.

Chapter 7: Academic identity interrupted: reconciling issues of culture, discipline and profession (Rab Paterson)

Paterson looks at how a seemingly random series of jobs and educational choices came together and shaped his professional and academic trajectory. From the shipyards in Scotland to a university setting in Japan, his journey crosses cultures, disciplines and professions. He reflects on how important lessons learned as a tradesman, and later in the fields of language instruction and political science, challenged his ideas about his own professional identity and areas of expertise. Paterson also shares the effects of casualised employment conditions in Japan on both his decision to pursue a doctorate and his ability to see it through to completion.

Chapter 8: Into the fray: becoming an academic in my own right (Lynn P. Nygaard)

As an academic writing specialist, Nygaard examines how the transition from expert (helping researchers write and publish in academic

journals) to novice (becoming a researcher and writer in her own right) was a difficult one. She reflects on how the skills she needed as a professional – familiarity with different kinds of academic writing, disciplines and methods – made it more confusing for her to find her own voice as an academic. While much of the academic literature measures doctoral success in terms of how quickly students complete a programme, Nygaard argues that her choice to publish in academic journals and books alongside completing her doctoral thesis was both deliberate and designed to help her develop her own academic identity. Finally, she reflects on how both her budding academic identity and experience as a professional helped her overcome a personal crisis and complete the programme.

Chapter 9: The cultural encounters of women on the periphery (Safa Bukhatir and Susi Poli)

As women from non-English speaking countries and with different cultural backgrounds, Bukhatir and Poli reflect on what intercultural competence has meant for them in their doctoral journeys. Bukhatir shares her experiences as an Arab-Muslim woman in the UK, including how she manoeuvred herself around the various microaggressions she faced. Poli, an Italian woman who later temporarily relocated to England, describes her struggle in finding a balance between her native Italian culture and her adopted English culture. The two authors reflect on how their friendship served as an important social support mechanism and how the challenges they faced ultimately served to help them identify inconsistencies between theory and practice in both their personal and professional lives. They argue that intercultural interaction involves far more than language competence and requires critical reflection on bias, as well as a critical examination of the gendered landscape that exists across cultural contexts.

Chapter 10: The 'peripheral' student in academia: an analysis (Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard)

Pulling together the various themes that emerged within and across the narratives, this chapter explores four broad categories of challenges and opportunities:

1. Demands associated with being a 'peripheral' student and the function of social networks in developing a sense of belonging.
2. Issues related to supervisory and other faculty relationships.

3. Struggles related to identity, language and/or culture.
4. The role of expert, novice and 'impostor' labels in internalising a scholarly identity.

Each category is unpacked, while also examining the personal characteristics and institutional features that helped the authors along the journey to becoming scholars. After each section, implications for institutional policy and planning are also discussed.

1
Belonging and becoming in academia: a conceptual framework

Lynn P. Nygaard and Maria Savva

What does it mean to become a scholar? And at what point in the doctoral journey can we say that we have become one? Is it when someone hands us a degree and tells us that we can now call ourselves a doctor? Or is the process more internal – a gradual understanding of what it means to conduct research and belong to a scholarly community, culminating in a feeling that we are, indeed, scholars? While doctoral programmes might very well measure progress in terms of clear milestones such as being admitted to a programme, completing coursework and defending the thesis, the internal process of *feeling* like a scholar might take place along a very different path.

This is especially true for those who begin their journey at the periphery of higher education and in some very profound ways struggle to feel like they belong. In a university setting where most students are full-time undergraduates, part-time doctoral students stand apart. Likewise, mature students with a strong professional identity might feel particularly like outsiders in an institution dedicated to disciplinary knowledge and the creation of an academic identity. And while international students are not uncommon (especially at the doctoral level), most are able to take up residence in the country of their studies, whereas international distance students are at a distinct disadvantage as they struggle to integrate.

'I don't really think of myself as an academic, but more of a teacher', is a feeling many Doctor in Education (EdD) students have, not only when they start the programme, but sometimes also when they finish it. For many, the academic research (and publishing) aspect of a doctorate may feel like an ill-fitting costume they are forced to wear for a short period

before they can return to their more familiar practitioner environment. For others, the realisation that they have something to contribute to an academic discourse is transformative, and 'academic' becomes part of their identity, part of who they are, regardless of where they are situated and how they earn their living. In this book, we use the terms 'scholar', 'academic' and 'researcher' interchangeably. We are aware that they have different connotations – with 'scholar' perhaps more comfortable for those in the humanities, 'academic' for those in university settings and 'researcher' for some in the social sciences and those outside university settings. But for us, the important distinction lies not in the differences between these terms, but in the difference between someone who feels like a genuine participant in an academic discourse and someone who feels more comfortable identifying as a practitioner or professional.

Throughout this book, we look at the process of developing an academic identity through the lenses of *becoming* and *belonging* (Mantai, 2019; Archer, 2008). We see academic identity as developing over time, where there is a significant period of in-betweenness, of being no longer just a student, but not yet a scholar. This liminality – or 'status of being betwixt and between' (Deegan and Hill, 1991: 327) – is characterised by periods of confusion or ambiguity that often manifest in writing practices associated with the milestones of course completion and thesis writing. Techniques and study habits that worked well for the student in an undergraduate context may no longer work for conducting doctoral research (Williams, 2018). And what might have been praised in previous educational or professional contexts may now be criticised.

In an anthropological context, liminality is often used as a concept to describe the confusion a migrant encounters when entering a new country where customs and practices seem inexplicably different. In the context of the doctoral journey, liminality has often been framed as purely intellectual in nature. Trafford and Lesham (2009: 306), for example, describe liminality as when doctoral students feel 'intellectually confused, are frustrated and recognise that progress is impossible'. However, in the context of the international student, and the mature part-time student, a broader understanding of liminality is essential: students not only struggle with their thinking and writing, but also grapple with 'in-betweenness' related to their cultural and professional backgrounds. By looking at the development of academic identity in conjunction with the professional and personal challenges students face, we frame 'becoming' as a process that has both an individual and social dimension, one that ultimately involves finding out who we are and where we fit in (Mantai, 2019). This process inevitably

involves an inner journey – one that takes place alongside, and may well have an impact on, the academic journey.

This chapter provides the conceptual framing for how we situate the concept of 'becoming' a scholar as one that intersects with a developing sense of belonging. We explore how identity develops, and some of the key challenges facing different groups of students on the periphery of higher education. We describe how individual agency, including the use of different coping strategies, can mitigate some of these challenges. In this discussion, we draw primarily from literature on doctoral identity development, but also student retention and on trends affecting the development of doctoral education more broadly.

The complexity of scholarly identity

Who am I as a researcher? What is my expertise? Where is my disciplinary home? What is my epistemological perspective? Who, among those I read, are my people? Where is my tribe? All these questions involve more than solving an intellectual puzzle and are related to 'belonging' in a wider sense. A sense of belonging in academia, however, develops in tandem with a sense of belonging in other groups as well. Mantai (2019), for example, argues that doctoral candidates' feeling that they belong in personal, social and professional communities is critical to their 'becoming'.

Our point of departure is that a person's academic identity grows alongside and intersects with other aspects of identity, such as the beliefs we have about who we are and how we fit into the world. Even many of the beliefs we have about ourselves as individuals – including thoughts about how introverted or extroverted we are, how intelligent we are, or how creative we are – are shaped by our experiences of belonging to various groups, and how we are positioned (or position ourselves) within those groups (Hogg, 2006). All of us are members of more than one group at a time: our sex or gender, our age, our profession, our nationality, our religion and our social class, as well as many other group identifiers, all coexist and intersect. Some of these are groups we consciously choose to join, such as political affiliations. Other times we are associated with groups by default, such as gender, ethnicity or citizenship, either because of our outward appearance or other circumstances beyond our immediate control. And still other groups, such as 'medical doctor' and many other professional groups, we can only join when others formally confer membership (Hogg et al., 1995).

Although we are members of many groups at one time, the salience of specific aspects of our identity and its relationship to our sense of belonging is likely to depend on the larger context we find ourselves in (Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2015). Nationality is a good example; it might be something I never give much thought to until I find myself in a different country. The moment I arrive, I am aware of my foreignness, but it perhaps does not affect my sense of who I am. I am still me, but I'm me in a different place. After living in a foreign country for more than a holiday, however, 'foreigner' or 'immigrant' might become part of my identity. The feeling of being a foreigner comes partly through the social structures that place me in this group: the rules for visas, the different queues I must stand in at airports or my voting rights. But the feeling of 'foreignness' also comes from my encounters with the unwritten rules and informal customs of my new home (Hall, 1971), such as how to celebrate holidays, how to dress for work or social gatherings, or how to approach strangers to ask questions. And the more different I look from the others in my new place of residence – either by the way I dress, the colour of my skin and hair, or the way I behave – the more I will be reminded by others that I am, indeed, foreign. Some differences I experience might be inconsequential and amusing. I might call something an 'elevator' instead of a 'lift', or I might joke about the temperature of beer and the placement of commas. Other differences are less inconsequential. Proper etiquette where I come from might be directly insulting in another place. What I might see as a respectful handshake might be considered highly inappropriate contact in a different context, resulting in a situation where at least one of us will be deeply offended by the other.

All of us encounter different sets of customs and unwritten rules on an everyday basis (Hall, 1971). For students, changing a university means getting used to new library routines, discovering where to go to meet other students and learning how to find information. This is true even in the absence of moving to a different country. Changing a discipline can mean getting used to completely different ways of understanding the world and writing about it. The same can be true for changing geographical regions, even if the language is supposedly the same: British, American, Australian and Canadian English, for example, all have small, inexplicable differences that vex even the native speaker. The ways that our educational and professional backgrounds have shaped how we write, think and approach problem-solving can also be directly challenged by the expectations and unwritten rules of how research is conducted and written about in a doctoral programme (Koole and Stack, 2016; Ye and Edwards, 2017).

Many of these unwritten rules stem from underlying social hierarchies that place greater value on some behaviours, characteristics, activities or outputs over others. In the modern university context, academic publishing in high-ranking journals is perhaps the greatest source of prestige (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011). This means that research is considered a more prestigious activity than teaching, and being a teacher is a more prestigious position than being a student. The value placed on academic excellence as measured by journal publications means that the EdD and other professional doctorate programmes are sometimes considered to be less prestigious than the conventional PhD because they have less emphasis on pure research (Poole, 2015).

This hierarchy also means that students coming from a professional background might discover that the things that matter the most in their professional context might not matter at all at the university (and vice versa), which may prevent those with a strong practitioner background from identifying as scholars, researchers or writers (Lawrence, 2017). The extent to which academics feel like they move their way up the hierarchy can also depend on their race, class, gender and employment status (Archer, 2008). For example, the position of gender within the hierarchy of academia can allow women to identify as students, but struggle with embracing all the other aspects of identity that suggest 'expert' (Lawrence, 2017). Similarly, students of colour may face a series of overt and covert obstacles that white students do not (Jaeger and Haley, 2016).

All this means that developing a sense of belonging in academia can be harder for some students than others. Hardré et al. (2019), in a study that looked at factors that could predict whether students would complete a doctoral degree, point out two groups in particular as being vulnerable: (1) non-traditional students who return to the classroom after many years of establishing expertise outside of academia such as educators, social workers, business managers, engineers or health care professionals, who may feel that their professional expertise is treated as irrelevant, and they must start over as novices; and (2) those who come from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds, who have to adjust to both a new language and the unspoken cultural norms of a new country. In addition, academics who are the first in their family to attend a university may not appear different from other students on the outside, but along with navigating unfamiliar territory, they may also find little understanding or support from home about the challenges they face or the aspirations they hold (Gardner and Holley, 2011).

Embarking on a doctoral journey in the changing landscape of academia

Developing a sense of belonging depends not only on various aspects of a person's identity but also on the environment in which they find themselves. Students are not impervious to larger trends that affect the development of the university. For the authors in this volume, increased globalisation and changes in the perceived purpose of doctoral education were of special importance. In the first instance, globalisation and the accompanying emphasis on increased mobility in higher education led to the design of a programme that gave all of us the opportunity to pursue a terminal degree in one country while living in another. As a form of widening participation, this could arguably be viewed as a public good, representative of concepts traditionally associated with cosmopolitanism (Osler and Starkey, 2005) or international-mindedness (Savva and Stanfield, 2018). The fact that the candidates enrolled in the programme needed substantial financial resources to gain access, however, points to more practical objectives at the university level. Adding students to enrolment registers while increasing university income, particularly in the case of international students who pay higher tuition fees, likely served as a strong institutional incentive.

The location of the programme in the United Kingdom is also an important aspect of globalisation. Economic growth and improved job prospects in Anglophone countries (Sharma, 2013), the position of English as a global language (Lillis and Curry, 2010) and the link between the English language and access to elite, internationally recognised universities (Hayden and Thompson, 2013) have all created a type of 'global currency' that is overwhelmingly assigned to education provided in Anglophone countries. This hierarchy is probably most evident in ranking tables, where universities in the United States and the United Kingdom continue to dominate the highest tiers (Center for World University Rankings, 2020; Times Higher Education, 2020; QS Top Universities, 2020). Arguably, this added value does not necessarily translate into a better-quality education per se, but rather implies an increased exchange value which is perceived to be more favourable in international job markets. More importantly, this increased value has the power to draw students from all over the world, as the very existence of our cohort demonstrated.

The emphasis on English as a language of power and the prestige associated with Anglophone universities also creates another more

implicit hierarchy among students, where those with English as a first language become privileged over those who speak English as an additional language (Lillis and Curry, 2010). This privilege is related not only to the relative ease with which those who have English as a first language are able to decode the literature and write about research, but also to the assumptions made about ability – where those with English as an additional language are often made to feel less competent than their peers regardless of their actual qualifications and abilities.

A second trend in the academic landscape has to do with the changing purpose of a doctorate degree. Originally, the purpose of the doctorate was to grant a 'licence to teach' within a specific discipline. This purpose later shifted to the more Humboldtian idea of training researchers, and currently there is a new shift towards providing education to meet relevant needs in society, as evidenced by the current demand for auditing, accountability and quality assurance (Poole, 2015; Wellington, 2013). This ongoing shift reflects a growing debate about whether universities should focus on producing scholars who can carry out discipline-based academic research or emphasise producing professionals who can carry their expertise directly to the job market.

The development of professional doctorates, such as the EdD, is symptomatic of this debate and represents a response to a common criticism from employers that traditional doctoral students lacked applied subject knowledge, practical experience and the overall skills necessary in the workplace (Taylor, 2008; Owen, 2011). Professional doctorates were introduced in the UK in the 1990s, and by 2009 there were 38 EdD programmes nationwide (Hawkes and Taylor, 2016). The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2014; 30) states that 'professional doctorates aim to develop an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge'. According to this aim, students enrolled in a professional doctorate should receive training in academic research relevant to their profession, thereby deepening their sense of professionalism and augmenting their practice. But because professional doctorate programmes are situated within a university, and as such are beholden to how the university conceptualises and evaluates education, both students and faculty must navigate this tension (Scott et al., 2004).

This tension plays out in the ways doctoral programmes combine taught modules and independent research, as well as the formats of student deliverables. Conventional PhD programmes have traditionally focused almost exclusively on independent research, with few if any taught modules. In contrast, professional doctorates have emphasised

taught courses, a shorter thesis and perhaps a portfolio approach to evaluation (Scott et al., 2004). These differences are not cosmetic but rather related to the intended purpose of the outputs – whether they should be focused on honing skills that can be transferred to the workplace or represent disciplinary knowledge and skills related to the production of academic research.

The push for increased relevance in doctoral programmes creates an interesting paradox. Whereas experienced professionals represent the 'ideal' because they have direct connections in their respective professional fields, these same qualities can serve to marginalise working professionals with respect to other students. This was the case for our cohort as well. Just as our 'internationalness' set us apart from traditional doctoral students, so too did our close ties with the professional field, making it harder for many of us to fully identify with and embrace a scholarly identity.

Learning to be a researcher

Regardless of how much emphasis is put on ties to the professions and social relevance in general, learning how to conduct research within a particular discipline is still a key aspect of doctoral training (Mantai, 2017). Learning to conduct research involves defining a problem, learning how to approach it methodologically, figuring out what literature to read, learning how to analyse data and think critically, and putting together an academic argument in writing. Moreover, this takes place within a certain academic department, where expectations are often implicit and poorly communicated (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

For EdD students returning to higher education after spending time in the workplace (and with active ties to their profession), something as simple as defining the research problem may be difficult because of the different way that problems are defined and approached in the workplace setting compared to academia. Whereas the aim of research in a professional setting has a practical orientation, the aim of disciplinary-based research is to contribute to an academic discourse. Zambo et al. (2015: 234) observe that EdD students in particular often have 'one foot in the world of practice and another in the world of academe', where the academic world requires them 'to change their perspectives from normative to analytical, personal to intellectual, particular to universal, and experiential to theoretical'. These challenges suggest that the tension between seeing doctoral education as training scholars within a discipline versus

preparing professionals for a workplace outside academia can be problematic in how students are expected to approach their studies.

Moreover, among the different kinds of professional doctorate programmes, the EdD stands out for attracting not only older, well-established professionals who are returning to higher education after a long absence, but also a large number of students who have a background in different disciplines (Koole and Stack, 2016; Scott et al., 2004). For many EdD students, this means that when they return to the university to pursue a doctorate in education, they may not have a strong foundation in the discipline of education from which to draw (Scott et al., 2004). Students moving from one discipline to another, or from a workplace environment to an academic setting, may find their assumptions or previous knowledge challenged by their new setting – which may value a different kind of truth claim, supported by different kinds of knowledge or evidence, and founded on a different kind of logic.

Conducting doctoral research also involves developing a sensitivity to ethics. While most practising professionals are familiar with the ethics governing their profession, ethics related to research might introduce some new dilemmas that might not only be unfamiliar to the EdD student, but also on occasion seem to challenge some of the ethical norms of their profession (for example, obligations to report on or keep confidential various conditions). Even within a pure academic context, ethical considerations governing the carrying out and writing of research are seldom straightforward, and strict adherence to ethical principles at one level might threaten the adherence to ethical principles on another. For example, conducting insider research, or research on easily identified individuals, might force the researcher to make an uncomfortable choice between protecting the anonymity of the informants or providing adequate transparency about methodology to the reader. International students, particularly those who reside in a country other than where they either conduct their research or will have it evaluated, might face what appear to be conflicting, or at least different, sets of expectations for ethics – such as the degree to which ethical review is a formal or informal process, or has an approval or advisory function. Since ethical guidelines are normally developed within a specific setting – both cultural and disciplinary – this might lead to tensions for researchers who are conducting research outside that context (Killawi et al., 2014). For example, written informed consent that is intended to protect informants may be problematic in a context where the signing of such a document is potentially regarded as proof of collusion with parties from a foreign state, thus putting informants at risk.

Ultimately, learning to be a researcher also comes down to learning to write academically. Academic writing involves developing an appropriate voice for the discipline and method being used – for example, using more 'author absent' language in the natural sciences and quantitative social sciences, while developing a unique authorial voice in the humanities and qualitative social sciences (Geetz, 1988; Gnutzmann and Rabe, 2014). It also means understanding how arguments are developed and what constitutes evidence in the field in which the student is writing. While all students struggle with finding their academic voice, EdD students might face the additional obstacle of first having developed a strong professional voice, and may struggle with feelings of frustration when the style of writing that is successful in their practice becomes criticised in an academic context.

Furthermore, because writing a doctoral thesis is perhaps the most ambitious writing project students have ever undertaken in terms of both length and depth, they will also have to learn how to develop good writing habits – which might be particularly challenging for part-time EdD students who maintain a full-time job alongside their studies and may have limited time to write. Moreover, like any other doctoral students, they may experience difficulties in both getting started and letting go of their work (Chapman, 2017). Difficulties in accepting 'good enough' at the same time as learning what constitutes 'excellence' may increase performance anxiety and unhealthy perfectionism (Ball, 2012; Leisyte, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). Students who are working in a second language may experience increased feelings of impostor syndrome and insecurities about their writing ability, despite overall language competence (Nygaard, 2019).

Supervision and other support

Given the complexity and ambiguity of the research process, the role of the supervisor becomes essential in helping students navigate unfamiliar territory. It stands to reason that the more unfamiliar the territory, and the more the student struggles with a sense of belonging, the more important this support becomes. This is just as true for EdD students as it is for any other group of students, but part-time international EdD students might struggle with issues of physical distance creating additional barriers to communication. Not surprisingly, supervisor supportiveness has been identified as an important predictor of doctoral student satisfaction and success (Dericks et al., 2019; Nesterowicz et al., 2019;

Sverdlik et al., 2018). Components that establish supportiveness include the quality of supervisory engagement (Nesterowicz et al., 2019), the use of structure in providing scaffolded feedback (Kumar and Johnson, 2019; Roberts and Bandlow, 2018) and the ability to point students to relevant resources (Roberts and Bandlow, 2018). The setting of boundaries has also been identified as a practice that holds students accountable and encourages greater independence (Roberts and Bandlow, 2018).

Defining appropriate levels of supportiveness, however, is largely dependent on matching student needs with particular supervisory styles (Gurr, 2001; Dericks et al., 2019). A student who is highly dependent on structured support may feel neglected when paired with a supervisor who takes a 'hands-off' approach (Gurr, 2001). Likewise, a student who is highly autonomous may report similar dissatisfaction when paired with a supervisor who is too 'hands on'. Beyond style preferences, the actual needs of students can also vary. Some students need more help with navigating an unfamiliar university and understanding the formalities, while others might need more help in finding appropriate literature, learning to write for an academic audience or learning the unwritten rules of a new discipline. Matching student needs with supervisor styles can become especially challenging when the students come from different cultural backgrounds or possess a substantial amount of professional expertise; in both these contexts, supervisor strategies that work well with most students may be misinterpreted and thus fall short.

At the centre of the student–supervisor relationship is the student's sense of ownership over their own work. Although the supervisor is meant to provide guidance, it is the student who is ultimately responsible for the final product. The issue of ownership can become problematic, however, when the supervisor's expectations or vision prove different from that of the student. Such moments often call for careful negotiation between the student and supervisor, with the ownership of the research always belonging first and foremost to the student (Wisker et al., 2010). In this way, the setting of boundaries is not something that is limited to supervisors (Roberts and Bandlow, 2018), but is also a tool that is accessible to doctoral students. In other words, part of establishing an identity as an academic also involves knowing what advice to follow, what advice to reject, and how to seek help from alternative sources when the supervisor alone is insufficient.

Indeed, there is little reason to expect that a supervisor can meet all the learning needs of students regardless of whether they are traditional or non-traditional (Sweitzer, 2009). This is perhaps especially true when the students reside outside the country of the educational institution.

Required courses and supervisory sessions are far from the only resources students have. As pointed out by Mantai (2017: 673), scholarly development 'takes place in multiple processes, which are diverse in nature, and usually happen in traditional and non-traditional sites of learning'. Students learn by struggling on their own, by interacting with other students, by taking additional courses offered at the university (perhaps by the library or a skills centre), by expanding their reading beyond that which is specified in the curriculum and by drawing on their previous experiences – either from the workplace or other educational contexts.

Two other important sources of support are financial and social (see, for example, Baltrinic et al., 2013). In a study of 3,092 doctoral students across disciplines, Van der Haert et al. (2014) found that students with no financial support showed the highest withdrawal rate, contrasting with students with research fellowships who showed the lowest withdrawal rate. This remained consistent even when controlling for the ability of the students. Other research has also confirmed that financial concerns related to continued employment and the ability to meet financial obligations were a source of significant pressure (Cornwall et al., 2019; Hockey, 1994). While financial support often comes in the form of grants or fellowships for many doctoral students, these are likely to be far more difficult to acquire for part-time students.

Many part-time students support themselves through their own participation in the workplace, which means that their continued enrolment can be dependent on the security of their jobs (and if they are working in the casualised work environment of higher education, their jobs may be very insecure indeed). At the same time that they are financing their education through full-time work, part-time students juggle competing work demands that often require adherence to strict deadlines. Since doctoral school deadlines are more flexible, these typically take a lower priority (Morrison-Saunders et al., 2010). This, too, can contribute to extended completion timelines and/or increased attrition rates.

Social support is another source that needs to be considered. The opportunities doctoral students have to interact with others help to shape the beliefs they hold about themselves, while also combating feelings of isolation that have been known to contribute to doctoral student attrition rates (Ali and Kohun, 2006; Jaraim and Kahl, 2012; Jones and Kim, 2013). The concept of having 'critical friends' is discussed in the work of Hawkes and Taylor (2016) who note that friends in doctoral cohorts may connect with each other to share similar research interests. For international students, such friendships may have less to do with similar research areas and more to do with drawing on psychological support or

even practical forms of support, such as receiving feedback on writing. For example, Morrison-Saunders et al. (2010) found that writing, rewriting and the repetitive nature of ongoing literature searches contributed to negative emotions among doctoral students. It is likely that these types of challenges are even more pronounced for international students, particularly for those for whom English is an additional language.

Social support, therefore, can take a multiplicity of forms and be instrumental in managing the highs and lows that are a normal part of the doctoral process. Morrison-Saunders et al. (2010) further note that doctoral students experience a wide range of emotions including anxiety, boredom, fear, frustration, loneliness, elation and satisfaction. In group feedback they found that students often expressed relief that others experience the same emotions. This speaks to the importance of feeling an affinity with others and how these connections can build a sense of belonging (Mantai, 2019). A sense of belonging can then, in turn, help to combat feelings of loneliness that are so commonly reported among doctoral students (Ali and Kohun, 2006; Jaraim and Kahl, 2012; Jones and Kim, 2013; Lahenius, 2012; Morrison-Saunders et al., 2010).

Making choices and forging a path

The different impressions from the university, the classroom, supervisors, the student cohort, the workplace and others can, and do, often create a bewildering cacophony of input. Who should I listen to? How is it possible to make sense out of all these sometimes conflicting messages? The individual agency involved in making sense out of the senseless, of knowing what voices to listen to, is strongly related to building an identity as a scholar – regardless of context (Mantai, 2019). And importantly, agency is linked with being able to successfully complete a doctoral programme (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Developing agency means learning to successfully negotiate conflicting sets of expectations (see, for instance, Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2015). What worked for a student in a previous context, perhaps in a different discipline or country, may not work anymore. Study habits that worked with a previous supervisor and degree programme may not be relevant in a new setting (Ye and Edwards, 2017). Students may also have to learn to navigate the stress that comes from realising that a particular aspect of their identity makes them feel somehow different from those around them, or even prevents them from pursuing a desired course of action.

The identity work that we do in response to such challenges – that is, the work we do to establish, confirm, reject or process different aspects of identity – depends on how we understand our own agency, our ability to manoeuvre in a given context and our ability to cope and adapt. One of the ways people express agency is how they outwardly present themselves in an effort to associate or distance themselves from various aspects of their identity (Hall and Burns, 2009). Again, to return to the example of being a foreigner, I have some degree of choice about how I embrace or reject my foreignness: I can choose to learn the new language and speak it diligently, even at home. I can try to learn the humour, embrace the cuisine and pick up on all the other invisible social cues. And if I look the part, I might even 'pass': others might no longer treat me like I am foreign. At this point, I may no longer feel foreign, and 'foreigner' may no longer feel like a salient aspect of my identity.

Alternatively, I can resist learning a new language, embracing a new cuisine and learning social customs that seem strange to me. I can emphasise my foreignness by choosing to dress differently. Most likely, I will take some sort of middle road – adopting some new customs, resisting others, keeping some things, abandoning others. And my strategy might change over time. I might begin by embracing change enthusiastically only to become more sceptical with age, or vice versa. My experiences might also change other beliefs I have about myself. After years of struggling to understand those around me, I might no longer think of myself as intelligent and a good communicator; or, after distancing myself from my working class background in my former place of residence and embracing opportunities in a new country, I might think of myself as successful and entrepreneurial.

Identity is not fixed, but fluid, responding both to circumstance and the choices made by individuals (Hall and Burns, 2009). Identity development comprises a complex set of interactions between the social groups to which individuals belong, their beliefs about themselves that come about through experience, the various contexts in which they operate, the position they hold within those contexts, and the agency they exercise in responding to these pressures. And there is no guarantee that two doctoral students – even with the same background and facing the same challenges – will make the same choices (for instance, see Ye and Edwards, 2017). Agency can mean choosing to adapt to expectations or taking initiative to challenge expectations – such as actively engaging in self-identification or advocacy. Examples might include taking on more work than is required in order to learn, rejecting the title of 'doctoral student' in favour of 'doctoral researcher' or challenging ideas about who should be

included in the canon of theoretical literature (Trahar, 2011). Becoming a scholar is thus not simply a question of taking some courses and writing a thesis. It is about entering a situation that challenges various aspects of who we already are so that we emerge at the other end in some way fundamentally changed – and belonging to a new community.

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2
A tale of two languages: first-language attrition and second-language immersion

Barbora Necas and Susi Poli

Linguistic competence is about more than an ability to communicate as a native or non-native speaker. It is also about identity – including thoughts about where we come from, where we belong and what we feel we have access to. But most importantly, perhaps, it is about what we would like to share. It is the idea of sharing that brought us together to form this chapter, where we reflect on how the process of identity reconstruction was, for both of us, inextricably linked to language. In this chapter, Barbora, a native English speaker who returns to the UK after nearly 30 years of living in Italy, shares her unexpected struggles with first-language attrition (Schmid, 2019; Schmid et al., 2004) and the ensuing feelings of imposter syndrome (Breeze, 2018). Susi, a native Italian speaker who temporarily relocates to England, describes what it was like to immerse herself in the English language and culture. She explores how she came to associate speaking with her professional self and writing with her scholarly self, before eventually coming to terms with her identity as a blended professional (Whitchurch, 2009). Both experiences involved internal struggles that resulted in an altered sense of self for Barbora and a mid-life reassessment for Susi.

As co-authors we bring different perspectives to this chapter. Although both of us were connected with Italy throughout a good part of our doctoral journey, our personal heritage was very different. One of us, Barbora, migrated to the United Kingdom as a young child from Czechoslovakia and became British by naturalisation. Barbora was raised in England and after completing her higher education, moved to Italy

where she learned Italian and worked as an English language teacher at Bologna University. In contrast, Susi was a native-born Italian who was raised in Italy and completed her schooling there. After completing her degree, Susi worked and developed her professional identity also at Bologna University as a higher education manager.

Despite working at the same university, the two of us did not meet in Italy. Instead, it was not until the shared locus as international doctoral students in London that our parallel life stories crossed to form a shared space. As two Italian speakers in the context of higher education in England, it seemed natural that the two of us should co-author a chapter on the theme of linguistic and professional identities. We both shared the first-hand experience associated with carrying the label of a 'non-native speaker' and the ways in which knowledge of another language, more broadly, can serve as both a resource but also a hidden disability. From our very first encounter with our international colleagues in London to the constant analysis of our own researcher reflexivity we were, without realising it, always selecting 'stories' that gave purpose to the transformative process of redefining our identities both as doctoral students and as professionals. Language – spoken, written, pragmatic and cultural – played a central role. It was both symbolic of the new place we wanted to own and a tool to be mastered. And it was, in fact, the process of mastering a language (and all that comes with it) which ultimately led us to explore and identify our boundaries.

Writing on linguistic and professional identities together (Barbora)

In writing this chapter we made a conscious choice to avoid straightforward biographies as 'monologic teller-led stories' (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2011: 86) and to reflect instead through conversation, seeing the stories we each told as 'interactional achievements' (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2011: 86), a process we hoped would produce insights into how we experienced linguistic identities. In this way, this chapter was the product, but our narrative was a process. This was also in line with the overarching theme of identity and, more specifically, linguistic identity, as one being grounded in interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Our linguistic identities were and are, therefore, not a fixed attribute but a conversation that emerges through interaction on the theme of our professional identities.

The challenge we faced, though, was how to identify what had remained constant in our respective senses of self and what had changed during our experiences as doctoral students. We decided to schedule a time where we could engage in conversation and made arrangements to record the conversation in order to better assist our reflection process. We avoided preparing ourselves in any way for our meeting. Our aim was to interact with rather than 'undergo' the other's presentation of themselves. I had no doubt that Susi and I would meet outside our respective professional environments; we would talk in the kitchen warming our hands while clasping mugs of hot tea. For me, the kitchen table signified social interaction and had in fact very little to do with food. Susi, however, was quite impervious to what I had considered as given and simply gave me a choice of her office or my office. This was a cold and estranging start to our chapter for me.

No more was said until we came to reflection after our conversation. It was Susi who remembered the question of choosing the venue for our conversation. Later we both realised how this, too, represented the cultural indexicality of language (Braun, 2001), a term that is used to describe how words carry connotations across different cultures, both generational and community. For Susi, the office was regarded as a safe space, far enough to distance her from the family burdens which impact on reflective practice and thereby positioning the professional sphere as a freedom form. In contrast, I couldn't – and indeed didn't – separate myself from family burdens. My professional sphere was also not a freedom form. Unlike Susi, I had been feeling professionally 'ceilinged' for some time in my professional role as an English language teacher – with my work environment offering little in the form of progression or recognition for language teaching professionals. At the same time, my linguistic identity as a native English speaker had also remained static. It was bound by a stifling reflexivity in which roles and environments fused into one entity. Our difference in perspective, we later found, was embedded within our individual stories.

Susi's story: leaving home behind

Feelings of isolation, anxiety and identity confusion are commonly reported among doctoral students (Ali et al., 2007; Levecque et al., 2017). Similar feelings have been associated with the linguistic and cultural adaptation of those who leave home to settle in a new overseas

environment (Chapman et al., 2014; Savva, 2013, 2017; Ward et al., 2005). As an Italian woman studying in an English university, I was no exception to these difficulties. Moreover, as a more mature doctoral student, I struggled to align a firmly rooted professional identity as a higher education professional and research manager with a newly evolving identity as a scholar. In this section I provide a brief autobiographical context followed by a reflection on how the linguistic and cultural challenges I faced as an international doctoral student intersected and influenced the (re)formation of my professional and scholarly identities. I explore this intersectionality through the unique context of academic literacy and, in particular, how I came to associate the spoken language with the functional professional sphere and the written language with the deeper academic sphere.

My decision to enrol in a doctoral programme came after 15 years of work in a variety of professional roles at the University of Bologna in Italy, where I held secure and safe employment in what was considered to be a coveted research management position. By all accounts there was no material need for me to pursue any major life changes. Leaving the perceived-to-be 'safe' space at my home university to take on the challenge of a professional doctorate, therefore, was somewhat of a diversion from my life's otherwise predictable path. Of course, being a professional who suddenly decides to undertake doctoral research is not an uncommon phenomenon in and of itself. The vast majority of contemporary doctoral students enter programmes after some work experience, and many pursue their studies part-time while continuing full-time work (Offerman, 2011). What is less common, however, was my choice to move my academic studies to a different country much later in life – and all the physical, social and emotional challenges that such a move entailed (Poli, 2017).

Although the particular doctoral programme I chose was designed for students who could maintain their residence overseas, I decided to take a sabbatical from work and relocated my family to England shortly after the programme commenced. This decision was incited by the realisation that, as a non-native English speaker, academic writing in English would require a significant time commitment and my full dedication. The need for additional space and time among those who speak English as an additional language is evidenced in research that points to the challenges international students face in adjusting to academic or other learning environments (Hyland and Hyland, 2019; Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011). Processes involved in academic writing often require additional feedback, successive drafts and heightened effort for those who continue

to think and process in a different language (Hyland and Hyland, 2019; Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011). This disadvantage extends to academic speaking, such as conference presentations, which can augment feelings of anxiety among those who are non-native speakers of English (Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011). Besides giving myself the time needed to focus on my studies, the move was an attempt to immerse myself in the English language and culture. I believed that this would help me to build linguistic momentum and allow me to become more comfortable with both spoken and written forms of English.

As an expert in the field of higher education and particularly in research management, I had much to say about the sector but did not yet have the capability to express myself fully and freely in English. This feeling is vividly summarised by Steve Carell when he writes 'Sometimes I'll start a sentence, and I don't even know where it's going. I just hope to find it along the way' (quoted from Kreuz and Roberts, 2019: 60). Nor was I able to escape from the fear of being misunderstood or even judged negatively by native English speakers. These challenges inevitably affected my self-confidence. I became increasingly self-conscious when interacting with others as I struggled to build my intercultural competence in a new environment. This competence involved the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes (Byram, 1997, 2009) well beyond the context of English culture. It came to include the idiosyncrasies of academic culture as well, while at the same time navigating between the clashes of cultures and roles that I experienced professionally and personally (Poli, 2017).

The difficulties associated with expressing myself freely inevitably led to frustration, chronic feelings of loneliness and confusion. These symptoms aligned very closely with the phenomenon of culture shock. Ward et al. (2005) identify symptoms of culture shock as:

- a strain engendered by attempts to continually adjust;
- a sense of loss regarding friends, family, home or professional status;
- anxiety about being rejected by members of a new culture; and
- confusion about role expectations and self-identity, as well as feelings of impotence surrounding one's inability to cope with the new culture.

Similar symptoms have also been reported among overseas staff working in international schools (Savva, 2013, 2017) and offshore branch campuses in higher education (Chapman et al., 2014; Healey, 2016). Despite representing their flagship universities abroad, faculty have reported feeling disconnected from institutions back home as they struggle to integrate in the host cultures they are immersed in (Chapman

et al., 2014; Healey, 2016). These feelings resonated strongly in my overseas life in England, where I felt both disconnected from my home institution back in Italy, yet not fully integrated in my adopted institution in England.

Language was only one of the challenges I faced. The more conservative attitudes and behaviours which were specific to both the English and academic cultural landscape were another set of challenges I grappled with. This was not an easy task given my Italian background, where hand gestures and emotions remained an integral part of conversation and communication. I found myself putting a great deal of effort into better controlling my hand gestures and emotions as a way of raising my level of self-confidence. I believed this external adjustment would allow me to reconstruct and further develop the merging of my professional and scholarly identities. This was markedly different from Barbora, who appeared to be at ease in multicultural contexts and did not report any associated stress. Her only worry seemed to be the slow pace of her 'living' English. In the end, I felt that she demonstrated much more familiarity in dealing with the overarching plurality of cultures surrounding us.

In fact, it was the deep understanding of my profession that ultimately served as my anchor during this chaotic time, helping me to avoid a deeper personal crisis. My firmly rooted professional identity provided a sense of safety in the plurality of cultures I came to struggle with while in the UK. A turning point in my journey, however, came nearly three years into the doctoral programme shortly after my upgrade interview. The upgrade interview was important because it involved a faculty review of my work up until that point and provided official acknowledgement that my work was of good enough quality to proceed to the final research stage. It was around this time that I felt my identity make a decisive shift. Perhaps it was the validation of the upgrade interview, in combination with the preliminary research I had successfully completed up to that point, that increased my confidence. I noticed that I was asked more frequently to share my expertise in the academic community and, as a result, found myself becoming more comfortable in internalising its habits and even its academic language. The sharing of my expertise came to include presentations at the Society for Research into Higher Education and the German Society for Research in Higher Education, to name just two. These opportunities were the result of both my active involvement in the academy while in London and the professional networks I had built over the years in Bologna. Consequently, I found myself increasingly leaving

behind my professional self and moving more in the direction of the academic sphere.

This disassociation from my professional identity created some initial confusion, prompting a critical incident (Cunningham, 2008) whereby I felt a strange tension associated with simultaneously belonging (yet not belonging completely) to both the professional and academic spheres. The competing demands to change and to remain the same were peculiar to me as I dealt with elements of both constancy and change (Bamberg, 2011). Eventually, I freed myself of the need to compartmentalise the two identities and came to identify instead as what Whitchurch (2009) describes as a 'blended professional', an individual with identities drawn from both professional and academic domains. This new hybrid identification allowed me to develop my expertise as an academic by building on my professional expertise. It was meant to both affirm my pride in belonging to the professional community and to complement it with the academic path of my doctoral degree. The professional side of me provided 'food for thought' while the academic side handled and organised the data, produced critical thinking and essentially turned my thoughts into discourses of action with actual effects in the workplace (Archer, 2003). Thus, this practice of shifting from one to the other domain, the professional and the academic, became the common ground for me to shuffle on.

The change in how I viewed my career, however, cannot be detached from a sort of midlife crisis or a 'reassessment'. Shortly after my upgrade, I also felt a need to take on a much slower pace and possibly take some time to think. Thus, the doctorate became a further space for my professional development, far apart from the professional office at the home university. As I reconciled my professional and scholarly identities, I continued to face linguistic challenges – with academic language imposing itself and becoming a leading plot in my new life overseas. Becoming adept in academic language and, particularly in research writing, was important both as a determining factor in degree completion (Sala-Bubaré et al., 2018) and as a gateway into the academic research community (Flowerdew, 2008; Inouye and McAlpine, 2019).

It became apparent early on that written products were the most valued outputs in academia (Paré, 2017). Research writing, therefore, would become an important part of gaining group membership into the academic community and the overall socialisation process in doctoral study (Flowerdew, 2008; Inouye and McAlpine, 2019; Sala-Bubaré et al., 2018). An additional level of adaptability for me had to do with my interaction as a research manager. Research writing was meant to engage not

only academic peers, but also professional practitioners. As a result, I had to remain sensitive and flexible around others' time during collaborative research (Costley et al., 2010). The deliberately slower pace that I had imposed on myself, therefore, was also intended to provide me with the necessary time and space to develop my research writing skills as I was dealing with research with different peer groups.

Since value in academia seemed very much attached to written work, I quickly came to associate writing with the academic world and speaking with the professional world. In my conversations with Barbora, the tension between speaking and writing in the process of identity formation unmistakably surfaced. Speaking was more often associated with the professional dimension, the importance of communication and appearance being at its core. In contrast, writing represented the academic sphere, the content beyond the frame of appearance. Likewise, I often associated speaking with my life in Witney (the town I had settled into while in England) and writing with my academic life in London. Moreover, speaking was connected to my sphere of emotions and, in my view, the relationship between the two needed to be mitigated. I felt that English should become the vehicle through which to express my emotions, both in speaking and in writing.

The need for a safe space was not easy to express in the conversation with Barbora, and so it did not come up straight away, since she did not express any desire to have or to find such a space. Perhaps her kitchen or my office, the physical venues that both of us had chosen as favourite spaces of interaction with others, could be regarded as safe or even neutral spaces to pursue self-fulfilment or just as self-retreats. Thus, my hesitation to express this need to claim my own space may have been associated with the fear of being judged by her (as she was a native English speaker), a fear that so often non-native speakers have even regarding issues that extend beyond the mere sphere of language (Ward et al., 2005). My own tendency was, once more, to compartmentalise, and as such I disassociated my work life from my personal life. It is for this reason that I also likely preferred meeting in the office over meeting at the kitchen table.

Subsequently, in dealing with issues of self-confidence I could not easily detach myself from the core of my thesis, which also looked for an understanding of how other women, in leadership posts in higher education management, had turned obstacles into opportunities in their careers and built up their own levels of self-confidence (Poli, 2018). In many ways, I saw myself in these women's constructions and found myself moving back and forth between my own story and their stories. My

thesis, therefore, became an important tool of self-reflection and helped me unlock what affected me most, the struggle between the native and acquired aspects of my professional, scholarly and linguistic identities. While I embraced my blended identity (Whitchurch, 2009) as both a professional and scholar, I could not say the same for my linguistic identity. Instead, I made a conscious effort to handle my emotions more rationally and I promised myself that this should also be embedded in both my writing and in speaking. Again, only in English and with emotions kept under wraps.

Barbora's story: returning 'home'

As a native user of English, I should have been able to 'just do it'. Not only was English my first language, I was also qualified to teach English to speakers of other languages and had nearly 30 years of experience. I was an examiner for language testing, I taught university students and had an MA in Education in Applied Linguistics, where I focused on codeswitching and the dialogic construction of meaning. As a trilingual speaker, codeswitching was of special interest to me because it explored the process of alternating between two or more languages in a single conversation (Dewaele and Wei, 2014; Myers-Scotton, 1995). Dialogic construction also resonated with me because of its focus on language and its relationship to identity work (Beech, 2008). I arrived in the programme, therefore, with a strong theoretical foundation in language development and years of teaching English language discourse. And yet I was not prepared to create or use it myself.

During the early years of the course in London, I found solace in being able to have my own internal dialogue in a language, English, which was not dislocated from the environment I grew up in, the UK. This felt very different from the duality I had lived up until then in Italy. There my internal dialogue, my inner linguistic English self, was detached from my external verbal Italian linguistic self. It was difficult to transit between the two. The initial sense of peace I felt in London, however, was short-lived. As the coursework progressed, I became increasingly uncomfortable in my use of the English language both in its spoken and written forms.

Creed and Scully (2000) write that there is a performance-based element to identity work. This premise became problematic for me as I began to question whether my 'performance' would be sufficient in the programme. My discomfort became so acute that I found myself avoiding social events and implementing strategies to avoid speaking during group

work. Meetings with my supervisor, in particular, caused enormous distress. I simply could not put words to my thoughts. The syntax was gone and so were the words which I thought I knew. I felt as if English had become a foreign language to me and I had suddenly lost all of the first-language compensatory strategies which I had relied upon up until then to get by.

I realised later that my English had not evolved since I had left the UK nearly 30 years earlier. I was, in English, the person I had been 30 years before. And so, despite teaching English on a daily basis in my professional role, it was no longer a language I engaged with outside the classroom. This phenomenon, I later discovered, was a form of first-language attrition, a process whereby proficiency in the first language is subsequently lost (Schmid et al., 2004). Schmid (2019) compares the process of language attrition to a virus that enters a computer, making minute changes to the underlying program and causing various malfunctions. It is commonly reported among multilinguals, who are more likely to experience greater communicative anxiety in their first language during stressful situations (Dewaele, 2007), something that I was experiencing first-hand. Other research on first-language attrition highlights how languages learned later in life can reshape the first language in profound and unexpected ways (Schmid et al., 2004; Schmid, 2019). Indeed, I felt that my extensive use of Italian over the years had, in fact, reshaped my use of English in ways that I had not noticed until I began my studies in London.

Since language is such an important part of identity development (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008), my struggle with the English language involved much more than a communication problem: It became an identity problem that threatened my sense of belonging. Pao et al. (1997) note that for individuals who have multiple heritages, a native-like dominance in both languages is crucial to feeling a sense of belonging. I felt as if I had lost my native speaker identity somewhere in the past, but I had nothing to replace it with. The dialogic process of identity formation had not been allowed to transit between permanence and change, between uniqueness and sameness, between agency and submission (Bamberg, 2011). I felt that I could not interact fluently in any language.

Beyond my personal identity, my professional identity as an English language teacher was also threatened. My work in Italy was based, in part, on my qualifications as a *native* English speaker. This classification provided me with a type of linguistic prestige that is often associated with educational elitism in what has become a highly commodified global market in English language instruction (Relaño-Pastor and Fernández-Barrera, 2019). My self-esteem suffered and I began to develop symptoms

of imposter syndrome, the feeling that I did not belong and that I was somehow fraudulent in representing myself (Breeze, 2018). It was a feeling both of not having agency over my world and of the world not offering recognition of my linguistic heritage and skills. I felt nothingness. The process of writing did not prove any easier. Scholarly writing involved changes in a voice, style and content that I was not prepared for. I wondered how I would be able to gain membership into the academic community through research writing (Inouye and McAlpine, 2019; Flowerdew, 2008) at a time when I was experiencing so much crisis with my linguistic identity.

My linguistic challenges were further compounded by some personal challenges I was facing at the time. My entry into the programme coincided with a vulnerable time in my marriage, where I had begun to reach a tipping point. A few years into the programme I found myself in the midst of a separation whereby I had to often provide lengthy and meticulous reports in Italian. This further disenabled my English, creating a situation whereby the writing demands associated with my doctoral work in English were competing with very pressing writing demands in Italian. The emotional stress, which also resulted from an inability to progress, became so acute that, at one point, my supervisor sent me to the student well-being officer to see if it was actually a problem associated with special educational needs. The loss of my linguistic identity combined with the personal hardships I was facing at the time quickly began to erode my sense of self, and I found myself becoming increasingly silent.

From the very first time we met in London and for the first few years of the doctoral programme, Susi and I spoke exclusively in English. There was no codeswitching in the talk between Susi and me. These artificially imposed boundaries made me feel increasingly uncomfortable, perhaps because codeswitching often serves as an implicit form of social approval (Myers-Scotton, 1995), a way of displaying kinship between two speakers engaged in dialogue. At a time when I felt my sense of self eroding, the absence of this kinship in our conversations felt like an outright rejection. Susi's narrative frequently returned to her concerted efforts to control her emotions and, by doing so (by refusing my gambits in Italian), she unknowingly frustrated my attempts at emotional connection.

Dewaele and Wei (2014) note that attitudes towards codeswitching are often linked to personality, language learning history and current linguistic practices. Their research found that participants who grew up in a bilingual family and lived or worked in ethnically diverse environments had a significantly more positive attitude towards the act of codeswitching. This profile was very much reflective of my own life experiences. I felt very much at ease in multicultural contexts, and this

was probably largely due to my background. I arrived in the UK at an early age and I had grown up juggling my 'English self' outside the home at school with my 'Czech self' inside the home with my family. I had been socialised into moving between and across cultural conventions rather than maintaining a divide between them. In contrast, MacSwan (2016) observes that some attitudes towards codeswitching involve the view that it is a sign of linguistic incompetence or what has been referred to as 'lazy speech'. I assumed that Susi subscribed to this latter view.

In our conversation, Susi spoke about the loneliness of the doctoral programme. Yet I wondered how much of her loneliness was associated with her conscious determination to take on an English persona different from her Italian persona. I wondered if her loneliness was not so much the doctoral journey in general terms but a stifling of her Italian sense of self. I wondered how a dialogue with oneself could be conducted in a language one knows 'academically' but has not experienced. I was not convinced that this was possible and felt that it was also a very lonely place to be. Even in cases of advanced linguistic competence, the indexicality of language, the heritage of the words themselves, hijacks meanings, denying dimensions and adding others which are not even known, never mind intended. Susi suffered loneliness in the doctoral programme, and I suffered silence. It was a lonely place for both of us to be.

What I experienced when talking to Susi, who kept to a self-imposed convention of speaking English in the UK and Italian in Italy, felt like something similar to a laboratory trial. It was only through working together on this chapter that I began to actually experience the importance of codeswitching through its absence rather than through its presence. From our conversation I discovered my attempts to speak Italian symbolised what she had left behind, and it was for this reason that she chose not to reciprocate. This nevertheless created an ambiguous and tense foundation for our friendship. What I felt to be the mechanical nature of our talk was exhausting for me. It lacked the respite from rationality and reason which intuition gives you. I would have preferred some expressions in a language I did not understand but which conveyed emotion. Working out who Susi was and what she felt through the meaning of the words she used was hard work, and I eventually gave up.

Final considerations: Susi's position

Looking back, I realise that my feelings of loneliness were the result of not feeling that I belonged in a wide range of spheres, including the

familiar sphere of my home institution during my time away. At times, I felt a disassociation with my own country – even with my own culture – in my struggle to understand the broader context of higher education. Reconciling my professional, academic and linguistic identities was a difficult process. All along, however, I maintained a deep commitment to my profession – demonstrating a strong sense of agency in my effort to understand my place in the field of my work and study.

Eventually, I moved back to Italy to resume my work at the university. By then my proficiency in English had increased as a result of the three years I had spent in England. The lived experience abroad had certainly cultivated a much stronger sense of my identity as an English speaker. My relocation back to Italy, however, was not without its own challenges. It became increasingly apparent upon my return that I would have to work hard to maintain my linguistic gains, as the cultural surroundings that enabled my English language growth were no longer present. This required a conscious effort on my part to purposefully move in and out of both languages in my conversations with others, but also to purposefully choose whether to express my emotions or keep them to myself, depending on particular circumstances.

My conversations with Barbora were instrumental in bringing many of my struggles to light. It is through our conversations that I developed a greater awareness of my linguistic identity and its relationship to my professional identity. This understanding extended to my sense of belonging (and not belonging) over time and throughout the course of my career. Perhaps the confusion I experienced between my professional and academic selves was the result of feeling the need to choose between one or the other – an all or nothing view. This, however, was a faulty choice. I have come to appreciate my hybridity, which does not confine me to a single identity, role or language. I can be both a professional and an academic. Likewise, I can associate with my native Italian culture, but also with my adopted English culture. This multi-dimensional perspective has given me the freedom to see myself at the centre of a network of professionals and academics coming from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such a network is likely to prove advantageous to myself, as well as peers and colleagues (all those I am working with) and my home institution.

Final considerations: Barbora's position

The doctoral journey has required me to reflect on my researcher reflexivity, but it has also afforded me a context and stimulus to reflect on my

own linguistic identity. As an English language teacher, my linguistic identity was inevitably tied to my professional identity. The doctoral journey provided me with an opportunity for growth at a time when my professional and linguistic abilities felt stagnant. I believe that the difficulties I experienced with writing were closely associated to my own issues with agency in English and in Italian. Life events, like Susi's relocation to the UK and my personal circumstances during my doctoral studies, appeared to have impacted our writing. From our conversation I saw how the intensity with which one experiences life events in one particular language enables writing in that language and at the same time frustrates writing in another language. I believe there are many interesting questions regarding the nature of bilingual or multilingual writing currently being researched, and my personal experience made me appreciate the complexity of this type of writing.

Although it has taken longer to complete the doctorate than I had hoped, addressing these issues has been a constructive step towards developing a greater sense of my professional self. The entire doctoral journey has been for me a critical incident (Cunningham, 2008) in my professional life, a period of personal growth at a time when life events heightened my receptiveness to issues regarding language and identity. In many ways, the Doctor in Education (EdD) provided an opportunity to reconstruct and reclaim myself. Although I did not know it at the time, I realise now that the EdD programme was the first stepping stone in my own identity reconstruction. This process has not been an easy one, and it inevitably became intertwined with my linguistic identity.

In embarking on doctoral studies, we were both looking for something external to the 'sense of self' imposed upon us by our circumstances. We were looking for something which would enable us to transit freely between feeling unique and being the same, between permanence and change. The doctoral journey has been a quest for a sense of agency in our professional selves, but has also entailed what Susi refers to as the loneliness of not belonging linguistically or institutionally.

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3
I found my tribe online: belonging in the context of precarity

Muireann O'Keeffe

> *By any accepted standard, I have had more than nine lives. I counted them up once and there were 13 times I almost and maybe should have died.* (Hunter S. Thompson, cited in Taylor, 2005)

Helen Lees (2016) argues that it has become commonplace in higher education to conceptualise faculty career development in terms of survival, likening it to life or death. She compares the demise of her career in higher education to death: 'I have lived two academic lives. In one, I died, or rather was killed' (Lees, 2016: para 1). Working in higher education is seen as precarious, with some declaring that universities no longer want to provide secure positions for employees (Cutterham, 2016; McGuire, 2015). This theme certainly reinforces Standing's (2011) theory about modern working conditions, coining the expression 'the precariat' – referring to an emerging class of people facing job insecurity, moving in and out of temporary positions.

Like many others in this precarious environment, I had navigated an eclectic mix of positions in higher education – spanning e-learning and teaching development roles – without establishing permanency in any particular role. Nonetheless, because I loved the area of teaching and academic development in higher education, I felt inspired and motivated to pursue an educational doctorate to become a researching and scholarly professional (Gregory, 1995). I followed my heart, making an optimistic decision to pursue a doctoral degree in the midst of economic uncertainty. In this chapter I describe how being employed in an insecure and precarious work environment shaped my doctoral journey. Changing jobs partway through my studies not only meant that I could not carry

out my research as I had planned, but also made it difficult to find a community where I could belong. I explain that I addressed both challenges by looking outward to online communities, which became both my topic of research and a place for me to find a sense of belonging.

The doctoral research process can feel like a solo run – one that can feel longer and more difficult when it involves working at a distance from the university and supervisors. However, I discovered a community of fellow scholars online through various platforms such as Twitter and blogging, which in turn supported my research. Through this experience I argue that online networks of scholars can provide beneficial support systems for budding scholars during the doctoral process. Indeed, online support networks for doctoral students might be an integral future part of the doctoral study process.

The doctoral experience helped me understand, navigate and develop my own voice amid the power structures of higher education. To this end, I hope that the reader will appreciate how an online community of scholars can provide support, encouragement and care for scholarly and professional development during doctoral studies. While my story is set in the social and economic context of higher education in Ireland, my experience of becoming a scholar in a casualised higher education environment has commonalities with other contexts across a globalised higher education environment.

Undertaking a doctorate in a precarious environment

Embarking on a doctorate in a corporatised and globalised higher education is an ambitious and demanding task for anyone. Modern higher education is associated with pressure-filled norms, competition and survival of the fittest (McGee et al., 2019; McGuire, 2015; Lees, 2016). University education at doctoral level is dominated by the race to attain funding for research and to be the first to successfully discover and publish results. The number of doctoral students in all fields of university education has increased, while at the same time the resources and support structures for doctoral study are under pressure. Coupled with this, employment structures in higher education favour short-term precarious roles rather than providing staff with longer-term tenure.

Despite this, when I decided to pursue a doctorate, I was dedicated to working in higher education, particularly in the area of academic development where I felt strongly motivated to help teachers improve their teaching practices. On completion of my master's, I was fortunate

to be offered job opportunities, and I fulfilled various temporary roles in e-learning, lecturing, project management and academic development. However, I had not developed a sense of professional belonging or secure occupational identity (Standing, 2011) within a specific university or particular discipline. I hoped that the doctorate would give me that.

I registered as a Doctor in Education (EdD) student to deepen my scholarly knowledge and understanding of higher education. I wanted to develop my ability to think critically about global practices and innovation within education. Most of all I wanted to prove myself at the highest level of educational standards (Leonard et al., 2005). I looked forward to being able to develop relevant areas for further research within my field.

Although I started my doctoral studies to learn more about education, knowing that I would be tested intellectually, I did not anticipate the extent to which my knowledge and identity would be challenged and transformed. Nixon (2008) urges that doctoral studies should be underpinned by a critical and constructive questioning of one's professional self, role, identity and values within higher education. This was certainly true in my case. My work life had been primarily focused on improving the practices of teaching and learning in higher education, but during my doctoral studies I became a different entity, a doctoral researcher and budding scholar interested not just in teaching practices themselves, but also in a deeper and more critical understanding of why and how different practices emerge and what kind of implications they have. Developing an identity as a scholar became an opportunity to spend more time reading, writing and gaining critical insights into my passions about education and my professional practices. The doctorate was a gift of time to process and gain deeper understanding of my professionalism in higher education.

Indeed, a major benefit of the doctorate was the opportunity to engage in critical reflection about myself as an educator. During this time, I collected my thoughts and took time figuring out *who I wanted to be as an educator*. I reflected on whether my practices as an educator were aligned with my educational values, and how my professional practices were congruent with these values. As I became more aware of my values, my interest in education for social justice (Freire, 1968) grew, I explored the courage to teach (Palmer, 1998) and I thought about the purposes of education (Biesta, 2013). I embraced values that put students at the centre of my practice and that enabled a dialogic approach with my students (Biesta, 2013) while helping them to reach their highest potential (Richards, 2010).

I was also able to reflect more systematically, and with greater criticality, on the frustration that I and other temporary employees in higher education across the world experience due to continuous pressures from market forces and the infinite requirement of adaptability and entrepreneurialism. As a scholar and researcher, I lifted my perspective above my own personal experience and was better able to identify local and global factors contributing to the expansion of higher education, alongside the impact of increasing student numbers and reduced budgets. The experience empowered me with new understanding which helped me consolidate my identity as a scholar and navigate the higher education environment. Through this process, I gained insights into the reasons behind the conditions of casualised work in higher education, which directly affected my tenure (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015; Lees, 2016).

Shortly into my doctoral studies, my already precarious state became even more precarious as the major global economic crisis of 2009 contributed to further reducing work opportunities in higher education, and directly impacting my own trajectory. My initial research interests had been closely tied into the structures and strategic work of the university I was employed at when I first enrolled in the programme. But because my contract ran out and renewal had now become impossible, I had to seek employment elsewhere. This professionally turbulent period posed challenges in identifying research opportunities linked with my professional practice: I could not lead research in an institution that I did not belong to. This was a challenging time as a doctoral scholar, and I was faced with the biggest setback of my doctoral journey – namely, how I would identify a research topic and with whom I could carry out research.

Identifying a twenty-first-century research topic

Perhaps because of the professional challenges associated with a casualised work environment, I began to see the importance of online networks. I realised that during this period I had made significant connections with others working in my professional field through online social networks, rather than in the university where I was (temporarily) based. I wondered whether this experience might be a fruitful point of departure for my academic research. A literature review on the use of social networking in higher education revealed that much of the writing in the area was based on anecdotal, personal accounts rather than facts

or research. Specifically, I discovered a scarcity of qualitative research on how online social networking was used for professional development purposes in higher education (Lupton, 2014; Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012). Some years earlier I had established my own professionally related blog (see https://goo.gl/Q8L7nU). Through blogging about my interest in social networking sites for professional learning, an online community of similar researchers and professionals validated my ideas and signalled that more research was needed in this area. Eureka! I had identified a gap in existing knowledge that required further study.

Exploring the existing research, I saw increasing pressures on higher education professionals to engage with social networks for research and teaching, but at the same time staff were neither confident nor ready to use these social platforms (O'Keeffe, 2016). Consequently, I decided that my doctoral research would explore how professionals in higher education were empowered or hindered in using social networks for research, teaching and other higher education work. Importantly, this innovative research idea was not dependent on my place of employment, and I was able to recruit participants from various institutions and areas of higher education.

Next generation doctoral support

Consequently, despite (or perhaps due to) a professionally turbulent period, a research idea was born. Conversations with other researchers that I identified online helped me to find a scholarly research aim and purpose. Not only did these networks inspire and inform my research, but also the people I connected with on online networks provided care and support during the doctoral journey. While I did not belong to a specific academic department during this period, my Twitter network connected me with peers I could talk to and with whom I could discuss research on a regular basis (Frost, 2018).

Gardner and Gopaul (2012) write that experiences of part-time doctoral students are complicated and require multi-faceted initiatives of support. Additionally, Martinsuo and Turkulainen (2011) report on the positive effects of peer support on study progress. My experience of peer support was hugely positive and beneficial. Even though my EdD group of peers at the Institute of Education (IOE) were spread across the globe in locations such as Ireland, England, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Norway, Japan and Australia, we remained in regular email contact, sharing news and feedback on our assignments,

thesis proposals and insights into research. Ultimately, peer support underpinned my positive doctoral experience and commitment to complete the doctoral journey. My community of support at the IOE extended beyond those in my immediate class. As a student working at a distance, I was unable to participate in many of the face-to-face workshops for doctoral development. To compensate, I found a UCL Facebook group which shared experiences of other doctoral students and knowledge about doctoral processes. This group provided support and useful responses to questions arising and played a part in sustaining my enthusiasm on the doctoral path.

In the digital age, there is considerable online support and guidance for doctoral students, as well as massive open online courses (MOOCs). I enrolled in a MOOC related to my research topic of social networks in higher education run by George Veletsianos in Canada. Another MOOC, 'How to survive your PhD', coordinated by the Australian Thesis Whisperer, Inger Mewburn, was helpful in providing emotional and practical support during the doctoral process.

Through MOOCs I created links with other doctoral students. We discussed challenges of the research, of institutional research policy, of ethics, various research methods and many other things. These online platforms away from the gaze of supervisors were spaces where questions could be asked, and frustrations vented in a safe way during the challenging phases of the doctoral process. After the MOOC completion, I kept in touch with many of the MOOC participants via a private Facebook group 'PhD Owls – Older, Wise Learners'. In this Facebook group we have since cheerleaded and celebrated one another's doctoral submissions and achievements. To this end, I became a twenty-first-century doctoral student, no longer singularly reliant on support from a supervisor, but reaching out and connecting with others online for advice and encouragement during my research journey.

As mentioned, blogging was an integral activity during my doctoral journey. I regularly wrote blog posts about my research. To help my writing I also read other blogs such as Patthomson.net, Thesiswhisperer.com, and Researchwhisperer.org. These blogs helped the process of writing and gaining clarity on my doctoral narrative. The initial stages of writing up felt messy and incoherent, but encouraging advice from blogs like Pat Thomson's (www.patthomson.net) helped me understand that writing and rewriting were crucial to the process of analysis, interpretation and generating findings. I began to trust the ambiguous process of qualitative and interpretive research. As one of my peers emphasised, 'research is not plug and play'. Instead, I found that the research process was about

moving continuously forward with a question, to which there was no perfect answer. Persistent engagement made sense of the findings. For me, writing and blogging were key practices reifying my critical thinking. Writing online revealed my intimately created, newly born knowledge, triggering conversations and feedback from a community of online scholars. I invested my energy in an activity of '100 Days of Writing' where I blogged for one hundred days. I wrote reflections and musings on my research. These posts fuelled online discussions which supported critical insights into my emerging findings and eventually the production of my thesis. Looking back on these blog posts I notice the development of my voice as a scholar.

On my blog, I was honest about the struggles I encountered during the research with various theoretical frameworks. My blog posts offered what Wenger (1998) describes as small gifts of undeserved trust into a community of scholars. Blogging about emotional-relational experiences supported the development of trusting relationships with others and the building of a community around my topic. Blogging became an integral part of my personal, professional and scholarly biography and provided me with a public and socially networked platform where I became recognised as a researcher in the field.

Twitter played a big part in connecting with other scholars in my research field. Much like Frost (2018), Twitter helped me make contact with researcher peers I had never met. I used Twitter to share my research experiences, and participated in a dynamic research community. Within this informal network, I tweeted stories of my research highs and lows. I told anecdotes of the trials and tribulations of research and shared my research findings. Through the process of tweeting and blogging, I established a digital identity as a scholar in this field, establishing relationships with similar scholars online (Stewart, 2015). Informal and friendly tweets generated a sense of affinity with others contributing to participation in online communities. From my experience and emerging research in the area, I suggest that online communities can contribute positively to the ongoing development and support of emerging scholars.

To declare that it was easy to present my research musings, emerging findings and knowledge online would be misleading. I felt vulnerable in placing my embryonic ideas in the online public space. How would people respond? Would I experience trolling? Nonetheless, I risked placing my emerging research and new knowledge online on blogs and Twitter. I found that the benefits outweighed the risks. I was warmly welcomed into a generous and obliging online community. The

courage to voice my academic activities, scholarly questions and needs online was met positively by others. Stewart (2015) notes that academic scholars increasingly provide emotional support for others online, echoing Veletsianos's (2014: para 5) remark that 'social media and online social networks function as places where (some) academics express and experience care'. Similar to my experience, Budge et al. (2016) write that Twitter can be an enjoyable and social space offsetting potential risks and negative implications of online social spaces.

For sure, I found an empathetic community of fellow researchers online. Nonetheless, there are stories of academics who have negative experiences of posting about research online (Academics Anonymous, 2018). This inspires me to think of my own experience and to continue to engage with others I meet online with care and due respect. Indeed, my research (O'Keeffe, 2016) into how higher education staff used Twitter for professional learning found that feelings of vulnerability and cautiousness and capacity to participate in online social networks inhibited participation in online spaces. Even so, participants in my study valued learning from peers who shared online, although they were reluctant to post online as they did not want to risk placing themselves in vulnerable positions on public social networking sites. Educators found the prospect of criticism from the educational community a terrifying and demanding prospect. An outcome of my doctoral research is that I am motivated to inspire and teach others to 'care for' and support others in positive and constructive ways on social media platforms.

Like most doctoral students, the student–supervisor relationship was critical during my doctoral research (Barnes and Austin, 2009), but here my focus is on the other kinds of social supports that played a key role in my doctoral journey. Commonly, in higher education, numbers of doctoral students are increasing whereas supervisory resources are thinning, with limited scope to answer and support the holistic questions, ideas and fears of students. As a result of the expansion of doctoral schools, students are at risk of feeling isolated and not wholly supported. The role of social support for researcher identity development and sense of belonging and community is critical and expands beyond the immediate institutional environment (Mantai, 2019). In the digital age, doctoral research need not be a solo run. Increasingly, support for doctoral students could include participation in online communities of researchers and scholars so that budding scholars can find essential support, encouragement and inspiration.

From margin to centre: developing my voice online

Some good advice by a former colleague was that doctoral students are apprentice researchers, learning to undertake and accomplish research. I didn't know how to perform research, so I asked questions. Lots of questions. As a novice researcher, I was inducted into a community of scholars where I progressed from the periphery of research communities to a more central position, sharing insights, asking questions and finding solutions. Initially, I felt cautious about expressing my opinions and research online, but I noticed other emerging scholars placing their research findings and interpretations online. I witnessed the care and hospitality given to other emerging scholars and this gave me the confidence and legitimacy to express and voice my research. Through participation in online communities I developed and grew as a researcher.

Looking back to when I commenced my doctoral studies, I remember that I participated on the peripheries of networks by observing rather than participating – learning from online discussions, seminars and events online. As a newcomer, I was gradually recognised by others in the same field. As months and years progressed, and as I started to voice my research online, I felt I became more embedded in communities. In turn, this engagement supported me emotionally and socially. Time passed by and I shared insights about my research with others in the community. In this way, I became more confident voicing my comments and research findings to others on blogs and on Twitter.

Thus, I believe online social networks such as on Twitter or blogging can be a gateway for doctoral students into academic communities (Bell, 2016; Cronin, 2016). In these online spaces, novices can legitimately participate in safe, supported communities while building scholarly and digital identities and relationships with scholarly peers. I was welcomed into spaces of discourse and learning where a network of scholars stimulated my reflections on debates emerging in this field of inquiry, consequently having an effect on my interpretations and findings. As my own professional confidence grew, I continued to participate in these online academic communities more readily.

Presenting my research both online (via Twitter and my blog) and at conferences provided opportunities 'to share, reflect upon, critique, improve, validate and otherwise develop' (Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012: 768) my scholarship in a participatory networked approach. I contributed to conferences in my research field. Indeed, many of the scholars I made links with in online communities encouraged my

contribution to conferences. I presented at conferences such as the Society for Research in Higher Education conference, EdTech Ireland, the Digital Research in the Humanities and Arts conference and the Educational Studies Association of Ireland conference. Shortly after my graduation, I was invited to contribute to the final panel at the Open Education Resources conference in London. This opportunity was offered to me as a result of my doctoral research and the online profile built around my research.

From the doctorate to academic life

In retrospect I recognise that the doctoral journey experience was transformative. The EdD programme took a structured approach to research where I investigated the building blocks of social science research (Grix, 2002) and I began to establish and foster my critical thinking. Participation in online scholarly communities emancipated my voice as a scholar as I shared my research findings, interpretations and opinions. I now perceive and live my professional, scholarly life and educational practices with an established, informed and critical perspective on education.

As mentioned previously, I commenced my doctorate during a global economic recession which triggered a budget and employment constrained environment in higher education. Within these circumstances I had not established a permanent role or sense of professional identity and belonging to any particular area. I experienced first-hand my professional identity being affected by social, economic and institutional factors. However, through the doctoral process and online social interactions with scholarly peers, I established a sense of belonging to a community of scholars. I felt more empowered, that I had enabled my voice and that I had increased agency within the higher education setting. I believe that my doctoral studies combined with the support attained from online social networks helped to foster the development of my professional and digital identity.

Opportunely, after completing my studies, I was offered permanent employment as an academic developer, a professional role providing academic development to enhance the practices of teaching and learning in universities. As a consequence of my online presence and digital identity built up during the doctoral period, I was already connected to other networked scholars across the world in turn helping me fulfil my role in the best way possible. Thus, the process of acquiring

my doctorate and participating in online academic communities shifted me out of precarious work circumstances into permanent employment in higher education.

It's not what you achieve ...

... it's what you overcome that defines a career. My doctoral journey began with a vague idea of what I might perform research on. Professional employment challenges coupled with economic recession were hindrances at that point in time. But opportunities presented themselves to me when I developed a digital online presence as a budding scholar, and in time, I built my own online research community. In a digital, socially networked era, doctoral research need not be a gruelling solo run; I discovered opportunities to develop far-reaching research networks across the globe. I found my tribe of research scholars online. Similarly, many of these scholars questioned and debated the direction and nature of contemporary higher education. In turn, this process helped me to understand the context of higher education and the field of academic development in which I now am employed.

Involvement in the doctorate programme and in online academic communities continues to influence and develop my capacity as an academic developer. Indeed, some assert that the longer you stay a student, the better a teacher you will be. Originally, when given opportunities to teach, I taught in the best way that I knew how, but my doctoral research got me to question my practices as an educator and widened my awareness of the 'I who teaches' (Ferguson, 2015: 49). That is, I am dedicated to critical reflection on my role as an educator and on the choices I implement in practice. My critical thinking extends to concerns, practices and cultures within online social networking sites and their use within higher education. I now give critical thought to the implications of participation on social networks while supporting higher education staff to navigate online social networks with care and safety. In my current role, I feel well prepared to facilitate discussions and workshops among higher education colleagues on social networks for learning, teaching and research purposes.

At this point in time, I recognise I enjoy my work as an academic developer so that I can support the practice and scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. My interest in what it means to provide education in a digital age (Beetham, 2015) has been expanded, and my research into online social networks and their potentials for research and learning in higher education is increasing in significance.

Critical inquiry into online social networks is only dawning, with many challenges and potentials arising. Through the doctoral process I found my voice enabling me to contribute to critical and strategic thinking on these topics. Learning and inquiry into these issues will continue as finding perfect solutions is unattainable (Ferguson, 2015). As an academic developer, I continue to support professionals in higher education by involving them in discussions about the online social networks and the digital age in the context of global and local higher education.

At the time of writing, I am keen to develop the capacity of higher education professionals to participate constructively in online social networks to build their networked scholarly activities. As a result of my research, knowledge and role as an academic developer, I now have the agency to influence pathways for professional development on these topics in higher education. I appreciate that a key factor to the successful participation in online networks is the development of professional and digital identity (Beetham, 2015; Gee, 2005; Ito et al., 2013). My research has highlighted that the development of professional confidence coupled with the growth of digital capabilities is paramount to budding academic identities and ability to participate in online social networks.

Indeed, others have noted that scholarly engagement online requires the development of new styles of informal and rapid communication – cultural practices that are counter to formal academia (Lupton et al., 2018). In light of this, I continue to investigate how best to support scholars and higher education staff to develop capacity as digital academics. Enduring questions include: How are professionals in higher education prepared to work and participate in online social networks? Are academic developers ready to support the development of digital identity and digital capacity among higher education staff? Also, are doctoral researchers and future scholars equipped to operate in the ever more complicated digital age of higher education? Furthermore, I acknowledge that online networks can be perilous places and like Stewart (2015) I think that academic developers have a duty of care to support and keep safe the development of the digital academic. Consequently, my interest in how we foster positive habits and safe relationships among higher education professionals in online spaces continues to develop. These are issues that doctoral research has posed for me and that I will continue to find answers for in my future professional and scholarly life.

Conclusion

I began this chapter highlighting the career insecurity that pervades global higher education. Indeed, Standing (2011) writes that a higher education system that promotes competitiveness contributes to feelings of alienation, anxiety and anger among faculty. Relatedly, Lees (2016) argues that staff should be invested in to improve motivation, performance and well-being while reducing staff turnover. For me, not having a permanent, ongoing position in higher education was disheartening at times, and social support – and a sense of humour – were important coping mechanisms.

However, this unstable employment experience was a source of social and economic insight which strengthened my self-awareness and built my resilience. As Nelson Mandela said, 'Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again' (Mandela cited in Oppong, 2017). In turn, that store of resilience supported my doctoral journey; I felt compelled to concentrate and succeed in my doctoral studies. Immersion in an online community was crucial for my ability to succeed in my doctoral studies and finish my degree. Increasingly, scholars and academics are required to invent their academic selves online. The digital age offers increased flexibility for academic and scholarly life. Emerging scholars can socially network and build relationships with academic peers across the world, enabling new modes of academic practice, collaboration and knowledge creation.

For me, diving into the digital world made all the difference. Finding my online tribe, gaining meaningful practical and emotional support in what was a vulnerable and precarious time as an academic and a doctoral student helped me build resilience. If there is one thing I learned from this doctoral journey, it is that by embracing uncertainty and seeking out support through social networking sites I was offered opportunities and possibilities to reinvigorate and reinvent my professional self in a precarious but flexible digital age. Through this experience, rather than dying, I bounced back from adversity and now enjoy a renewed academic life.

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4

A view of the Western university through the eyes of a non-Western student

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The experiences of international students in Western universities often include navigating cultural misconceptions (Casanave, 2002; Durkin, 2008) and unfamiliar power relations (Hofstede, 1986, 1991; Shaw, 2009; Slethaug, 2007). Where student research involves gathering data outside Western contexts, the rigid implementation of ethical guidelines can be particularly problematic (Barsky, 2019; Naveed et al., 2017; Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013). In this chapter, I draw on my experience as a non-Western doctoral student and reflect on what it was like for me to enter the world of a Western university. I use the term 'Western university' generically as a reference to universities typically found in liberal democratic countries, such as those in the United Kingdom. I discuss what it was like coming from a conservative Middle Eastern national and organisational culture, which emphasises the importance of the collective, to a more progressive and individualistic culture. I also discuss how I struggled to apply Western ethical guidelines, such as informed consent and the audiotaping of interviews, in a cultural context that viewed such requirements as ethically questionable. By sharing my own experiences and situating them within the existing literature, I hope to provide valuable insights and strategies for students coming from similar cultural backgrounds and for the faculty who work with them.

To contextualise, my doctoral journey began after 35 years of professional experience in the gas, oil and mining industries. At the time, my employer in Saudi Arabia had contracted with an international consulting firm to develop and execute a capability-building programme

aimed at realising the company's vision of becoming a world-class mining enterprise. One of the capabilities involved establishing the Learning and Development Academy, which came to include a Train-the-Trainer Program (TTTP). A key aim of this effort was to create internal experts that could eventually provide internal training to employees across various specialities, thereby eliminating a chronic reliance on external consultants. As head of the Learning and Development Academy, I was fully immersed in the design and execution of the programme. My doctoral research aimed to explore the perceptions and changes in attitudes among participants in the TTTP. During my four-year tenure in the doctoral programme, however, I came across some unforeseen challenges. My own expectations upon entering university were that faculty would have knowledge of, or at least an interest in, understanding the cultural backgrounds of their non-Western students. However, a number of culture-related challenges surfaced that indicated otherwise. It is these challenges that this chapter seeks to disseminate and better understand.

Cultural misconceptions and biases

I begin my story in the first year of the doctoral programme, when a group of supervisors stepped into one of our classroom sessions to observe students in the new international cohort. I heard later that the purpose of the visit was to get to know the participants better so that they could split us among college faculty to supervise the first research assignment, which at the time involved writing a short essay related to the themes of professionalism. Initially, I assumed that there would be some competition among faculty in supervising students from non-Western cultures, because I honestly believed that each cross-cultural student had the potential to provide faculty with an exceptional learning opportunity to develop cultural knowledge and competence.

By the end of the day, however, I discovered that I had been left in a pool of unassigned students. I also couldn't help but notice that all five of us in the unassigned pool were of non-Western backgrounds. It appeared that the group of supervisors had, for some reason, shied away from mentoring us. Eventually, one daring faculty member rolled up her sleeves and decided to take on the challenge with all of us. This is how it came to be that all five non-Western students in the group were assigned to work with the same supervisor at the onset of the programme. Feelings of isolation were further reinforced when the same supervisor continued to work with me for the second and the third research assignments during my first year.

Difficulties associated with supervising international students are not a new phenomenon. Several scholars, including Casanave (2002) and Durkin (2008), caution that international students joining UK universities are likely to face various difficulties acclimating to the new academic environment, systems and standards. Shaheen (2016) identified a growing concern that international students are at risk in their lack of expression of critical reflection in an increasingly demanding higher education system in the United Kingdom. Todd (1997) suggests that international students might be viewed as problematic due to the intensive coaching that supervisors often have to provide. However, he also argues that international students provide opportunities for supervisors to gain a better understanding of learning and education, as they have to find the means to address the unique educational and cultural needs of their students.

Although I felt that it was reasonable to expect that faculty members should have some basic knowledge of other cultures, I was disappointed to discover just how little they knew about my part of the world – the Middle East. Many did not know anything about Saudi Arabia beyond oil. Some did not even know that Saudi Arabia and Jordan are two neighbouring Arab countries, or that millions of people from all over the world go to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries for work. This was particularly relevant to me because I was a Jordanian national working in neighbouring Saudi Arabia as an expatriate employee.

I wondered how I could have a meaningful dialogue with faculty who did not know such basic information about my cultural and organisational contexts. For example, I had to answer the same question 'Why are your participants all males?' several times. Faculty were unable to digest the fact that females in our region do not hold jobs in the mining sector, despite my providing a written explanation of my study's context as part of my methodology section.

What made the situation even more challenging was that, on numerous occasions, I felt that they had internalised stereotypical images of Arab culture – namely, images of great wealth, a disregard for time or money, and a condescending view of women. There were numerous instances, for example, where faculty expressed surprise when I followed up with them if they were late in responding to my inquiries or my most recent submissions. Their surprise at my seriousness as a student, in combination with their repeated comments about shopping, gave me the impression that some believed I was in London for shopping and to have a good time, not for a highly regarded academic degree. At times, I also felt that some female faculty were aggressive and dismissive of my

comments during class discussions, perhaps because they perceived my questions as undermining their authority and academic standing.

It took some time and hard work on my part to eventually convince the various faculty and supervisors (through close follow up, timely delivery and persistence) that I was a serious and capable student who was keen on making reasonable and timely progress. The notion that international students inevitably require a lot of coaching and chasing to make academic progress is not uncommon. In a survey of faculty supervising international students, findings revealed that faculty were not empathetic, and were often critical of students for not assuming responsibility for their own academic work (Robertson et al., 2000). Another study reported that staff also tended to doubt the capabilities of international students to complete assignments (Beoku-Betters, 2004). Ironically, this feeling was a key driver for my determination to graduate as early as the university system allowed and, indeed, I was the first to graduate in my cohort.

As a mature student with many years of experience in my sector, I was hoping to bring to the programme valuable knowledge about workplace training that was potentially useful to both national and international contexts. I hoped that faculty would be interested to learn more about me, my context and my national culture. Three years into the programme, however, I found that faculty knowledge about my part of the world remained minimal. Such cultural misconceptions and insinuations continued to haunt me throughout my degree.

Unfamiliarity with relevant power relations

Driven by ideals of individualism, learners in the West are encouraged to think critically and challenge their instructors (Calloway-Thomas et al., 1999), while the more collective cultures view instructors as the infallible, all-knowing, source of knowledge. As a result, non-Western students expect more guidance and engagement from their supervisors (Slethaug, 2007; Shaw, 2009). It is for this reason also that international students coming from such cultural backgrounds tend to be agreeable and less argumentative or challenging to their supervisors (Wisker, 2005). This practice has been described as one belonging to high power distance cultures (Hofstede, 1986, 1991). In my case, I often hesitated to ask questions or request clarifications in order to present myself as a more competent and able researcher. Unfortunately, this deprived me from getting some of the help I needed during the process.

I recall one instance where my two supervisors, who I was fortunate enough to work with, unknowingly made two contradictory formatting edits. One supervisor made an edit relating to the proper formatting of quotes in the body of the discussion section of my thesis, and I accepted that edit and used it consistently throughout the chapter. A few days later, I passed that chapter to my second supervisor who – seemingly unaware that I was following the advice of the first supervisor – suggested I revert to the previous formatting style. I did not dare to bring this matter up for discussion, as I wished to avoid embarrassment and confrontation. Instead, I chose to reverse my edits following the guidance of the second supervisor. Those edits, fortunately, went unnoticed by the first.

Such conflicting incidents may be handled immediately and with little thought by Western students coming from more liberal and democratic countries, but are considered to be very much off-limits for students coming from more conservative countries like my own. Although the relationship between the international student and the supervisor may appear as a normal two-way relationship, the supervisor plays a far greater role in building a successful mutually positive relationship (Mustafa, 2004). Increased awareness of such cultural differences and their effect on faculty–student relationships is, therefore, an important skill that needs to be cultivated and attained among faculty working with students from non-Western backgrounds.

Knowledge about whether mentees come from a low or high power distance culture – and what that means in the student–supervisor relationship – would be particularly beneficial because it would allow faculty to anticipate the specific challenges that such students are likely to have. These challenges may include adjusting to a new way of living and coping with a new set of values and interpersonal behaviours. As argued by Pedersen (1994: 157):

> International students are expected to learn a new language, new rules for interpersonal behaviour, and a new set of rules that all the other students on campus have spent their whole life learning ... they [international students] are expected to 'adjust' to a relatively narrowly defined set of behaviours in order for them to succeed.

Indeed, I grew up in an education system where teachers provided straightforward corrections and directions to students. As a result, I was expecting the same type of directives at the university level in England. Instead, I found that my supervisors' communication styles were more inquisitive and thought-provoking. Questions such as 'really?', 'are you

sure?' or 'what do you mean?' pressed me to better explain and provide further evidence for my rationale. Likewise, comments such as 'compare this point with what you said at the beginning of the chapter', 'apparently you need to research this point further' or 'suggest you read *xyz* for more insights on this topic' served as further indicators that my work was not yet done. Such feedback, although new to me, held me to high academic standards and always placed the ownership of my own work back on me. Nevertheless, it was something that required some adjustment on my part, as it was not an approach I was accustomed to.

Beyond faculty–student relationships, knowledge of high power distance relations also became crucially important in my research work. In my part of the world, authority plays a central role, and it is not unusual for it to be delegated to a teacher, father or employer. It is typically not acceptable in an organisation to contact employees individually without first notifying someone in an authority position, such as a department head. Such an act would be considered not simply rude, but also hostile on my part, and could ultimately jeopardise both my research and the participants who decided to unilaterally partake in the study.

Besides going against protocols of authority, contacting potential participants individually would also be awkward because many organisations in the Middle East consider employees' participation in organisational studies to be an integral component of their actual job roles. In this sense, it is taken for granted that employees will support initiatives which aim at improving the quality of programmes and services, especially if such services are provided by external consultants. These cultural values contradict Western assumptions which are likely to: (1) view supervisor encouragement as a form of coercion; and (2) treat employee participation in research as an individual choice that is distinctly separate from other work responsibilities. Given the cultural context of my research, I had little choice but to follow the protocols of the region within which I was conducting my research. To do otherwise would have placed my entire research study and its individual participants in jeopardy. However, as I explain below, this placed me in a difficult situation with respect to how research ethics are conceptualised in Western universities.

The informed consent dilemma

A key element of research ethics in the Western context is informed consent, which meant that when I was preparing to conduct interviews, I was not only expected to contact each participant individually, but I was also

expected to ask each participant to provide their signature on an informed-consent document. According to university guidelines, informed consent is necessary to ensure that participants are aware of the kind of research they are partaking in and to ensure that their participation is not coerced. This supposedly ensures the validity of the results and protects the safety of the participants. It can also be assumed that another purpose behind the informed consent is to ensure that the university remains protected from any legal issues that may come up during research.

The difficulty with obtaining informed consent from individuals in Middle Eastern cultures is that they are not usually agreeable to signing documents. As confirmed by Barsky (2019), providing a signature is considered a very serious matter, which might have grave legal implications. As a result, many prefer to exercise caution when asked to sign anything and often view such requests with doubt and cynicism. This was especially true in the case of my own research, which had an added level of complexity in that it involved the participants giving potentially negative feedback that might contradict the reported success of the programme. These respondents were likely to worry that their feedback might upset management and that signing a document could lead to punitive consequences. In this case, their safety was better ensured by *not* signing an informed consent form.

This type of predicament is also highlighted in the work of Naveed et al. (2017), who caution that insisting upon adherence to the ethical guidelines of Western colleges may serve to discourage people's participation in cross-cultural research and even harm them. Cultures can be so different that something which appears to be highly ethical in one context can be unethical in another, particularly with respect to informed consent. For this reason, caution should be exercised when applying Western research approaches in non-Western countries (Dawson and Kass, 2005; Upvall and Hashwanni, 2001).

A danger of rule-oriented teaching is that ethics are presented as a rigid checklist that the student quickly discovers is difficult to work with in real life, for a variety of reasons (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013; Clark, 2012; Tikly and Bond, 2013). The real learning happens when the student questions the apparent rigidity of the guidelines and learns to weigh various concerns against one another. Thinking through a range of possibilities is difficult for all students, but particularly for non-Western students who may feel that no discussion is possible. Faculty working with non-Western students will have to be particularly aware of these dilemmas (Myers, 1993). One way to do this is to approach ethics from a broader perspective. Lavery et al. (2007) argue that 'informed consent' is mainly a Western ritual that is interpreted differently in different

cultures, while 'trust' is a universal theme which can be easily embraced by people from different cultures. Cross-cultural researchers need to be given flexibility to adjust their research plan based on their own situations, including the ability to achieve informed consent in different ways and in such a way that trust is maintained.

In my case, for example, I was conducting research in a context where requiring a written consent form may be viewed by others as a lack of trust in participants' words, which would have made it difficult for me to even recruit participants. It became increasingly harder for me to ignore the unique cultural and organisational context of my research. To do so would have been detrimental to the very credibility of the research I was looking to conduct, as participants (those I would be able to recruit) would be too fearful of the potential negative consequences or reprisals from their supervisors to give forthright and honest responses. The challenge I faced was to find a way to negotiate a balance between the expectations of the university, on the one hand, and the cultural norms of the region in which I would be conducting my research, on the other. The outcome of this negotiation eventually involved a compromise, whereby I approached participants and provided to them *verbally* all the information they needed to gain their consent.

Once consent was given, I invited them to participate in the organisational study. I did not, at this point, present any formal documentation for signatures due to the negative cultural ramifications this would have for actual participation. After the interviews, I shared the findings of the study, including how the findings would benefit our organisation. It was at that time that I finally asked participants to physically sign the informed-consent form in order to help me satisfy a standard Western university requirement. Participants were pleased to sign these consent forms, which I filed in my study and kept ready for presentation. It is important to highlight here that all participants provided informed consent prior to the study, but that this consent was not initially provided in a *written* format.

The audio-taped interview

Yet another dilemma had to do with guidelines for the audio-taping of participant interviews. Though I agreed that the recording of interviews would provide a more accurate record of what was said, I was concerned that audio-taping might restrict the candour of my participants and undermine the overall credibility of the study. This is because in Arab

culture, individuals are likely to feel apprehensive and even fearful about the idea of being audio- or video-recorded. This is especially true when the informants might be saying something critical of their employment situation and they do not want a permanent record of it. The situation gets even more stressful when the interview is conducted in a foreign language and participants are more concerned about the accurate and proper use of the language than the content of the message.

I expected that my participants would speak more freely, provide greater detail and be more comfortable about switching to their native language to express certain thoughts if I did not record the interviews. This concern has been validated by a study conducted in Qatar by Killawi et al. (2014), where it was reported that participants generally hesitated to participate when they discovered that interviews would be recorded. This supports the notion that Arab participants, in particular, are very concerned about recording their interview responses. Once again, I was faced with the dilemma of negotiating between standard university practice and gathering credible data from my participants given the unique cultural context. I decided that I would do both. I would follow protocol and begin each interview with the recording turned on. Around half-way through each interview, however, I would stop the recording and continue with the interview while taking notes. As expected, the discussion after stopping the recording rendered a lot of very relevant data for the study. It was very interesting to also note that during the interviews, participants would repeatedly ask me to pause the recording so that they could say some negative comments that they were not comfortable sharing while the tape was on, which of course provided me with very valuable data.

Institutional implications

While it might not be feasible to standardise ethical standards to fit every culture and context, I believe it is incumbent upon research institutes and their faculty to gain cultural competence and be more appreciative of the unique contexts in which cross-cultural researchers operate. It is my position that as researchers we are obligated to preserve and show due respect to local norms and ethical standards. Guidelines, therefore, should remain flexible and adaptable in cross-cultural contexts. In my experience, however, the reality is that systems and faculty practices in Western universities are very much an outcome of individually oriented Western cultures. This may work reasonably well when research is

being conducted in a similar individually oriented culture. Difficulties arise, however, when faculty who may be unfamiliar with non-Western students' cultures attempt to implement requirements and practices dogmatically, often ignoring the dissimilarities between Western cultures and educational systems and those of their non-Western international students.

This is problematic because in order to generate high-quality research projects, a high degree of congruence between research guidelines and the specific contexts in which cross-cultural researchers operate needs to exist. Developing such congruence should, ideally, be part of broader university efforts aimed at ensuring positive academic and social experiences that acknowledge and accommodate cultural differences, while still maintaining programme integrity. When we consider the steadily growing number of international students who enter Western universities and the institutional competition to attract them, the seriousness of this matter becomes even more evident. Green and Powell (2005) highlight the importance of international students to the host communities and universities, including their role in producing research and income for universities. Although universities operate in academia, it is important to remember that they still need to be viable in the sense that they need to generate cash and be competitive. For this reason, it is my belief that soliciting feedback from the growing client base of international students and using this feedback to make substantive changes should become a more pressing priority.

In my view, faculty who are earmarked or choose to supervise international students would benefit from some form of cross-cultural training. This training can include learning the difference between low and high power distance cultures and what that means with regard to faculty–student relationships. This type of training can shed light on cultural differences early in the training process, giving faculty the opportunity to speak up and disagree, but also have their assumptions challenged. Most importantly, such training would play a critical role in helping faculty to begin a meaningful dialogue and provide relevant coaching to students coming from other backgrounds. The acquired cultural competence can also be applied to inform codes of ethics and avoid stereotyping that may arise from lack of cultural awareness (Seibert et al., 2002).

Guidance on faculty–student relationships may further include beginning the supervision process by explicitly addressing cultural and educational differences and similarities. After all, knowledge of and a discussion about each other's cultural and educational backgrounds

has been deemed as a necessary condition for intercultural supervision (Hu et al., 2016). Ideally, universities might even consider sponsoring visits for faculty to tour regions that have high representation in the student body, thereby increasing faculty awareness of differences. Such an investment would likely have the highest impact on the quality of services provided to non-Western students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've reflected on some of the challenges I faced as a non-Western student attending a Western university in the United Kingdom. I have focused on faculty awareness, increased sensitivity across supervisory relationships of a cross-cultural nature and a more flexible approach to Western-style research ethics regulations when applied to non-Western contexts. I have presented these areas of struggle with an eye to how other non-Western students might negotiate any cultural dissonance they might experience in their own research and also to how changes on an institutional level can ensure faculty are adequately prepared to take on the challenges that are unique to both non-Western students and their cross-cultural research projects.

There are those who may feel that the burden of adjustment should lie unequivocally on the international students who choose to attend Western universities. I would argue, however, that in the case of cross-cultural research, the burden must necessarily shift in order to ensure successful research outcomes. For me, it would have been far more helpful to work with a more flexible set of guidelines that provided alternative approaches to fulfilling ethical requirements precisely because of the cultural context. Placing the entire burden of adaptation on the student also raises the question of whether universities are sufficiently customer oriented (Akanwa, 2015).

If the retention of international students is relevant to the overall viability of global higher education settings, then faculty must be given the tools necessary to interact meaningfully with such students. The availability and accessibility of cultural training, whether in the form of professional development incentives, colloquiums or seminars, can help faculty to acquire an increased sense of cultural sensitivity and diversity. As primary representatives of universities, faculty partaking in cultural training are likely to be better equipped to address both styles of supervision and types of accommodation based on the differences in the cultural

and academic backgrounds of their students. Similarly, such awareness also ensures that international students receive the optimal support needed to maximise their learning.

Finally, I do not want to conclude this chapter by giving any false impressions about my experiences. My engagement in the doctoral journey has brought about an important transformation. My struggle to function in a different cultural setting has made me more appreciative of cultural diversity and more receptive to different world views. This has proven especially valuable to me because the organisational studies I administer require a constant interface with a wide range of international partners and their employees. Consequently, it is through my struggles as an outsider entering the world of the Western university that my own intercultural abilities have expanded and transformed.

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5

Navigating the pass: distance, dislocation and the viva

David Channon, with Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard

Editors' introduction

Doctoral students face multiple threats to their sense of ownership and agency – particularly when carrying out their doctoral work far away from the traditional bricks-and-mortar university. Although distance programmes and online learning have been promoted as a viable solution for making doctoral education more accessible, distance studies have also augmented many of the challenges faced by doctoral students. These include communication and supervision difficulties (Erichsen et al., 2014; Roberts and Bandlow, 2018), learning to navigate faculty feedback and agendas (Olalere et al., 2014), as well as maintaining mental health and a work-life balance (Sverdlik and Hall, 2019; Wisker et al., 2007; Wellington and Sikes, 2007). This chapter looks at how distance learning, dislocation through multiple job changes and conflicting faculty feedback can present unexpected obstacles leading up to the viva. The author shares both the emotional and logistical difficulties he faced navigating such obstacles, including the implications of ignoring his own intuition amid inconsistent feedback from both supervisory and non-supervisory faculty. After an unexpected viva outcome that required major revisions, the author takes us through his emotional journey while at the same time drawing attention to potential gaps in the evaluation of Doctor in Education (EdD) criteria. The author's own voice is supplemented by input from the editors (represented by italicised text). This interactive approach aims to highlight the complexity of the various events, experiences and emotions for the individual author, as well as how they connect to the larger body of academic literature.

The context and author

My doctoral journey began in Myanmar in Southeast Asia in 2012 as an employee of the British Council. I had lived and worked in Myanmar for 10 years prior to beginning the Doctorate in Education (EdD), initially as an English language tutor. During this period, I completed an MA in citizenship education and successfully concluded the first two years of doctoral study. The decision to undertake academic study, as a very mature student, was a response to the professional demands of my job, which were constantly changing, challenging my abilities as a teacher and teacher-trainer. Over a span of five years, my position within the British Council would change many times.

Some very significant political developments took place during my time in Myanmar that would impact the British Council's strategy in the country and by extension my own professional role. The first elections to be held in 20 years took place in 2010, 2012 and 2015, and these marked important transition points in the country's slow progress from a full-fledged military dictatorship to a quasi-civilian democracy, in which one-third of the seats in parliament were still reserved for unelected members of the military junta. Early in my sojourn in Myanmar, I was invited to participate in capacity-building courses for key potential influencers in the process of political reform such as members of the, then, political opposition – the National League for Democracy – and later for newly released political prisoners. These political education courses were designed to raise awareness of current global developments in areas such as environment, law and international relations and were being carried out under the radar of the authorities. It was a privilege to teach such individuals who had suffered so much for their beliefs and whose education had been so curtailed. At the same time, I felt some trepidation each year when my visa needed to be renewed, anxious that the authorities may have gotten wind of these courses. Involvement in their development and implementation represented a significant departure from my initial professional position as English language tutor.

The British Council, as it had done since colonial independence in Myanmar in 1948, ostensibly continued to function as a cultural relations organisation and English language provider. However, it is fair to say that the opportunity to extend my professional expertise had arisen because the British Council had gone beyond its traditional role and adopted a more explicitly political stance. These organisational decisions had a significant impact on my early research interests, which

became focused on the role of the British Council in the political socialisation of young activists.

Along with a small group of other colleagues, I set about creating curricula capable of raising the awareness of activist students regarding current developments in global politics, law and the environment. We also developed courses in citizenship education for teachers and interfaith dialogue. Finally, through the Chevening Scholarship programme, we were able to partner with the UK's Open University to jointly deliver courses in governance and politics and environmental policy. We were able to arrange an exposure trip to the UK for a group of 14 activists, which would entail meetings with MPs and with civil society organisations. The latter became the topic of the Institution Focused Study (IFS) phase of the doctorate.

Over several years, the author invests an enormous amount of time and energy in these activities and they are seminal in shaping his research interests. The author's initial choice to gather data from his work site reflects both an intrinsic interest that he had developed over time and an external circumstance that lends itself to relatively easy data collection. Indeed, most choices made by doctoral students involve a combination of intrinsic and external factors when it comes to selecting a research focus (Brailsford, 2010; Wellington and Sikes, 2007), with accessibility to networks having a particularly marked influence on research direction (Olalere et al., 2014). The author's initial research choice is firmly rooted in such networks, providing him with ample resources to draw from.

Positions, orientations, trajectories

A critical turning point in this academic trajectory took place following the election of the 2010 government, which expressed its commitment to opening up Myanmar's education system to international scrutiny and assistance. At the same time, the installation of a new management structure within the British Council offices led to a realignment of its strategic priorities away from engagement in political education, in which I had invested considerable energy, and toward the wider goal of providing teacher training. This culminated in 2014 in a nationwide teacher-training project partially funded by the UK's Department for International Development and in partnership with Voluntary Service Overseas (Ulla, 2017).

These changing priorities had a considerable influence on my professional role and on the research trajectory I had been pursuing. In 2013,

I was seconded for a year to the English Department of Yangon University to conduct teacher training to newly qualified teachers of English. These changes coincided with the thesis stage of the doctorate and meant that, were I to continue, I would need to reorient and refocus my research interests to reflect the reality of this new position.

The author's relocation limits his ability to access data from the original research site and, as a result, he must consider changes to his research topic. This represents a genuine restriction in the author's agency: he simply no longer has access to his original source of data, and the power to regain this access is outside his scope of control. As a result, changes in his research design are shaped by concerns about access to networks of data collection (Olalere et al., 2014). While changes in research direction and methodology are common in doctoral work more generally (Hunter and Devine, 2016), it is one thing to voluntarily adjust research direction based on data analysis or changing interests and quite another to have to change research direction because of a sudden inability to access a research site. For the author, redirection of his research means starting all over again and it is natural to try to salvage whatever he can moving forward.

This was, and has proved to be, one of the greatest challenges of my doctoral journey. At the same time, an opportunity arose within the English department to become involved in curriculum development for newly reopened undergraduate courses in English Literature. This related strongly to my previous involvement and interest in syllabus design and materials writing for political education courses, albeit in a different discipline, and immediately struck me as a fascinating research topic.

During that first year of the thesis, I also encountered a number of books and articles addressing an apparent drift in higher education curricula away from humanities and towards greater investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) along with technical and vocational education. There appeared to be a lack of research on the design of higher education curricula, in particular, the role of learning aims, graduate attributes, transferable skills and the balance of knowledge, skills and dispositions. This gap informed the rationale that lay behind the research questions for my thesis. The questions, 'What influence is internationalisation having on the process and direction of higher education curricular policy in Myanmar?' and 'What rationales are in evidence?', aimed to explore how higher education curriculum policy in Myanmar was being formulated and put into practice. This included the rationales for educational reform that underpinned it and the role played by international partnerships. It also aimed to address the wider

conceptual debate on the purpose of higher education and whether it was aimed too narrowly at employability (Barnett and Coate, 2005).

However, I was experiencing difficulty in getting my thesis proposal approved at my upgrade interview. The upgrade interview served as an important milestone in the EdD programme because it acknowledged the quality of work I had completed thus far, while also allowing me to move ahead to the final stage of my doctoral thesis. One reader of the proposal, who was an internal subject matter expert in a non-supervisory role, was unclear about the focus of my research. He also took issue with the emphasis I was placing on the so-called STEM–humanities divide, which he felt was under-theorised – particularly the claims I was making for the role of neoliberalism in the squeezing of humanities subjects from the higher education curriculum. I corresponded with this reader for some time before taking the decision to move discussion of this divide to the margins of the literature review chapter. The thesis proposal was finally approved, and I was ready to embark on the next stage. While this sharpened the focus of the thesis on the main research question regarding internationalisation of the higher education curriculum, it also served to eclipse a key interest and motivation for writing for me.

A second reader from within the department also provided feedback on the research proposal which was significantly more positive, stating that the research questions were well articulated, that the research itself was timely and that the thesis had 'identified key theoretical debates'. My supervisor's attention at that time was focused more on the organisation of the thesis, which he felt needed to be redesigned (see below), and left it up to me to respond to the first reader's comments. Triangulating between these various arbiters of the thesis was a confusing experience and challenged my ability to hold on to a sense of ownership over the direction of the project.

The author attempts to negotiate and navigate feedback from a challenging reader who is serving as a gatekeeper. He finds himself in a predicament whereby moving on to the next stage involves either following the reader's feedback or convincing the reader that his feedback is faulty. While much has been written about the importance of quality supervision in doctoral studies (Lee, 2019; Wisker et al., 2007; González-Ocampo and Castelló, 2019), including discussion around communities of practice for supervisors working with international students at a distance (Wisker et al., 2007), there is relatively little that speaks to the influences of non-supervisory faculty (such as readers and tutors) in the research choices of doctoral students.

In discussing the practice of educational consulting firms, Steiner-Khamsi (2019) notes that the advice and services that are provided often have less to do with what the client needs and more to do with what the firm can give. This observation may very well hold true for feedback provided to doctoral students. If we consider that faculty members come with their own specialisation, feedback to students is likely influenced in part by their own interests and expertise rather than the intentions of the researcher alone. As such, doctoral students may (unwittingly) find themselves trying to navigate their research within the confines of faculty or departmental interests or agendas (Olalere et al., 2014). As the author's narrative continues, we see multiple players providing feedback that the author does not always agree with. Acquiescing to these suggestions leads to an erosion in his sense of ownership.

I decided to approach the research question through an examination of the literature on internationalisation in global higher education and an analysis of international policy in relation to Myanmar in a policy analysis chapter. Initially, this became an analysis of policy documentation related to an international conference organised by the British Council in Myanmar that I attended in 2013. It met with my supervisor's approval. The four words he wrote were 'This seems very strong', and, indeed, it later proved able to withstand the examiners' assaults. I planned to extend this analysis to a wider set of internationally recognised reform processes and documents, which were aimed at reshaping higher education inside Myanmar, thus directly addressing the research question.

Authorship and authenticity

The design of the thesis became unexpectedly more complex when my supervisor convinced me that this being a professional doctorate, my own involvement in curriculum development in Myanmar should take central stage in the thesis. Indeed, the reflection on professional experience is a central feature of a professional doctorate as opposed to the more theoretical, and lengthier, process of the PhD (Zambo et al., 2014). Together, we developed the idea that I could re-envision my own involvement in the redesign of the English Literature curriculum as the case study of a piece of action research. This would evaluate the practical and professional dimensions of the implementation of a cross-national partnership in curriculum design at a grassroots departmental level. The case study chapter eventually expanded to 13,000 words exploring my role in this project and an attempt at a phenomenological treatment of

the intercultural dimension of the relationships involved in its implementation. This initial reorientation marked the start of what became a prolonged process of professional reflection on the meaning and definition of authenticity in the research process.

There were two important implications of the shift from an analysis of policy documentation to the elaboration of a case study. First, although I could accept that professional reflection was a requirement of an EdD, the retrospective reinterpretation of my previous professional role as action research felt concocted and inauthentic. Second, I would need to add action research and professional reflection to my existing methodology of critical discourse and policy analysis. These considerations slowed the process of research and writing.

I struggled to genuinely integrate the different methodological approaches I was using, such as phenomenology and critical realism. They appeared to be rooted in quite contrasting theoretical traditions. I probably spent far too long attempting some kind of lofty philosophical synthesis of these traditions when I could have been collecting valuable data. On the other hand, the route through a doctoral thesis is situated in a rich and varied landscape of educational ideas, beliefs and practices, and I was keen to use the opportunity to explore this wider territory. The lesson I failed to learn was how to balance a purely intellectual desire to explore theory with the practical business of actually writing and carrying out a research project.

I recall my supervisor being optimistic at the early stages of the thesis, even referring to a possibility of a published book. This was in contrast to doubts I was having about the focus of the thesis and the methodological approach I should take. Yet I was keen to believe in what he was saying and could believe that it was believable. This was partly in deference to his experience and personal affability, but also because he was simply stating the requirements of the professional doctorate written into the handbook itself. Reflecting critically on this, I could have and should have been more proactive in opening up my own doubts and hesitations concerning the focus of the thesis during supervisory meetings.

The decision to make the main chapter a case study produced the dilemma of how to situate a very idiosyncratic piece of action research within an analysis of the international higher education policy context in Myanmar. It was the beginning of an endeavour, as I now look back, to paper over some significant cracks in the research design. I constructed an argument for the document analysis as an extended context for the case study and nothing more.

Despite his misgivings and on the basis of his understanding of the requirements of a professional doctorate, the author decides to accept his supervisor's suggestions. This represents both a breakdown in communication in supervision, as well as a continued threat to ownership. A breakdown in communication between student and supervisor is one of several negative experiences reported among doctoral students, along with lack of response, being too critical, and territoriality and an unwillingness to stand up for students (Hunter and Devine, 2016). Communication, however, is a two-way street and requires students to express their own concerns. Some may remain silent out of respect for their supervisor; others may fear repercussions. The author's story suggests, however, that whatever the reason for remaining silent, acquiescence on the part of the student may lead to greater problems down the line because the responsibility for the thesis ultimately rests on the student. A student's ability and willingness to act independently from supervisors is an important characteristic of success identified among doctoral students (McAlpine et al., 2009; Roberts and Bandlow, 2018). While the role of the supervisor is to provide guidance and feedback, it is the individual student who is ultimately responsible for the contents and design of the thesis. Blended programmes have typically been better at communicating this (as measured by student satisfaction) than programmes delivered completely at a distance (Erichsen et al., 2014).

Dislocation and distance

I had seriously underestimated how long the thesis stage would last. Changes in organisational strategic trajectories, mirroring the opening up of new opportunities for international educational partnerships occurring at a national level, had profound repercussions on my professional position. As a result, within a year, I was being interviewed for a new post as manager on a nationwide teacher-training project in Myanmar that would take me away from the English department and the university, which represented a valuable source of easily obtainable, first-hand data. Indeed, before I left, I carried out face-to-face interviews with several heads of department, although these were never included in the final thesis.

At that juncture, the infrastructure guaranteeing internet and mobile services in Myanmar was still in its infancy and under strict government control. This meant that I could not be sure of being able to gather good quality data at a distance. In addition, research in Myanmar has traditionally been viewed with suspicion by the authorities, and the

diplomatic etiquette involved in negotiating interviews with members of staff was more conveniently carried out on the ground.

The cultural norms surrounding freedom of expression in regions of Southeast Asia are similar to some countries in the Arab Gulf Region in that embedded within the culture is a wariness surrounding any participation in research that involves a permanent record (Jones and Smith, 2002; Killawi et al., 2014). In Southeast Asia, for example, there are a number of surveillance states that have pervasive internal security measures implemented to monitor citizens (Jones and Smith, 2002). It is for this reason that digital recording, signatures and the like are viewed suspiciously by locals. Given this reality, it is possible that the informants may not have spoken freely in the interviews that were gathered at a distance – a key concern of the author.

A further dislocation occurred a year later when my position as project manager became, for a variety of reasons, untenable, and I made the difficult decision to leave Myanmar and return to the UK. I searched for and found a position as a teaching fellow at a leafy university in the south-east of England. Completing a doctorate while working full-time was a challenge I had become used to. Combining study with relocation and settling into a very new position at a UK university added another layer of complexity and of further distance, physical and psychological, from the research site. The final iteration of the thesis was produced far from the steamy flux of Myanmar in the quiet woodlands of Surrey.

The unlocking of the internet and of mobile technology from government control in 2014 meant that I could carry out online interviews with staff and students at Yangon University and these formed the backbone of the evidence I used to argue for the case study as a successful example of a cross-national partnership. However, these interviews carried out using social media could not entirely substitute for the face-to-face interviews I would have carried out if this had been a genuine piece of *in situ* insider action research as the thesis purported it to be.

The issue of distance also became problematic when I attempted to reflect on and tried to evaluate my own professional role in the case study. There were two issues. First, the interpretation of this role as action researcher was an invention that suited the requirements of the thesis, but which distorted my actual role as a teacher-trainer. Second, the focus of the case study on the nature of my professional relationships with local staff in the development of a new curriculum demanded a psychological, phenomenological proximity that was very difficult to achieve at a distance – and yet had found its way into my methodological menagerie.

The relationship between the policy analysis chapter and the case study remained problematic in my mind, and yet my supervisor and

internal reader, prior to the viva, concurred that the thesis was 'very strong' and 'almost over the line'. At the same time, the internal reader commented that the topics in the thesis as a whole ranged very widely and recommended that I focus more specifically on mutuality in pedagogy and partnership, a concept that I had begun to explore in the final chapter. He suggested I highlight this concept in chapter headings and subheadings and even in the title itself. The apparent ambiguity in the feedback I received prior to the viva was unsettling. It hinted at a lack of focus or cohesion at the heart of the thesis which remained a source of anxiety for me but which I was unwilling to share.

Despite my continuing doubts concerning the connection between the case study chapter and the policy analysis chapter, I accepted the comments and suggestions of the internal reader, a renowned expert in the field of curriculum, whose works had inspired my early interest in the subject. I determined that the weight of the feedback was positive, even effusive. The possibility of a successful outcome was being dangled tantalisingly before me, and I was inclined to accept the suggestions being made and to plough forward. Nevertheless, as was later proven, I should have been truer to my own doubts and articulated them more proactively.

I made the suggested changes, although my supervisor advised against changing the title itself. A mock viva was arranged. I prepared a PowerPoint presentation and made sure to highlight mutuality. No suggestion that there was anything fundamentally wrong with the thesis was made. By this time, the case study had become something of a caricature, concocted from the fragments of an experience I felt increasingly alienated from. It masqueraded as action research, but the curriculum initiative had existed, in the manner of a Russian doll, as a project within a project, and represented nothing other than a small-scale experiment in collaborative curriculum making. The inflation of the concept of mutuality, suggested by the internal reader, was also making me uneasy, as it seemed exaggerated. The niche nature of the case study was exposed, rather aggressively I would suggest, during the viva. The examiners questioned the relevance of the case study to the research question and contrasted this with the policy analysis chapter, which they felt was more pertinent and should have been expanded.

The viva defence

The viva is a process that takes place behind closed doors and, as a result, issues of fairness and transparency have come under increasing scrutiny

(Park, 2003; Tinkler and Jackson, 2002). Trafford and Leshem (2002) describe the logistics of the viva in a British setting: Two examiners (one internal and one external to the institution) read the thesis and provide independent written reports to the university. The university then provides copies of the reports to each examiner, a chair and the student's supervisor. Guidelines for the viva are also provided to examiners at this time. At an EdD viva, the doctoral candidate is allowed to give a short presentation highlighting the key aspects of the thesis and is then expected to defend their work by fielding questions from the two examiners. The chair is there to coordinate the viva in an administrative role, and the supervisor is permitted to attend but only in an observing role. It is the two examiners who ultimately determine whether a student will be awarded the title of doctor.

Facing the internal examiner, arguably the foremost expert on Burmese education, felt suddenly rather terrifying. The presentation felt over-rehearsed and awkward, and I could sense impatience from my audience. When the questions came, I was taken by surprise by their inquisitorial nature: 'Why did you think you could ...?' comes to mind, and the negative judgement it implied made me feel extremely unsettled. It was not only the questions, but also the manner in which they were asked that seemed to push me further and further into a corner. The haranguing, 'Tell me what your contribution is', still haunts the edges of my dreams. The external examiner was altogether more diffident and seemed to defer, in the main, to his colleague. However, he, too, was dismissive of some of the claims I had voiced regarding the growing dominance of STEM and the squeezing of humanities in higher education. Possibly the most confusing question was why I had not drawn on the wider Myanmar policy literature for the analysis. I was tempted to say 'but that's precisely what I was intending to do, until ...', but by then it was too late.

The judgement when it came was that the two main chapters were not aligned, and that one of them needed to go. The indication was that the one to go should be the main chapter – the case study. In other words, major changes to be made over the course of a year. I have always felt that this was an accurate assessment of the work I presented. Indeed, it clarified my own doubts concerning the thesis and provided a clear set of guidelines for restructuring it. The examiners launched themselves upon the tray of sandwiches while I felt a weight drop, not of relief but of shock and betrayal. I somehow managed to thank them for their time and wriggled free of the room. Immediately following the viva, my supervisor's only response seemed to be humorous surprise at how subjective and idiosyncratic opinions could be, although he did admit that the examiner had been particularly challenging in this case. It is

disappointing, but you can rise to it and resubmit in a few months – or words to that effect – were what I walked away with. I would have to rewrite, as I then appraised it, as much as half the thesis. Not something that could be done in months given my current workload. An avalanche is how I would later refer to the emotion.

Wallace (2003) notes that it is not unusual for doctoral candidates to have negative feelings about the viva even when successful. Her research found that successful candidates who reported feeling a sense of achievement tended to employ metaphors or similes of sporting competitions or debate. In contrast, successful candidates who reported negative feelings after a viva often deployed imagery relating to interrogation or imprisonment (Wallace, 2003). In this regard, the avalanche metaphor used by the author is of special interest. Whether the metaphor is reflective of the viva or the doctoral journey more broadly is unclear. The viva defence, more generally, remains an extremely draining and anxiety inducing experience. Trafford and Leshem (2002) identify three variables in a successful defence: (1) explicit scholarship appropriate to the subject area; (2) personal resilience; and (3) interpersonal awareness. In the case of personal resilience, confidence in responding to questions, engaging the examiners at any level of questioning and the ability to deflect or reject inappropriate questions are key components (Trafford and Leshem, 2002).

Contrasting with successful vivas, Mullins and Kiley (2002) conducted interviews with 30 experienced examiners and found that the most common characteristics of a 'poor' thesis were lack of coherence, lack of understanding of the theory, lack of confidence, researching the wrong problem, mixed or confused methodological perspectives, or work that is not original. Applying these characteristics to the author's plight, we see a chronic struggle with the coherence of the thesis, including challenges associated with conflicting theoretical/methodological positions. These difficulties all came together to affect the author's confidence on the day of the viva.

Climbing out of the avalanche: coping with major revisions

I fell into something of a depression following the viva and found it hard to concentrate, going over and over in my mind the things that had been said, the guidance I had been given, my own understanding of the differences between a professional doctorate and what I was now being asked to write, which was much more like a mini-PhD. When I happened to meet the internal reader at a conference some weeks after the viva, he

was surprised to hear that I had not passed and alluded to the possibility that examiners may not always fully appreciate the differences between professional doctorates and PhDs. This simply added to the feeling of confusion I was experiencing. The emotional impact of such an experience has been variously described as demoralising or even traumatic.

Feelings of depression are especially common among doctoral students (Ali et al., 2007). Reasons for this include thesis difficulties, adviser issues, isolation and/or financial stress (Ali et al., 2007; Delamont, et al., 1997; Wisker et al., 2007). For the author, the viva outcome was a disturbing event for two reasons. Firstly, he was required to make major revisions at a time when his professional responsibilities were demanding. Secondly, and perhaps more disturbing, he realised that the requested revisions were in line with what he felt to be true all along but hesitated to act on.

The instructions I was given for rewriting the thesis would entail deleting any references to the relational, intercultural dimensions of the project. The recently highlighted concept of mutuality was consistently ignored throughout the viva. The interview data I had rather painstakingly gathered over weeks of online conversations with former staff and students at the university was deemed irrelevant. Any mention of phenomenology was to be avoided, and the key requirement of the EdD for professional reflection was downplayed or marginalised.

Although I had written quite extensively on issues of inequality and intercultural understanding, the examiner seemed to find the case study too simplistic and lacking sufficient critical reflection on my own role in the process. More than that, it was of no general significance and had no relevance to the wider processes and rationales for internationalisation that were, supposedly, the main focus of the thesis. The removal of these voices in the rewritten thesis and their replacement by an extended critical analysis of policy documents represents for me a diminution of ownership and thus of authenticity.

The humanities–STEM debate received very little response from the internal examiner who asked that I concentrate instead on analysing national and international higher education policy in Myanmar and on unearthing the priorities of international partners as I had begun to do in the policy analysis chapter. These excisions invoked a further sense of losing ownership of the thesis and I decided, provisionally, to give up on it. I took a holiday in South America and for a few months submerged myself in life and in work. I then came across 3,000 words I had written, prior to my supervisor's instruction to focus on the case study, analysing one of the key policy documents the examiner had specifically criticised

me for ignoring! It was something to hold on to and try to develop. I immersed myself gradually in the rewriting.

Having spent up to a year writing the case study, I was unwilling to remove the case study chapter in its entirety. Reflecting more deeply on the curriculum project, its representation as a case study changed for me. Interviews with teachers showed how effectively the project had been able to engage them in the process of curriculum design. The interview data also gave expression to the voices of students who had direct experience with the new curriculum. These voices I thought, perhaps naively, provided evidence for the success of the changes we had made. As I reviewed the literature on mutuality, I determined that it had been a genuine feature of the project. What had initially felt concocted and inauthentic gradually became more real. I resolved to keep the chapter and approached my supervisor with this in mind. He concurred that it was integral to the EdD and needed to remain, albeit in an attenuated form. The key challenge was to link the case study more closely to the extended policy analysis chapter.

Unlike the process leading up to the viva, the author made a significant shift in his approach. He has now taken full ownership of his work. His decision to reject certain changes to the thesis, such as the removal of the case study, is notable because it runs parallel to what Trafford and Leshem (2002) refer to as the ability to deflect or reject inappropriate questions in their description of personal persistence (one of the variables identified as central to a successful viva). These actions are also indicative of an ability to take initiative, an important characteristic for doctoral students (McAlpine et al., 2009).

I was finally able to establish a more substantive link between these chapters through understanding that the curriculum project had allowed teachers to become directly involved in the then dominant discourses of autonomy and quality I had extracted from the Myanmar higher education policy literature. Involvement in curriculum making had been empowering, giving teachers an opportunity to decide on a new set of learning aims and on new pedagogical approaches to teaching and assessment.

To return to the earlier metaphor, it felt like climbing out of the avalanche and clawing my way up and out metre-by-metre, word-by-word. A daily dissection of key documents and Skype interviews with international partners in Myanmar higher education gave me a renewed focus on the case study and its links to the wider policy context. During the rewriting, I continued to trace more substantial links between the abstraction of the document analyses and this reflective account.

Whether this would constitute a worthy contribution to knowledge had yet to be proved. The metaphor moved to the courtroom, and all I could do was wait for the jury's decision. Regardless of the result, it felt good to have re-engaged and to have exercised my best efforts to create a worthwhile project.

Post-operative

One year later and the thesis was rewritten and resubmitted. My supervisor continued to provide feedback at points throughout the year; however, I had to take a more proactive role in steering the process of revision. This process of re-visioning worked as an antidote to the ambiguity of supervision and examination I had experienced. I was able to reclaim a modicum of authenticity as I reflected more deeply on the implications of the small case study for the wider process of international higher educational reform in Myanmar. I carried out more interviews, this time with heads of international organisations in Myanmar, and these did find their way into the thesis, although in the final feedback they were criticised as being largely irrelevant.

The days shortened and lengthened. The submission deadline came into view. Alongside the resubmitted thesis with its new sections highlighted in blue, I had to submit a final cover letter addressed to the examiners – a form of written defence, describing in detail how I had responded to their comments. My supervisor showed me an example. The polite etiquette was at odds with my anxiety and anger at the manner with which the viva had been conducted. Yet, being so close to the end I chose to jump the final hoop. Hoop jumping is a commonly used metaphor to describe a developmental process that has somehow become mechanical. The key requisite was to satisfy the examiners' comments. At the same time, I still had doubts that they clearly understood the requirements of a professional doctorate as compared to a PhD. Thus, I inserted a short extract from the EdD handbook into the final cover letter, detailing the necessity for professional reflection. Not an easy decision to make, as it was potentially embarrassing for the examiners. However, my supervisor agreed, adamant that to satisfy the requirements of an EdD, the case study as an example of professional reflection, albeit in an attenuated form, should remain. Submission complete.

A few weeks later an email arrived from my supervisor headed 'congratulations'. Yet, despite my initial disbelief, sense of relief, excitement, it appeared that the examiners, while agreeing that the thesis

was able to pass and that the case study now met with their approval, would still like a further clarification of its contribution to knowledge; a 'coda' was how my supervisor described this 1,500 word extension to the conclusion. In other words, I had to contend with both major and minor – I would like to say heart surgery because, at times, it felt like that – corrections. Nevertheless, a weight had been lifted; I could enjoy the process of writing once more and was able to unearth fresh connections between the chapters.

Being there counts

The viva examination remains a source of anxiety and humiliation for me. I am glad to have survived and continued my studies, but it has opened a wound. Looking back over the thesis and the landscape of ideas I have encountered, the views were expansive and detailed, and the path scored with tiny trails leading into the surrounding academic landscape – places where I became lost or entangled. In the literature review chapter, my fascination with the STEM–humanities divide was difficult to reconcile with the evolving focus on internationalisation. In the methodology chapter I became ensnared in a complex philosophical debate on the respective merits of critical realism and phenomenology. The originally submitted case study had expanded to include a wide assortment of topics. It incorporated pedagogical methods that included techniques for creating a more interactive classroom. It explored the role of graduate attributes in curriculum design, mutuality in international educational partnerships and an analysis of a professional cross-national partnership. It also touched upon mentoring, as well as citizenship and its relation to literature teaching. These assorted topics were hard to reconcile but nevertheless allowed me to discover more of the surrounding academic territory. I have not given up the belief that one can undertake a course of study in order to learn.

Looking back now as a supervisor of graduate students myself, I am well aware of the need to frame a clear and focused research question from the outset. I was unable to follow my own advice and the thesis surveyed a plethora of theories and methods of research. As a learning experience this was ultimately enriching, but it also served to obscure the purpose of the research and complicated the process of writing. I also felt that my supervisor had lost interest in the thesis; while continuing to provide guidance, often purely stylistic, there was no sense of curiosity or excitement, no questions beyond the generic. The internal reader

was ambiguous in his comments – seeming to enjoy the range of subjects I had covered but recommending that I focus on the idea of mutuality.

I could have taken a different approach. I could have been more proactive in searching out sources of feedback other than my supervisor and latterly the internal reader and examiners. I would have appreciated more input at the early formative phase. Indeed, the writing of the thesis was, in general, an isolating experience, one that entailed a shifting sense of ownership. I took seriously the advice of the readers of the thesis at the various stages, positioning myself in the role of a student rather than a fully fledged researcher. I deferred too easily perhaps to their professional status and experience. A more fitting analogy for me, however, is a card game in which the players are playing by different rules. That the examiners explicitly asked for the removal of the case study chapter, with its attendant reflection on professional experience, and its replacement by pure policy analysis, proves to me that they had failed to understand a fundamental difference between the demands of a professional doctorate and a PhD. To be fair, only at a later stage did I myself become acutely aware of this difference and otherwise would have continued on the path of policy analysis so beloved of the examiners.

On the other hand, I could not easily have prevented or circumvented the transitions between professional positions and the spatial distance and dislocation from the research site that resulted. I am able to construct these transitions as critical incidents (Cunningham, 2008; Halquist and Musanti, 2010; Wellington and Sikes, 2007) by describing their effect in disorienting/orienting my research interests and trajectory. Dislocation from the research site influenced the access to and the quality of the data I was able to obtain but more importantly it removed a personal and professional sense of involvement and participation in the research. Being there counts.

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6
Understanding the personal significance of our academic choices

Maria Savva

> *'Can you tell me which way I ought to go from here?' asked Alice. 'That depends a good deal on where you want to go' said the cat. 'I don't much care where' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go' said the cat*. (Lewis Carroll, 1865: 36)

The doctoral journey can feel like an enigma – one that is filled with a vast field of choices that only we can make. These choices are not inconsequential, as each will take us on a different path, providing us with different experiences and different outcomes. The choice of research topic, in particular, is likely to have repercussions long after our doctoral studies are complete. Throughout the journey we are faced with various 'gatekeepers' (supervisors, upgrade committees, readers, examiners) who assess the quality of our choices. While an important part of the doctoral journey involves the ability to convince others that our research has value, taking the time to explore the value of our work on a more personal level has its own intrinsic worth. By exploring the personal significance of our research choices, we are able to understand not only *what* is important to us but *why* it is important. In doing so, we are also able to better harness the qualities of agency and resilience that are so critical to the completion of doctoral studies (Luse et al., 2012). The same can be argued for our choice to pursue doctoral studies, which is an endeavour that requires a significant time commitment.

In this chapter, I map the intrapersonal journey that paralleled my academic journey as an international doctoral student based in the country of Cyprus. I model how I used my academic studies, including my research topic selection, as a mirror to reflect and gain a deeper

understanding about who I am, where I come from and where I want to go. I differentiate between the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that contributed towards my academic choices and how I came to reconcile the two. I also demonstrate how I used the solitude that is often associated with the doctoral journey (Ali and Kohun, 2006; Ali et al., 2007; Wellington and Sikes, 2007) to create a space whereby I looked inwards to better understand my academic choices and my relationship to those choices. Finally, engaging in this reflective process served as important preparation for the world after the doctorate, when critical choices had to be made about life and career trajectories. It is my hope that readers will use the journey described in this chapter as a flexible model whereby they can begin to explore their own purpose and aspirations.

Selecting a research topic

Given the vast free range of choice, the process of identifying and selecting a research topic can feel like an overwhelming one. To help guide students, it is not unusual for university libraries or writing centres to offer guidelines on the topic selection process (MIT, n.d.; UCL, n.d.; University of Michigan–Flint, n.d.). Strategies identified in research-based studies include brainstorming, identifying things that the researcher is interested in, thinking and talking with a partner outside one's discipline and visualisation techniques (Luse et al., 2012). While such strategies offer important logistical support at the onset, there is relatively little research that delves deeper into the relationship between research question development and the researcher. Engaging in this deeper process, however, did much more than simply give me a research direction. I became interested in exploring why and how particular topics found their way into my thesis: Why did I choose one research topic over another? And what personal significance did the research I chose have to me?

Like many doctoral students, the research idea I entered with was not the same one I finished with. My initial research idea was rooted in concepts of national identity and social cohesion. I hoped to explore education systems in multilingual countries like Belgium and Luxembourg. The (seemingly obvious) realisation that I had no knowledge of the languages spoken in either of the two countries, nor any direct access to people in the field, prompted me to reassess my grandiose aspirations. At the time, I was teaching in an overseas international school, and at my supervisor's prudent urging I decided that the international school

context would provide a more logical route for my research. Besides, I already had access to people across numerous international schools and could plan both my research design and methods around this access. The availability of networks, therefore, was a decisive factor in changes to my research topic (Olalere et al., 2014). It was along this storyline that my research eventually shifted, focusing instead on the individual identity and intercultural development of educators, with my official thesis title becoming *An Investigation into the Intercultural Development of Anglophone Educators Working in International Schools* (Savva, 2015).

While network availability (or lack thereof) was central to changes in my own research topic, other external factors that have been identified as affecting research topic selection include criteria imposed by funding sources (Mosyjowski et al., 2017), faculty member research agendas and departmental core courses (Olalere et al., 2014). Although external factors can and do influence choices in research topic selection, there is usually some flexibility for individuals to pursue areas that are also intrinsically interesting (Mosyjowski et al., 2017). Choosing a topic that is intrinsically motivating is an especially important way of guarding against losing interest in a topic much later into the research process (Luse et al., 2012).

Beyond the external factors that prompted a change in my research topic, however, there were deeper layers behind my choices that I sought to better understand. Why, for example, did certain words find their way into the title of my thesis rather than others? Why were educators the focal point of my study instead of students, standards or curricula? And what precisely was the place and role of the term 'intercultural'? Why not literacy or language instruction? Why not curriculum reform or student assessment? These are all topics that could have easily been studied within the international school context. Why then, did I choose 'intercultural development'? And why should this topic be of any significance to *me*? These were important questions because answering them allowed me to tap into my intrinsic interests, which also provided me with the agency and resilience needed to complete my doctoral journey.

To get to the heart of these questions, I found myself going back in time to identify people, places and events that helped kindle my interest in this topic. What follows is a short autobiographical exploration of why 'intercultural development' became important to me both as a person and as a researcher. The reasons for this were not initially self-evident; I had to actively search for them in my effort to understand the intrinsic motivation behind my research. It involved digging deep into my life experiences and understanding the role particular events played in shaping my identity and the choices I would later make in my research.

In the sections that follow I utilise critical incidents as a way of highlighting events or situations that marked a significant turning point in my life story (Tripp, 1994). Critical incidents are different from crises in that they do not necessarily have the immediate concentrated impact often found in large-scale crisis situations. Instead, the impact often occurs slowly over an extended period (Cunningham, 2008). Moreover, critical incidents take place within the context of otherwise ordinary, often unnoticeable, parts of an individual's life (Angelides, 2001; Cunningham, 2008; Tripp, 1994). They can be one-time events or recur on a regular basis – perhaps they are something that is seen or heard. What defines a critical incident, however, is that its occurrence becomes increasingly problematic over time and is often accompanied by a noticeable and recurring feeling of discomfort. The cumulative impact of critical incidents in my own life has been profound. As I will illustrate, they have often served as fundamental precursors to struggle and change.

A dialectical past

My story begins in New York City where I grew up in a family culture that was quite different from the mainstream American culture. Both parents were immigrants who spoke little English; both were raised in Greek villages during the Second World War and, as a result, had only acquired a primary school education. As adults, they came to the United States where they attempted to build a better life with limited language proficiency and an equally limited education. Like all children, my identity was inevitably tied to theirs through processes of primary socialisation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). That is, the world I came to understand was mediated to me by my family and their circumstances.

Upon entering school, this influence was often challenged by forms of secondary socialisation, a process that extends to institutions and practices beyond the immediate family structure (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Aspects of secondary socialisation in my own life came to include daily exposure to American mass media, school curricula, teachers and friends – all of whom dominated much of my time while growing up. Yet the 'other' world at home also remained a significant force through my immediate family, relatives and the local church. As a young adult these contrasting worlds eventually resulted in some confusing identity issues, despite my being ignorant of them at the time.

On the surface, my European heritage allowed me to assimilate quickly into mainstream American society. Yet despite my external

assimilation, my internal assimilation lagged substantially. I spent much of my life moving in and out of two spheres, enjoying both but never feeling that I belonged completely to either one. The duality of feeling both privileged and disadvantaged at the same time aligned with what Martin and Nakayama (2015) describe as a dialectical approach. According to this approach, individuals often experience privilege and disadvantage simultaneously, thereby highlighting the multi-dimensional and sometimes contradictory nature of intercultural development (Martin and Nakayama, 1999, 2015). Importantly, such an approach rejects the dualistic 'either/or' view of privilege that is so prevalent today. In my own life, for example, I enjoyed the privilege of being a white American. Yet I was also a female, growing up in an uneducated, working class and non-English speaking household. In retrospect, these early experiences certainly contributed to my later interests in identity formation, citizenship and intercultural development. It is no surprise then, that all three of these topics somehow materialised both in my initial and final research idea – revealing themselves as deeply important topics in my autobiography.

Beyond this broad backdrop, I recall a specific incident in my early adulthood that played a key role in my developing interest in intercultural and international education. The summer after my high school graduation I travelled to Greece where I came across a cousin of mine who had been born and raised there. We were the same age, and shared the same first name and surname (the result of a Greek tradition of naming children after paternal grandparents). I recall my cousin's disappointment that summer in the outcome of some highly competitive national university entrance exams. She had done poorly and, as a result, did not gain entry into any of the universities in the country. At that time, this essentially meant her permanent exclusion from higher education. As a relatively mediocre high school student myself, I was somewhat taken aback. Blocked access to higher education had never passed through my mind, despite my own unexceptional grades back in the United States.

Most unsettling was the realisation that I could have just as easily been standing in my dear cousin's shoes – the same age, the same name, probably even the same grades. In many ways it was as if I was looking in a mirror, *yet by the sheer stroke of good fortune I had been born elsewhere*. As a result, the opportunities which would be made available to me were markedly different from those that would be made available to her. Although the exchange between my cousin and me was part of an otherwise casual conversation, I found myself returning to our conversation and feeling increasingly unsettled over time – a common indication

of a critical incident (Cunningham, 2008; Tripp, 1994). It was at that moment that citizenship and education also became privileges. And to this day, it is difficult for me to think of either as being anything less than that.

Citizenship was a privilege that I had given little thought to prior to my encounter. As an American I had open access to higher education, and it was this open access that eventually enabled me to reshape my identity despite any disadvantages associated with my parents' linguistic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. That summer remains a defining moment because of my new awareness and the accompanying curiosity that came with it. I remember wondering about how systems of education might operate in other countries. I should mention that, back then, the internet and cell phones were not prevalent, so I had no readily available way of accessing that kind of information. The seeds, however, had been planted.

Transitioning into education

Life rolled along uneventfully in the years that followed. I moved in and out of various jobs and eventually became more serious about my studies. I completed my undergraduate degree while working full-time and was awarded the title of valedictorian. Shortly thereafter I began working as a classroom teacher in New York City schools. At that time, teachers were required to earn a graduate degree in order to obtain permanent certification (a certification that New York State has since done away with). The requirement was quite broad, giving me the freedom to select any area of study as long as it was in the field of education. Since I had already secured employment, I had the luxury of choosing a specialisation that was based solely on my intrinsic interests. I applied to the Comparative and International Education programme at Columbia University and was delighted when I was accepted. I would spend the next two years completing an MA degree, while continuing to teach full-time in New York City schools.

International education was an intriguing area of study. Although I hadn't yet figured out how my interest could translate into actual employment, I did recognise that this was a field that had captured my interest and enthusiasm. I fleetingly entertained the possibility of taking my studies beyond the graduate level, but by then I was married and expecting my first child. I handed in my final thesis a few weeks before my due date and fittingly put aside any lavish academic ambitions for a

later time. Twelve years would come and go before I would be in a position to revisit my studies.

Around this time, a second defining moment took place. After 37 years of living in the United States I moved to Cyprus with my Cypriot husband and, by then, three children. Moving from New York City to a small island-nation was an especially challenging experience. I struggled with the slower pace, more conservative values and a comparatively homogeneous society that I felt was not always welcoming of outsiders. I went through a very typical experience of culture shock: I experienced strain engendered by attempts to adjust, a sense of loss, confusion surrounding self-identity and the feeling of being rejected by members of the host culture (Ward et al., 2005). Despite these challenges, a few years into my relocation I had the opportunity to pursue my doctoral studies. Interestingly, elements of culture shock and dissonance emerged yet again, but this time through the Anglophone educators I interviewed as part of my field research in China and the Netherlands.

I discovered that many of the stories the educators shared with me resonated with my own relocation experience. On the one hand, overseas educators enjoyed positions of privilege within the private school settings they worked in, yet once outside the school campus they were quickly relegated to the status of foreigner (Savva, 2013, 2017). Once again, these experiences reaffirmed a dialectical approach whereby individuals simultaneously experienced both privileged and disadvantaged positions (Martin and Nakayama, 2015). Notably, it was through my relocation and my research together that I was able to face some of my own identity issues. I realised, for example, that although I had a good understanding of the Greek language and culture, it was not a language or culture that I had fully internalised despite my ancestral heritage. As a result, and to my surprise, I came to appreciate the fact that although my parents were Greeks, my identity was very much a product of American culture. Ironically, it had taken living in a Greek-speaking country to realise just how American I was.

A fitting analogy to the relocation experience that comes to mind involves the interactive properties of oil and water. When placing a drop of water in oil, the water will naturally separate itself from the oil. The same holds true when a drop of oil is placed in water. It will rise to the top, making itself distinct from the surrounding water. In both instances the focal point depends less on 'the drop' and more on what surrounds it. That is, the context in which we find ourselves exerts substantial influence on how we see ourselves as individuals and our relationship to others. It was through placing myself in a context that was different

from what I knew that I came to recognise which cultural identity, in fact, resonated most with me.

Indeed, a sense of belonging is fundamental to the concept of citizenship. Osler and Starkey (2005) describe the three dimensions of status, feeling and practice as central to one's sense of citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2005). These three dimensions, of course, are not static and can change over time and place. Today I travel with one of two passports: a US passport or a Greek (EU) passport. My decision about which one to use is always based on what is most convenient and expedient. Sometimes I have asked myself which passport I would choose if convenience and expedience were not an issue – simply as an exercise to test my own loyalties. I am always comfortable in answering that I would choose my American identity. There are many reasons for this choice. I was born and raised in the United States. I command native fluency in the English language and my earliest memories of 'home' will always be in New York. Most importantly, it is through my American citizenship – and the many opportunities it has afforded me – that I have been able to flourish most. Yet I also value my European identity. It has developed partly as a result of my bicultural upbringing, but probably more so as a result of living on the fringes of Europe, bordering the Middle East for a decade. My studies in the United Kingdom and my travels throughout Europe during that time, including my visits to Greece, have all affected the internal landscape of who I am, creating a type of composite identity. Such a description is probably not so out of the ordinary given globalisation trends. Although coming to terms with my identity occurred relatively late in my life, I consider myself fortunate to have been able to discover these various dimensions of myself – with the doctoral journey playing a key role in what I would describe as a highly introspective process.

Motivation in doctoral pursuit: EdD or PhD?

Whereas this explains my interest in my research topic and why it is important to me, it does not explain why I felt the need to pursue a doctorate to begin with. Like research topic selection, reasons for choosing to pursue a doctorate can be categorised as being extrinsic or intrinsic in nature (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Whereas extrinsic motivation involves external control and refers to engaging in an activity to attain a specific outcome, intrinsic motivation is internally regulated and involves engaging in an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Extrinsic factors include things like employability

prospects, whereas intrinsic factors can more simply include a deeper level of interest (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Brailsford (2010) notes, however, that quite often individuals are motivated by a *combination* of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

This was true in my own experience. Reasons why I chose to pursue a doctorate aligned with those commonly found in research studies: obtaining a doctorate was a form of self-actualisation, a personal achievement, a status symbol, as well as something that was likely to open up more varied employment opportunities (Brailsford, 2010; Elsey, 2007). Acquiring a doctorate had the capacity to fundamentally change how others viewed me and, subsequently, how I viewed myself. This outlook was rooted in research pointing to our sense of identity as one which is influenced, to a significant degree, by the social order around us and our relationship to that social order (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Hornsey, 2008; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982). In my own mind, obtaining a doctorate was an individual achievement that came with social recognition and status.

Yet personal achievement and status can be realised in many ways. People can show status by the size of their homes, the cars they drive and the clothes they wear. And more varied employment opportunities can materialise through increased attention to networking or perhaps expanding the geographic limits in which one is willing to work. The point being that both status and increased opportunities can be expressed or found in forms that do not necessarily have to do with obtaining a doctorate. The initial response provided, therefore, was a surface level response that did not delve into the deeper layers behind my choices.

My own belief is that it becomes increasingly difficult to complete a doctorate if there is not enough intrinsic interest present. This is largely due to the extended, comparatively less structured, yet highly intricate nature of the doctoral journey. Whereas undergraduate and graduate degrees are supported by highly prescribed coursework, syllabi and frameworks, a doctorate requires students to engage in original thought and take on greater control in negotiating their ideas, their research and their relationships with faculty and supervisors (at least in the social sciences and humanities). While external institutional controls (such as ethical guidelines) serve to guide students, the planning, gathering, sorting and analysing of relevant data are structured by the individual student, not the institution. Likewise, it is the student who must ultimately construct and defend their research argument. Without the presence of intrinsic motivation these tasks become increasingly difficult to accomplish.

In exploring the intrinsic aspects of my own motivation, I came to recognise that beyond the material benefits I hoped to get out of the intellectual endeavour, there were also things that I hoped to contribute. It is the desire to contribute meaningfully that, I believe, guided me to choose the doctoral path. I had something to contribute not because my life had been perfect and stellar, but for the very opposite reasons. My life's path was a long and winding one, and as a result of my own shortcomings and struggles I wanted to believe that I had developed some useful insights. It is these insights that I believed served to enrich my perspective and allowed me to stay reasonably grounded.

After almost 20 years of working as a classroom teacher in both primary and secondary schools, I was ready for a change. Teaching was a rewarding but also daunting experience – the latter evidenced by high attrition levels among teachers on a global scale (Craig, 2017; Newberry and Allsop, 2017; Kelchtermans, 2017). Most notably, its applied nature failed to provide a space for the conceptual and analytical thinking I craved. In contrast, research provided me with a flexible and autonomous platform whereby I could reflect and think critically about areas that were both personally and professionally interesting to me. Publication gave me the further capacity to leave behind an artefact of myself that would continue to exist long after I was gone.

I was initially drawn to the Doctor in Education (EdD) because of my teaching background. Having spent a good part of my life as a classroom teacher, obtaining an EdD seemed a logical extension given my skills and experience. As I progressed in the programme, however, I began to question whether an EdD was, in fact, the best match for my particular career aspirations – which included moving into a faculty position at a higher education institution. I observed that, unlike me, quite a few of my classmates intended to remain in their respective non-academic professions. I also noticed that two classmates had made a switch to a PhD early in the programme. I recall that one of them did so because the university he worked for, in a North African country, refused to recognise the EdD as a doctoral degree. I decided to explore this matter more deeply and found that perceptions about professional and traditional doctorates were wide ranging. Park (2005) notes that professional doctorates are a response to a demand in the community that traditional doctorates have not adequately fulfilled. As comparatively newer degrees, however, professional doctorates are also viewed by some academics, whether openly or privately, as less rigorous (Poole, 2012). Given the competitive job market in academia, this latter perception was of special concern because I did not want to compromise

my ability to apply for faculty jobs at universities across multiple countries and continents.

At the time I had already completed all of the required assignments in the EdD programme, with only the final thesis remaining. Whereas both the EdD and PhD required about 80,000 words of writing, the EdD compartmentalised half of those words through incremental module assignments and an Institution Focused Study, with the thesis being the final 'assignment' of approximately 45,000 words. In contrast, the PhD concentrated all 80,000 words into a final culminating thesis. Since I had already completed all of the required module assignments and the Institution Focused Study in the EdD, making the switch to a PhD meant that I would end up writing approximately 120,000 words – which was more than was required for either degree! It would have been much easier for me to stay the EdD track. Given the ambiguity and uncertainty of my future career path, however, I decided to make what felt like a safer choice at the time. And so, I contacted my supervisor about making the change.

It is worth noting that my concern ultimately proved to be a moot point as I eventually took a faculty job in New York where I would work alongside many outstanding EdD colleagues. In other words, having an EdD or a PhD would have made no difference at all with regard to hiring decisions at the institution I eventually came to work for. Interestingly, despite being awarded a PhD, the most memorable aspects of my doctoral journey remain rooted in the friendships I formed through my participation in the EdD programme.

Academic choices, agency and resilience

Whether enrolled in the EdD or PhD, taking the time to understand the deeper reasons behind my choice to pursue a doctorate, as well as my choice of research topic, was central to harnessing the qualities of agency and resilience. Whereas agency was central to the creative endeavour of generating work and ideas, resilience provided the long-term stamina necessary to see the various work and ideas to completion. But how do we begin to develop these characteristics?

It is difficult to separate agency and resilience from factors associated with intrinsic motivation discussed earlier. Studies support intrinsic motivation as a factor that enhances student ability to complete graduate and doctoral level work (Ivankova and Stick, 2007; Zhou, 2015). When combined with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation

can also serve to produce desired outcomes (Ivankova and Stick, 2007). However, extrinsic motivation alone can serve to undermine agency and resilience due to its relationship with external controls (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Given the extended nature and intricate work associated with doctoral study – as well as the prevalence of mental health issues among doctoral students, such as feelings of isolation (Ali and Kohun, 2006) and difficulties establishing a work-life balance (Brown and Watson, 2010; Levecque et al., 2017) – it can be argued that intrinsic motivation is a particularly valuable component in both the psychological well-being of students and increased completion rates.

It was this intrinsic motivation that fuelled my own sense of agency during my studies. I found myself stepping out of my comfort zone on numerous occasions to take on new roles and participate in various events where I was viewed by others as an emerging 'expert'. The liminal space between being a doctoral student and becoming a scholar was an ambiguous one (Turner, 1987) where I engaged in what was essentially a gradual form of identity reconstruction. Taking on a leadership role was certainly not something I had been groomed to do in the years leading up to my doctoral studies, and yet learning to promote and advocate for myself was necessary in order to be seen. The importance of self-initiative in the doctoral process has been highlighted as a key factor of success both as it relates to student ability and student willingness to act independently from supervisors (McAlpine et al., 2009). It is for this reason that I pushed myself to submit manuscripts to peer-reviewed journals and to present my ideas to colleagues, and later to professionals and academics in high-profile conferences.

Although I could not appreciate it at the time, each new role and activity served as a type of scaffold, moving me closer to identifying as a scholar. Together this scaffolding facilitated important shifts whereby I was able to transition out of my role as a passive student, to one of an active intellectual. While not always a formalised part of the programme's curriculum, these activities served an important pedagogical purpose. McAlpine et al. (2009) underscore the educational importance of less formal aspects of doctoral study, such as engaging in conversations and establishing relationships with peers, independently reviewing literature, participating in conferences and writing proposals, as well as the process of writing the dissertation. Ultimately, it is through participation in both formal and informal activities that students engage in a process of identity reconstruction (Beech, 2011).

Developing an identity as a publishing academic, in particular, was not without its challenges or setbacks. For every manuscript that was

accepted, there were many more that were rejected. Even the manuscripts that were accepted were not immune to the scathing comments of the omnipotent anonymous reviewer (sometimes referred to in academia as 'reviewer # 2'). These challenges highlighted the importance of resilience, which served as an important defence for feedback that was not always complimentary. Most significantly, resilience and its relationship to work production involved accepting rejection and failure as a natural part of the academic process (Nygaard, 2017). In fact, rejection seemed to increase according to the level of risk I took. The more risks I took, the more critically I was judged. The potency and importance of resilience in academia is probably best illustrated in J. Haushofer's (2016) published 'CV of failures'. A successful professor at Princeton University, Haushofer (2016) courageously published a very unconventional CV for the world to see – one that highlights all of his failures. Besides illustrating the importance of agency and resilience, this particular piece of work also debunks the utopian portrayal of a linear and steady career progression. In my own journey, because I had taken the time to tap into my intrinsic interests and was engaged in research that was meaningful to me for its own sake, it was easier to keep going in the face of rejection.

Life after the doctorate

Logic would dictate that after successful completion of the viva one should experience feelings of relief and elation. It was for this reason that I was somewhat perplexed when these emotions did not arrive in the way that I had imagined they would. There certainly was a sense of relief and of course I was pleased. But I also felt an unexpected sense of confusion and loss. After years of preparing for the climactic viva, it was over in a blur, followed by a relatively quick deflation. This unsettling 'quiet' continued for several weeks afterwards. In hindsight, I recognise that I had been stripped of something that had become a very intricate part of my life. For years, my first thoughts every morning centred on my thesis. Afternoons and evenings were spent either in front of my laptop or on my bed, reading through articles and books. Even during the occasional dinner out, my thoughts would inevitably drift to my thesis instead of my dinner companions. That was all gone now. An unexpected sense of loss crept into my daily life. I had lots of time on my hands now, but what should I do with it?

To combat the sense of loss after a successful viva defence, Di Pierro (2007) underscores the importance of providing closure in the form of

debriefing in doctoral programmes. This final step creates a space for doctoral students to decompress and really think about their journey in a meaningful way. Like many other doctoral graduates, I used my time after graduation to formulate new articles for publication and to prepare for stressful interviews for academic posts (Di Pierro, 2007). All this took place within a context of continued full-time employment and family responsibilities. Here, a new kind of anxiety emerged: how could I best put my degree to work? Even worse, would I be *able* to put my degree to work? I do not claim to have any easy answers to these questions. And, in fact, the answer for each reader will be a very personal one. Some may want to chase the higher education path, as I did, while others may find they are better suited to a practitioner-oriented or corporate path. Still others may have the luxury of basking in the glory of acquiring a doctorate, without any strings attached whatsoever.

As a result of examining why I made the choices I did, the personal growth I experienced was perhaps most valuable *after* programme completion. I understand who I am, why particular issues are important to me, what I am interested in and – just as importantly – what I am not interested in. I know these things not because someone else has told me so, but because I have engaged in the long and arduous process of introspection that paralleled my research. Now is a good time to refer back to the quote with which I opened this chapter. It is a quote drawn from a scene in Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In the scene, Alice is lost in a forest when she notices a Cheshire cat sitting on a tree:

> 'Can you tell me which way I ought to go from here?' asked Alice. 'That depends a good deal on where you want to go' said the cat. 'I don't much care where' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go' said the cat. (Carroll, 1865: 36)

For me, this quote suggests that there are many paths that open up before us during our lifetime and identifying the right path is dependent largely on where we 'want' to go, or at the very least, what we would like to see along the way. Yet knowing where we want to go is not self-evident. How many times have we thought we wanted something, only to find out once it was in our possession that it was not as we had imagined? Contemplating deeper questions such as why we want certain things, as well as how we want to realise them, guards us against potentially faulty decisions. For me, understanding where my choices came from helped me to decipher the path(s) which were best suited to my goals

and interests. It allowed me to peel back the layers and shine a light on what shaped my choices, and the distinct impact that each choice had on the trajectory of both my research and my life.

Today, I find myself back in New York as Associate Professor and Director of International Studies, working in one of the 25 colleges that make up the City University of New York. I am happy to be back home in New York, where I feel very much in my element. I should mention, however, that it is not unusual to find me in Greece or Cyprus during the summer months. The slow pace and simpler life lends itself to intensive bouts of writing, particularly in the afternoons when it is much too hot outside even for the seaside. My previous experiences living abroad, despite what they felt like at the time, have allowed me to see life through new lenses.

The doctoral journey has proven to be both a transitional and a transformational one. It has compelled me to look carefully and deeply at both myself and the world that surrounds me. In the process, I have read great works, travelled to faraway places, formed new friendships and met many new and interesting people who have shared their stories with me. All the while, I have felt extremely fortunate for the opportunity to partake in this highly rigorous mental and spiritual exercise. It is an exercise which, for me, has incited unprecedented personal, professional and academic growth.

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7
Academic identity interrupted: reconciling issues of culture, discipline and profession

Rab Paterson

All students carry their past experiences with them when they embark on a doctoral programme. However, for mature students with a wealth of professional and vocational experience – especially if they have moved across disciplines, countries, continents and cultures – these experiences can complicate the doctoral journey. This is especially so when it comes to having a sense of belonging to an academic community (Mantai, 2019). In my case, returning to academia as a mature student was always going to be difficult. Born and raised in Scotland, I had been away from the UK for almost 12 years establishing an academic teaching career in Japan, where I worked as a respected professional teaching digital literacies and research skills to adolescents. Prior to my work in Japan, I had worked professionally in a wide range of other fields including shipbuilding, language and business skills teaching, and had studied different disciplines, including Asian history and political science.

Although I initially entered the doctoral programme with confidence in my abilities and skills, the education discipline and its approach to academic research proved to be substantially different from my prior studies in other fields. Besides having its own distinct subject content, the field of education also had its own research methodologies, many of which contradicted the methods I had been accustomed to working with. Compounding this challenge further was the implementation and usage of digital technology and pedagogy that was a significant departure from what I was accustomed to and had thrived under in Japan.

On a more personal level, my status as a long-term expatriate living abroad also posed some difficulties. Like many other returning expatriates,

I found myself frustrated with 'home' not being as I remembered it (Morgan et al., 2004; Stroh et al., 1998; Paik et al., 2002), prompting a type of reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000; Adler 1981), a process by which individuals face the same adjustment issues back home that they faced while abroad. This was the case even though I was only returning for short periods each term and for academic studies rather than work. I realised that not only were things different from how I remembered them, but also that I did not return as the same person I was when I left years earlier. Much had happened between my leaving the UK and returning later for my studies, as both my identity and expectations had shifted in fundamental ways.

Accordingly, in this chapter I reflect on how my identity continued to evolve as a result of the difficulties I encountered amid this continual shift in cultures – not only societal, but also professional and academic. I examine how, as an academic, I struggled with the switch from historical and political studies to educational research and draw heavily on my prior educational and vocational experiences to help make sense of the difficulties I faced. In addition, I explore the tensions I encountered juggling personal, professional and academic aspects of my life and the mental adjustments that were demanded of me, particularly the challenge of balancing my teaching work at Japanese universities as an established professional against my residential study periods in the UK as a novice doctoral student.

Finally, I reflect on how precarious work conditions in the Japanese higher education sector and the pressures this brought to bear on my time, energy and finances – when combined with the other challenges mentioned above – ultimately led to my decision to withdraw from the Doctor in Education (EdD) programme at the MEd stage. Graduate programmes have high attrition rates, in some contexts around 50 per cent (Hardré et al., 2019). Although the specifics of my trajectory are unique, my story nonetheless exemplifies many of the challenges that international and mature students face that affect their ability to complete their doctoral programmes.

From the classroom to the shipyards: discovering professional communities of practice

According to some researchers, childhood introversion can result in students becoming overly focused on their studies (Goel and Aggarwal, 2012). This was certainly true in my case. I grew up in the east end

of Glasgow in Scotland in a working-class family, none of whom had ever gone to university. In addition, my father died when I was young, so I grew up in a single parent family as an only child. I became very isolated, focusing on my studies without any support network. I finished my Highers (Scotland's equivalent to English A levels used to gain admission to university) by age 16, a year younger than most. However, there was no precedent in my family for pursuing higher education and this was out of the question due to my family's financial situation. Consequently, I took a full apprenticeship in the shipyards on the Clyde in the early 1980s. This was the start of my post-high-school identity formation.

Most apprenticeships in those days involved spending the first year in a skill centre. The training model involved what would now be called 'legitimate peripheral participation' in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), a concept that describes how new entrants to any field become experienced practitioners. In our case, as young trainees in the shipyards we were grouped according to trade and given an instructor who was a fully time-served tradesman to guide us. Being part of a community of learners produced a real feeling of camaraderie, as everyone was learning the same things for the same purpose.

Through the skill-centre approach apprentices practised their particular skill sets through project work. After a year of training, apprentices graduated and were transferred to the actual shipyard where they were part of a bigger community of practice that included those from their cohort. Here we took part in and used what Wenger (2000) refers to as mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire: We worked collectively on the same ship, for the same company and for the same client, using a shared repertoire of skills. Although it was not called that at the time, this was also an example of project-based work related to learning (Lucas, 2010). This was my first real experience of higher education. Although studying while also working in a full-time job was a challenge in terms of time management (Trueman and Hartley, 1996), the shipyard experience helped me to feel like a contributing member of that community and boosted my confidence, as I was surviving and thriving in what was a very difficult working environment on the Glasgow docks.

Many years later, the idea of community would exist in my doctoral cohort as well, albeit in a slightly different way. All of us were learning the same content in our first- and second-year core courses. Despite being part of the same programme and aiming for the same result, we had very different research interests. Indeed, both the doctoral research we conducted and our daily lives outside our studies remained remarkably

different. From this vantage point, there was little in the way of direct help we could give each other. We did, however, maintain a support network where we helped each other in other ways. Some colleagues, for example, provided workshops for the cohort where they were qualified to do so (see Wenger, 2000, for a discussion about participation and engagement).

Although our cohort remained physically intact during the required core modules, this changed once our coursework was completed and we began our individual research. We lived in different countries, had different supervisors and research interests, and did not always plan our campus visits at the same times. As a result, we saw much less of each other. Communication technologies enabled some form of continued contact between us as a community, but I found it far less effective, like many other students who prefer face-to-face meetings for difficult aspects of learning in courses (Jaggars, 2014).

From the shipyards back to the classroom: developing an academic teaching identity

After years of engineering work, I was no longer the introverted, shy boy I had been when I entered the shipyards in 1983. I had transformed into a self-confident, time-served tradesman who had made ships costing billions of pounds that sailors relied on, and who had survived working in a rough environment. My time in the shipyards would be limited, however, when I was made redundant by cutbacks shortly after the end of the Cold War. This period served as a critical turning point. Without the redundancy, my life would have taken a vastly different course and I may not have moved into an academic life.

It was the desire to travel that took me to the Republic of Ireland shortly after the shipyards where I completed what was then called the Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults (CTEFLA). Obtaining this certification required coursework that was very different from what I was previously accustomed to. Back then, the engineering curriculum that the shipyard arranged (on a day-release basis at a further education college running in tandem with the actual apprenticeship) dealt with engineering and naval architecture-based concepts that were usually of a theoretical nature, and which seldom informed the actual working practices in place on the factory floor used by older, experienced tradesmen. The CTEFLA course then, was not only in a different discipline from my engineering work, but it was also largely

practice-based. It was a course designed to help people become language teachers by providing them with skills they could actually use on the job. For me, this course was a breath of fresh air coming after the less-than-practical engineering courses I had experienced in the college as part of my shipbuilding apprenticeship.

Although I did not pay too much attention to it at the time, the period in Ireland was also to be the start of a shift from thinking of myself as a shipbuilder to identifying as a teacher. Researchers looking at early-stage teaching professionals and identity have called this process 'redefinition' and 'reconstruction' (Goodson and Cole, 1994) when describing individuals transitioning into new careers from established ones in other fields. After completing my language coursework, I worked briefly as a language and business English/business skills teacher in Japan for six months and later in Egypt for a year. The experience of teaching and working with other teachers helped solidify my identity as a teacher. I focused on developing my 'delivery skills' (Goodson and Cole, 1994) because for me being a good teacher meant focusing on my teaching skills rather than just the content I was teaching (Nias, 1987).

My experiences teaching in Asia and the Middle East made a lasting impression upon me and prompted me to return to the UK for further studies. I completed an undergraduate degree in Pacific Asian History and then a graduate degree in Pacific Asian Area Studies at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). My studies were rooted heavily in history, which was a significant departure from both my practically based English language training and vocationally oriented engineering background. History was more about learning how to analyse why something happened by examining a range of contributing factors. Although I initially struggled with this shift, I soon caught up and completed all the requirements for both degrees. During this period, I continued teaching English part time so my teacher identity became further solidified. As I became more confident in my teaching, my focus also shifted more towards the student experience (Harmer, 2015). This was also around the time that I began to think of myself as both an academic and a teacher, rather than just as a teacher.

Culture shift: evolving as an academic in Asia

Shortly after finishing my studies at SOAS I was awarded a Japanese government *Monbukagakusho* research scholarship to study at Waseda

University's Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, where I was admitted to a PhD programme as an international relations candidate. Having exhausted all of my savings for my MA graduate studies, I had no other sources of postgraduate funding. Winning the scholarship was another critical turning point in my life, as it brought me back to Japan where I have since stayed. My work there examined US foreign policy towards Asia, and more specifically the missile defence issue. Educationally speaking, although the university was a Japanese one, my supervisor was not, and so the research aspect of my studies was similar to what I had done at SOAS. This time, however, I was doing research on present-day actors/groups/nations as a way to predict the future instead of examining the past. My research at Waseda University led me to further build an identity as an academic as well as a teacher, as I had started to present and publish in the fields of political science and international relations.

My studies in Japan eventually led to a number of part-time university teaching positions. It was around that time that I noticed a transformation not just in the way that I viewed myself, but also in the way that others began to view me. Japan's patriarchal society, Waseda's prestigious placement in that ranking and SOAS's reputation catapulted me into a person-of-status in Japan. Coming from a working-class background, this was another major identity shift I had to contend with. After a year or two of part-time university teaching, I was able to get the first of a few full-time (albeit non-tenured) contracts at well-known and respected universities in Japan. After a few more years, however, my supervisor at Waseda retired, and I also found that my interests had shifted away from international politics. Despite being at 'all but dissertation (ABD)' status, I withdrew from the PhD programme shortly after that.

This would become another important turning point in my life, as it officially ended my student status in Japan. By that time, my professional identity had become purely that of an academic/teacher, a relatively high status in Japan for a foreign resident (Blincowe, 2018). My academic identity reflected the years of work I had done as a PhD candidate, whereas my teacher identity reflected my day-to-day work in the classroom. It was around this time that I started to develop an interest in educational technology, something I had been using in my research and teaching for a while. This brought about another shift in identity as I became established as a practitioner/researcher in what was a newly emerging field in Japan.

As I developed a reputation as someone knowledgeable in the use of educational technology, I became a frequent presenter and workshop leader at educational technology conferences throughout the Asia Pacific

region. In terms of my identity then, I was following a 'democratic professionalism' model (Sachs, 2001) by running teacher-training workshops on educational technology without state or school support, and getting recognition from my peers for doing so. I also received some measure of recognition from other quarters as I won the Apple Distinguished Educators award, the Google Certified Innovator award, co-founded and set up the first Google Educator Group in Japan and became one of only a select few Google Certified Trainers in Japan.

Back to the drawing board: new schools of thought and technological adjustments

Although my success in Japan boosted my self-confidence significantly, my opportunities for tenure-track positions were limited by the fact that I lacked a doctoral degree. It was this obstacle that prompted me to begin exploring ways in which I might finally attain a terminal degree. After some research on distance and online doctoral programmes, I discovered the Doctor in Education (EdD) programme at the Institute of Education (IOE). I was attracted to both the reputation of the programme and the structure of the course, which was designed specifically for students living outside the UK, as this would allow me to keep my teaching position in Japan while being able to work on obtaining a doctorate in the UK.

I enrolled in the programme feeling confident about my ability to take on the work. Soon after I began my studies, however, it was very much a case of feeling as if I was back to square one. The approach to academic research in the education discipline was very different from my prior studies in other academic fields.

What is a fact?

Perhaps the most jarring difference was the emphasis on reflection, which required putting something of myself and my motives into written work. This was very different from my training as a historian, where such personal input was always discouraged and minimised in an attempt to remain impartial or neutral. History-based research is usually designed in such a way that it negates any need for self-reflection. The aim is to let the facts speak for themselves. I discovered the 'facts' in education were not seen to be quite as objective. Instead, they were seen as something to be interpreted through the personal lens of the researcher, along with

all the inherent biases this entails. Golde and Walker (2006: 6) observe that, 'Not only is the knowledge base, by definition, in every discipline different from others but the ways in which knowledge is created and shared are different. Inevitably, then, doctoral education is different among the various fields of study.' My previous study of history actually served as a handicap to my research work in education, as I naturally (based on my prior studies) tried to do the opposite of what was expected in educational research writing! For example, in my first paper I received feedback asking where my opinions and reflections on the issues were.

My experiences with the fields of political science and international relations in Japan were equally unhelpful in preparing me for research and writing in the field of education. My initial supervisor in Japan had encouraged a multidisciplinary approach so long as the research clearly stated what type of viewpoint was being used at the onset (that is, whether the events were seen through an anarchist, capitalist, communist, liberal, Marxist or neo-liberal lens). This was intended to limit researcher involvement as, again, the 'facts' were supposed to speak for themselves. As in my historian experience, the reflective element was again largely absent in my work with international politics. Instead, I had to learn a whole new set of approaches that included action research, constructivist, phenomenological, positivist, qualitative, quantitative or any one of a whole new range of approaches related to education. As many of these 'lenses' were new to me, this was a little disheartening as I felt I was back to learning the basics again rather than doing doctoral level research building on what I had already learned.

My assumption that I was well prepared because of my academic training in history and international politics, along with my extensive experience and training as a teacher, thus proved to be largely untrue. The education discipline required that I relearn much of what I thought I already knew. Indeed, my background in education was limited to that of a teacher-practitioner, not a researcher. This was an important difference between education as an applied practice and education as a conceptual discipline. Each required very different skill sets, and this very issue came up when I passed the doctoral upgrade panel just prior to starting data collection for my thesis. The review panel felt that I needed to be careful to separate my role as a teacher in my own classroom (where I was conducting research on my students) from that of a researcher.

Another important challenge for me had to do with the implementation and usage of digital technology. In Japan, my expertise included the use of educational technology and, more specifically, content management systems (CMS)/learning management systems (LMS) such as

Apple's iTunes U and Google Classroom, as well as the Google Apps for Education (GAFE) set of tools. At the time I began my doctoral studies in the UK, the IOE utilised the Blackboard CMS/LMS system, a system my Japanese university had discarded three years earlier in favour of the open source Moodle. This was because Blackboard was viewed as being cumbersome to use and expensive, while Moodle was open sourced, free and easily customisable by users.

A few years later, the IOE did switch to Moodle, but by then my Japanese university had already left it in favour of GAFE (the forerunner to what is now GSuite) and Google Classroom. Finally, toward the latter part of my studies, Microsoft Office 365 was in use at the IOE, while my university in Japan had more or less migrated away from Office in favour of the cloud-based GAFE. It seemed most EU-based universities did not use GAFE because it stored and copied all user data into Google's global server farms for redundancy in case of a regional systems crash or regional data loss. This Google security practice of backing up data in multiple places for safety, however, meant that it could not guarantee EU-based user data was kept within the EU. Therefore, according to the EU data storage rules any GAFE data would not be considered a 'safe harbour' (Miller, 2015). Unfortunately, this prevented the IOE from using GAFE when this was the major LMS/CMS system I was used to. Indeed, I was one of the influencers behind my university in Japan moving to GAFE and the lead trainer on getting staff up to speed on how it worked, so I was in a position of some influence, which also reinforced my identity as an educational technologist – an identity that was not present when I was at the IOE.

Beyond my frustration with the technical aspects of having to work with a system I viewed as cumbersome, I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated with the dual identity of one day being a knowledgeable and respected member of staff at a well-known university in Tokyo, and the next day a newly enrolled and unknown first-year doctoral student in London, where I had little influence or power. It was difficult coming from an environment where I was in charge of choosing and using my own range of digital tool sets, and as such was seen as a trailblazer, to one where I was labouring under a different and difficult old-style digital environment to which I had no input.

In fairness, I did provide a few educational technology workshops for the IT services department on Apple and Google apps, but these were low-key sessions that I offered after a chance encounter with the IT Services Manager, rather than my being recruited for these workshops as a specialist, as happened frequently at my university in Japan. Aggravating

my feelings of frustration were the rules and regulations governing data storage, low to no availability of Apple computers, and cumbersome Wi-Fi and password issues that required the frequent changing of passwords.

Some of these rules and regulations were easier to deal with than others. The password issue was simple enough because I already used a password managing app, but the absence of Google Docs was not so simple. Whereas Google Docs automatically and frequently saved my work, Microsoft Office did not. Since I was accustomed to working with Google Docs I frequently would forget to save my work, which became problematic when drafts were lost. Therefore, a mental shift was required on my part and this shift was not an easy one as I viewed it as a backward step.

Life in Japan: cultural, financial and social issues

As a UK institution, the IOE had a different educational culture from what I had experienced in 10-plus years of living in Japan and working at Japanese universities. In terms of self-identity, this was a very hard adjustment to make. I was now back studying in the UK after an academic absence of almost 12 years, half a world away (literally) from my established reputation. Furthermore, I was also now the student *gakusei*, not the master *sensei* (to borrow the Japanese expressions) that I was used to being.

In addition, being a part-time and distance mature student meant that what was important to me vis-à-vis my studies in the UK was not always recognised as being important to those people and groups demanding my attention in Japan. According to Kember (1999), these external non-study demands can be broken into three sections: family, work and social. While one could expect that the demands of being in a doctoral programme would put undue pressure on a family with young children, my wife and extended family were always very supportive. In contrast, the work and social environments I had to deal with were less so. In the Asia Pacific region, group identity plays a larger role in work and social expectations than in the UK. In my experience, people pay great attention to what group they belong to and feel an obligation to go to events organised by the group, as they have a fear of being ostracised. In my own situation, there was pressure for me to take part in group events in Japan, and this often interfered with my research, study and writing time.

Most of my social group members in Japan were also work colleagues, and some were also partaking in distance programmes.

Although I had no issues with those group members, fellow teachers and departmental leaders who were not participating in such programmes were less supportive when participation in a graduate programme meant missing work events. Fortunately, some colleagues eventually became supportive when they saw that my research studies were feeding back into my work, as I was sharing what I had learned as part of an action-research culture being promoted at my university at that time. Missing from Kember's (1999) analysis, however, are financial factors. Like most non-tenured teachers in Japan, I did part-time work at other places in addition to my full-time contracts to cope with the cost of living. This is because most full-time university jobs pay much less than tenured positions and typically have staff on a 4-day week, as they know most teachers will take part-time work on their 'research' day off to earn extra income.

The piecemeal nature of employment in the Japanese world of academia was a major hurdle for me, as it pertained to the management of my time, work and finances. To complicate matters further, my full-time work contract expired during my studies and was unrenewable due to new contract limit laws in Japan that made contract renewals extremely rare (Okunuki, 2016). As a consequence, I took temporary leave from my studies so that I could focus on job hunting and this was a very stressful period in my life, as my work was the main source of income for my family. Unfortunately, women in Japan frequently earn much less than men (Nakata and Takehiro, 2002), especially when returning to work after child rearing, as was my wife's case at that time. Therefore, money was tight, and it was around this time that I began to also question my identity as an academic, educational technologist and researcher.

As an overseas resident (of Japan), I also had to pay tuition fees at the higher overseas student rate despite being a UK citizen. Besides the high cost of living that came with having a family in Japan, I was also required to borrow a large sum of money to fund my studies. I had made this decision relying on the strength of my self-identity as someone who could successfully complete the programme while earning a decent salary in Japan. Yet I was now out of a job, out of the doctoral programme and with no sign of a job or a return to my studies on the near horizon. The job market was particularly difficult for me because of a lack of openings at Japanese universities for people with my specialised skill sets, as most Japanese universities were far behind the times in adopting educational technology (ITU, 2007; Suzuki, 2009) and had not yet seen the need for these skills.

This was where my professional self-identity now was: an identity that was not in demand in my country of residence and chosen field of employment. My cultural identity also no longer seemed to belong in the UK, as Scotland was (and still is) going through a time of heightened desire for independence while the UK itself was moving away from an internationalist outlook and towards Brexit. Although both countries were holding referendums on those issues, I did not have a voice or a vote because non-resident citizens were not permitted to take part. Meanwhile in Japan, I was a permanent resident but without a vote, as Japanese electoral laws do not allow non-Japanese residents to vote.

A year and a half later, I found myself back in London at the IOE. I had found another full-time job working on an interesting collaborative Business English Communication project between a well-known US university and a high-level Japanese one. That gave me the employment stability and funds to continue with the doctorate work. This new job opportunity was a lucky break, as it required me to use many of my ed-tech and digital literacy skills in an interesting and innovative way and also involved teaching adult learners again, something I had not done for a few years. In this job the main 'students' were business executives working in Japan in a variety of commercial sectors. As well as reinvigorating my identity as an academic and researcher, this also involved developing another identity as a business skills trainer, again something I had not done since my teaching in Egypt and Japan in the mid-1990s and the part-time work I picked up when I first arrived in Japan in 2000. However, this new job was also a term-limited one, with yearly contract renewals. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure to do work above and beyond the contract terms to ensure the renewals would keep coming, as well as a lot of other extra work due to the restructuring of the department in which I was working. This gave me less time to focus on the doctoral work at a time when I was already under a tight timetable due to the years taken out.

The extra costs from paying the course fees from my own pocket came at a time when I had no job security, so I consequently took the decision to withdraw from the EdD programme in late 2019 with a Master of Education degree in Practitioner Research awarded for the work I had already done. Financial issues affecting doctoral completion rates have been cited as a factor in research (Sverdlik et al., 2018) as have scholarship opportunities in this area. This certainly was a major factor in my case, as I was a self-funding student with no access to scholarships and with family financial responsibilities in Japan, compounded by my particular unstable employment situation in Japan at the time. The idea

of parenthood and being away from children as a negative factor in doctoral work has been covered (for instance in Trahar, 2011: 41–7), but in my case it was not being away from my family that was the issue, it was the time taken from my research in supporting my family that was the issue. Therefore, I had little choice but to focus on employment matters to support my family.

Summing up

In hindsight, my diverse life experiences have given me insight into a wide range of fields and methodologies. Indeed, some of my earlier experiences – like my work in the shipyards – helped me to develop a strong sense of confidence. While the learning communities in the shipyards and the IOE operated in different ways, they both involved being a part of a community that provided a sense of comradery, teamwork and support. The same diverse experiences, however, also created unexpected obstacles for me. My previous studies in other fields in no way prepared me for graduate studies in the education field. Instead, different approaches to knowledge and schools of thought felt more like a handicap because the methodology norms in these academic fields were considered to be undesirable in the field of education (and vice versa). This was probably the most serious academic issue I struggled with, although by the latter stages of my doctoral work I had gained a better understanding of this.

Cultural differences and the shift from expert to novice also played a role. On a professional level, it was not easy to switch from a respected position in a highly status-oriented society like Japan to a low-level position (of a student) in an only slightly less status-conscious society in the UK. My expertise as a leading professional in educational technology in Japan was difficult to align with differing standards of data control and technology in my new environment. These issues continued to pose challenges for me, since I had to sometimes move physically via travel or sometimes just in mindset. Skype calls or emails with supervisors, for example, involved a back and forth for me not only between two time zones but also between identity zones.

On a personal level, I was faced with trying to strike a balance between belonging to two very distinct cultures, yet not being treated as a full participant in either one. This was most evident in my having to pay international student fees while pursuing my studies in the UK, a country where I held citizenship by birth and blood. It was also evident

in my inability to vote in important referendums being held in Scotland and the wider UK during the period of my studies. A similar predicament existed in Japan, where I had lived and worked for many years but was not permitted to vote, as non-Japanese do not have the franchise in Japan.

Finally, conflicting demands associated with work, family and finances involved very real pressures on time management. Being a part-time doctoral student in the UK, but with a full life half a world away in Japan, was not easy. My work life in Japan remains uncertain as I am on contract work with little job security. And this uncertainty was ultimately the reason for withdrawing from my doctoral studies. I nonetheless remain committed and resilient to the challenge of continually evolving as an academic, despite my decision to withdraw. Not fitting comfortably in any one discipline or doctoral programme means that this has not been easy, but nothing worthwhile in life ever is.

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8
Into the fray: becoming an academic in my own right

Lynn P. Nygaard

Having agency, being able to make choices and plot one's own course, is an important part of building an identity as a scholar (Mantai, 2019), as well as being able to complete a doctoral programme (Sverdlik et al., 2018). But it is not always clear what having agency means in practice, especially when students enter a doctoral programme with a fully developed professional identity that may pull them in different directions than would be expected by the university (Hardré et al., 2019; Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2015).

In my case, I had established a successful career as a specialist in academic writing and publishing before embarking on a doctoral programme. This meant that although I was familiar with the products of scholarly activity (such as journal articles and monographs), I knew little about how to conduct the research that went into those products. I was like a coach who had never played the sport themselves. I could help people write about their research, but I had no research of my own to write about. By starting a doctoral programme and learning to carry out and publish my own research, by leaving the safety of the sidelines and throwing myself into the fray, I believed that I would become a better coach and develop a new-found sense of legitimacy (Wellington, 2013).

I thus started my doctoral journey with a clear idea of what I wanted to become: a publishing academic and a better writing coach for academics. I assumed that, because these two identities were so closely related, the journey would be relatively painless. However, some of the skills and personal qualities that made me a good support for other scholars made it difficult for me to establish my own academic identity. And I quickly discovered that knowing how academic writing

and publishing works in general was of limited help in figuring out what worked for me in particular. And to become an academic in my own right, getting a doctorate would not be enough. I would need to take some extra time to publish alongside my thesis. In perhaps direct contrast to much of the literature that frames delays in doctoral progress as a symptom of failure, I see the delay caused by this publishing activity to be a direct result of my own agency and a deliberate construction of my academic identity (Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2015; Mantai, 2019).

The aim of this chapter is to deconstruct this deliberate identity construction by examining first how I developed as a professional and then how that shaped my path as a doctoral student, where my identity as a professional sometimes helped but often posed a challenge to my development as a scholar. I reflect on how my own sense of agency led me to take extra time to publish outside my doctoral studies, and how the strong academic identity I was building (in combination with my professional expertise) helped me tackle an unexpected personal crisis that could have easily forced me to discontinue the programme. I conclude by noting that the importance of building an identity as an academic in my own right meant that receiving acknowledgement from the scholarly community through citations of my publications represented a far more important milestone for me than receiving my degree.

From accidental to purposeful professional

My professional journey had an inauspicious beginning. I was born and raised in the United States, and after I finished my BA in women's studies at UC Berkeley, I thought perhaps a gap year in Norway, where my grandparents were from, would give me something to do while figuring out my next step. I decided to study political science at the University of Oslo mainly to keep myself occupied while I was in Norway. While still a grad student, I started making extra money 'language washing' academic articles written in English by Norwegian researchers. That is, as a native English speaker, I would read through what Norwegian authors had written and try to 'fix' the English. I had no particular desire to be a full-time copy-editor, but I thought it was a good way to turn my linguistic disadvantage into an advantage. As it happens, that 'one year' in Norway has turned into three decades – and counting. To my own astonishment, I completed my graduate degree in political science from the University of Oslo, and the part-time freelance copy-editing I did to earn a little extra cash developed into a core competence that eventually allowed me

to become a specialist in academic writing and publishing. In my current position, I help researchers at my institute write journal articles, grant proposals and doctoral theses, in addition to regularly holding writing workshops and retreats for researchers throughout Norway.

Because I came into my profession 'accidentally', I missed out on what I imagined other writing professionals had – a writing-related university degree and colleagues who work with writing-related issues. My training was neither purposeful nor directed. I became a writing specialist almost despite my disciplinary expertise and employment context. It was only after many years of waiting for 'something better to come along' that I finally started to purposefully seek to develop myself as a professional.

A key turning point for me came when I accepted a position at a research institute as an editorial adviser. In doing so, I moved from the anonymous world of freelancing, where I would receive a manuscript in the mail, to working shoulder-to-shoulder with researchers. As a freelancer, I never saw what happened to a manuscript after I edited it. But working alongside researchers, I could see that hours of meticulous editing were often ignored because, as one told me, 'while the language is better, it is not what we meant to say, or what the journal wants'. I learned then that the work of academic writing involved much more than just picking out the right verb; it also involved learning how to tell a story about research and what it means. As a freelancer, I could only work with the words I saw on the page and what I thought they meant. But as a colleague, I could talk to the authors and try to understand what they were trying to say, which also meant asking questions about what was not on the page. I learned to shift my focus from the surface features of the language to what was happening underneath: the struggle to make sense of research and explain it to someone else. And this was far more interesting to me than correcting minor points of grammar or syntax.

This shift in focus from the surface features of language to the challenges of transforming research into writing inspired me to put together my first workshops, and the demand for these workshops inspired me to write my first book. I spent about five years working on *Writing for Scholars: A practical guide to making sense and being heard* (Nygaard, 2008). Writing the book helped me develop my ideas about building an academic argument and tailoring it for an audience – as well as how to approach the task of putting words on paper. The more I wrote about these things, the more I paid attention to them in my practice. And whenever I had an epiphany while working with a researcher or answering a question from someone in a workshop, I wrote about it in

my book. Writing the book cemented my interest in academic writers and the writing process. I no longer needed to figure out what I wanted to do. I was already doing it.

Writing the book also thrust me into a world I scarcely knew existed: other writing experts who also specialised in working with academics. Unfortunately, this meant that my initial pride in publishing my first book turned quickly to dismay. How could I have not known about all these other experts? Indeed, one of the first reviews of my book pointed out that I used no references and expressed scepticism that I could have written all that with no inspiration from others. But while most people become professionals by first learning how other people do it before finding their own path, I did it the opposite way. I figured out a way of editing and working with academic writers before I even knew that there were other people out there doing the same thing and writing about it. That is not to say that I had never read any books on editing or academic writing, just that I had never systematically approached learning about it as if it were a proper profession.

At this point, I was becoming a kind of 'blended professional' (Whitchurch, 2009), straddling professional and academic domains. But I felt that although I had been developing a unique kind of competence, neither my professional understanding of academic publishing nor my understanding of how academia works was as developed as it could be. A colleague encouraged me to apply for a part-time Doctor in Education (EdD) programme. Until that moment, it had never occurred to me that I *could* pursue a doctorate. I had assumed that my graduate degree in political science and my lack of background in education would eliminate me from consideration as a candidate. The EdD, however, allowed me to use my professional experience, rather than my previous discipline, as a point of departure for developing both as an academic and as a professional. Moreover, since the programme was in London, I could still live in Norway but pursue my doctorate in a country where the language of instruction was my native language. From that point on, my professional development became intensely purposeful. However, being allowed to pursue a doctorate was one thing; being equipped to do so was something else.

Jumping into the fray

Coming into the EdD programme at the age of 48 and as a seasoned professional, I was afraid that I would be too old and too used to being 'the expert' to be able to handle being a student again. I worried that my

profession as writing coach was too strange compared to other education professionals and I would feel like an outsider. I was also concerned that my background in women's studies and political science would leave me ill-prepared for the field of education. All of this was true, but not nearly as problematic as I feared. I was indeed a bit older, a bit strange and a bit under-prepared. On the other hand, I had some advantages that the others did not. Not only did I have a solid background in research and academic writing, but unlike most of the others in our programme, I was moving from a context where I was a foreigner having to speak a second language to a context where I was still a foreigner but had the luxury of being able to go back to my first language.

What turned out to pose the greatest challenges were the very real differences between the sidelines and the game. It's a lot simpler to think about strategy when you are watching the game from the bleachers, and a lot harder when you are in the thick of it. Thus, even after coaching dozens of doctoral students through thesis writing and publication in journals, I was not ready for exactly how painful writing the thesis and publishing my own work would be.

You are what you read: finding the right literature

A first challenge for me was figuring out what I should be reading. An obvious starting place for any researcher is becoming familiar with what other researchers have already said. Locating the right literature is presumably relatively straightforward for someone who is basing their doctoral research on the same topic, same discipline and same methodology as the work they carried out as a master's student. But like many doctoral students who enter their programme from another discipline, or enter academia from a profession, I lacked these advantages – and I was unprepared for what that meant.

The terms I used to describe what I saw in my everyday practice were not the same as the terms that are used in the academic literature. The questions I wondered about were not the questions that were addressed by academic researchers. For example, as a practitioner I wondered why some researchers seemed to write and publish with more ease than others. As far as I could see, it was not necessarily related to overall intelligence or talent, or even the ability to string words together to form sentences. I felt like this question was a good starting point for doctoral research, but where should I start looking for answers? What search terms should I use?

I felt quite alone in this. While librarians can help you find things when you know what you are looking for, there is little they can offer when you are unable to articulate what you need. I eventually found what I needed through a combination of poking around through empirical studies on 'research productivity' and (at my supervisor's suggestion) looking into a theoretical perspective called 'academic literacies' (see, for example, Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Scott, 2007). I briefly thought I could tick 'theory' off my to-do list, but then realised that this was only a beginning. I had to fill in some of the blanks with other theoretical ideas – and the search for those was long and painful. I had described the importance of building a good theoretical framework many times in my workshops, but it was the first time I really understood how difficult it was to do.

Like most students before me, I got well and truly lost in theory, but I am not sure how I could have approached the reading more efficiently. Since I did not have a clear academic identity as a starting point, my reading was messy and eclectic. What was a strength for me as a professional – my ability to read academic literature from a variety of traditions – became a kind of weakness for me as a student in terms of being able to locate a core body of literature. I did not have a natural sense of disciplinary home and did not think twice about reaching into social psychology, scientometrics and bibliometrics, sociology, applied linguistics and whatever other field came across my radar. Everything seemed equally interesting and equally relevant, which made it very difficult to pick out what would serve my research best. But even though I ended up using very little of this reading in the final version of my thesis, the search for relevant theory, and the critical thinking involved in deciding what best served my research, was invaluable. The reading forced me to ask myself what kind of academic I was trying to be.

Is this research yet?

Once I started to get a sense of the literature, I faced the next challenge of trying to understand how to conduct the research itself. The traditional purpose of doctoral programmes is to train students to become researchers (Mantai, 2017). Having observed the research process for many years, I imagined that when the time came for me to carry out my own research, I would instinctively know how to do it the right way. But because I mostly worked with the end product (academic articles) or the idea stage (research grants), I failed to appreciate how many choices researchers have to make along the way, how thinking evolves and how

often there is more than one right answer (or seemingly no right answer). Because I was unsure about whether I was doing the research 'correctly', I felt like an impostor – like I was play acting, while everyone else knew more than I did (Pajares, 2009).

Even more complicated than deciding how data collection should work was figuring out what to do with the data once I got it. I read, of course, several books on thematic analysis and diligently took courses on NVivo. But the analysis still felt like a mysterious process that boiled down to reading through the interview transcripts multiple times and in different ways until I felt inspired to say something about them. Could this be research? How was I supposed to know if I was doing it right? When the time came to write about my results, I felt the full impact of impostor syndrome (see, for example, Pajares, 2009): I'm not really a researcher. I don't belong here. What if someone realises that behind what might appear to be a string of well-crafted sentences is actually a pile of nothing?

As a practitioner, I knew that especially doctoral students feel that writing is a lonely process, but until I started trying to write about my own research, I don't think I truly understood what they meant. Both the literature (such as Wisker et al., 2010) and my own practice suggest that it is important for academics to feel a sense of ownership of their writing. Before I started conducting my own research, I saw this as purely a positive thing: having ownership meant having pride and responsibility. But my experience as a student showed that ownership also brought with it a kind of loneliness that came from feeling like only I could make the important decisions about my own writing. And that was a new kind of loneliness for me.

Transforming research to writing

A third challenge was, ironically, the writing itself – which was supposed to be my area of expertise. While I knew a lot about academic writing in general, when it came time to write about my own research, I was horrified to realise that not only did I make the same kinds of blunders that everyone else does, but also that – like everyone else – I was blind to them. For example, I was appalled to hear the comments from both of my supervisors on an early draft of mine along the lines of 'we can't figure out what your research question is'. If there is one point I repeat ad nauseam in my lectures, it is that everything in an academic paper revolves around the research question (or aim), which means it has to be clear to both the author and the reader. I couldn't believe that I hadn't managed to do that myself.

I unconsciously expected my experience would somehow make me different, which made me interpret some of the natural stages of learning and early drafting as evidence of failure. And because I was always telling students in my workshops to not interpret their inadequate early drafts as evidence of failure, I was disappointed in myself for doing exactly that. So, I was critical not only of my writing, but also of my own response to redrafting.

I also struggled to find my voice as an author. My professional role required me to help others bring out their voices, regardless of what discipline they were in, not to develop my own. So once again, what was a strength for me as a practitioner was a weakness for me as a budding academic. Fine-tuning someone else's academic voice was not at all the same thing as trying to develop my own. No matter what I tried, it didn't feel natural or convincing.

Moreover, as a professional, I focused on improving the flow and readability of academic writing for publication, helping authors make difficult concepts simpler for wider audiences to understand. However, as a doctoral student, I was supposed to be writing a thesis – which is another genre entirely. The doctoral thesis is supposed to conform to university regulations and the expectations of the examiners, which 'militate(s) against the production of a text which, in content, tone and organization, might be pleasing and informative to a wider audience' (Poole, 2015: 1520). I found that my usual focus on trying to write in an engaging manner was often not considered appropriate for the thesis, and my main supervisor often pointed out portions of the text that (to her) came across as unprofessional – or 'too journalistic'.

The view from the other end: receiving feedback

Finally, perhaps the most difficult part of the entire doctoral journey for me was being on the other end of feedback, which meant switching from a higher place in the hierarchy to a lower one (Lawrence, 2017). Feedback was normally something I gave, not something I received. And as a professional, I had strong opinions about how feedback should be given. Because I learned early on that what is not on the page is sometimes just as important as what is there (and because I could never assume I had enough subject matter expertise in the topics I edited), I developed a style of coaching that focuses more on asking questions rather than moving straight into giving advice. This had two separate but related implications: First, I was unprepared for a different style of giving feedback; and, second, I had little experience in being on the receiving end and did not know how to process

all the feelings of insecurity that arose when someone in authority gave negative feedback about what I wrote (and how it was written). I was unprepared for the tension that would arise between my main supervisor and me when she not only told me things I didn't want to hear, but also approached the process in a way I didn't expect.

As a result, what for her was probably a straightforward diagnosis of a writing challenge in an early draft, accompanied by a clear recommendation, felt to me like a direct assault on my professional identity as a writing specialist. I resented being treated like a novice, which I'm sure had more to do with me being a mature student than my supervisor's abilities as a supervisor. I didn't necessarily disagree with my supervisor about what was wrong with my draft, but what I wanted was the kind of open-ended coaching conversation I try to have with the researchers I work with. I wanted her to ask me critical questions, to try to understand my work, to force me to think about what I was trying to say and help me make my own decisions – not just jump straight to a solution that felt wrong to me.

The resentment I felt at being told what to do was exacerbated by the fear that what appeared to be a writing challenge might in fact be a symptom of a deeper problem – namely, that I did not know what I was doing. What if someone realised that this so-called expert in academic writing really knew nothing about research? The more I learned about doing research, the more I realised how messy and ambiguous it was – and the more I feared that I was somehow not doing it right. It was thus difficult for me to listen to any kind of feedback without tapping into that fear.

Before embarking on my own doctoral journey, I had seen this kind of fear repeatedly on the faces of the researchers who came to me for help, but I wasn't sure where it came from and it was easy for me to dismiss its importance. This was the first time I felt it myself. I like to think that now I will not only be more sensitive to this kind of fear in my supporting role, but I will also be able to work with it constructively (and not just ignore it) by considering the issues related to identity development that lie implicitly between the lines (Hall and Burns, 2009).

Stretching out the doctoral journey: saying 'yes' to everything

More than one of my cohort classmates commented that I would surely be among the first to finish, given my background in academic writing and publication. But my motivation for being there was not to get the

degree as quickly as possible. I was there to enhance my identity as a professional by developing my identity as an academic. For many people, a doctoral degree is a ticket to a dream job – or at least a job. I was already working in a job I loved and had no intention of leaving. Instead, I hoped that the process of obtaining a doctorate would give me an opportunity to learn everything I had missed out on by not taking my professional development seriously all those years. Moreover, I had an important point to prove to myself (and others): that I, too, could write and publish as an academic. Daring to put myself out there was exhilarating. It was terrifying. I knew exactly what I should do, and no idea how to do it. Whatever the cost, I would use the opportunity of being a doctoral student to become an academic writer in my own right.

One of the costs was, of course, that I was by no means the first one to finish. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that I was among the last. To the frustration of my supervisor, I embraced every opportunity to publish that came my way. By the time I finished, I had published four academic articles and one book chapter based on my research. I also produced a second edition of my first book (Nygaard, 2015), and a whole new book on writing a master's thesis (Nygaard, 2017b) – both of which were based on my professional expertise rather than academic research. I also deliberately set out to build networks by attending academic conferences and holding writing workshops at the Institute of Education, all of which took time away from thesis writing.

The delays in my doctoral progression caused by all this additional writing, publishing and engagement in network building were a direct result of my own choices – my own agency. Slow progress is often seen as failure, on the part of either the student or the doctoral programme, whereas in my case, it was deliberate. I was also in the privileged position of not having to worry about financing, as well as getting a formal interruption of study (which also helped to relieve some pressure). For me, it was a case of my personal goals not being fully aligned with the goals of the university (see Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2015). While I'm sure the university was more interested in getting the students through the programme as efficiently as possible, I was more interested in getting as much out of my experience as a research-producing academic as possible. I knew I would go back to my position as a professional (support staff rather than researcher), and I was worried that I would never have this opportunity to conduct research again. In light of the debates about student drop-out rates and slow progress, this makes me wonder whether we have fully appreciated the possibly diverging goals that students might have. And in writing this, I am also reflecting on the

irony that had I been in a standard PhD programme, my goal to publish academically might have been better understood (although the two non-academic books I published as a professional might have been less appreciated).

Writing: interrupted

While the delays I described above were fully a result of my own choices, I also faced a delay that was not in any way within the scope of my control. As I was on my way to the book launch to celebrate the publication of my second book, I got a phone call. My husband had been critically injured from a fall, and they did not know if he would survive. After weeks in intensive care and months of rehabilitation, he recovered far better than we could have hoped, but would never be the same. Coming back to writing after nine months on sick leave was the hardest thing I had ever done. The thesis felt meaningless. I used all my energy to just get through my day. It was almost a year after the accident when I would start writing again, and a bit longer before my writing started to make any sense.

So why didn't I quit? Although personal crises are a well-known reason why students leave a doctoral programme, I suspect that it depends on the nature of the crisis. There is no question that this crisis was dramatic and all-consuming. But we were fortunate that after the lengthy recovery, my husband regained (almost) full mobility and was able to take care of himself. In other words, I did not end up with a permanent, time-consuming caregiver role and was able to gradually turn my focus back to my work. For many people, a personal crisis like this means never being able to redirect their gaze back to their studies. But more important than the nature of the crisis is probably the presence of other factors that enabled me to continue despite a major setback.

In a review of factors that affect the likelihood that doctoral students will finish, Sverdlik et al. (2018) describe both external factors (such as financing and supervisor support) and internal factors (such as motivation). With respect to external factors, I remained financially secure and continued to receive a salary throughout my sick leave. Moreover, the fact that my employer was paying my tuition made me acutely aware that I had to ensure that the investment was not wasted, so I felt morally obligated to see it through. And what was perhaps the most crucial external factor in my case was the very practical help I received from my supervisor to arrange a second interruption

of studies. At the time of the accident, I was in such a state of shock I did not have the energy to think about such things. All I could do was put one foot in front of the other. My supervisor, on the other hand, saw that this needed doing and took care of all the paperwork. She later expressed surprise that I found this so helpful. But although it was quickly done from her end, from my perspective it was something I was in no position to do. Had she not done this, I might well have been seen by the university as inactive and unresponsive, causing massive problems for me down the line with respect to my ability to finish within the allotted time frame (since I had already stretched out my doctoral period through all the additional writing projects I took on and my first interruption of studies).

Even these factors would not have been enough had the internal factors not also been present. Sverdlik et al. (2018) describe four main kinds of internal factors: motivation, writing skills, self-regulatory strategies and academic identity. All of these played a role – first and foremost my high degree of intrinsic motivation. I did not embark on a doctoral programme because of some nebulous promise of a different job. I did so because I had a clear idea of how I needed to develop as a professional. My motivation to finish – to see it all the way through to the end – was driven not only by the carrot (self-development) but also by a fairly large stick: Not being able to complete a doctoral degree when my professional identity was based on my ability to coach doctoral candidates through the demands of academic publishing and thesis writing would have been tantamount to saying that I simply cannot do what I help others to do. It was hard to imagine a more definitive threat to my professional identity, at least in terms of my own ideas about my competence. Quitting did not feel like an option for me, even when I didn't see how I would be able to go on.

Second, there was no question I benefitted from having well-developed writing skills. And here I am not referring to an ability to write eloquently (because I feel like that comes and goes sporadically), but rather an ability to self-regulate – to make myself write irrespective of inspiration. Indeed, this is how I was able to pull myself out of this slump. And here, for once, my professional expertise gave me a distinct advantage. One topic I touch on in my writing courses and books is that even the best-laid plans can implode, and sometimes life just happens: people get married, divorced, have children, move house, get sick and so on (Nygaard, 2017b). What matters is how you come back. So, I made myself do what I tell everyone else to do: stop looking at writing like a performance with high expectations for perfection, and

start treating it like a workout – something that is simply an unquestioned part of a daily routine. I started with 30–60 minutes of 'thesis work' every day. At the beginning, it was mostly reading what I had written already, making notes, reading some new literature, making more notes and trying to remember why I was doing this in the first place – and making notes about that. I focused on developing the routine of sitting down to work on the thesis, not on what was coming out on paper at each session. And slowly, I got into the habit of writing again. And the writing got better. In this way, too, I grew as a professional. I had coached other writers through some very difficult periods, but it was not until I needed the same techniques myself that I really understood how much they matter.

Finally, Sverdlik et al. (2018) identify academic identity as an important factor, and point out that this identity is strengthened through, for example, participation in conferences and publishing activities. This is precisely why I became a doctoral student to begin with and, as described above, I fully embraced this aspect of the doctoral journey. By the time the accident happened, I was so fully invested in building my academic identity that, again, quitting simply did not seem relevant. I had already published, attended multiple conferences and was building a network of like-minded academic colleagues. The roots had taken hold. Moreover, throughout all of this, I was in contact with the other members of my cohort – even when we did not see each other physically anymore – who not only offered support but also gave me a strong sense of belonging.

Hardré et al. (2019: 125) write that 'some factors that influence graduate student dropout (like family or financial crisis) are less controllable or amenable to intervention by higher education institutions'. My experience suggests that although higher education institutions cannot do anything about such crises per se, they can provide considerable help in easing the student back into the fold. As I described above, getting help with formalising an interruption of studies was crucial. Moreover, the techniques I used to get back into writing again are highly teachable (and are indeed an important part of my workshops). While the university as an institution did not offer me any specific help in this respect, there is no reason why this kind of support cannot be made available. Writing centres could, for example, offer workshops on picking up writing again after a long absence and tackling writer's block. Finally, encouraging and stimulating the kind of informal networks that emerged from our cohort and provide a strong sense of belonging can provide immeasurable help when crises arise.

Becoming an academic

Archer (2008) talks about the pressure young academics feel to 'be' academics, without feeling like they have a chance to 'become'. To me, this refers to the pressure to instantly be an expert in everything academic without being able to take the time to learn. I felt this pressure not only from the outside, but also (and perhaps mostly) within myself. Although I wanted to embrace the role of learner while in the doctoral programme, and often did, it was hard for me to escape the pressure to demonstrate that I already knew the kinds of things that I was supposed to be learning. In other words, I was focusing on the product of doctoral education, not the process (Wellington, 2013). The fear I felt when I received negative feedback speaks very much to this pressure. As someone who was already supposed to be a kind of expert, it was hard for me to accept the vulnerability involved in the process of learning. This is perhaps another reason why extending my doctoral studies was so important to my development. It forced me to take time to become.

The exact moment I felt I could begin to legitimately call myself an academic in my own right happened unexpectedly – and long before I graduated. In my initial days of easing myself back into my thesis after the accident, I carried out a supplemental search for more recent literature when I found someone else's doctoral thesis that seemed extremely relevant. I was skimming through the introduction when I found a reference to one of the articles I had written. There it was. In black and white. Someone cited 'Nygaard 2017a', as if I were an authority and my article had something to contribute to the discourse. I remember being so floored by seeing a reference to my own work – in a work that I considered to be authoritative – that I had to stop reading. I never had any real doubt that I was capable of writing something of publishable quality; I just did not think I would ever have anything to say that other academics would be interested in.

For other people, I imagine getting the doctoral degree would mark the moment they knew their journey was a success. For me, it was this: the first citation of my work spotted in the wild. Not from a colleague, or a friend. Not from someone who I met at a conference who was just trying to be nice to me. From somebody I'd never met who was doing doctoral research and found my article to be relevant enough to download, read and then cite in her own work. I had produced a research output that was externally validated by the community (Mantai, 2017). That's it, I thought to myself. I'm officially a scholar, and I finally have an academic community I belong to.

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9

The cultural encounters of women on the periphery

Safa Bukhatir and Susi Poli

The population of international students in higher education (HE) in the UK is increasing, and yet it can feel as if there are still tacit assumptions that all international students meet the same challenges and that their international background is, or should be, irrelevant. As international doctoral students in the Doctor in Education (EdD) programme, the authors of this chapter come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. We describe how our doctoral journey presented different challenges for the two of us and how it helped us build intercultural competence that ultimately gave us tools to identify and address inconsistencies in theoretical knowledge, as well as disparities between theory and practice. We also reflect on how our developing friendship helped us cope with many of the challenges we faced as women on the periphery of higher education.

Safa is an Arab professional from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) working in dual-language early childhood education. Susi is an Italian professional working in HE management. For both of us, the concept of intercultural competence, that is to say, the ability to initiate and manage intercultural dialogue with individuals/groups who are different from us, religiously, ethnically, linguistically and nationally, through mutual understanding and in a respectful way (Barrett, 2013), was key to our academic, professional and personal development. Our desire for continuing postgraduate studies was also stimulated by a search for answers to the various ambiguities and challenges we faced in our professional roles.

In the initial stage of our search for a suitable university to start our doctoral study, we noticed that the universities we considered (in the UK and USA) strongly promoted internationalisation and intercultural

learning on their campuses. The educational outcomes and the advancement of intercultural competence, however, were not the only reasons for our interest. We were particularly drawn to programmes that would give us the option of completing part of our studies from a distance, thereby allowing us to tend to our professional work and family responsibilities in our home countries. We also considered studying in these universities because their institutional strategies, reflected in internationalisation practices, were directed towards helping students obtain internationally recognised certification, preparing them for qualifications in the pursuit of professional careers in 'a globalised economy' (Byram, 2018: 3).

As practitioners ourselves, we witnessed and were influenced by the growing impact that internationalisation has had on all sectors of education worldwide, through strengthening the sense of social responsibility as a result of various levels of mobility leading to ongoing personal, social, academic and professional intercultural interactions. As individuals, we were affected differently by internationalisation. Susi had lived and worked in several university settings across Europe, interacting with people from different cultures regularly in her role as research support manager. Safa worked as the executive director of a private international school, and later launched her own preschool nurseries based on the British Early Years Foundation Stage and the International Early Years Curricula. In both settings, Safa came in contact with teachers and students from different countries, ethnicities and backgrounds around the world. Both of us worked with people who had different ideas about the meaning and aims of education, the processes of teaching and learning (theories and methods) and cross-cultural/intercultural communication. And, for the both of us, the international profile of the Institute of Education (IOE) became the main reason to enrol in the professional doctorate programme offered for international students.

As we progressed along our learning journeys, we realised that our encounter with the international context of the university was more complex than we had initially assumed. This meant that we had to re-examine our views about intercultural communication and reflect upon what we, and others around us, understood about intercultural competence. It also led us to re-visit our understanding and perceptions regarding practitioners' professional practices and reflective learning, which contrasted with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in broader international contexts. Susi noticed a clash between her understanding of academic theories that described her professional practice, the dominating perspectives of the academics, and the practice itself. Safa was overwhelmed with the disparities she observed in

perspectives on education: inconsistencies in views on educational outcomes, teaching and learning theories and professional practice, between and among the national and international contexts on all levels (individual, social, professional and organisational). Our aim in this chapter is to share our reflections on intercultural competence, and how it might influence the process of adaptation in foreign cultures. This, we believe, is conducive to the success of academic learning that could later be applied in our professional practices.

Reflections on language and culture

Language and culture are considered central to making positive and fruitful intercultural communication. Although neither of us are native speakers of English, language was not a real obstacle to starting our doctoral studies. Susi was familiar with the IOE's linguistic, academic and social contexts because it was the college where she had completed her MBA. Safa was familiar with, and had always admired, the multicultural social context of the United Kingdom through her vacation visits with her family. Her parents' desire for their children to be fluent in English and well-educated motivated Safa to become proficient in the language. Likewise, the international orientation and relationships of the UAE and its strategic aims to become a cosmopolitan hub enriched her knowledge of the world.

However, both of us found that intercultural interaction involved much more than a common language. According to Barrett (2013), students' intercultural interactions with their colleagues, faculty members and others in the university setting are expected to encourage positive communication, mutual understanding and respectful intercultural exchanges through owning and applying values, knowledge and attitudes that empower and enable the appropriate set of cognitive and behavioural skills. In agreement with Barrett, the question remained whether these sets of skills were known, appreciated and, most importantly, applied. The assumption by the university that the international curricula and the cross-cultural social activities for students would be sufficient to 'immerse' international students in the host culture socially and academically posed a major challenge for us. According to Hammer (2012), intercultural capability does not increase by merely internationalising the college experience. International capability requires all students to have the knowledge about, and awareness of, other cultures in relation to their historical and cultural observable artefacts. This may include

surface-level knowledge related to food, music and clothing, but also deeper knowledge about sensitive traditions, nonverbal behaviours, the importance of social events/celebrations and taboos. We discovered that developing our own intercultural capability helped create a mindset to prepare us to engage in situations in respectful ways that valued diversity, supported mutually acceptable ways of behaviour and interaction, and guided us to find more commonalities in values and opinions. We will elaborate further on this in our learning journeys.

Our learning journeys

While we both entered the programme with great enthusiasm, we were nevertheless aware that studying in a foreign setting would create some psychological stress (Hammer et al., 1978). The stress did not appear right away for either of us, but rather manifested over time, in different ways for us both. Though we might not have known a lot about all the cultures around us, we considered ourselves to be respectful of all and accepting of cultural differences. This increased our confidence in our communication and interactions with others.

In navigating our ways around and within interpersonal, academic and professional relationships, we realised that we shared a good amount of 'intellectual curiosity' (Hammer et al., 1978) which motivated us to know more about the people around us, their backgrounds and their professional interests. We also shared and exchanged academic and work-related ideas, papers and books, and we encouraged each other to attend conferences and workshops to enrich our academic learning, professional knowledge and skills. We frequently pondered our personal and professional biases, and tried to avoid 'romanticising' the idea of being non-native speakers of English, or belonging to minorities or outgroups. Such concerns frequently worry international students, hindering their ability to perform, and their willingness to fully integrate in the academic community of the university (Lantz-Deaton, 2017). While aware of such worries, we neither wished to allow them to cripple our academic abilities, nor did we want to hide under such implications and give way to self-doubt, pity or inferiority.

We were both enthusiastic and prepared to engage in the many academic and social discourses awaiting us, and we expected similar attitudes from individuals in the host and dominant cultures around us. However, this was not always the case. After a short while, we realised that there was much more to intercultural capability than the

perceptions we had of ourselves as interculturally competent and part of an international cohort in an international university. Intercultural capability and competence require that we apply our knowledge in multicultural experiences to manage them in better and easier ways for everyone involved (Barrett, 2013). Here, our skills of cultural open-mindedness and empathy were put to the test during the interactions with our colleagues in the programme.

Although many of our colleagues and tutors were friendly and approachable in their interactions, curious about other cultures and with a good degree of understanding and thoughtfulness, we faced a few unpleasant attitudes and experienced some misunderstandings that revealed acts of prejudice, superiority, generalisation and stereotypes. These incidents exposed, as Bennett (1998) explained, similarity-based monocultural interactions that reflected the inflexibility in acknowledging and tolerating different ideologies and world views. They also represented a form of microaggression, which involves sending negative and denigrating messages to members of marginalised groups, even if those messages are unintentional (Nadal et al., 2010, 2012). Below, we make these incidents clearer as we recount our individual and collective stories about how we experienced different aspects of intercultural competence and negotiated our identities as international doctoral students.

Being an Arab woman in British academia (Safa)

I was happy and enthusiastic to begin the EdD programme, because pursuing a postgraduate degree was a long-awaited dream. Upon entering the university building on my first day, I was surprised and delighted to see the large number of international students in the reception hall socialising with one another. As I continued to check the building and its facilities, I found myself admiring the allocation of a multi-faith prayer room, a considerate service that demonstrated the efforts being made by the institute to create an inviting environment for the student body.

The first face-to-face session began with all the students, tutors and administrators from various departments introducing themselves to the group, with a brief presentation about the contents of the first module. At tea break, I felt a bit worried when I came to know that most of my colleagues in the cohort came from HE and non-governmental institutions. It was even more worrying that I was the only self-employed student in the group, having had previous experiences of employment in public and private international schools before starting and leading my

own preschool. I was concerned that my theoretical knowledge and professional experience of schools and preschools might be compromised during discussions. My lack of deep knowledge of HE, its theories and professional practice, made me sceptical about my ability to participate confidently in presentations, although I felt more comfortable in the individual and group discussions.

With everything looking relatively easy on the surface, and all the information written in the handbooks and on the website, and despite considering myself a confident and social person, I felt reluctant to approach the tutors or ask for academic support. I sensed that the dominant context of the college communicated, as Zoels and Silbermayr (2010) explain, 'power' vibes based on the individuals' subjectivities, their views and their awareness of their privileged positions. I felt that some of the tutors spoke with greater ease and at greater length with students that were native speakers of English than with students who had English as an additional language. I am not sure if this was because of a predisposed perception that communication would be much easier in the former context, or the ethnocentric assumption of greater similarities in knowledge and world views, or perhaps a polarised mindset of superiority as Pettigrew (1998) and Hammer (2012) explain, respectively. Whatever it was, it restricted the confidence I had in myself to approach and communicate with them at the start, and produced what Pettigrew (1998: 78) calls 'high intergroup anxiety and threat'.

Another situation occurred when a course leader in one of the modules assigned the task of assignment supervision of all Middle Eastern and Asian students (with only one Western student in the group) to the same tutor, who also happened to be from a minority group. The tutor was shocked, and I was very surprised! I questioned whether this was an issue of equality, where the foreign/minority students were all grouped together and given to the same tutor, solely based on ethnicity, and I refer to Pettigrew's (1998) analysis of intergroup situational contact. Regardless of institutional claims of a mutual communication and learning approach, I felt that it could have been a prejudiced perception of our inferiority in knowledge, again based on our national/cultural affiliations.

In relation to administrative issues and authority (Lantz-Deaton, 2017; Hammer, 2012) I could add to the above incidents my endless worries over my thesis, as my supervisor retired when I had just begun writing my thesis proposal in April 2014. Despite my recurrent requests, I was not assigned a second supervisor (like many of my other colleagues) until October 2017, after I had already drafted almost six chapters. I did

not find the courage to complain further because I felt my part-time status and my cultural affiliation might weaken my position. I suffered from continuous anxiety and worried that I would not be able to complete my thesis because I needed the reassurance and support of a second supervisor on campus who could help me with academic and administrative matters.

That is why I was grateful to Susi when she introduced herself in a very humble and friendly manner, showing empathy from the first day. Based on her previous knowledge of the university system, Susi offered additional support by answering my questions, accompanying me to the university offices and eating lunch with me. In addition, we would dine together (and sometimes with other colleagues) whenever possible at the end of study sessions. Susi continued to clarify many issues, whether in person during London visits or through emails. Susi's genuine encouragement decreased my initial anxiety and lessened the stress I might have had otherwise, due to a new and complex intercultural and academic experience (Lantz-Deaton, 2017). Later, we were fortunate enough to have established a great friendship and excellent academic collaboration exchanges based on mutual professional interests in the field of educational leadership and management.

Although I had many positive learning experiences and interactions, I also observed interesting patterns of 'denial' and 'neglect' in the attitudes of a few individuals influenced by cultural ignorance or stereotypes perpetuated by the so-called global war on terror and reflected in an 'us versus them' mindset (Hammer, 2012). So, despite the apparent internationalised images and settings facilitated by the college, I wasn't completely surprised to notice that the lack of information others had about my region, religion and/or culture was due to the formal, limited or lack of intercultural interactions with the UAE and/or the Arabian Gulf nationals. This quickly became evident in class module instruction well beyond my first day in the programme.

I recall that on one occasion, we were asked to watch the documentary *Man on Wire*, where Philippe Petit makes his famous and dangerous walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Center. After the documentary was over, we were asked to express our opinions on what we had just witnessed. While I admired Petit's courage, I thought such an act was too dangerous and unnecessary. The tutor was celebrating the controversial nature of Petit's act by giving it a progressive light, one that enabled exaggerated personal liberties. I knew, however, that my opinion opposed this view, and I believed that it would be unwelcome. For fear of being different, and therefore stigmatised, I refrained from stating it. In

accordance with Barrett (2013), I felt that my opinion would encourage the tutor and colleagues to link it with my cultural affiliation – hence there was a possibility that my opinion would be devalued and I would experience discrimination, a potential threat I was not ready to face during my study. However, an Arab Muslim colleague who had a similar opinion to mine was not so timid; he spoke clearly of his opinion and that caused, as I had suspected, some tension. Again, I found myself wondering whether his ethnicity and religion had anything to do with the way his opinion was received. To my surprise, when a Western student agreed with him, it caused a great deal of the tension in the classroom to ease. I noticed the hard frown on the tutor's face was significantly reduced when the Arab colleague was joined in his opinion by the Western one.

Although unsettling, I did not think of the above incidents as particularly challenging because I was familiar with the complexities of such contexts and considered myself capable of handling such situations wisely. Sometimes I would find myself challenged by moral and/or religious dilemmas pertaining to my beliefs and culture (Cushner and Brislin, 1995). I witnessed more than one incident where another Arab Muslim colleague was alienated, only for favouring epistemological standpoints different from the tutor's or espousing world views different from the rest. There was a discomfort and a dichotomy I felt, in the way he was treated by some tutors and students, while I saw him as a competent professional, who valued continuous learning and strove for better opportunities to advance his career. In my opinion, these incidents contradicted the celebration of diversity of ethnicity, culture and thinking that was claimed by the university. Like the earlier incident described it occurred to me, though I hoped I was wrong, that perhaps his being from a different culture put him in an unfavourable light, whereas had he been from a Western culture his difference of opinion might have been better received.

Beyond institutional factors, I also had to contend with challenging behaviours from individual members of my cohort that were reflective of a broader ignorance. One day, an incident occurred at lunch when two colleagues and I were introducing ourselves and getting to know one another. As I started speaking of myself and my background, one of the European colleagues, who worked at an international security and peace-advocating organisation, made the irrelevant and inaccurate remark that 'women in their society do not drive'. I was shocked, not only for the blatant prejudice laced in that comment, but also for the misleading, incorrect knowledge and complete disregard for the fact that I did not come from a country that banned women from driving. This judgement was

obviously born from a perception where my image (wearing the hijab) allowed that student to paint all those who came from the Gulf region with an overly broad brush that implied ideological narrow-mindedness and extremism. It was an unnecessary comment that showed an obvious lack of intercultural competence, and strained a friendly conversation by projecting a wrong, prejudiced and skewed perception due to my Muslim Arab background.

I was also subjected to the very superficial knowledge that some individuals gained from tourism, business and/or brief employment experiences (Cushner and Brislin, 1995). I recall a fellow student very confidently disagreeing with me about contextual information about the organisational culture and professionals in the UAE, based on his brief stay and limited interactions with the locals in the country. Interestingly, he was very quick to disagree with another colleague for providing what he considered inaccurate information about the indigenous groups from his own home country. I found his communication to be a nonconstructive intercultural dialogue, in terms of the impact of his limited experience and cultural orientations on contextual knowledge he had about my country, characteristics of intercultural competence that Barrett (2013) considered to be essential. This particular interaction appeared to be layered with ethnic, religious and gendered overtones that left me feeling angry, confused and uncertain about whether I had misunderstood the interaction. These feelings are characteristic of microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2010, 2012), which are often more implicit and difficult to pinpoint.

At times, I faced the challenge of keeping all my social interactions positive and friendly – a situation Hammer (2012) explains as a form of the minimisation mindset as a survival strategy practised by non-dominant culture members. Sometimes I had to decide between to 'go along to get along' (Hammer, 2012: 122) or to preserve my identity. I would be frequently invited to join my colleagues after hours – and I would find myself deeply appreciative of these invitations and the regard – but most of the time declined. My mind always contemplated the evenings and what they might include, such as alcohol and informal conversations that could be, to me, inappropriate from a cultural or religious standpoint. To avoid the embarrassment or any potential offence to myself or others, I decided to refrain. I did join my colleagues on several lunches and dinners, but I made sure that those outings would not bring them or me any awkwardness or discomfort.

Like Bennett (1998: 2), who asserts that in multicultural settings 'the intercultural communication approach is different-based', I believe that everyone is entitled to express their beliefs and views as well as take

pride in their identities, instead of only the facets that include group commonalities. I respected, and was aware of, the cultural and ideological differences among the members of my group and others at the college. However, seconding Barrett's (2013) view of individuals' multiple cultural affiliations within specific contexts, I saw myself primarily as a Muslim Arab female international postgraduate student. I was not ready to 'idealise' other ideologies and cultures at the expense of minimising or dismissing my own just to fit in. I believed that the respect for other cultures did not mean denying or demeaning one's own beliefs and culture.

Upon observing and reflecting on these thoughts, I understood how students at the college, whether from the host country, dominant or non-dominant cultures, grouped themselves according to like-mindedness in their values, beliefs, behaviour patterns, language or world views. Very often, they represented what Bennett (1998) identifies as the similarity-based approach in their intercultural communication. This is another reason why my friendship with Susi became so valuable to me: she was an open-minded professional who, while celebrating the commonalities between herself and others in a very joyful and sincere way, also bridged the gaps constantly and respectfully during academic and social interactions with an unconditional consideration and understanding of others' priorities and apprehensions. With reference to the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours that Barrett (2013: 5–6) argues are necessary for 'understanding and interacting appropriately and effectively with those who are culturally different from oneself', I saw that Susi exhibited a high degree of intercultural competence in building positive and constructive relationships with everyone. Susi helped me to focus on the positive aspects of this sophisticated context and to tolerate the recurring uneasiness as I developed greater social confidence.

In summary, I was very conscious about my identity and tried to preserve its uniqueness amid the multi-layered intercultural context at the institute. Meeting people from all around the world in an international academic and professional context, and discussing with them a lot more than just education, was an invaluable learning opportunity, especially when I decided to spend longer durations in London than were required to finish writing up my thesis. My close interactions and contact with others over a longer time period helped me to reduce my own prejudices (Pettigrew, 1998). This represented what Hammer (2012) describes as intercultural mindsets of 'acceptance': the ability to understand and respect deeper patterns of cultural differences while interacting and communicating, to guide our ethical judgements related to the meanings

and value of cultural perspectives and practices of others. That time, in the view of Murphey-Lejune (2003), allowed me to truly experience the essence of the learning journey I had sought. I even appreciated my silence in situations where I avoided being singled out, because I realised later that it provided me with lots of opportunities for observation, reflection and wisdom. I did not want to disturb my academic learning or compromise any informative interaction or constructive relationship I could have built for the sake of defending my perceptions. Multiple truths exist in the dynamics of facts and realities, and discovering them as time passes creates, shapes and shifts individuals' life stories. I dreamt of going home having won a very rich experience, so I made a very deliberate choice to utilise the challenges I faced to strengthen my patience and tolerance, thereby expanding greatly the value of my learning journey.

Being a Western, foreign and 'difficult' woman in academia (Susi)

Despite my many years of working in higher education, I entered the doctoral programme feeling hesitant and uncertain about both my abilities and how I might be perceived by others. Academia is well known for fostering feelings of impostor phenomenon/syndrome (Breeze, 2018; Chapman, 2017; Leonard, 2001) and being an international student for whom English was a second language only complicated these feelings for me. The concept of imposter phenomenon was something I explored in my own thesis. It first appeared in an article written by Clance and Imes (1978) describing how high-achieving women tended to believe that they were not intelligent and were over-evaluated by others. Leonard (2001) found a similar pattern among doctoral students, noting that women often brought their own gendered dynamics to intercultural matters whether or not they realised this to be the case (Leonard, 2001). My friendship with Safa played an immensely important role in helping me to cope with such feelings, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to tell my story through our friendship. Drawing on Safa's attitude, values and behaviour, I reflect on my own inner motivations and struggles, while also modelling how our friendship served as an important part of my social support network (Mantai, 2019), contributing significantly to my intellectual and personal growth.

Among a sea of unfamiliar faces, Safa remained a welcoming and friendly face from the very first day of the programme. At the time, she too was trying to adjust to the new situation, and this shared fear of

the unknown seemed to bring us together. I felt safe with Safa because, like me, she arrived in the programme with a cultural and linguistic background that was different from the university location. But more than our shared circumstances, it was ultimately Safa's open and non-judgemental disposition that made me feel most at ease and allowed me to enter into many thought-provoking conversations with her. Over the course of our studies we talked about our families, countries, cultures, beliefs and our respective fields of practice. We came to share our views about intercultural understanding, ethics, social and community commitment and much more. Our conversations were all-encompassing, and there was no topic that was too trivial as we examined socio-cultural, socio-economic, organisational and other factors which affected our professional, personal and academic lives.

This dialogue was especially critical because, like Safa, I felt intimidated by the diverse academic disciplines and professional domains that were represented across our cohort. We frequently sat through class sessions that covered quite complex theoretical knowledge. Being introduced to matters of professional practice outside my own areas of interest and expertise pushed me out of my comfort zone. I felt uncomfortable being in this predicament, and my lack of confidence hindered me from joining discussions during class sessions. Our companionship was critical because it provided me with a space where I could effectively 'rehearse' many of my thoughts, without feeling the pressure of performing in front of others and potentially receiving any negative judgement.

More generally, I also observed that Safa showed a genuine interest in the academic disciplines and professional fields of her colleagues. I especially appreciated that she did not impose her academic knowledge, professional practice or opinions on others. The ability to suspend judgement is a key component of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997), and it is this quality that also encouraged me to discuss my ideas openly with her. Thus, it was the conversations I had with Safa in the first term that encouraged me to also become interested in exploring new areas of knowledge, even those not directly related to my professional field. It was our academic and professional dialogue that also boosted my confidence and gave me a strong sense of reassurance as I pursued my studies. In time, I increased my participation in individual and group discussions, and this helped me to slowly regain my confidence in public social interactions.

There were differences between us as well. In some ways I saw the two of us as being culturally placed at the antipodes. As a white European

I was able to downplay, even hide, my native Italian background. Indeed, I did this on multiple occasions in my attempts to better fit into the academic community I sought to belong to. The need to minimise my foreign status came about when I began to notice that some of my cultural habits and behaviours were not always viewed in a positive light by others in the academic setting. I noticed, for instance, that my sharp tone of voice, my enthusiastic expressions of excitement or my animated hand gestures (which so often accompanied my speeches) were sometimes met with displeasure. At times, I could follow the facial expressions and the eyes going up, down and around me when we spoke together – indicating that they may have been distracted by my excessive 'flying' hand movements while speaking or trying to argue my point of view.

Each time I became aware of a cultural disconnect between my native Italian culture and my adopted English culture, I would think to myself, 'I can do this, I can downplay my Italian culture on occasion'. This required me to draw on my intercultural abilities which, more than anything, required increased sensitivity and awareness on my part. I devoted myself to observing, even imitating others, with the intention of adjusting what others perceived to be faulty in my behaviour. I utilised these observations to develop a kind of multicultural 'toolkit' that I could draw upon selectively to adapt, depending on the needs of each situation (see Necas and Poli in Chapter 2). However, I also found myself wondering whether Safa could have done the same – or if she had ever wished to do so. Whereas my Western background and appearance gave me the ability to downplay certain cultural behaviours, Safa would have faced a comparatively bigger challenge had she felt the same inclination. Yet Safa was so proud of who she was, especially with regard to her faith and more conservative values. She did not seem to be someone excessively obsessed by the technical aspects of cultural interaction: how to do this and that, to please or align with others. She would have fought against all odds only to be herself. Perhaps this is what I admired most in Safa, her sense of worth was not dependent on external sources, and her intercultural sensitivity did not involve giving up her sense of self – at least not as it pertained to the need for validation from others. In hindsight, I could say that Safa had developed her own multicultural toolkit, one that took a very different form based on her own character traits and needs.

As our time in the programme progressed, Safa and I found ourselves engaging frequently in intercultural discussions. It was fascinating to observe others in the university hall or while sitting in the library. We regularly discussed how we felt similar to or different from

our other classmates and what had hurt us in others' behaviours. While doing that, we felt a sort of innate sisterhood as we helped each other cope with the pressure coming from assignments, classmates, tutors and all the challenges that come from a multicultural environment. This included the culture of academia, with its unique demands on our writing development. We supported each other in developing our academic writing skills, giving feedback to each other when completing written assignments and essentially becoming what Hawkes and Taylor (2016) refer to as critical friends. It was intriguing to see how we differed and yet how we felt close to each other despite these differences in our culture, ethnicity and citizenship.

I eventually came to realise that intercultural sensitivity was a tricky concept to identify and manage properly. Some might argue that special tools are needed, even courses, to acquire intercultural sensitivity. Most of all, I found that it was about awareness. I had acquired some of this sensitivity through my many years working with many different people across cultures and locations. My research at the institute expanded this sensitivity through my work with women in leadership. What I had not realised prior to my doctoral studies, for example, was that intercultural skills also involved navigating a gendered landscape.

Embedded deep within our cultural norms and values were the expectations of what a woman must be. It was at this juncture that I also began to see the subtle but deep impact of intercultural skills in being a woman who must play according to what have been described as the unalterable 'rules of the game' (Gertler, 2010; Bourdieu, 1984; Hollingsworth, 2000), particularly in the HE sector (Morley, 2013). While talking to Safa and hearing her stories I began to understand more clearly what being a woman means in a world dominated by men. We discussed gender roles within our respective cultures, reflecting on our converging or diverging views, and I was surprised to find that despite seeing myself (and being regarded by others) as a maverick throughout my career and life, I, too, had been playing all the stereotypical female roles that women are obliged to fill in so many societies around the world. These stereotypes included pressures associated with being a loving and inspiring mother, a dedicated care provider for parents and a supportive wife to the husband. At the same time, however, I was a woman in need of a career reassessment at a mature stage of her career (see Necas and Poli in Chapter 2), a woman innately thirsty for lifelong learning, career improvement and so much more.

The time spent with Safa and the many conversations we engaged in played an important role in developing this increased understanding.

It was through our shared doctoral experience that we came to increasingly value the importance of intercultural competence. We agreed that everybody should know how it feels to be in others' shoes, immersed in another culture. It was our belief that the dynamics and implications of intercultural understanding and communication should become a compulsory module at any level of study. The doctoral pathway triggered an understanding of my multiple identities – that of a non-native speaker, a doctoral researcher, a professional manager in HE and a female manager in that sector – headed initially by my search for professional purpose. My participation in the programme added layers of meaning to my professional practice while refining the understanding of myself not just as a professional in a leadership role – which as a research topic had been the starting point of my doctoral journey – but also as a woman in the field.

In retrospect, I realise that embarking on the professional doctorate enriched my multicultural awareness and competence. Pursuing a doctorate offered many different lenses through which I could reflect on my understandings and the understandings of others through interactions with everyone around me. Safa and I both discovered deeper meanings of intercultural capability and competence by practising self-reflection and empathy through our friendship. This helped us to engage and activate broader perspectives while interacting academically, culturally and socially with individuals in all sorts of situations. This also enabled us to accept others who might be different from us and imagine ourselves 'being in their shoes', thereby acknowledging their identities and understanding their perspectives, even if such a shift in perspective challenged our own norms and values.

Reflections on our learning

Our academic journey and intercultural interactions taught us how theoretical knowledge, professional background and practice should inform one another. We used coping strategies to navigate all sorts of social and academic situations, where our cultural standing and world views set us apart as international students. We found that these struggles improved our intercultural competence in that they allowed us to face these obstacles promptly, and to continuously reflect on the influence of culture on us and others. During our conversations, we both were often mindful of the reflective practice that we had developed, and the more we observed and engaged in academic discourses, the more we felt confident when we expressed our thoughts and voiced our opinions.

Going through repetitive cycles of retrospective reflection made us conscious about our learning and taught us to reflect faster *during* our academic experiences. As we critiqued each other's academic work, we related our understanding to our professional work and evaluated our performance accordingly. So, in accordance with Gibbons (1994), our learning process, comprising sharing and critiquing knowledge and practice, transformed from the mere theoretical mode to the applied and experiential mode of learning. We then felt confident to exchange and enrich our professional understanding together and with others. We gradually started interweaving the scientific knowledge we gained in our studies with the experiences we lived in our professional workplaces. This exercise helped us contextualise what we learned and improved our professional practice. It continues to build our professional repertoire fortified by an academic framework.

Noteworthy here is the realisation that our friendship enabled us to discover and explore common academic and professional goals, and to cooperate to achieve these goals. This resonates with Pettigrew's (1998) statement about the effect of positive emotions and cross-group friendship through longer contacts in reducing prejudice, hence encouraging intergroup cooperation. Unlike undergraduates or full-time postgraduates, this is not similarly easy for part-time international students, despite belonging to the same cohort. This is due to the often limited face-to-face interactions that are such an integral part of verbal and nonverbal communication (Bennett, 1998) and their impact on multicultural settings. The time factor is significant here, according to Pettigrew.

Therefore, drawing on our experiences that are aligned with the findings and recommendations of Pettigrew (1998), Bennett (1998), Hammer (2012) and Barrett (2013), we agree that in multicultural settings such as HE institutions, intercultural competence is key to positive intergroup and cross-group interactions. To promote and design fruitful experiences for international students, HE institutions could adopt and design what Hammer called a 'cultural mentoring' framework of sessions, led by the administrations and representatives of the various cultural/ethnic backgrounds, for their tutors, administrators, support staff, home students and their international counterparts. These sessions would involve an orientation and dialogue that includes appropriate and holistic intercultural knowledge content representing different cultural, demographic, and socio-economic and political groups (Pettigrew, 1998; Hammer, 2012). The goal would be to promote broader and deeper cultural self-awareness and 'cultural other' awareness. Ongoing gatherings

may follow during the succeeding terms to allow for non-judgemental and non-evaluative interaction opportunities, so that everyone learns to know, examine and reflect upon their own collective experiences over time, thereby developing their own intercultural competence. These activities, we believe, would help both faculty and students better understand their own subjectivities, intercultural skills and behaviours (Pettigrew, 1998) towards the 'other'. We believe that this would lead to positive changes in attitudes towards different-based intercultural communication (Bennett, 1998; Lantz-Deaton, 2017) that recognises and appreciates mutual understanding, respect and equal opportunities when working cooperatively towards achieving common goals.

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10
The 'peripheral' student in academia: an analysis

Maria Savva and Lynn P. Nygaard

The narratives in this book were written by individuals who, despite residing in faraway countries, decided to pursue a doctorate in the United Kingdom. The decision for many was influenced by a multiplicity of factors which, when considered together, made pursuing a degree abroad a desirable choice. For some, the initial motivation to enrol in a Doctor in Education (EdD) programme had to do with external factors: to build professional expertise (Abdrabboh, Nygaard), to mitigate frequently changing job roles (Channon) or to respond to years of working in a casualised work environment (Paterson, O'Keeffe). For others, the decision was fuelled more by a search for something deeper or a way to find meaning both professionally and personally (Bukhatir, Poli, Savva). The initial factors considered were not static and sometimes changed along with new circumstances and information. The decision to switch from an EdD to a conventional PhD (Savva) or the decision to purposefully extend enrolment (Nygaard) are indicative of an evolving journey.

However, many of the authors would not have been able to pursue a doctorate in London were it not for a programme that was specifically designed to meet the needs of a very distinct population: mature and returning international students who could continue to reside in their home countries for the duration of their studies. To this end, the programme served as an important bridge, providing an extraordinary opportunity for the authors to access a degree at a prestigious overseas institution, without having to upend work or family responsibilities back home (Abdrabboh, Buhkatir, Paterson).

The 'prestige' factor associated with the particular university was not irrelevant and was described by several authors as a contributing

factor in the programme selection process (Abdrabboh, Bukhatir, Paterson, Poli). Indeed, most of the contributing authors were free to pursue a doctorate within their respective countries of residence. Besides being more cost-effective, the proximity of a nearby bricks-and-mortar campus would have likely provided easier access to both resources and faculty. Moreover, for the authors for whom English was an additional language, attending a university at home would have provided the added comfort of working in their first language. Even those who were native English speakers but were residing abroad had access to English-medium instruction in their countries of residence – a phenomenon that speaks to the widespread power and influence of the English language and its affiliated cultures (Doiz et al., 2012; Waters, 2018). Yet each author made a deliberate decision, of their own free will, to pursue their studies outside their country of residence, at a university that they believed would offer them something more.

As one can imagine, the scholarly endeavour was both enriched and further complicated by this choice. While the authors enjoyed the privilege of partaking in a programme offered by a prestigious university, they nevertheless continued to operate along the periphery of university life due to the distance nature of the programme. The narratives in this book provide a window into the lives of what we have described as the 'peripheral' student: the international student, the distance student, the more mature and returning student, the part-time student and the student pursuing a professional doctorate. These are characteristics that all the authors owned on their path to becoming scholars and became an important part of the identity work they would engage in. It is these characteristics that also influenced the most dominant themes across narratives.

In this chapter, we reflect on the themes that emerged both within and across chapters, focusing on four broad categories of challenges:

1. demands associated with being a 'peripheral' student and the function of social networks in developing a sense of belonging;
2. issues related to supervisory/faculty relationships;
3. struggles related to identity, language and/or culture; and
4. the role of expert, novice and 'impostor' labels in internalising a scholarly identity.

In the sections that follow, we unpack these challenges while also examining some of the personal characteristics and institutional features that contributed positively towards individual growth and the fostering of a

strong sense of community. After each section, we reflect on implications for institutional policy and planning.

The 'peripheral' student and belonging

Being a part-time, international and more mature doctoral student in a professional doctorate all make for what we have described as a 'peripheral' student, which contrasts sharply with the young, full-time undergraduate students that universities generally cater to (HESA, 2016). For many of the contributing authors, achieving a balance between full-time employment, part-time academic studies and family responsibilities posed significant challenges. Most continued to work full-time while pursuing their doctorate. To mitigate the competing demands between work and school it was not unusual for authors to draw their research topics from their work environments. This was a practically and professionally expedient choice that also enabled authors to deepen their professional knowledge through research, especially since the EdD emphasises becoming a 'reflective practitioner'. Relying on access to a specific work environment, however, meant that unexpected life events such as job loss or job change made such planned research projects untenable for some (Channon, O'Keeffe, Paterson).

The distance nature of the programme further complicated the challenges faced by the authors. On the one hand, the programme allowed the authors to pursue a doctorate on a part-time basis without requiring them to change their employment status or relocate to the UK. On the other hand, this also meant limited physical access to the campus and its intellectual resources (Baker and Lattuca, 2010). Since visits were restricted to week-long modules each term, this predictably created a disconnect in the authors' ability to integrate fully into the culture of university life (Lahenius, 2012). Few in the cohort, for example, were in a position to attend classes, seminars or workshops offered throughout the year. Nor were they able to take advantage of long-term opportunities to teach at the university. Although two authors did share their expertise by offering short lectures during their termly visits (Nygaard, Paterson), these were of a one-off nature. Furthermore, there was also limited access to university services such as writing help (Bukhatir) and counselling services (Necas). Thus, while the international EdD programme itself was designed to serve the needs of the peripheral student, the broader institution was not designed to do the same. It was this type

of disconnect that eventually prompted one of the authors to temporarily relocate to England (Poli).

As authors pursued their degrees, they also faced a variety of unexpected life events. For some, changes in employment required sudden changes to research questions (Channon, O'Keeffe), often rendering hours of writing and planning obsolete. For others, a temporary hiatus to deal with family, health or financial issues (Necas, Nygaard, Paterson) was necessary before rejoining or ultimately withdrawing from the programme. For one author, a difficult viva defence and the subsequent need to make substantial changes in the thesis required hours of additional time and energy (Channon). And for another, the decision to pick up and relocate, bringing family members along, also required change that deviated from original plans (Poli). Some of these challenges are described in the work of Sverdlik et al. (2018), who found that a variety of external and internal influences contribute to decreases in student well-being and can ultimately affect retention rates.

Personal qualities that emerged as being particularly important in navigating such challenges included a strong sense of agency, a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances and resilience. In the case of adaptability and resilience, these qualities have been closely associated with high levels of intrinsic motivation, or what Duckworth et al. (2007) refer to as 'grit'.

The doctoral journey, with its inherent demands for building a new kind of expertise and academic identity, can also be a lonely one. While feelings of isolation are not unusual among doctoral students (Lahenius, 2012; Morrison Saunders et al., 2010) or international students in higher education more generally (Batterton and Horner, 2016; Marangell et al., 2018) they can be more pronounced for students who are working from a distance and are often cut off from student experiences. Some of the authors actively sought to alleviate such feelings in creative and resourceful ways. O'Keeffe discusses her use of online social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook for group support, while Poli tries to fully immerse herself into the English culture after her relocation. The search for comradery was particularly evident within the cohort, where close friendships were formed (Bukhatir, Poli) and communication with peers via group chats or email was ongoing (Nygaard, O'Keeffe, Paterson, Savva).

Among the cohort, the opportunity to connect with others in the programme who were in 'the same boat' was made possible through the required modules in London, where students would regularly meet and interact each term. It was through physical presence, a shared experience

and a sense of common purpose that group cohesion was able to take place (Pilbeam et al., 2013). The cohort model also allowed students to feel a sense of belonging, a feeling that is such an important part of developing a scholarly identity (Mantai, 2017, 2019). Although the primary purpose of the taught modules was to impart specific knowledge and skills related to research and the academy, the secondary (perhaps even inadvertent) social and emotional benefits provided through the modules proved to be especially valuable. This is because embedded within the inadvertent social network was also a professional network. As mature professionals, cohort members already came with knowledge in a wide range of education specialisms. These included corporate training (Abdrabboh), technology (O'Keeffe, Paterson), language learning (Channon, Necas, Paterson), research management (Poli), academic writing (Paterson, Nygaard), private schooling (Bukhatir), early years education (Bukhatir, Savva) and international education (Savva), to name only a few. Furthermore, with each member's expertise came regional networks to professionals and institutions in other parts of the world.

Since these networks were geographically dispersed, a global educational network which members could readily draw upon surfaced as an unexpected but powerful resource. In this way, the cumulative contribution of cohort members created a type of social capital, whereby members of the cohort stood to gain through their relationships and connections with each other (Bourdieu, 1986). It is here that both the non-traditional and international nature of the doctoral cohort offered distinct advantages. It was through the shared experience of doctoral work that a community emerged, identities were forged and friendships continued long after the required modules were completed.

At an institutional level, therefore, the strategic planning of shared experiences as a way of fostering natural social networking opportunities holds immense value – not least in allowing students to reflect on their emerging identities as academics and what it might mean for them as professionals. Laying the groundwork for these shared experiences becomes particularly important when we consider that high dropout rates in higher education have been attributed, in part, to a lack of socio-emotional support (Lahenius, 2012; Ali and Kohun, 2007; Jaraim and Kahl, 2012; Pilbeam et al., 2013; Morrison Saunders et al., 2010). To this end, adaptable modes of study, including the ability of students to move from full-time to part-time status (or vice versa), is another structural feature that can provide non-traditional students with added flexibility. Similarly, the ability to access temporary, non-punitive pauses in

enrolment is helpful to those who may find themselves in difficult and unexpected life transitions. By anticipating potential stumbling blocks, adaptable modes of study can offer protective factors for students while also preserving the viability of the programmes themselves.

In the case of distance programmes, the cohort model, where students move through coursework as a single group, can have a positive impact both in mitigating feelings of mental isolation and building internal support mechanisms (Wesson, 1996). This type of model was particularly instrumental in creating a sense of community that authors felt they belonged to. Here, the regularity of meetings should not be confused with the frequency of meetings, as international cohorts do not have the benefit of attending frequently. For our own cohort, group activities within the modules were particularly beneficial because they provided students with opportunities to get to know each other better through their research topics (Hawkes and Taylor, 2016), creating fertile ground for the development of what would eventually become a self-generated learning community.

Supervisory and faculty relationships

The role of the supervisor is crucial for helping doctoral students learn how to conduct research and navigate the complexities of the university system. This is especially true when we consider the highly prescribed nature of the education leading up to the doctorate. Whereas undergraduate and graduate degrees operate with pre-determined coursework, syllabi and frameworks, a doctorate requires students to engage in original thought and take on greater control in negotiating their ideas, their research and their relationships with faculty and supervisors. Learning to take ownership of one's research, therefore, is an important part of the doctoral journey. It is the student who must plan, gather, sort and analyse relevant research and data. Likewise, it is the student who must ultimately construct and defend their research argument. While supervisors play an important facilitative role (Chapter 1 in this volume), unexpected challenges may materialise when feedback from supervisors or other faculty members does not align with student intentions. Such a predicament can be even more challenging for students coming from geographical, disciplinary or workplace settings where respect for authority is given greater emphasis than independent thinking.

The struggle to maintain a sense of ownership is illustrated in several chapters, when authors find that the vision they have for their

research and writing proves different from that of their supervisors or other faculty members (Abdrabboh, Channon, Nygaard). In Channon's narrative, we see deference to the recommendations of multiple faculty members based on the belief that they perhaps know better. This includes his supervisor, the internal reader and the examiners. In the first instance, his supervisor guides him in a particular direction that he feels hesitant about. In the second instance, the internal reader, who is charged with reading and providing feedback on his completed thesis prior to official viva submission guides him in yet another direction. In the third instance, he discovers that his initial instincts were correct but, by then, it is already too late. Throughout most of his journey he dismisses his initial instincts and ultimately finds himself slowly losing ownership of his thesis, watching it move in directions he is not fully comfortable with. Although he eventually reclaims his research, it is not before a very emotional viva defence followed by a period of deep and conflicted reflection. His narrative brings to light the role that non-supervisory faculty, like internal readers and examiners, can have on the trajectory of student research, with the former remaining an area where there is little research.

In Abdrabboh's narrative, we see struggles related to ethical codes of conduct in a cross-cultural context. Whereas signed consent forms were considered standard ethical practice in the British context, they were viewed as suspicious and potentially offensive in the Saudi Arabian context. This creates a significant dilemma for Abdrabboh as he needs to balance university requirements with the reality of his research context. The contradiction between these two value systems was difficult to resolve not simply because they were different from each other, but because they were ideologically opposed to each other (Savva, 2017).

Finally, in Nygaard's narrative we see the issue of ownership emerging when she struggles to reconcile a fledgling academic identity with a more established identity as a professional. As an academic writing coach, she not only found herself initially rejecting faculty recommendations but also taking offence to them – seeing them as threats to her own professional identity. After years of coaching others, she found herself in the uncomfortable position of being on the receiving end of criticism and being unsure about the best way forward. She had to find a way to tackle and incorporate feedback while still maintaining ownership.

Across these three narratives (Abdrabboh, Channon, Nygaard) we see the authors grappling with feelings of annoyance, anger, even resentment. Yet in every instance, we also see the authors engaging in self-reflection to find their own truth, one that would put them at ease with

their research work and allow them to move forward. This 'emotional rollercoaster' – with a 'knee-jerk' reaction followed by introspection and learning – is a key aspect of the doctoral journey (Morrison Saunders et al., 2010). It is possible that the reflective practices authors were required to engage in through their coursework facilitated important reflections beyond the formal learning environment (Cunningham, 2018). Once again, agency materialises as an important personal characteristic in the doctoral journey, along with increased self-awareness.

The reality is that faculty supervisors often have a long list of competing demands to attend to, of which student advisement is only one. Research has underscored how difficult and time-consuming supervision of doctoral students can be (Erichsen et al., 2014). Moreover, while faculty supervisors see themselves as guides or mentors, they also expect a certain level of independence from students and do not see themselves as editors (Roberts and Bandlow, 2018). That being said, the narratives suggest that supervisors could benefit from increased opportunities within their institutions to reflect on their roles, both in a context with other supervisors and with their students. None of the authors, for example, reported having engaged in a discussion with their supervisors about expectations regarding supervision, the relationship between the supervisor and student, and what it means to have ownership over their own doctoral learning. In fact, there are tools that have been developed to gauge and align expectations of both supervisors and students (Griffith University, 2020; Ulster University, 2020). Perhaps more institutions would benefit from formally integrating such tools into doctoral programmes. These tools could be used as a way to better match supervisors to students, or at the very least, as an activity that supervisors and students can engage in together to establish a strong initial foundation for the student-supervisor relationship.

From a student perspective, integrating expectations related to the student–supervisor relationship within the required teaching modules could potentially prove valuable. If students are expected to advocate for themselves and their ideas as researchers in their own right (Gurr, 2001; Roberts and Bandlow, 2018), then being able to sift through advice to deem what is relevant is an important developmental skill that should be explicitly taught in doctoral programmes. Such a programme feature would empower students to better exercise their right to accept, reject and, as we have seen in the narratives, negotiate ideas/directives coming from faculty that may differ from theirs. Indeed, during the development of this book we discovered that an instructional element entitled

'Managing Your Supervisor' has since been incorporated into the taught modules of a similar programme (Hawkes and Taylor, 2016).

Identity, language and culture

For international students, identity related to language and culture becomes increasingly relevant when it emerges as being distinctively different from the mainstream milieu. This can pose additional challenges for those residing in their home country while pursuing education abroad. In the case of the contributing authors, each one connected with a culture that was different from the host country of the United Kingdom. Even those who maintained British citizenship (Channon, Necas, Paterson) had been living in another country for many years prior to enrolment. Moreover, not only did all connect with a different culture, but most also connected with another language. Six out of the nine authors had English as a first language, and three had English as an additional language. All were living or working in a context that required the use of a second language on a regular basis. In this sense, the cohort was a unique amalgam of hybrid identities with each individual bringing varying levels of comfort relative to both the British culture and the English language.

Most of the authors who had English as a first language grew up in English-speaking countries but had moved to and were residing in other (non-English) countries. The editors of this book, both Americans, were living in Cyprus (Savva) and Norway (Nygaard) during their studies. Similarly, three of the authors were British citizens (two had grown up in England and one in Scotland) but had since become long-term residents in the countries of Italy (Necas), Myanmar (Channon) and Japan (Paterson). A sixth author held Irish citizenship and lived in Ireland (O'Keeffe). For several of these authors we see a very real struggle between national identity and their sense of belonging. This was communicated as the distinct experience of being vested in two countries or cultures without fully belonging to either one (Necas, Paterson, Savva).

The three authors who grew up in non-English speaking countries and whose first language was not English had Arabic and Italian as their first languages. Though one author from this group chose to temporarily relocate from Italy to England (Poli), the remaining two authors continued to reside in their home countries for the duration of their studies: one was a Jordanian national living in Saudi Arabia (Abdrabboh) and the other a citizen and resident of the United Arab Emirates (Bukhatir). Although

this latter group also struggled with developing a sense of belonging, their struggle was, for the most part, acute and specific to the UK context as opposed to chronic. Feelings of dissonance in this group were most often related to language fluency (not to be confused with ability) or perceived cultural stereotyping.

At first glance, these two groups would appear to have little in common beyond the shared doctoral experience. A closer look, however, reveals that the two groups mirrored each other in unexpected ways. Whereas the first group was made up of native English speakers, the fact that the majority resided in non-English-speaking countries was highly relevant. It meant that they arrived in the programme with a strong awareness of what it was like to operate in a national context where one's identity, culture and language were different from the mainstream society. Such experiences have been shown to be salient in the development of intercultural sensitivity (Savva, 2013, 2015). This shared struggle of difference, albeit in flipped contexts, also became a vehicle through which the various members of the cohort bonded. A nuanced but noteworthy commonality among cohort members, therefore, was not so much about their experiences *with* the 'other' but rather about their experiences *as* the 'other' (Savva, 2017).

For the three non-native English speakers (Abdrabboh, Bukhatir, Poli), the difficulties associated with their status as non-native speakers of English had less to do with their actual language ability and more to do with how they were perceived by others. Abdrabboh and Bukhatir, for example, both recall a group of tutors stepping into a classroom session to observe and pair off with students for the first research assignment. By the end of the session, they both notice that they are in a pool of predominately non-native English speakers, none of whom has been selected by any of the tutors.

Similarly, Bukhatir observes how tutors converse with greater ease and at greater lengths with students who are native English speakers. This predictably affects her confidence which, in turn, affects her willingness to express her thoughts and ideas in class discussions. Likewise, Poli describes the disapproving facial expressions she observes when she uses excessive hand gestures to communicate. Picking up on the unspoken conventions and protocol of the English language and culture, she struggles to adapt and conform by limiting the use of her hands while speaking. In all three narratives, we see participation in class discussions becoming a carefully measured task involving the constant weighing of risks against benefits. In fact, avoidance has been reported as a common coping mechanism among international students (Sandekian et al.,

2015; Pham and Tran, 2015), with personal and social factors playing a central role in types of coping methods (Pham and Tran, 2015).

Though language ability was not a central issue in the narratives, one author did describe language fluency as a challenge (Poli). While individuals who speak English as an additional language may demonstrate adequate language ability, this does not necessarily mean that they can communicate in the same free and effortless way they would otherwise do in their first language. An analogy that comes to mind is one where a right-handed individual must suddenly use the left hand for all activities. Although the necessary tasks can still be accomplished, the speed and overall fluency of movement will inevitably be compromised. Moreover, the same individual will likely need additional time when compared to their peers who are not compromised in the same way. For Poli, a fear of being judged by her more fluent peers and professors, who may have equated a lack of language fluency with a lack of intelligence or aptitude, resulted in strategic withdrawal from group conversations. Yet here was an individual who came with extensive expertise in her field and had much to contribute to discussions, prompting feelings of both inadequacy and immense frustration.

Somewhat unexpectedly, language struggles and avoidance behaviours were also reported by Necas, who was a native English speaker but had been a permanent resident in Italy for many years. Despite studying in the country where she grew up, she nonetheless felt that her English had stagnated. This phenomenon has been reported in research on multilinguals who have been shown to experience greater communicative anxiety in their first language during stressful situations (Dewaele, 2007). Similarly, other research on first language attrition highlights how languages learned later in life can reshape the first language in profound and unexpected ways (Schmid and Köpke, 2017; Schmid, 2013). For Necas, her professional role as an English language instructor back in Italy further exasperated feelings of stagnation.

Beyond language, the two authors coming from more conservative Middle Eastern regions described a lack of cultural awareness among certain faculty and/or peers (Bukhatir, Abdrabboh). This included an unfamiliarity of power relations both in personal and professional exchanges. Whereas the university encouraged direct lines of communication, authors from this part of the world preferred a less direct approach. Abdrabboh describes how he receives contradictory feedback from his two supervisors, and in attempting to avoid any potential embarrassment or confrontation on their behalf, quietly chooses one set of feedback over the other, hoping that neither will take notice. In

another instance, he describes his frustration when faculty repeatedly ask him why he has not included women in his cross-cultural study, despite explaining on numerous occasions that women in Saudi Arabia do not hold jobs in the mining sector and that this is a cultural norm that is well beyond his control as a researcher.

Although countries in the Arab Gulf are far from being the same, both Abdrabboh and Bukhatir discovered that gross generalisations about the region and its people were frequent and recurring. Whether it was faculty continually alluding to anticipated shopping extravaganzas in London (Abdrabboh) or peers making inaccurate statements about driving laws for women in the Arab Gulf countries (Bukhatir), the behaviours described revealed beliefs deeply rooted in stereotypes and aligned most closely with literature on microaggressions (Altaf and Howard, 2017; Nadal et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2010). Though microaggressions are often unintentional, they nevertheless send negative and denigrating messages to members of marginalised groups (Nadal et al., 2010). Moreover, individuals who are targets of microaggressions often feel angry and confused, questioning whether prejudice was involved in an interaction, and whether to confront the perpetrators (Nadal et al., 2012).

Microaggressions surfaced both outside and inside the classroom. Abdrabboh felt that female professors, in particular, were dismissive of his opinions when they did not align with theirs – perhaps viewing his comments as undermining their authority. Bukhatir reaffirms this treatment of her Arab classmate in a separate chapter, noting that his treatment caused her to take a more reserved and measured approach in class discussions. She made this decision to avoid being judged in a negative light as a result of her more conservative religious beliefs and values. While both authors successfully negotiated the various chasms, this was not without first having to work through difficult feelings of alienation.

These narratives suggest that even in the highly cosmopolitan and global city of London, a place frequently touted for its diversity and inclusivity, assumptions connected to place of origin, faith and appearance can affect how students are treated. While the existence of prejudice or simple ignorance about different cultures might be relatively uncontroversial, the implications for institutional policy are less so. On the one hand, it is perfectly rational to assert that the responsibility to adapt rests unequivocally on the student who has selected, of their own free will, to study in a different country. On the other hand, institutions have responsibilities to support the international students they accept into their programmes. As suggested by Abdrabboh and Bukhatir, cross-cultural training aimed at sensitising faculty to deep-seated assumptions

would be a beneficial institutional investment. Similarly, since international students arrive with varying levels of cultural knowledge about their host country, offering cross-cultural training (perhaps within new student orientations sessions) could help acclimate students to the cultural norms and values they are about to be immersed in. By incorporating cross-cultural training into existing programmes, both faculty and students are given the opportunity to better understand and appreciate the cultural and social protocols that they and others are working from.

Scholarly identity: the expert, the novice and the impostor

Though teaching, learning and leading were not new concepts to members of the cohort, switching from a professional mindset to an academic mindset was not always an easy task. Such a switch involved moving from an applied emphasis to one that was more conceptual, requiring the use of skills that most authors did not utilise in their day-to-day professional work. Moreover, several in the cohort had previous education in a different discipline, meaning that the development of academic identity also meant rethinking previous approaches to disciplinary knowledge and research. Paterson, for example, highlights the difficulties he faced with reflective aspects of educational research, something he was explicitly trained to avoid in prior research fields. Nygaard describes the difficulty of converting her professional knowledge into something that could be researched academically. And Necas writes about her difficulty reaching various doctoral milestones despite her strong qualifications as a native English speaker and an English language instructor, noting that by all accounts she should have been able to 'just do it'.

And so, in many ways, the expert status the authors enjoyed in their professional work was challenged by the novice status they were relegated to as beginning doctoral students. Straddling the two worlds of expert and novice posed many challenges, not least of which was a compartmentalised sense of identity, which often involved a back and forth not only between two time zones but also between identity zones (Paterson). As one can imagine, the expert–novice divide provided fertile ground for increased feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in ways that some authors were not always prepared to deal with. Whereas most authors entered the programme feeling self-assured, some found themselves questioning whether they had taken on too much (Bukhatir, Poli).

Likewise, there was a heightened sensitivity around how feedback was communicated (Abdrabboh, Channon, Nygaard), underscoring the insecurities doctoral students can feel when facing judgement from academic staff and/or peer group members (Chapman, 2017).

Beyond formal learning associated with developing research questions, theory and methods, authors also began to learn about the more nuanced dimensions that were specific to the culture and language of academia – of belonging to an academic community. This was not necessarily something that was taught in a class, but rather involved the unspoken protocols of the academy: how to speak, write and gesture, how to network in ways deemed appropriate, when to say 'yes' and how to say 'no'. These more subtle aspects of the academy brought an added layer of complexity to the process of becoming a scholar. Though the level to which authors engaged in this more implicit aspect of scholarly identity varied, there were several authors who made it a central part of their doctoral experience. Nygaard, for example, purposefully aimed to extend her enrolment in the programme precisely because she was looking to keep herself connected to the academy for as long as possible. Poli, who was particularly aware of academic culture due to her professional role as a research manager, relocated both for improved access to resources but also for a more direct line of entry into the academic community. After her upgrade interview, she too made a deliberate choice to slow down and extend the period of her studies. Their cases challenge the notion that the success of doctoral programmes should be measured by time to completion.

Despite difficulties, the novice role emerged as one of a protagonist. It was through the novice role that authors began to explore and cultivate their academic identities. Education was a far-reaching and expansive field through which each author had to find a niche area to carve out their own space (Nygaard). Beyond looking outwards to relevant literature, creating such a space also involved delving inwards to better understand internal motivations and interests (Savva, Nygaard). As the programme progressed, it was the novice role that became central to merging the personal, professional and academic roles into a scholarly identity. The term 'blended professional' (Whitchurch, 2009) materialised explicitly in two chapters (Nygaard, Poli), referring to the overlap of professional and academic identities, and demonstrating an eventual shift away from a purely professional identity.

The expert–novice discussion would not be complete, however, without also referencing what is commonly referred to as impostor syndrome or impostor phenomenon, a rather common experience having

to do with a faulty sense of self-esteem. Breeze (2018: 194) describes impostor syndrome as:

> Feelings of not belonging, of out-of-placeness, and the conviction that one's competence, success, and likeability are fundamentally fraudulent, that it is only a matter of time before this is discovered, before being *found out* [italics in original].

The steep fall that cohort members experienced going from expert to novice created exactly this kind of vulnerability. Ironically, we see this in the narratives of some of the most established cohort members. Nygaard, for example, who had spent years helping other academics publish their papers, describes recurring feelings of self-doubt about her worthiness as an academic. Similarly, despite her expertise in social media, O'Keeffe looks to gather strength and support through participation in social media support networks initially as a quiet observer, testing the waters from a distance, before gradually joining conversations and becoming a full and active member of the academic community. These examples support other research which underscores the prevalence of impostor syndrome/phenomenon in academia and its role in developing a scholarly identity (Hutchins and Rainbolt, 2017; Vaughn et al., 2020).

From an institutional perspective, transitional opportunities served as important socialising mechanisms (Baker and Lattuca, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001). Presenting at conferences or seminars, running workshops, publishing and joining academic groups offered both external and internal validation, helping to scaffold the development of a scholarly identity (Mantai, 2017). These opportunities were key because they provided a space whereby students could 'rehearse' the role of the scholar, or what one author described as a shuffling back and forth between the professional and academic spheres (Poli).

It is here also that a strong sense of agency surfaced as a powerful personal characteristic. Authors were eager to take on new initiatives, including initiatives that they created themselves (Nygaard, Paterson). Despite the restrictions which were inherent in the distance programme, most authors in the cohort capitalised on opportunities for growth above and beyond their thesis work. These transitional activities served as important precursors to what would eventually become a transformative experience – fundamentally changing the internal landscape of each author's sense of self. In this way, the doctoral journey can be seen as a crucible of sorts, whereby how students entered the programme was fundamentally different from how they finished.

Collectively, these narratives point to the various ways that transitional opportunities serve as important stepping stones for developing academic identity, combating impostor phenomenon/syndrome and developing a sense of belonging. Such opportunities enable students to build expertise and demystify academia, through activities such as publishing their work, participating in conferences, running workshops or even teaching courses. Because these activities make up a large part of what it means to be a practising academic, taking part in them during the doctoral period seems to make identifying as an academic somewhat easier. Although the emphasis of many doctoral programmes is unequivocally on the completion of the taught modules and production of the thesis, student participation in these 'supplementary' activities has been highlighted as playing a very important role in the development of a scholarly identity (McAlpine and Amundsen, 2009). This also suggests that although such participation might delay completion of the doctoral degree, programmes that encourage students to take part in these activities may end up producing 'researching professionals' that are more likely to continue to produce research.

Concluding remarks

The stories in this book have mapped out the scholarly journeys of nine individuals whose paths briefly converged in an international doctorate programme in London. While the life circumstances and trajectory of each author were unique, this chapter has sought to highlight the most notable patterns and themes among them. Most evident is the centrality of identity in the process of becoming a scholar and the powerful need to belong somewhere. All of us arrived in the programme already belonging to an array of social groups related to our age, faith, gender, nationality, language(s), profession, values and beliefs. Yet nested within these broader categories were still finer, more nuanced, categories. Language, for instance, was nested within culture, and small things like having a particular accent or mannerisms could have repercussions for both how we perceived ourselves and how others perceived us.

Despite differences in our stories, each of us entered the programme with expectations that were challenged in unanticipated ways. We struggled to align who we were on the inside with who we could be on the outside – all the while adapting and negotiating the multiple identities nested within us. Becoming a scholar was a transformative journey borne out of the daily external and internal struggles each of us faced.

Beyond challenges, the journey also revealed personal characteristics and institutional protective factors that helped us navigate an otherwise difficult academic terrain. Personal characteristics included adaptability, resilience, self-awareness and agency. Comparably, institutional protective factors included providing flexible modes of study and creating opportunities for shared social experiences, as well as offering auxiliary academic opportunities to enhance and support the development of a scholarly identity.

It is our hope that prospective and current doctoral students will glean important insights from the narratives in this book and that they will resonate and spark discussion among those who read them. Faculty members who work with doctoral students also stand to gain deeper insights into the unique challenges of students who operate on the periphery. Last but certainly not least, those who are charged with the planning and design of international doctoral programmes may find the themes and institutional protective factors presented here useful in informing future programme development.

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Becoming a Scholar provides a window into the lives of nine non-traditional doctoral students. As mature, part-time, international students enrolled in a professional doctorate programme, they reflect on the transformation process of becoming scholars, and their narratives provide breadth and depth to themes that represent a diverse cross-section of cultures, identities and communities.

Recognising that the process of becoming a scholar is as much internal as it is external, the book provides an opportunity to engage with authentic personal stories that remain firmly rooted in academic literature. By bringing the 'human face' behind the doctoral journey to the forefront, the narratives draw much-needed attention to the personal journey that inevitably parallels and intersects with the academic journey. Although the narratives are drawn from a professional Doctor in Education (EdD) programme based in the UK, the struggles are sure to resonate with a much wider range of doctoral students and academics, sparking lively discussion, debate and reflection. A must-read for students preparing to embark on the doctoral journey, and essential reading for doctoral programmes that wish to equip students with important knowledge about the challenges ahead.

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