

# JPHE

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# JOURNAL OF PRAXIS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Journal of Praxis in Higher Education* (JPHE) is dedicated to praxis in higher education. A key assumption underpinning the journal is that education is a moral and political activity and that higher education and its practitioners cannot free themselves from moral nor political considerations. However, this assumption comes with several commitments. Rather than standing only from the outside looking in, as in positioning science or research as more valuable or important, this journal recognises the importance of a reflexive inside perspective. This implies taking the present structures, conditions, traditions and values – both internal and external – seriously, but also in situ when researching higher education.

The journal is committed to research aimed at the transformation of existing practices and conditions in higher education. In particular, it is promoting research that has a transformative potential including both practical and theoretical dimensions of educational work and higher education research. It is also committed to the idea that through education research, one can seek to promote social justice as well as the capacity of people to express agency, and increase the possibilities provided by society at large to its members.

Research concerning praxis in higher education is thus, in a sense, both a theoretical position and a form of active engagement. This journal welcomes contributions that are directly concerned with praxis in higher education or with research that is manifestly relevant to praxis in higher education. This focus includes the following areas, but is not limited to them:

- Empirical studies of the consequences of particular pedagogies, policies, and development activities in higher education;
- Purposes and implications of higher education;
- Justice and other ethical considerations associated with higher education, including implications for politics, society, and sustainability;
- The concepts of praxis and related concepts (e.g., praxis development, theory in praxis, practical wisdom, practical judgement, *phronesis*);
- What constitutes ‘good’ practice and ‘good’ professional practice in further/higher education? (and ‘good’ for whom?);
- Comparative studies regarding the enactment, contexts, and/or outcomes of praxis in higher education;
- Leading and governance in higher education; standardisation;
- Professional learning in higher education;
- Studies on changing conditions for practice and praxis in higher education;
- Transformative and responsive education;
- Research approaches as and for praxis in higher education;
- Praxis-oriented higher education pedagogies;
- Power and agency in higher education;
- Inclusive education and practices in higher education;
- Criticality and/or fostering critical thinking in higher education;
- Academic identity and living spaces in higher education.

Exploration of key issues and topics from a range of theoretical viewpoints and intellectual and methodological traditions is encouraged. For further information, please visit [www.jphe.org](http://www.jphe.org).

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*From the Editors*

## **The historical potential of flux in this unique moment. Conceptually highlighting an opportunity for praxis-driven change**

The second edition of a new journal is sometimes the toughest. The honeymoon excitement and energy of launching a brand new journal evaporates, and the journal is no longer new. It also does not help if you are trying to put together a second issue at the end of a semester and academic year, when many of us are in the middle of final exams, course assessment and thesis evaluations. And it really does not help if a global pandemic breaks out and turns higher education upside down in every way imaginable.

It is not our purpose in this editorial to make light of the health, economic, political, leadership, and public policy challenges facing the societies our higher education institutions serve. And it is especially not our intention to minimize the negative and tragic impacts experienced by so many across the globe, including our colleagues. Rather, we are interested in advancing an alternative angle for contextualizing these challenging times, along with suggesting a counterintuitive, praxis-driven contribution many of us are in the position to make, because we may be the *last* people on earth at risk, not the first.

When something of biblical proportions impacts lives, the moment—unless it is fatal—often offers a profound learning opportunity. The purpose of this editorial is to stress that we are now in such a moment and it is exceptionally easy to miss if we slip in to the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflexive scholarly cliché of *seeking* attention instead of *paying* attention. In its most humorous, self-effacing form, this distinction is drawn by Joseph Gordon-Levitt in his 2019 Ted Talk, ‘How Craving Attention Makes You Less Creative’ (Gordon-Levitt, 2019). More seriously, however, thinkers like Newport (2016), Robertson (2018), and Shahjahan (2015, 2016, see Acknowledgements) make a disturbing case about the different ways 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars now focus and spend so much time seeking attention that we may have forgotten to pay attention to the ideas and ideals that might matter the most. Therefore, the question we pose in this editorial is: *what could we pay attention to, right now, if we more profoundly understood the historical juncture and the exceptional potential in this particular moment in time?*

What might matter the most, in the midst of a generational challenge, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for even asking this question. Some of us may have, if we want, time for fundamental, critical reappraisal and reflection across several levels of higher education. It is obvious to ask and hope, as many do, if

higher education is up to this challenge in highly visible settings where game-changing moves are being made by our colleagues in university hospitals and medical research labs where vaccines, therapeutics, and testing methods are born. The argument we underline to colleagues around the globe is that higher education might be what matters the most—in the long-run—in the analytically opposite corner, where everyone is *not* focused just now; in other words, where most scholars work, doing the jobs most scholars do, most of the time. For example, Angervall, Baldwin, and Beach, in this issue, focus on this by problematizing an unseen ‘mission stretch’ in teacher education. Through this, they are able to illustrate a growing gap, or what is described as ‘two different worlds’ between those who do research or those who primarily teach in teacher education.

Everyday challenges like these also concern the work of colleagues focused on the global, transnational tensions we outlined in our inaugural editorial<sup>1</sup> (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019). None of those tensions have gone away, as the 2020 global protests focused on policing and endemic structural racism have vividly underlined. Moreover, the tensions may have become exacerbated by the current pandemic and associated economic shockwave. Those twin global stresses are likely to trigger challenges to assumptions about higher education from all quarters, not all of them friendly. That acknowledged, we would argue that challenging assumptions is never a bad thing, as most of the tensions we highlighted in our first editorial need unconventional, not conventional engagement.

In this issue, Fagrell, Fahlgren and Gunnarsson suggest precisely this when it comes to rethinking the role of higher education’s most important stakeholders, while Clarence, also in this issue, focuses on the specific context of postgraduate education. In the latter paper, the need for attending to/engaging with the affective dimension of academic writing is also highlighted. If we are paying attention, just now, we might recognize that this is actually the ideal time for action and asking what higher education *could be* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, post pandemic.

The reason we may not see a far more interesting 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on what we *could* do is frankly because we are still mired in 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal and neoliberal Eurocentric, US, or Anglo-centric preoccupations with what we all *should* be doing, which is a completely different question. The ever-present tension between a curiosity-driven *could* and morally or pragmatically-grounded *should* often obscures our greatest potential contribution, as an institution that not only can build vaccines in the middle of a pandemic, but saw the pandemic coming, knew what to do, and even anticipated events like this in global health (university) programs around the world. That reality is easy to miss, but it is also worth thinking about, as this is the university—at its best. And that is only one small part of a very large, global story. The larger, global story includes all university scholars. We underline the university’s long-term potential is measured in decades and centuries. During events, such as a pandemic, long-term idealistic vision can be easy to forget, as many of us are understandably consumed and distracted by real-time cable news cycles and the instantaneous, comforting connections in the 24/7/365 Twitter, Instagram, and IMs that comprise today’s

social media environment. That acknowledged, what follows is a different way to conceptualize *paying attention* in this unique, historical moment by putting the scholarship most of us do into perspective.

### **Engaging the tensions that will be waiting for higher education: post-pandemic**

There are several reasons academics might be tempted to jump with both feet into seeking attention and letting everyone know how we feel and what we are doing during the pandemic. This is not saying that there is no pandemic-related work to be done. This second issue of our journal features an example of introspection and analysis based on the lens of practice theory focused on the stories vividly experienced in the types of settings many of us find ourselves currently working in, by Sjølie, Francisco, Mahon, Kaukko, and Kemmis. In contrast, it is harder not to be skeptical of many across knowledge work, in general, and higher education in particular jumping onto the ‘pandemic bandwagon’ with little to say and even less to actually contribute. Instead, what about looking past the obvious and using this unique time to reorient to the ideas that have slipped below the surface, fallen off agendas, or faded from intellectual debate and community dialogue? Issues that will not be discussed in our next performance evaluation, are not measured in our institutional metrics, will not be spoken about in a (vice) chancellor’s speech, probed in an accreditation visit, and will not be featured in international rankings? These ideas and issues were explicitly underlined as the tensions brought into focus in our initial editorial (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019). With the exception of structural racism and social justice, few of these tensions have been the focus of many scholars understandably preoccupied with the pandemic.

The main reason we highlighted higher education’s enduring, transnational global tensions in the first editorial, and return to them explicitly and extensively here, is their persistent and seemingly intractable nature. However, when we wrote the initial editorial, we did not anticipate that we would have a real opportunity, so quickly, to re-think and reconsider our approach to those tensions and honestly assess why higher education has not had far more positive impact in those areas. One important insight that we would offer, after reflecting on this period of potentially transformational flux, is that while we in higher education are good at many things, learning (ironically) within or from extraordinary events is not typically something many of us are famous for or even have experience with. There are of course exceptions, but we point this out because, when collaborating on this editorial, we found ourselves wondering about the extent to which we were aware of the complex structural forces that now shape how we spend most of our time as academic professionals. Those dynamics explain whether we are—or are not—focused on what matters the most. We, along with many colleagues, argue ‘the best version of higher education’ was *not* what we were up to—as an institution—as the pandemic hit. As Newport (2016), Robertson (2018), and Shahjahan (2015;

2016, see Acknowledgements) theorize, pre-pandemic, many of us had been lulled into a blizzard of fragmented activity, datification, unmoored from institutional or personal potential that could benefit *all populations* in society, not just *some populations*. We are not getting a ‘do-over’ in 2020, but this might be as close as many of us will get in our lifetime.

### **Time will tell**

The potential of critical reflection and analysis of extraordinary events experienced by ordinary people is nothing new. It is business as usual in many fields. Airline pilots, crews, and air-traffic controllers learn from aircraft crashes, surgical personnel learn from inadvertently killing patients during failed operations and first responders like police, paramedics, and firefighters routinely learn *especially* through careful analysis of exceptionally extraordinary events.

As we collaborated on this editorial, we noted many of us often do not systematically de-brief as we move forward, as is typical in the fields noted above. Because we often do not, we cannot help but speculate if this is one of the reasons why so many of the tensions we focused on in our initial editorial have not been ameliorated by higher education, even though higher education appears to *potentially* offer the best leverage, institutionally, organizationally, and professionally on those serious challenges. Perhaps, as Shahjahan (2015) or Bourdieu (1988) both argued, a more profound understanding of time, in part, explains how (or if) scholars define, engage, and even shape the era in which they live for the wider good of society.

What if we, in higher education were better at learning, over time, like pilots or surgical teams or firefighters? What might that look like in higher education? Because many of us have the time to reflect, re-think, refine, and regroup, we, the editors, have firstly (above) done our best to spotlight this unique moment in time. Secondly, we have simultaneously tried to draw attention to contextual and structural issues which explain why it is so easy to miss and why that matters for our journal’s audience. Thirdly, (below) we offer a practical conceptualization that illuminates the lack of real pressure many are under in contrast to colleagues, neighbors, friends, and relatives who are directly or indirectly involved in highly visible, but also *essential*, supporting positions and occupations crucial to getting our societies and communities through the pandemic. Few of us are neither directly nor indirectly in highly visible or even low visibility positions crucial to negotiating the crisis our societies are now engaged, especially during the acute stage and immediate aftermath. That is not good or bad, but that is how it is.

### **Conceptualization: why many of us have time to think about this?**

Maybe the emergent structural nature of higher education does not bother you. Perhaps you work in a position where you spend the majority of your time paying careful attention to acute topics, issues, and challenges facing the communities and societies we serve. Maybe you are even making significant strides towards ameliorating the tensions we spotlighted in our first editorial that you do not need to bother with genuflecting to the commercial platforms and the algorithm-driven indexes that frame your country's institutions' research, teaching, social engagement—and perhaps your career path.

In contrast, many of us are in the middle of negotiating precarious positions with short or no funding horizons and do not have free hands when it comes to academic freedom. And many do not have the types of positions where they can ignore the Euro, US and Anglo-centric conceptualizations of time and commercially-driven datafication of knowledge work (Robertson 2018; Shahjahan 2015, see Acknowledgements). In terms of technology, this is very easy to see in the EdTech industry, as they step forward to profit across education, broadly speaking. When upper secondary education and higher education go online, the providers of internet platforms, such as Zoom and Google, are integral, which translates into private profit. Not only can the EdTech industry gain access to large amounts of data that they now can profit from, they also have the opportunity to advance their positions in different ways (see Klein, 2007; Saltman, 2016).

It might be the case that your position is secure, or the opposite; that you understand the relationship between power and (your) time, data, and institutional metrics, or have not really thought about it. Especially those two structural tensions have led our team to reflect that all of us, in higher education, have an unprecedented opportunity to critically reflect on what we—collectively and individually—hope higher education *could be*, post-pandemic, in terms of the structural dynamics shaping higher education. For instance, what consequences will the surveillance make possible through all this data have for academics and students within and across countries across the globe? Might it be, as Robertson (2018) and Shahjahan (2015, 2016, see Acknowledgements) suggest, we, as professionals, are losing control over higher education? What happens to countries (neighborhoods and entire groups) *outside* this surveillance and across the digital class divide (Zakaria, 2020), outside the platforms and ideas about time that structure the vast bulk of our focus and actions? So, rather than give in to short-term, datafied actions that do not change anything, we offer the following conceptualization to illustrate why we might want to take a beat in a moment of transformational flux analogous to the eye of a hurricane.

There are two key dimensions that put many of us in a conceptually defined space where we may have—for the first time in our lives—a new space and perspective to think about the best version of higher education for those who matter the most. 'Those who matter the most' is different for every individual, operational

unit, sub-organizational unit, higher education institution, and system. And might people who need us the most be the least likely to directly benefit from our hands-on action, as scholars?

**What is our role? Is our contribution in/visible?**

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, most people can ask themselves, in a professional sense: ‘What is the nature of my role?’ (in the pandemic) and ‘are my efforts visible or invisible?’ (in the pandemic). In other words, there are two dimensions: *role/degree of involvement* and *in/visibility* that illuminate one way to conceptualize a rudimentary institutional, occupational, professional, or even a societal division of labor.

Like all typologies, this first attempt deals with key qualitative *distinctions*, broad *dimensions*, and *extremes* at the end of spectrums. Because all typologies are abstract oversimplifications, they miss nuance between the extremes. Further work, if any were warranted, could be done by colleagues who could operationalize our rudimentary suggestions into statistical generalizations to defined populations, or relational generalizations, to social networks. That said, for the purposes of broad, qualitative brushstrokes that illuminate an exceptional opportunity, we hope this initial conceptualization suffices to ground our point. Anything beyond that falls outside of the scope of a brief editorial.

Role and visibility in the COVID pandemic		Role: degree and nature of involvement in the pandemic	
		Indirect ‘hands off’	Direct ‘hands on’
Visibility in the pandemic	Highly visible	<i>Indirect Highly visible</i>	<i>Direct Highly visible</i>
	Invisible	<i>Indirect Invisible</i>	<i>Direct Invisible</i>

Table 1. Conceptualizing ‘role’ and ‘visibility’

*Hands-on and highly visible professionals: the professionals who save lives*

At the risk of stating the obvious, we all know who these professionals are and why they are highlighted first. They are the *hands-on* emergency room doctors, paramedics, intensive care doctors, nurses, aides, and technicians. These people, in short, may end up saving your life if you end up on the wrong side of the pandemic. Despite their highly visible role, they by and large are not seeking, nor do they want attention. There is a lesson in their professional reality for those willing to learn it. They make their living paying attention—to you and I.

To the extent that research scientists are directly engaged in the race for a vaccine, therapeutics, better forms of diagnostic testing, they are also ‘hands on’,



but in a different way. If and when they are successful—or they fail—it is highly visible, but like those directly in harm's way, they do not have time to think about visibility. If it comes, it is long after completing the task at hand.

*Hands-on, but often invisible: the essential workers whose work allows yours*

Society's essential workers are equally important, for example, mass transit drivers, food market cashiers, pharmacists, internet service providers, public utility employees, plumbers, electricians. Pre-pandemic, this was often an invisible, underappreciated set of roles. During the pandemic these ordinary people have been asked to expose themselves, *hands-on*, to extraordinary risks. Many of them have cheerfully shown up, but it has come at a lethal price—for all of society, in general, and for far too many of them, in particular.

*Hands-off, but highly visible: key actors with key contributions*

While not on the front lines, people in leadership positions in government service and key industries, some political, some civil authorities, some professionals are in highly visible, crucial positions, especially when it comes to public policy debate, decisions, direction, and execution of public policy, government-industry cooperation, and the use of society's resources. In addition, journalists covering the pandemic are often highly visible and the reason we understand the topic to the extent that we can. Where societies have fared well, it is because of exceptional leadership and process-driven decision-making, as well as those who cover it in critical media. The opposite is unfortunately as true.

*Hands-off and invisible: or 'most people', including most scholars*

In the response to COVID-19, the role many readers of this journal have not been directly involved in a *hands-on* or critical supporting and visible role of those who are in harm's way. The exception might be readers supporting colleagues, in some form in the life sciences and university hospitals. A similar, easy to miss and crucial role may very well have been to many colleagues, scholars, and others who drew support from our scholarship in ways that turned out to be very important, yet invisible.

That acknowledged, with respect to COVID-19, some of us might have felt uncomfortably invisible. Many people in other domains are in a similar, bystander role. The best real contribution we might make? Washing our hands, socially distancing, wearing a facemask in public. This can sometimes feel quite unimportant. Many of us wish we could do more and there are small acts we can do. They do not quite stack up to what others have their hands full with, just now. However, we are arguing this is not a bad thing, if we use this time to pay attention to the very real potential we have to act, if we only recognize it as such.

## **The potential of transformational flux for higher education**

During this historical moment of transformational flux, invisibility, with a more profound appreciation and understanding of time, along with structural power dynamics, might actually be a good thing. This moment is a set of circumstances that can be put in perspective, which is what we have done our best to do in these few pages. The easiest way to do use this time might be to reflect more carefully on the wicked problems we have always been focused on. We could assume visible, hands-on roles in higher education's biggest challenges—especially those who tend to be ignored by some in positions of power. There are parts many of us have yet to play, where we could be doing better. Perhaps, a lot better. Is there really anything preventing us from doing this?

In higher education, the tensions we cited in our inaugural editorial offer numerous, unmet challenges in acute need of direct, hands-on roles, analogous to those we see battling COVID-19 on the news. This has tragically been underlined during the pandemic, in the US and around the globe regarding the lethal structural racism where unarmed black people are killed by armed police. While this topic might seem far away and unimaginable to many scholars, the magnitude of the global resonance and reaction to social justice issues in our communities was difficult to miss for anyone paying attention. The question that arises is whether we, in higher education, engage those challenges or remain silent and on the sidelines? Many in higher education across the US are currently asking if higher education could be playing a more constructive role in social justice issues. We wonder if the same questions might be every bit as relevant in our own societies? This is only one issue, but it is inextricably related to the wider neo-colonialization of knowledge work (Robertson, 2018; Shahjahan, 2016) that might be happening because seeking attention—inside the box and by feeding the algorithmic metrics — is the now the fastest route to promotion and tenure in the systems where several of us work. This moment offers us a chance to ask ourselves if that is really the legacy we want to define our collective contribution to university scholarship?

It is natural to want to help during a once-in-a-generation challenge. Contemporary social media networks and commercial media platforms framing our actions and reinforcing fragmented activity offer us plenty of 'as if' opportunities for activity that in many cases has nothing to offer that outweighs washing your hands, using a facemask, and social distancing.

Around the world, the practicalities of scheduling fall semester 2020 rest uneasily against larger questions about the relevance and responsiveness of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is thrown into sharp relief, especially when contrasting essential workers risking their lives daily, while many highly educated elites shelter or are trapped in place. The biggest risk many of us face? Whether or not our internet service providers allow us to connect with our global web of colleagues. As Zakaria (2020) wrote recently in the Washington Post, post-pandemic comparative analyses of who was most negatively affected during the pandemic will probably underline that *it was not us* (cosmopolitan, highly educated

knowledge workers). However, critically appreciating this moment of flux might also reveal insights that highlight an easily overlooked potential, as to what higher education's most essential contribution to a post-COVID society might look like. That type of society includes understanding those across our countries and in our communities whose life and livelihood has been fundamentally altered, while bearing the brunt of the risk and the negative consequences. It is easy to understand why those groups hardest hit might view highly educated hyper-connected expert elites with suspicion. That said, the role higher education now has the chance to play in bridging global, intersectional tensions is worth paying attention to, if for no other reason than we can. Zakaria's editorial did not engage that point or potential, but we argue that we—all scholars—are now in the position to do precisely that.

*David Hoffman, Melina Aarnikoivu, Petra Angervall, Catarina Player-Koro, and Kathleen Mahon*

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# Who is we? Attending to similarity and difference as discourse praxis in the university classroom

Collective on Praxis in Health Sciences Education<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*The word we evokes ideas of both belongingness and non-belongingness through its ability to create constellations of solidarity and exclusion. In education, its use has the power to draw invisible yet substantial lines between dominant and counter-hegemonic ideologies—and teachers and students—in ways that dynamically influence the operation of power between actors. Reflections emerging from a collaborative partnership between a student, teaching assistants, and professor during an undergraduate course on sex/gender and health revealed significant opportunities for critical pedagogical practice around we. This paper analyzes how we and related terms (like they, us, them, etc.) function in the higher education classroom and offers our analysis into the possibilities of using we as a starting point for anti-oppressive and reflexive educational praxis. Ultimately, we contend that we has the potential to work as an intervention countering dominant ideologies and normative assumptions operating in the classroom.*

*Keywords: anti-oppressive pedagogy; critical discourse analysis; critical pedagogy; reflexive education; higher education*

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## Introduction

*We* is a tiny word with massive implications. *We* can evoke ideas of both belongingness, and non-belongingness by constructing an in-group, sharing in common allegiances and identities, and an out-group, a *them* or a *they* that exists in opposition to, and is excluded by, the speaker's *we*.

In the field of linguistics, this working of *we* has been described as an example of *clusivity*—linguistic forms that communicate the (lack of) belonging of certain ideas or actors (Wieczorek, 2009). In this project, however, we have been more interested in the uses of *we* from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> The individual authors of the Collective are Alice Cavanagh, Tahmina Shamsheri, Padmaja Sreeram, and Stacey Ritz. The authors contributed equally to this research and article.

Although *we* often reads superficially as a form of inclusion, it can also operate on more insidious levels: *we* can be used to homogenize and elide difference and diversity, to center and affirm some identities while rendering others more marginal, and to obscure operations of power and privilege in a community. In the context of higher education classrooms, we contend that attention to *we* could be a valuable component of anti-oppressive educational praxis and reflexivity, as every invocation of *we* produces constellations of solidarity and exclusion, wherein different members of the same learning community are included, excluded, or precluded from meaningful recognition and belonging. Interrogating how the word *we* (or *us*, *our*, *they* and *them*) operates in a classroom offers educators and students a starting point for reflection-in-action, on-action, and for action unto itself. Indeed, in our undergraduate health sciences classroom, we found that examining uses of *we* helped make explicit some implicit workings of power, and reminded us of our unique positionality in strengthening and/or redistributing concentrations of power. In this paper, our central aim is to document our reflections on the uses and functions of *we*, and to consider how a reflexive attention to *we* in higher education classrooms could enhance efforts towards anti-oppressive educational praxis. Autoethnographic methodologies in health sciences and health professions education research have been proposed as useful mechanisms to elicit relevant and incisive reflections from individuals who are embedded in the culture being studied.

To situate our discussion, we briefly describe the context of the course, and elaborate on our own *we* before contextualizing our work with reference to theoretical understandings of identity and critical discourse analysis. We provide examples as to how *we* operates in university classrooms and how it might be unpacked, before suggesting some of the downstream effects and implications of paying attention to *we*. As *we*—the authors of this paper—are situated in the health sciences and medicine, we see particular application of these practices in the context of biomedical and health professional education, but contend that the general principles are applicable and valuable more broadly in higher education.

### **Contextualizing and locating our *we***

Because discourse is central to the work of teaching, our subject positions play out loud and clear in classroom contexts. (Glazier, 2005, p. 232)

In a paper that seeks to talk about the function of *we* in classroom discourse, we feel that it is important to talk about the *we* that is us, the authors of this paper, how we came to be doing this work, our relationships to it, and how we are situated in and beyond the classroom.

Our collaboration formed in the Winter/Spring of 2018 in the context of an undergraduate seminar at McMaster University on sex and gender in the health sciences and biomedicine. The course is a 2nd year undergraduate seminar offered

by the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program entitled HTHSCI 2T03 - Sex, Gender, & Health<sup>2</sup>; it is open to undergraduate students from any program in the University in Level 2 or higher. The class consists of a weekly 3-hour seminar, 13 weeks in length, with a class size of 40–50; across the years 2018–2020, the course has been comprised of 60% students from the Faculty of Health Sciences, 31% from the Faculty of Science, 6% from the Faculty of Social Science, and 3% others.

The objectives of the course, as articulated in the course outline for 2018, are that students will be able to

articulate a nuanced understanding of the terms *sex* and *gender* based on relevant scholarship, and analyse discourses of sex/gender in health; discuss how sex functions as a biological determinant of health, how gender functions as a social determinant of health, and the complexity of the dynamic interactions between them; constructively critique health literature and policy using a sex/gender-based analytical framework; appropriately apply sex/gender considerations into research, practice, and policy in health contexts; and show how [] they have developed [their] skills in written and oral communication, group and independent work, and giving and receiving feedback. (Ritz, 2018)

In the first half of the semester, the course was organized principally around the discussion of case studies on different topics in health viewed through the lens of sex/gender (for example, heart disease, allergy, and depression); students were assigned papers to read from the literature that shed light on how sex/gender factors influenced these health conditions, with a facilitated discussion of key insights from those papers in the weekly class time. In the second half of the course, students formed groups to pursue a project on an issue related to sex/gender and health of their choosing, and taking a form of their choosing, using an inquiry-based pedagogical model, with occasional guest speakers. Students were evaluated based on short ‘response notes’ to the readings, a case study project, the inquiry project, and a final reflective synthesis paper.

In order to promote an open, safe environment for discussion and student contributions in the classroom, the instructor (SR) included some guidelines in the course outline (discussed on the first day of classes) about ‘striving for an equitable, inclusive classroom’, avoiding ableist or unnecessarily gendered language, considerations about ‘air time’, ‘safe space’, and how to handle conflict and disagreement respectfully. The instructor also introduced themselves by their first

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<sup>2</sup> The full course outline is available at <https://bhsc.mcmaster.ca/course-outline/>

name and encouraged students to address them that way, to try and encourage a less hierarchical dynamic (which, of course, cannot be eliminated).

In terms of our roles in that classroom, we are four: a student from this class (Tahmina Shamsheri—TS), an undergraduate peer tutor (Padmaja Sreeram—PS), a graduate course design consultant (Alice Cavanagh—AC), and its instructor (Stacey Ritz—SR). Initially, AC, SR, and PS began to collectively write, share, and discuss reflections on our own experiences in the course, as part of AC's course design consultancy project with the campus teaching and learning center, and also with an eye towards improving the course for future iterations. At the end of the semester, TS spontaneously shared with SR that she had been carrying out a similar and complementary exercise in reflection on the course independently, and TS was invited to join the process.

At that point, we began to understand our undertaking as a form of collaborative autoethnography, akin to that described by Lapadat (2009). In this case, we had each been preparing detailed reflections on our individual experiences of the course from our respective perspectives throughout the semester. We collectively interpreted those reflections through a dialogic process informed by perspectives from critical discourse analysis. Our dialogue identified a number of common themes in our reflections (for example, about whiteness and race; geography, location, and space in the classroom; interactions of gender identity with the sex/gender focus of the course); of these, the workings of *we* in classroom discourse were identified by all of us as the most compelling for the deeper exploration we describe here.

This theme, however, did not simply emerge from the data fully formed (Varpio et al., 2017); our interest in this facet of classroom speech acts was a product of the 'various discourses that define who we are' (Glazier, 2005, p. 232), just as our values, experiences, and academic backgrounds also infuse the analysis we put forth here (Joseph, 2009). Since our engagement with *we* during and after the course was shaped by our observations of the different valences that *we* carried relative to our own distinct subject positions, we each reflect briefly below on the discourses that shaped our arrival to this class and participation in this collective:

*Tahmina Shamsheri*

Before I came to this collective, I was exploring critical pedagogy from the perspective of the learner as it relates to the problem-based learning and inquiry ethos underpinning McMaster's Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program. Drawing on experience and relevant literature, my project focused on the interface between theory and praxis in the context of the sociocultural and institutional locations within which I found myself embedded. The project involved collecting autoethnographic field notes from each of my classes for the year. I was invited to the collective by SR after a conversation revealed a strong alignment between the goals of my project and that of the collective. As a woman of color and an immigrant, my engagement with critical pedagogy was sparked by experience first, and literature second. Thus, my enrollment in this class was driven by intellectual,



political, and personal interests in pursuing critical understandings of sex/gender and health that troubled dominant biomedical discourse and accounted for a fulsome notion of *health*.

*Padmaja Sreeram*

As an undergraduate learner in McMaster's Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program, I was trained to ask questions about the world around me, related to health, science, education, and human society. While working on a project course with SR in the area of sex, gender, and immunology, I directly grappled with constructs of sex and gender in ways that challenged and complicated reductionist and logical positivist commitments to the pursuit of a universal *objectivity*. The nature of questions I wanted to explore began to form outside the problem-field of traditional biomedical sciences, venturing into the interplay between critical social theory, epistemology, and basic and applied health sciences. Upon hearing SR's plan to create a course on sex, gender, and health, I immediately asked to contribute to the course by providing support in course design and facilitation.

I joined this collective as a peer tutor for the course, wherein I was part of the instructional team (with AC and SR) and therefore institutionally separate from many of my peers (including TS) enrolled in the course, and yet not formally charged with assessing, grading, or didactically teaching students. As the only racialized, first-generation immigrant member on the instructional team, I wanted to ensure that the course explored the imposition of cis-hetero-patriarchal, white European settler constructs of sex and gender on racialized bodies, influencing the way we are sexed and gendered.

*Alice Cavanagh*

I arrived to our collective as an MD/PhD student in the first year of my doctoral work, increasingly preoccupied by questions of place: place as physical (as in, 'How do the places we teach/learn/doctor structure the experiences of people in them?') and place as socially constituted and conferred ('Is it my place to teach/learn/doctor?'). My thinking around both of these questions is particularly indebted to hooks' writing (1994) in conversation with Freire (2000) as recently described elsewhere (Cavanagh, Vanstone, & Ritz, 2019). Although my academic capital—a Master of Arts in Gender Studies—qualified me to be hired as a student course design consultant providing feedback on course delivery and design, I felt uncertainty around assuming a position of power in a class intended to trouble hegemonic discourses about sex, gender, and health. As a white, cisgender settler, in training to become a physician, I am conscious of both the limitations of my partial perspective (Haraway, 1988) and the ways in which discourses we were critiquing also confer profound privileges to me and others who share in my subject position. Understanding and responding to this fueled my interest in this project and shaped my contributions to this work.

*Stacey Ritz*

Formally trained as a biomedical scientist in the tradition of a reductionist empiricism that values *objectivity*, and occupying multiple nodes of privilege, it has been a long-term, ongoing project for me to come to recognize and embrace the reality that ‘my experiences, beliefs, and identities are necessarily reflected in how I view and interact with the world’ (Glazier, 2005, p. 232), and that this has major implications for my teaching. Prior to 2011, although I had engaged significantly in critique of the practices and discourses of science, my teaching centered principally on the basic physiological processes of the immune system, and I did not give much thought to how my identity might be at play in that context; coursework from the Master’s in Education I pursued while a faculty member triggered more focused reflection on my educational praxis. When I launched a new course on sex, gender, and health in 2018 (my main area of scholarly expertise), I made it an explicit goal for myself to incorporate intersectional perspectives and to foster an inclusive classroom culture. I realized that identity was going to be much more *present* in this context than in a typical immunology class, and that I would have to be particularly attentive to the tendency to center my own experiences and ideologies, particularly given that I occupy a relatively privileged social location. Work from Lather (1991), hooks (2003), Freire (2000), Glazier (2005), and others was particularly significant in informing my frameworks for reflection. This has proved to be an even more challenging task than I anticipated, humbling and enlightening in equal measure, especially drawing my attention to the ways that whiteness and Western cultural ideologies dominate my worldview.

**We as discourse, identity, and interpellation**

Any act of speech carries embedded layers of meaning that extend beyond literal definitions of the words used. Discourse, then, is not simply the language itself, but is the culmination of the language plus the layers of action, interaction, beliefs, ideologies, values, symbols, ways of thinking, identities, and more that serve to delineate systems of knowledge, social identities, and ways of doing and being in the world (Davies & Harre, 1990; Gee, 2011; Luke, 1996). In other words, the idea of discourse recognizes that language takes on meaning principally through the social context in which it is employed, and the meaning of words or acts depends on the context and the roles and identities of the participants (Davies & Harre, 1990). Discourse can be understood as ‘a form of action that both presupposes and at the same time brings about unique ways of being in the world’ (Keating & Duranti, 2011, p. 332). In Foucault’s view, discourse ‘creates a field of knowledge by defining what is possible to say and think, declaring the bases for deciding what is true and authorizing certain people to speak while making others silent or less authoritative’ (1974, p. 49). Critical discourse analysis is the study of these layers, in relationship to the social structures of power, dominance, and oppression they may work to uphold or subvert (van Dijk, 1993).

The word *we* is a particularly interesting discursive entity because of the way it represents a nexus of identity and community, producing assumptions about shared values and norms, and constituting what positions are socially available to take up in a given context. These particular meanings of *we* are often unstated but implicitly understood. van Dijk (2011) suggests that these intimations of *we* frequently fall along one or more of a few common axes: the use of *we* addresses aspects of identity (as in, ‘who are *we*? who belongs to *us*?’), activity (‘what do *we* do? what is *our* task?’), goals (‘what do *we* aim to achieve?’), and resources (‘what is the basis of *our* power?’). Using the word *we*, a speaker makes a claim both about their own membership in a community predicated on shared identity, speaks on behalf of that community, and gestures to others that they understand as included in its membership.

Important to this understanding of *we* as a discursive entity are contemporary conceptions of identity as a social construct. In this line of thinking, the characteristics said to define an individual are understood as shifting across contexts, performed in transaction with others and ideologies as opposed to being fixed in all circumstances (Anton & Peterson, 2003; Davies & Harre, 1990; De Fina, 2011; Luke, 1996). This understanding of identity is related to, but distinct from, the concept of ‘subject position’: identity is a product of performative materialization of one’s social milieu (Davis, 2012), whereas subject position describes the situated perspective from which one engages with the world (Anton & Peterson, 2003). While an individual’s performative identity may not reflect all elements of their social location, their perspective is inescapably shaped by their subject position. In this reading, uses of the word *we* are acts of identification and identity-making that may or may not correspond with the speaker’s subject position. By invoking a *we*, an individual ‘takes a place in the social order, making sense of the world from this vantage point’ (Anton & Peterson, 2003, p. 406).

At the same time, using *we* also assimilates one’s audience into part of a *we* or a *them*, whether they like it or not. This working of *we*—its effects on those made subject to its discourse—can be understood through what Althusser (2006) described as the process of interpellation. Much as a police officer exerts power over a pedestrian by calling out to them on the street, the word *we* hails an audience as part of a common whole (or not), exerting materially constitutive effects in the form of social inclusion and exclusion. Just as we know that people and communities are policed differently because of racism, classism, cissexism, and other elements of their subject positions, we also recognize that *we* does not hail all subjects equally. Indeed, *we* as used by people with social privilege most often serves hegemonic ends, falsely constructing universalities of experience that carry material consequences for dynamics of dialogue and exchange in education.

The function and sequelae of these interpellating discourses have been central themes of scholarship in critical pedagogy. According to Freire, ‘banking’ models of education—in which teachers didactically ‘deposit’ knowledge into passive learners—produce students as the objects of education (Freire, 2000, p. 71), echoing societal impulses that objectify economically marginalized underclasses.

In our reading, we understand this dynamic as producing implicit *we—them* constellations of power and disenfranchisement; teachers (a *we*) are understood as knowing while students (a *them*) are understood to occupy subjugated positions of ‘absolute ignorance’ (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Freire (2000) describes this dynamic as characteristic of an ‘ideology of oppression’ (p. 72), countered only via radical egalitarian turns that disrupt strict classroom hierarchies and privilege knowledge borne of experience. Students and teachers must become ‘critical co-investigators’ of social problems at play in their classrooms and beyond to foster consciousness and critical intervention into reality (Freire, 2000, p. 81). Feminist critics—notably bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)—extend Freire’s analysis of power in the classroom to attend to other forms of oppression that intersect with poverty. In this way, a feminist interpretation of Freirean pedagogy can help facilitate Rancière’s ‘dissensus’ (Rancière, 2011, p. 1) in the classroom, collectivizing learners’ capacities in service of social justice, despite the diverse heterogeneity of their lived experiences (Ellsworth, 1989). Through this reading, we suggest that creating opportunities for students and teachers to interrogate discursive *we* and *them* groups produced in their classrooms is one valuable opportunity for praxis in higher education.

### **The impact of *we* in the classroom**

Everything begins with the recognition of one’s identity.  
The first educative act is the recognition or the rescuing of  
the fact that the identity of the educator, and the pupil, has  
its own existence. (Gadotti, 1996, p. 156)

In education, uses of *we* are manifold, each with their own tacit meanings and effects. A teacher addressing a classroom may use *we* to cognitively acculturate learners as members of a common disciplinary community (as in ‘*we*, who study sociology’) or to describe an outcome they hope their students will achieve (as in ‘today *we* will learn how to calculate the anion gap’). Students may use *we* to advocate for their common needs (as in ‘*we* need more information to complete the assignment’) or to situate knowledge they have acquired elsewhere (as in, ‘*we* covered ideas about sex and gender in my second-year class’).

One *we* frequently employed in higher education by both students and teachers is the *we* meaning ‘those of us who are present in this room’. This *we* comes loaded with significant implications, particularly in view of structural barriers to higher education related to income, class, and other axes of social location and identity. For every ‘*we*, who are present’, there are also members of a ‘*they*, who are not’—a group whose perspectives are not represented, fostering ‘practices of ignorance [which] are often intertwined with practices of oppression and exclusion’ (Tuana & Sullivan, 2006, p. vii). Faced with a ‘*we*, who are present’, it is incumbent on learners and educators alike to ask: What power dynamics have

conspired to allow *us* into the room while keeping *them* out? What perspectives are missing as a result?

In addition, ‘*we*, who are present’ can also suggest ideas of homogeneity or commonality amongst community members that may not exist, obscuring the experiences of students who may not find resonance with the *we* being invoked. One example of this occurred during a dialogue in our gender, sex, and health course discussing hegemonic masculinity and femininity that has been recreated below:

SR – In **our** culture, **we** have the idea that there are certain kinds of activities or things that are considered to be *normal* or *permissible* or *expected* for boys and girls and men and women. This can constrain what feels possible, or affect our engagement or experience of those activities. For instance, **we** associate pink with girls and blue with boys, and there are lots of ways in which **we** make it easy for people to conform with those norms, and punish those who violate them.

Student 1 – Yeah, **we** think of hockey as, like, the *national sport*, but still **we** usually act like girls aren’t really legit as hockey players, or people assume things about **our** sexual orientation, like **we’re** all butch or lesbians or something.

Student 2 – Yeah! It’s so much harder for **us** to get into it, versus for **them** [the boys]. **They’re**, like, expected to play hockey.

In this conversation, for some people, hockey, gender, and *Canadian culture* served as a common touchpoint. These members of the classroom community invoked *we*, *they*, *our*, and *them* in their discussion, describing in turn, the culture they understood as belonging to Canadians, members of that culture, girls who play hockey, and boys who watched it. For other members of the classroom (including TS), this constructed a false universality—points of disidentification, illustrated through the gulf in their experiences of *our culture*, *girlhood*, and *boyhood*. To members of the classroom community who shared these assumptions, such an exchange would likely pass by completely unnoticed; for those who did not, cognitive dissonance was triggered as they were claimed under the umbrella of a *we* to which they did not feel an affiliation.

This process of active yet implicit othering and marginalization says ‘You are not like *us*’, often to those who are marginalized more broadly. Here, the *we* invokes whiteness, notions of what it means to be *Canadian*, and class in particular ways. It signifies that to belong, to this society, is to participate in these cultural activities. Those who do not, out of unfamiliarity, lack of interest, the high costs of entry,

(dis)ability, or a multitude of other reasons are therefore unable to assume belongingness in *Canadian-ness*.

As a complement to the invisible *they* in the room, there is merit in interrogating the other points of dissonance. For the men in the classroom, who were a minority, there was a reversal of the more typical dynamics of othering, where, in a conversation about a traditionally masculine activity, this group became a *they*. In all of this, questions can be productively raised about who we see as ‘in the room’, those who are in the room but not seen, and the ways that people make invisible parts of their being in order to be perceived as part of the *we*. This (real) example from the course itself may feel on-the-nose, and other instances of *we*—*them* constructions may not be so obvious or ideologically weighted, or may not actually hinge on the use of the word itself. Even where questions of identity and ideology are not invoked, the use of *we* can ostracize in other ways. Assuming common knowledge—for instance, of a place, a formula, a theory or a concept—frequently draws quiet lines around those who are in, and out, of *the know*. A physics professor guiding first-year students through a problem-solving exercise might comment that ‘of course we all know that the first law of thermodynamics is  $\Delta U = Q - W$ , and since the amount of heat added to the system was given in the problem, we can easily calculate *W*’. Those in the class who are familiar with the field are included in a *we* while others may well feel implicitly *called out* for not knowing something the professor thought should be obvious. Another example from outside of our classroom involved a field visit for a university course on the social determinants of health in an underserved, lower income neighborhood in the city. Implicit in the exercise was an assumption that the visiting undergraduate students were not part of the community they visited, reinforcing the perception of the university (and its attendants) as always and inherently separate from the community. The consequences were that those students for whom the community was home felt alienated from their learning environments (the *we* of the class) while simultaneously being (invisibly) stigmatized for belonging to that specific community (the implicit *they* of the community the class was visiting).

Thus, the use of *we* can exacerbate feelings of not belonging and exclusion. At the same time, it can obscure the contextual dependence of social norms, and miss opportunities to challenge stereotypes, biases, and gaps. Where the goal of the educator is to foster ‘a learning community that values wholeness over division, disassociation, and splitting’ (hooks, 2003, p. 49), the power of *we* to create those constellations of solidarity and exclusion should be examined carefully. At the same time, there are also scenarios in which the use of *we* can serve as a site for inclusion wherein the addressed are called to a shared understanding, goal, or struggle. Take for example the instructor’s remarks for the first class:

SR – This is a space for **us** to explore the ways that sex/gender influence health from an intersectional perspective. By the end of the class, **we** will be able to

critically examine health issues as not just biomedical but also sociocultural phenomenon.

SR – This will be a safe space for **us** to discuss a variety of, sometimes sensitive and triggering, topics.

In these two examples, the instructor uses *we* to invoke common learning goals amongst the class and the space is shared. Importantly, she establishes that safety for all students is essential to the shared space. In this way, *we* serves as a form of inclusion through the evocation of a common purpose and shared goals.

### ***We* as intervention in higher education**

Analyzing the use of *we* can be an instructive exercise of discourse analysis in itself. However, we contend that *we* and its relatives can serve as opportunities for praxis, extending beyond theory and analysis into intervention and anchors for action in real-time as classroom discussions progress. By *praxis*, we mean the kind of embodied educational actions that are grounded in principle, and deeply informed by a commitment to analysis, improvement, and reflection. In Lather's words, 'praxis is the self-creative activity through which we make the world...[it is] philosophy becoming practical' (1991, p. 11).

We believe that an instructor's reflexive practice focused on *we* can function to 'mobilize identities in the classroom' (Moya, 2009, p. 56) as epistemic resources, and to shine a light on 'ideologies and associations that unfairly advantage some people at the expense of others' (p. 62). In so doing, instructors will have a concrete tool with which to take up the challenge articulated by Darder, Torres, and Baltodano (2003), to identify problematic worldviews that have been unconsciously accepted, and begin to resist them so as to avoid translating these ideologies into problematic, discriminatory practices in the classroom.

Opportunities to seize *we* can be found in just about every educational context not only a typical university classroom, but also during clinical training, conferences and seminars, curriculum and policy discussions, tutorials and laboratories, and many more. In addition, although the instructor's invested institutional authority gives them the most latitude to enact these interventions, they can potentially be used by students as well.

In its most pared-down, generalized form, any time *we* is used, the opportunity presents itself for someone to ask 'who is *we* in this context?', or to point out that 'we might not all share the same perspective.' And, since the use of *we* always implies a corresponding *they*, one could also ask 'who is *they*?', 'what distinguishes *them* from *us*?', 'how might *they* see things differently than *we* do?' Taking up opportunities to interrogate *we* and its relatives can help identify gaps in our thinking, make implicit assumptions explicit, surface unspoken tensions and points of divergence, challenge biases and stereotypes, and disrupt patterns of

marginalization and domination that perpetuate inequity in the classroom and beyond. There are many opportunities to take note of how *we* is deployed in a classroom, and we can choose to draw attention to this. For example, any person in a classroom could intervene by posing questions such as:

- I notice the word *we* has been used a lot in this discussion, and I wonder if it might be helpful to be explicit about what is meant by that. Who is this *we* that we've been talking about?
- When you say *our culture*, what exactly do you mean by that? I suspect there could be some heterogeneity in what each of us considers to be *our* culture.
- It may be worth noting that in our discussion of activism, we've consistently referred to social activists as *they*; why do you think that is?
- Are there differences in power or perspective between *us* and *them* in this context that we should be paying attention to? Are *our* goals different from *theirs*? Why?
- You said, '*we* know that depression is caused by deficient serotonin concentrations,' but I'm not sure that this understanding is necessarily shared or universal. Are there other perspectives on the causes of depression that might be relevant for us to consider?

One of the things that is potentially powerful about *we* as an intervention is that, in principle at least, any person in the situation can invoke it, not just the instructor or other authority figure in the room. Students and trainees could conceivably ask exactly these types of questions about the use of *we* and its relatives directed at their peers or to the person in authority. In the context of student group work, these kinds of questions might be particularly valuable in helping to develop common purpose and perspective for a project or task. Certainly, though, the power to do this is not distributed equally in most classrooms; usually, one or more individuals are charged with the institutional authority to set the terms of the educational encounter, and have a greater ability to steer the agenda, and latitude to direct attention and allocate time to discussions about *we*. Moreover, intersecting axes of oppression combine and intersect to produce different subject positions from which efforts attempting to interrogate *we* are viewed as more or less palatable, agreeable, aggressive, or intellectual.

Even in instances where one chooses not to draw attention to the usage of *we* in the classroom, it is possible to undertake a real-time reflexive practice linked to *we*. Schön's (1983) model of *reflection-in-action* is a form of reflection that occurs dynamically in the midst of action, as opposed to *reflection-on-action* which one undertakes *post hoc*. Using reflection-in-action, one can catch one's self in the moment of using *we* and make a deliberate choice about how to proceed—potentially by clarifying what one means by one's use of *we*, or choosing an alternative framing. In the example above, by paying attention to *we* and its relatives, the instructor could have caught themselves saying 'our culture' and



chosen an alternative framing. In fact, this particular example is one that SR noted numerous times in-the-moment, and documented in her written reflections on teaching the gender/sex and health course; as a result of paying attention to it, she has shifted to identifying more specifically which culture(s) she is talking about (most often, she now says something like ‘in the dominant North American cultures’). Another possible reframing could be to say ‘this culture’ instead of ‘our culture’—the use of a non-possessive pronoun (*this*) is a subtle but significant shift in the discourse, as it references the culture without presuming an identification with it. In making such discursive choices, the speaker not only takes steps toward changing their own patterns of thinking and tendency to privilege their own experience, but also simultaneously models it for others in the audience.

These same questions and approaches can inform *post hoc* reflection-on-action in the service of praxis as well. In addition to the kinds of questions listed above, Lather (1991) identifies some other prompting questions that can be useful in probing our relationship with *we* and how we employ it in the classroom. For example, she suggests that we might ask ourselves ‘who are my “Others”?’ (p. 84), but also other related questions can shed light as well, such as ‘what is most densely invested?’, ‘what binaries structure my arguments?’, and ‘did I make resistant discourses and subject positions more available?’ (p. 84). We can also invest time in deliberately contemplating the *we* that we typically employ. What unifies the *we*? Who is included and excluded in my use of *we*? What are the norms, values, and ideological commitments that are presumed to be shared by that *we*?

### **Responsibility and limitations**

Of course, the utility of *we* as an intervention is subject to theoretical and practical limitations. Standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) suggests that those who do not feel themselves included in the *we* are more likely to be aware of its exclusionary usages; thus, marginalized people often have to not only endure the process and consequences of exclusion, but also to bear the burden of speaking up against it and the risks associated with doing so. In contrast, those with more social privilege and benefitting from hegemonic social structures are less likely to notice it, and even if they do, have limited incentive to interrogate their frames of reference in substantive ways (Simon & Dippo, 1986). Moreover, when privileged folks speak up to address the same issues, they are more likely to be perceived as *woken*<sup>3</sup> as opposed to being labelled disruptive.

This raises the question of who should take responsibility for interrogating the use of *we* and associated positionalities in a given context. In general, those with access to the greatest power should be willing to take on responsibility for recognizing their own privilege, and use that privilege to decentralize power. In that way, *we* as an intervention may serve as a very useful tool for those who already

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<sup>3</sup> Popular slang meaning ‘alert to injustice’ or ‘social awareness’.

wield significant power in the classroom, particularly the instructor, and particularly if the instructor also occupies other nodes of social privilege.

The question of performativity is crucial here. If interrogations of *we* remain an intellectual exercise without informing and motivating material changes to redress inequity and exclusion, then it is a hollow exercise. It is not enough to map out the differences between in- and out-groups as signified by *we*—it is important that we are careful not to essentialize differences, that we examine and take seriously the power relations bound up in *we*, and that we responsibly work to redress imbalances so as not to perpetuate a harmful status quo. Otherwise, educators wishing to implement explorations of *we* in their classrooms will ‘contribute to dominance in spite of [their] liberatory intentions’ (Lather, 1991, p. 15). At the same time, one must also be conscientious of not simply *performing* or taking up excessive air time. As Khabeer succinctly puts it, ‘You don’t need to be a voice for the voiceless. Just pass the mic.’ (2017).

### **Finding paths forward**

This paper has parsed the implications of *we* as a discursive entity in higher education, providing examples of both its common usage, its utility, and its limitations as an intervention. We have contended that letting *we* pass unexamined often works to strengthen discourses that maintain inequities linked to race, gender, and class, amongst other facets of social position and identity. We have also suggested that interrogating *we* provides one scaffold to enable reflexive inquiry that is necessary—but not sufficient—to dismantle these same inequities.

Ultimately, educators committed to anti-oppressive praxis must strive, as Freire wrote, to practice education as ‘a practice of freedom’ (2000, p. 80). To aid in such a practice, we suggest that instances of *we* can serve as worthy opportunities for reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, as a part of a more general educational praxis aimed at building more equitable, just, and inclusive communities.

## **Author biographies**

*Alice Cavanagh* is an MD/PhD student at McMaster University, studying medical education and health policy. Her doctoral work considers how physicians learn to think about intimate partner violence in the course of their professional training, exploring conceptions of trauma and trauma-informed care, and drawing on feminist and critical race theory to inform her work.

*Tahmina Shamsheri* is a graduate of McMaster University's Gender Studies and Feminist Research program, and holds a Bachelor of Health Sciences (Hons) with a specialization in Global Health. Her work takes an interdisciplinary and critical approach to the broad domains of medical education, health policy, and research. Her current research interests include medical violence and sex/gender-based analysis as a tool in health research.

*Padmaja Sreeram* is a medical student and Master's student in the Health Policy Program at the University of Toronto. She is working to shape health system reform by bringing together her background in anti-oppressive practices, health sciences and medical education, and health policy design, management and evaluation. Her interests include the impacts of anti-black racism on health, medical violence, and applying critical theory to address structural barriers in health.

*Stacey A. Ritz* is an Associate Professor in the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine, and the Assistant Dean of the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Her scholarship focusses on the incorporation of gender/sex considerations in experimental biomedical research, and critical pedagogy in health sciences and medical education, and the uses of critical discourse analysis as a pedagogical tool.

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# **Curriculum development and quality work in higher education in Sweden: The external stakeholder perspective**

Per Fagrell, Anna Fahlgren, Svante Gunnarsson

## **Abstract**

*This article provides an external stakeholder perspective on the influence of higher education in Sweden, exploring their views on curriculum development and quality work at the programme level. Semi-structured interviews with a selected number of representatives of external stakeholders involved in various educational areas were conducted at seven higher education institutions. The participants argued that changes in their business sectors, and subsequent changes in the knowledge and skills in the labour needed, should encourage higher education institutions to adjust and develop their programmes. They did not anticipate or demand immediate changes in response to their comments, nor did they see themselves as a part of any quality assurance scheme. Uncertainties about the internal decision-making process and organisation in higher education institutions apparently do not facilitate external stakeholders' understanding of their role in the larger scheme. However, all informants had comments on quality in higher education, perceiving it predominantly as something connected to the world of work. The practical implication of this study is that curriculum development at higher education institutions would benefit from communicating the internal decision-making processes to external stakeholders and agreeing on the expectations with them, in collaboration.*

*Keywords: Curriculum development; quality; higher education; external stakeholder*

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Corresponding author: Per Fagrell, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm  
(perfag@kth.se).*

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## **Introduction**

The involvement of external stakeholders in higher education takes various forms and modes and is often not firmly institutionalised (Thune, 2011). The scope and modes of collaboration between higher education institutions and business<sup>4</sup> are widely reported as being complex and multifaceted, due to the multitude of agents, activities, and different sets of goals (Anderson, 2001; Thune, 2011). Consequently, they are difficult to map and categorise, although attempts have been made (c.f.

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<sup>4</sup> In this study, we include the whole labour market as *business*; that is, we include, for example, public hospitals and schools, as well as private business.

Bonaccorsi & Piccaluga, 1994; Mora-Valentín, 2002).

Previous research on external stakeholders and their involvement in higher education, especially with regard to governance of higher education institutions and to quality assurance (Beerkens & Udam, 2017; Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014; Magalhães, Veiga, & Amaral, 2018; Musiał, 2010; Pinheiro, 2015; Rosa & Teixeira, 2014), has often raised concerns about the involvement of external stakeholders in what are mainly seen as internal higher education matters. In fact, there have been calls for quality assurance for stakeholder relationships (Lyytinen et al., 2017), while others have labelled external stakeholders ‘Trojan horses’ or ‘imaginary friends’ (Magalhães et al., 2018; Rosa & Teixeira, 2014). However, the voices of external stakeholders are rarely heard in this stream of literature. A rare exception is a study by Beerkens and Udam (2017), which shows that external and internal stakeholders have different expectations of quality assurance of higher education. Another example, and closer to curriculum development, is a study of industry advisory boards in engineering education (Genheimer & Shehab, 2009). While the study by Genheimer and Shehab is set in the higher education system of the USA, it concludes that in order to be effective, the expectations of the advisory boards must be agreed upon by the involved stakeholders.

This study focuses on representatives of external stakeholders involved in permanent advisory boards or temporary working groups for curriculum development of new or existing higher education programmes. By exploring the attitudes and expectations of a selected number of external stakeholder representatives, a scarce external perspective is added to the discussion on stakeholder influence in higher education. The study addresses the following research questions: How do the external stakeholders perceive the educational collaboration in which they are involved? If provided an opportunity, what would the external stakeholders like to affect, and what are their main arguments for curriculum development? What are their views on quality and quality work in higher education?

Semi-structured interviews with representatives of external stakeholders at seven different educational programmes in seven higher education institutions in Sweden were conducted. In order to gain as much variety as possible from the interviews, a wide range of educational areas was selected: teacher training, nursing, biomedicine, engineering (x2), environment and health protection, and media and communication.

### **External stakeholders’ involvement in contemporary higher education**

There are many ways to define and identify stakeholders and stakeholder relationships in higher education (c.f. Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010; Kettunen, 2015; Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2012; Marshall, 2018). In this paper, we define future employers of graduates as stakeholders in higher education, separate from government and students, referring to them as external stakeholders. As

stakeholders, employers are diverse, including individual businesses, industry organisations, professional bodies, and public organisations like schools and hospitals (Marshall, 2018). They are said to mainly be concerned with quality in terms of the result of higher education: the graduates (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Since employment of graduates has a strong place in the political narrative of economic growth and the economic state of the country, employers have become one of the most significant stakeholders in the higher education system (Marshall, 2018). Using a framework for stakeholder analysis adopted by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), Marshall shows how the transition from elite education, through mass education, to a presumed future of universal education (Trow, 2000) changes stakeholder relationships. Marshall claims that in mass education mode, the employers are the *definitive stakeholder* (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 878), with governments and students as two other strong stakeholders. However, Marshall notes that there are variants in different countries/regions in terms of the speed and conditions for the transition and thus also differences in the stakeholder relationships, and that status of employers as the definitive stakeholder may be particularly applicable in vocational sectors. With an example from engineering education, this argument is endorsed by Case (2017), who, by describing the historical evolution of engineering degrees and their stakeholders, argues that the introduction of the Washington Accords rendered engineering employers the most important stakeholder, supported by accreditation bodies such as ABET<sup>6</sup>, where employers have a strong influence (Lucena et al., 2008).

In Sweden, as in many other countries, a governmental agency conducts the external quality assurance and accreditation of higher education. The current national quality assurance scheme in Sweden, introduced in 2017, is based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) (ENQA, 2015). However, the main objective of the current Swedish external quality assurance system is to evaluate the internal quality assurance process at each higher education institution (UKÄ, 2016).

The involvement of external stakeholders in the internal quality work is not mandated nor regulated by the state or by the national quality assurance agency. In fact, collaboration between higher education institutions and business is not mandated or regulated at the national level in Sweden other than by the representation of external stakeholders at the board level, where they have been in the majority since 1988 (Musiał, 2010). However, in the appropriation directions from the Swedish government to every higher education institution, it is stated that higher education programmes offered at higher education institutions must meet the demands of students and the needs of the labour market. A Swedish governmental committee, investigating the development of higher education over the last 20 years, reported that the demands of students were well satisfied but that there were

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<sup>5</sup> The Washington Accord is an agreement between national bodies (initially of Anglophone countries but now extending beyond them) that perform the professional accreditation of engineers and engineering degrees to recognise one another's accreditations.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.abet.org/> (Accessed 19 March 2020)



doubts that the needs of the labour market were equally satisfied (SOU 2015:70, 2015, pp. 241-250). The committee remarked that changes in the higher education system since 1993, have left an opportunity to collaborate with external stakeholders in education not yet fully used (SOU 2015:70, 2015, p. 244).

### **Educational collaboration, curriculum development and quality work in higher education**

Previous research has reported that collaboration between universities and external stakeholders has traditionally taken place through informal agreements between companies and individual academics or institutions, and it can thus take varying forms and modes (Thune, 2011). Different traditions for educational cooperation in different business sectors, as well as in different educational areas, can explain the variations (Thune, 2011). Educational collaboration can roughly be divided into three main categories, the first of these is of particular interest in this study (Brandt et al., 2008): collaboration focused on

- creating new or revising existing programmes. This is mainly done through advisory committees/boards, where representatives of individual companies, trade associations, trade unions, and other organisations can make suggestions and comments on the content, structure, placement in time and space, teaching methods, examinations, and more.
- teaching and learning processes. This is mainly carried out through guest lectures, case studies, degree projects, external supervision, internships, and study visits.
- the transfer from study to working life. This occurs primarily through internships, degree projects, mentoring, recruitment fairs, career counselling.

To create or revise a programme puts the curriculum into the forefront. However, the curriculum as a concept is ambiguous and scholars have made several efforts to define it (c.f. Barnett & Coate, 2005; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). For example, Lattuca and Stark call the curriculum *an academic plan*, placed in a sociocultural context and influenced by different external and internal factors. The development of the curriculum has links to internal quality work and is thus sometimes called quality enhancement. In this article we prefer to use curriculum development. Curriculum development includes a) curriculum design—the design of university programmes, courses and related content, and b) curriculum delivery—the delivery of programmes and courses to students via a large range of mechanisms, such as lectures, student projects, and placements (Plewa, Galán-Muros, & Davey, 2015, p. 36). Fundamental curriculum development can occur when a programme, an institution, or an educational system faces a crisis (Graham, 2012) or an ‘external shock’, such as the change from elite to mass higher education (Plate, 2012). Taking

engineering education as an example again, the shift by the external accreditation body ABET from an input-based accreditation scheme to an outcome-based scheme in 1997 (Peterson, 1996) paved the way for a global shift in engineering curriculum development to a focus on intended learning outcomes at the programme level (Case, 2017). The aforementioned Washington Accord is an example of such an engine for curriculum development, predominant in Anglophone countries (Lucena et al., 2008), while the CDIO<sup>7</sup> Initiative (Crawley et al., 2014; Edström, 2017) exemplifies a growing global curriculum reform movement in engineering education. The CDIO framework is tightly connected to quality development and quality assurance. The defining documents, the CDIO Syllabus and the CDIO Standards, enable systematic processes, for example, defining the expected learning outcomes, verification of the fulfilment of program goals, and program evaluation, as well as recommendations to engage stakeholder in the processes. One example of how the CDIO framework is used as an integrated part of a university's the quality system is presented in Gunnarsson, Herbertsson, and Öрман (2019). The CDIO framework was originally designed for engineering education, but has in recent years been applied to other subject areas (Fahlgren et al., 2019; Malmqvist et al., 2016). It is worth mentioning that the CDIO framework was initiated from within higher education institutions, unlike the ABET criteria and the Bologna Process.

In Europe, as manifested through the Bologna Process during the last two decades, there has been a move towards increased knowledge transfer and innovation, as well as an increased expectation that higher education should better match the needs of the labour market (c.f. EHEA, 2015). Student mobility and employability have been two of the drivers for educational policy development in the Bologna Process. According to the ESG, external stakeholders should, for example, be involved in the design of study programmes (ESG 1.2) and in ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes (ESG 1.9), among other things (ENQA, 2015). Hence, the design of the quality assurance scheme imposes a relationship with external stakeholders and also implies a link to curriculum development, although the relationship between quality assurance and curriculum development is debated (Williams, 2016).

A model for quality assurance and quality enhancement, be it for a single programme or in a national context, or even in international context, relies on a definition of quality in higher education. Four themes emerge as the most commonly used concepts of quality in higher education: quality as exceptional, as purposeful, as accountable, and as transformative (Schindler et al., 2015). These themes, originally conceptualised in the 1990s (c.f. Green, 1994; Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Knight, 1996), are consistent with newer publications on quality (Schindler et al., 2015). However, Schindler et al. claim that there is a trend in the recent literature towards stakeholder-driven definitions of quality.

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<sup>7</sup> CDIO: Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate

Another way to approach quality is to divide it into quality characteristics, such as inputs, processes, and outputs (Udam & Heidmets, 2013; Westerheijden, 2007). *Inputs* consist of, for example, admission requirements, academic staff qualifications and staff/student ratios; *processes* consist of, for example, educational objectives, study load, student support and feedback procedures for students' and alumni's experiences; and *outputs* consist of, for example, graduates' knowledge and skills, graduation rates/drop-outs, and time to degree and employment rates. This division could facilitate an understanding of the whys and wherefores of different stakeholder groups' focus on different aspects of quality.

In earlier research about higher education institutions as organisations, quality has been identified as a conveyor for change (c.f. Stensaker, 2004); in fact, 'quality assurance has proven to be the most potent of change agents' (Kogan & Hanney, 2000, p. 240). In new institutional theory, organisational imitation has often been described as a way for organisations to respond to external (or internal) pressure for change, giving rise to the concept of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, studies have shown that external ideas are not absorbed straight into the organisation, the change process is dynamic in that external demands are 'translated' by internal actors, and given a local meaning. Furthermore, similar external pressures can still yield different responses due to different internal structures and traditions in the organisations—in this case the higher education institutions (Karlsson et al., 2014). The higher education institution can be fully aware of the external context and expectations, but still be focused on internal developments (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008).

This brief review of educational collaboration, curriculum development, and quality work, as well as stakeholders in higher education, forms the background to this exploratory study, helping to conceptualise the empirical findings.

## **Method**

This is a qualitative exploratory study of seven examples of educational collaboration. In seven different programmes, each from a different Swedish higher education institution, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of external stakeholders to obtain information about their experiences and expectations of the collaborations. The qualitative interview approach was chosen as suitable to understand the world from the informants' point of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, the exploratory approach was chosen because previous research indicated little knowledge about external stakeholders' view on the topic; thus, an exploratory approach would help us to unfold, explore, and possibly frame the phenomenon under study as well as prepare for future, more comprehensive studies (Patton, 2002). One educational programme at each higher education institution (henceforth called a 'case') was selected using a purposeful sampling method (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) with the intention of obtaining a rich variety of cases and thereby meeting the goals of the

study’s explorative approach. With a purposeful/snowball sampling method (Cohen et al., 2011), mainly assisted by programme management, the external stakeholder representatives were selected. The selected informants were typically involved in permanent advisory boards or temporary working groups for curriculum development of new or existing programmes. In total, seven semi-structured interviews with eleven representatives of external stakeholders were conducted, varying in length from 50 to 70 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded and analysed using the software tool NVivo. See Table 1 for a brief overview of the cases.

Higher education institution	Programme/ educational area	Level	Number of informants	Description of informant(s)
1	<i>Teacher training</i>	<i>Bachelor/ Vocational</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Course mentor</i>
2	<i>Media and Communication</i>	<i>Bachelor &amp; Master</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Advisory board members</i>
3	<i>Nursing</i>	<i>Bachelor/ Vocational</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Advisory board member</i>
4	<i>Engineering</i>	<i>Master/ Vocational</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Advisory board/programme management members</i>
5	<i>Engineering</i>	<i>Master/ Vocational</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Advisory board member</i>
6	<i>Environment &amp; Health Protection</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Advisory board member</i>
7	<i>Biomedicine</i>	<i>Bachelor &amp; Master</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Alumni network members</i>

Table 1. Overview of cases

The interviews were thematically analysed (Clarke & Braun, 2017), initially in a quasi-deductive manner, following Patton (2002, p. 453). Thus, we began the coding procedure by using the overarching themes from the interview guide as themes. This was followed by an inductive and data-driven analysis (Cohen et al., 2011) based on the responses from the interviews.

We have deliberately not interviewed programme management or collected and analysed internal documents or other detailed information about the different programmes because we wanted to focus on the external stakeholders’ views. However, we have collected information about the selected programmes before the interviews in order to provide an overview of each case.

### **Seven cases of external stakeholder involvement**

The seven cases are different in several respects, such as tangible differences in

educational area, educational level, and institutional setting, as shown in Table 1. The external stakeholders are involved in different ‘functions’, or ‘groups’, as we will call them henceforth. Many of the groups are associated with programmes that have been running for years and can be labelled as permanent, while some of the groups were created primarily for the purpose of supporting the higher education institution when it prepared to establish a new programme or conduct a major revision of an existing programme. In such cases, there were uncertainties about the status of the group when the new (or newly revised) programme started to run. In fact, in one case, the group had not met since the new programme started, about two years before the interview, leading the interviewee to suspect that the group no longer existed. The frequency of meetings also differed between the two types of groups; in the permanent groups, one or two meetings per semester seemed to be standard, whereas for temporary groups the frequency of the meetings could be both higher and more ad hoc.

We found no standardised form of recruitment onto the programmes for the representatives of the external stakeholders. Most often, it was the employer, a company or a public administration that had been asked to participate in the group, and the individual was appointed by the employer to fulfil the request. In several cases, the person appointed was also a graduate of the institution. When the group was permanent or existed mainly due to a shared and formal agreement on work placements (in nursing, for example), the employer had a taken-for-granted place in the group, and the person holding that place today had sometimes inherited it and would pass it on when and if he or she changed job position. In our material, course mentors in a teacher training programme constitute a special case. These mentors are recruited through ordinary job advertisements and are employed part-time (10-20%) by the university while still working as teachers in elementary schools. They function as *boundary spanners* between the university and the future employer, compulsory schools in Sweden. They are involved in teaching at the university, meeting students, monitoring and developing teacher training courses, and meeting university teachers. This is the only case in which we noticed a direct cost for the external stakeholders and their involvement in higher education.

In most cases, the external stakeholders have a degree of freedom that allows them to ensure internships for students, guest lecturers, plant visits, and so on. However, they often express self-criticism with regard to the way they bring back information and other news to the ‘home’ organisation and realise that there is potential for improvement in this respect.

The groups can consist of external stakeholders only or external stakeholders and a few teachers from the programme. In some cases, there are also student representatives in the groups. However, the main contact at the higher education institution, in many cases the only contact, is the programme management that runs the group and its meetings. Because the internal organisation at higher education institutions in Sweden varies, the responsibilities and abilities to make decisions for programme management differ from case to case. We explicitly asked the external stakeholders about the possibilities or limitations for

the group and/or programme management to make decisions, although we did not cross-check this with the programme management. The answers revealed that the external stakeholders are aware that their primary task is to give advice and decision support; they are not concerned whether any decisions are made within the group, by the programme management or somewhere else. Several of the interviewees recognised that the internal decision-making process universities can be long and winding:

I think he [the programme director] has to go higher [in the organisation], because there are these rules and regulations about who should [...] well, what position people have at the university. (Case 2, informant #4)

In the same interview, a moment later, the other participant observed, ‘Well, my picture of it is that it takes a long time, overall, I mean everywhere at the university’ (Case 2, informant #3).

All the interviewees felt that their opinions are sought out by the programme management and the university: ‘I don’t expect them [the university] to change everything just because I express new ideas, but I really feel that they listen’ (Case 2, Informant #3).

Although the expectations of immediate decisions or changes are low, there is an expectation of feedback and of seeing some kind of progression from one meeting to another. In some cases, especially those centred on the creation of a new programme or revision of an existing programme, the mission for the group is clearly stated by the university and understood by the external stakeholders. However, in the cases with permanent advisory boards, the external stakeholders cannot identify the mission of the group. There may be a mission for the group in those cases, but the external stakeholders cannot explain it. To conclude, the expectations of what the groups can or cannot achieve have apparently not been discussed and agreed upon within the groups. Furthermore, the internal decision-making processes at higher education institutions are mainly unknown to the external stakeholders in this study.

### **External stakeholders’ take on the development of higher education programmes**

The second research question for the study asked what external stakeholders would like to affect and what arguments they use for curriculum development. An initial finding of the study was that in their perception of the intentions of programmes and the arguments they use for curriculum development, the external stakeholders do not separate vocational degrees from general degrees. Furthermore, the agendas of the meetings in the groups usually guide the way things can be said and done. For example, in one or two groups, the focus is almost entirely on the mandatory

periods of work placements for the students and how to organise, monitor, and evaluate these. Any discussion about the regular courses in the programme and how to develop these or the whole programme are very much secondary topics, if they arise at all within the group.

In the other cases, the focus in the groups seems to centre on ways to improve the programmes. One issue that frequently arose in the interviews is the external stakeholders' ambition to communicate recent or ongoing changes in their sector. For example, in relation to environmental and health protection, local governments are facing a changing mission whereby they are now supposed to be proactive and preventive in order to help clients (also a new concept) to self-monitor legal obligations. This shift demands the development of the profession and hence the corresponding programme:

Then the students need to understand the big differences all these new laws induce. The EU legislation, as well as our own environmental law, both are now more proactive. And call for self-evaluation. (Case 6, Informant #9)

Furthermore, in the case of the biomedicine programme, the rapid development in the sector was emphasised by both interviewees:

This issue with us [the sector] going from small molecules to biologics [large molecules], is such a big shift in how to think about treatments and pharmaceuticals that it would be a pity if such a large [educational] programme missed it. (Case 7, Informant #11)

Another theme in the messages by the external stakeholders is the desirable knowledge and skills in new graduates for them to succeed in the labour market. In these discussions, the external stakeholders referred to the experiences of new graduates as much as, or even more than, information about the present curriculum. Overall, the dominant message from external stakeholders concerns the students' career opportunities, though not only for their first position after graduation. This was expressed in different ways, such as 'We want the university to foster curiosity, an ability to deliver [...] but also systems thinking' (Case 4, Informant #7) and 'We want students with more practical understanding' (Case 5, Informant #8). We interpret the 'we' in the quotes above and elsewhere in the interviews mostly to refer to *the sector*, including, but not exclusively, the participants' own companies/organisations. In the end, the messages always relate to the demand for labour and/or new knowledge coming from the university and onto the labour market.

## **External stakeholders' views on quality and quality work in higher education**

In the discussion of quality, an initial but important finding from the interviews was that, regardless of educational context, none of the external stakeholders see themselves as part of the internal quality process at the higher education institution. As the empirical material is only from the external stakeholders, we do not know the view on this of the programme management and the higher education institution. However, the external stakeholders all made comments on quality in higher education, obviously related to the programmes in which they are involved. The overarching theme in these discussions was quality perceived as something connected to the world of work. This focus on the output of the programme was balanced with comments about quality in the processes, such as the view that modern learning environments are a quality indicator. One more process indicator that was raised concerned the teachers:

Well, I think, hmm [...] that it [quality] is a combination of skilled teachers and competence in that area; I mean, both subject-related and pedagogically skilled. But also enthusiasm and dedication, which is also important for good quality, and that they have [...] they feel a big responsibility for their courses, to revise them and keep them up to date and such. (Case 7, Informant #10)

The idea that there can be differences in views on quality between external stakeholders and higher education institutions was recognised in the interviews, such as the idea that a programme can be of good quality for those students who want to pursue further studies at the university while being less good for a career outside academia. The following quote shows the other side:

Interviewer: So, is it an interpretation [of what you said earlier] that a programme has good quality if it prepares [students] for the profession?

Case 6, Informant #9: Yes, in my view it is. But, as I said, that does not necessarily mean that it has good academic quality.

There is a telling example of the difference in views on quality between academia and employers in one of the cases. One employer found the quality (in their view) of the graduates to be too low for the intended work situation. They have therefore established a 'first year of practice' for their new graduates, including mandatory lectures and seminars, as well as practical learning moments. Paradoxically, this 'first year of practice' has received criticism from the university in terms of the low quality of the lectures.



## **Concluding discussion**

To sum up the findings of this study: we received similar comments on several topics, despite the variation in cases. For example, independently of the educational context, the expectations, comments, and arguments from the external stakeholders were similar. The external stakeholders want to send messages to higher education institutions about changes in their business sectors, and about the subsequent changes in expected knowledge and skills, in order to encourage the higher education institutions to adjust and develop their programmes. The external stakeholders do not expect immediate changes as a result of their comments, and they realise that their task is to give advice to a sometimes long internal decision-making process at the higher education institution. Neither do they see themselves as a part of an internal quality assurance scheme at the higher education institution, although all have comments on quality in higher education, predominantly as something connected to the world of work.

This might be interpreted merely as different ways for external stakeholders—employers—to make sure that the higher education programmes can *deliver* the right competence. In reality, the messages from the external stakeholders centre mainly, but not exclusively, on employability and the intended establishment of the knowledge and skills necessary for students to obtain a future position in the business sector. In terms of quality in higher education, understood in terms of inputs, processes, and outputs (Udam & Heidmets, 2013), the external stakeholders seem to value a programme for its output, the students, rather than its input, the curriculum. In fact, anything else would have been more of a surprise because the legitimacy of the external stakeholders emanates from their up-to-date knowledge about the labour market in their sector and not from their proficiency in internal higher education matters.

However, as we have shown, in most of the cases, the external stakeholders have a broader perspective for graduate students that goes beyond their first position following graduation and posts at the stakeholders' own company or organisation. The messages about profound changes in their sector, about long-term career opportunities and about soft skills, such as curiosity, suggest that the external stakeholders see themselves as representatives for something more than their own company or organisation.

The fact that the external stakeholders do not see themselves as a part of an internal quality work process at the higher education institution is a bit of a surprise. It could be that they are in fact a part of the internal quality scheme but that this has not been communicated to the external stakeholders interviewed in this study. The comments from the external stakeholders about quality and their perception that academia and employers may value quality differently is a topic for further research. Different stakeholders' takes on the definition of quality may help to explain the scepticism about the involvement of external stakeholders in higher education, as mentioned in the introduction.

The external stakeholders in this study do not expect immediate change as a result of their input; rather, they see their input as advice. However, they all expect some feedback on how their comments and advice have been received. There is also respect for the internal decision process at the higher education institution, even if it is often a much slower process than in their home organisation, sometimes ‘stunningly slow’, as one informant put it. Earlier research on how external pressure for change must be ‘translated’ by internal actors in order to give it local meaning (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; Karlsson et al., 2014) may help to explain the slow process.

Uncertainties about the internal decision-making process and organisation at the higher education institutions do not appear to help the external stakeholders to understand what their role is in the bigger scheme. Because the external stakeholders do not have full insight into the internal decision-making process at the higher education institutions, they do not have the tools to increase the necessary external pressure for change; hence, they cannot become the definitive stakeholders in higher education today, as Marshall (2018) suggests. However, this assertion needs more research than this exploratory study can provide. For example, an in-depth study to identify situations in which ideas from external stakeholders really have an impact on higher education and its institutions today would complement this study. That said, a study with a focus on different ways for higher education programmes to either embrace or protect themselves from external pressure would also be interesting. The practical implication of this study, albeit exploratory with a rather small sample, is that higher education institutions would benefit from communicating their internal decision-making processes to external stakeholders and mutually agree on the expectations of the collaborations, in order to develop the curriculum more effectively.

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## **Author biographies**

*Per Fagrell* is a PhD student at the Department of Learning in Engineering Sciences at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. His main research interest is the role of external stakeholders in the development of engineering education.

*Anna Fahlgren* is an Associate Professor in Regenerative Medicine at Linköping University. Her main research interest is experimental orthopaedics. She is also program manager for a new BSc program in Industrial and Experimental Biomedicine where she has transferred and used the CDIO Syllabus on a subject outside of engineering.

*Svante Gunnarsson* is Professor in Automatic Control at the Department of Electrical Engineering, Linköping University, Sweden. His main research interests are modeling, system identification, and control of industrial robots. For many years he was chairman of the Program Board for education programs in Electrical Engineering, Physics, and Mathematics at Linköping University, including the engineering program in Applied Physics and Electrical Engineering. Since the start, he has had a leading role in the CDIO Initiative, a worldwide innovative educational framework for developing the next generation of engineers.

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# **Making visible the affective dimensions of scholarship in postgraduate writing development work**

Sherran Clarence

## **Abstract**

*Many university writing and student academic development centres serve both under- and postgraduate student-writers. However, it is not always clear that the training and development of those who work with writers accounts fully for the affective dimensions of postgraduate writing, specifically. Especially at the doctoral level, where an original contribution to knowledge is required, writers need to take on a confident authorial voice in their work, both written and in conversation with others. Research, however, shows that many doctoral students struggle with this. This paper argues that, to be truly successful and fit for purpose, peer writing development work needs to understand the nature of postgraduate learning and writing from more than just the technical perspective of writing a successful thesis. Writer-focused work at this level needs to account for the affective dimensions of writing and research as well, to engage students in more holistic, critical, and forward-looking conversations about their writing, and their own developing scholarly identity. The paper offers insights into the different affective dimensions of postgraduate writing, especially those under-considered in much practical work with postgraduate writers, and offers suggestions for a whole-student tutoring approach at this level.*

*Keywords: academic writing development; emotional labour; writing blocks; doctoral writing; writing support*

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Corresponding author: Sherran Clarence, Rhodes University, South Africa  
(s.clarence@ru.ac.za).*

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## **Introduction**

University and college writing centres around the world work, at the very least, with undergraduate students. But many also work with postgraduate students completing masters and doctoral degrees (for example, Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Toronto, and many others). For the most part, they do this through one-on-one and small group consultations and workshops with students focused on writing tasks or projects that students need assistance with. For example, a student would approach a writing centre with a paper, research report, or thesis chapter, and a writing tutor or consultant would spend about an hour per



appointment looking at issues ranging from argumentation and structure, to voice, style, tone, and even citations and formatting, depending on the student's writing needs (see Gillam, Callaway, & Wikoff, 1994; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2010).

These writing centres, in the main, tend to define themselves as working with both writers *and* pieces of writing. Their work seeks to enable students to find and express their voice (Archer & Richards, 2011); to challenge dominant and potentially exclusive forms of knowledge-making in the academy (Bailey Bridgewater, 2017; Nichols, 2017); and to enable access to understanding and creating writing that effectively communicates the writers' knowledge and meaning (Dison & Moore, 2019). Thus, writing centres, at least in theory, create tutoring spaces between students and writing tutors that are focused on writerly pursuits and development, which can take time to unpack and explore, especially with students who are traversing a larger articulation gap between their prior home and school and current university literacy practices (Dison & Moore, 2019). This work is not limited to writing centres, however, as it is also implicated in academic development work in faculty and departmental environments as well (Mitchell, 2010).

However, writing and academic development centres also work in the *real world* of university and college time and space, where what students write is always for assessment and evaluation, meaning it is usually *high stakes* and under some form of time pressure. Thus, there is often a gap between what we would like to work and focus on in tutorials—conversations focused on writers and their voices, ideas, and selves—and what we may end up focusing on in response to these pressures. We may, for example, focus on addressing concerns in single pieces of writing that students need to hand in for assessment, and in line with the standards set by their lecturers (Clarence, 2019a). This gap is not the focus of this paper, but it is part of the background to how writing centres may plan to, and then actually, construct and enact conversations about writing with student-writers. This in turn speaks to how approaches to tutoring are developed, and how peer writing tutors (also referred to as writing consultants) are encouraged and enabled to work with student-writers.

If we acknowledge that what we say and think we are and can do in a writing centre (or any writing development space), and what we actually do in practice, are not always the same thing, then we have the opening for a productive, albeit challenging, conversation about the role of writing support structures in shaping writer-development in higher education. This conversation can extend beyond just how writing centres work with students who seek out their help to how writing centres and writing development practitioners work with lecturers, disciplinary tutors, and research supervisors to 'demystify' academic writing as a knowledge-making practice at university (cf. Lillis, 2001; see also Archer & Richards, 2011; Dison & Clarence, 2017).

Working with research supervisors, who work primarily with postgraduate writers, is a relatively new area of concern for writing centres in particular, although there is growing evidence of work with research supervisors through academic

development that tackles writing the thesis (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Guerin et al., 2017). Most writing centres work with students, and where they are able to, with lecturers and tutors in academic disciplines around particular writing projects, assignments, and so on, to create bridges between what lecturers want from students' writing, and what students do with the tasks before them (see, for examples, Archer, 2010; Clarence, Albertus, & Mwambene, 2014; Nichols, 2017). However, as postgraduate student numbers in universities around the world grow, especially in contexts where there is significant student diversity in nationality, home language, prior school and literacy development, and so on, focusing on postgraduate student writing development is becoming an increasing concern in research and practice (see Guerin et al., 2017; Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Aitchison & Lee, 2006). This raises important questions about what the focus of postgraduate writing support, with students and their supervisors, should be, and how this support should be structured.

The support universities and colleges offer to student-writers is not necessarily framed by the same discourses that the support staff themselves use to characterise and guide their ways of working. Writing centres were established in different contexts (e.g., the United States and South Africa) as part of open admissions, or wider access to higher education (see Archer & Richards, 2011; Boquet, 1999). Widening participation for previously excluded or marginalised students (i.e., working class students, black students) has been linked to democratising higher education, and also to diversifying both universities and workplaces (Hinton-Smith, 2012). But, the process of opening up access to students who attended less well-resourced schools, and come from working class homes; who speak and write English as an additional language; who have diverse learning needs and goals, has created tensions in higher education. The tension most relevant to this paper is that between seeing writing as a set of skills students should have before they come to university (Bock, 1988), and writing as a set of particularised practices that students need to be inducted into by disciplinary and academic peers and experts (Lillis, 2001; Mitchell, 2010). Writing centres have been called to provide *remedial* support for students who *lack* the required writing skills; yet many position themselves firmly in opposition to this discourse, especially because research shows quite persuasively that many students, regardless of background or ability, struggle to acquire academic literacies and discourses, and take on new scholarly identities (Lillis, 2001; Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006).

Writing centres and academic student support units that understand writing more as a process linked to knowledge, meaning making, and identity work (Thesen, 2013) tend to focus rather on helping students understand and create writing as part of becoming particular kinds of knowers and writers (i.e., adopting different ways of expressing critical thinking, creativity, analytical reasoning, and so on) in their disciplines. This is true for work with both under- and postgraduate students. At postgraduate level, increased demand from governments for highly skilled *knowledge workers*, along with increased student numbers, may reinforce the discourse that sees writing as a set of skills students coming into a degree

programme should have in place already. Students who struggle to write at the new level (masters or doctorate) may then be termed *problem* students who require skills training or skills support to close the gap between the writing they are doing and what their supervisors and the university expect of them (Wingate, 2006). What this discourse misses is the crucial realisation that literacy demands change with each level of study, and with changed expectations of the writing or other literacy practices. This is part of what makes postgraduate writing different from undergraduate writing, and why postgraduate writers should not be expected to come into a masters or doctoral programme already knowing how to write a dissertation or thesis at this level. Writing at this level is not just about knowledge or words on the page in the right tense, form, and style; critically, it is a resource for expressing a new identity as a *knower*, and for claiming a more authorial voice in one's field of research.

Postgraduate and undergraduate student-writers have much in common in terms of what they need to work on in their writing, and what they are required to create and achieve with their assignments and tasks. However, I am going to argue that there are crucial differences. These differences, and the focus of this paper, emanate from the affective dimensions of scholarly writing, and the concomitant expectations of postgraduate education and writing, particularly at the doctoral level. The notion of identity development and change, and the transformative nature of moving across different conceptual and research thresholds (Kiley, 2009; Kiley & Wisker, 2009), means that postgraduate doctoral writing is indeed different from prior writing students have done. Undergraduate students are not untransformed by their studies and their learning and certainly engage in identity work, which has affective demands. However, the use of writing and research as resources to evidence how one has become a different kind of scholar is most marked at doctoral level, where a student's title changes when they graduate. This identity work is also more overtly part of supervision than it is part of everyday undergraduate teaching and learning. Identity work involves emotional, affective work. Thus, writing centres, and those who work with student-writers at this level, including research supervisors, need to understand what constitutes this affective dimension. Further, we need to critically consider how we can incorporate the affective labour writers need to do into our conversations with masters and doctoral student-writers, and where possible, with research supervisors as well. This reflective, conceptual paper emanates from my own work as a relatively new research supervisor, and from my writing development work with postgraduate student researchers and writers.

### **Writing at postgraduate level**

Before moving into the specific conceptual focus of the paper, I would like to first explore some of the essential meanings and practices that define or characterise postgraduate writing in particular. A key feature across levels of study in scholarly writing in higher education is the presence of an argument and its development in

a paper or thesis through the use of selected evidence and explication, drawn variously from published research, theory, and data generated by the writer-researcher. Behind all scholarly writing is the idea of the writer as researcher; whether they are responding to a question posed by a lecturer or creating their own research question, student-writers are required to do research to create a substantiated response to the task, often in the form of an argument, or a claim to knowledge. This is true of under- and postgraduate writing, because a primary logic underpinning higher education is knowledge creation, rather than knowledge 'consumption'; thus students become part of a broad community creating and extending knowledge in smaller and larger ways (Boughey, 2015).

I argue, though, that postgraduate writing is different from undergraduate writing in three key ways, and, further, that these are linked to an underlying axiology that marks postgraduate work as different from undergraduate work. These differences are, in brief, related to voice, confidence, and sophistication in the written text. The first key difference is that of *voice*. *Voice* is generally defined and understood in relation to argument or claims to knowledge, and can be described as the writer taking a position and expressing that position through choices around supporting evidence and explanation. The argument is a significant aspect of voice, because this is the tool the writer uses to contribute to knowledge in her field. Other crucial aspects of voice relate to understanding and having a sound grasp of the discourse conventions within the scholarly community a student-writer belongs to, and being able to choose and deploy these cleverly in their writing, to enhance, shape, and refine an authorial voice as a student becomes into a proficient writer (Hathaway, 2015). While it is not true to say that undergraduate students are not required to make arguments or have a voice in their writing, the strength of this requirement in terms of achieving ultimate success is not as marked as it is at doctoral level, where the absence of an *original* argument and commanding and confident voice (Trafford & Leshem, 2009) may result in a doctorate not being awarded.

A further important aspect of writing at postgraduate level, not often overtly spoken about and considered theoretically in writing instruction, is *confidence*, not only in one's writing, but also in the sense that one has something to say of value to the field. This is a second key way in which postgraduate writing differs from undergraduate writing. To claim and express a voice, of which an original argument is a significant part, postgraduate student-writers must have confidence in their claims to knowledge, and in the evidence and explanation they have selected and developed to sustain that argument. They need to believe they have something original and worthy to add to the conversations and debates that their discourse or disciplinary community is interested in. Several studies on doctoral writing or doctoral scholarship specifically mention confidence, or assertiveness, as key doctoral graduate attributes (Gurr, 2001; Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Wang & Li, 2011).

This sounds deceptively easy, but I contend, based on several years of work with postgraduate and early career researchers, that confidence is difficult to hold

onto in the face of feedback and critique from peer reviewers, examiners, and supervisors that is not always formative and constructive in tone or intent. Several studies attest to students' emotional responses to, and subsequent blocks around, feedback from supervisors on their writing (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Can & Walker, 2011; Stracke & Kumar, 2010). Postgraduate writing, in more immediate and visible ways than undergraduate writing, asks student-writers to really consider the scholarly community they are joining with their own research, and to think carefully about where and how their work is positioned within that community. Their work is going to be published in an online database upon graduation, and accessible to other researchers. This raises the stakes for supervisors and students, and can have implications for how confident students may feel, and how hard they have to work to hold this confidence in the face of tough feedback that reflects these stakes. Thus, this is an area of postgraduate writing development that needs conscious attention and focus in writing development work.

Thus far, I have argued that postgraduate writers need to claim a clear and critical voice in their writing, and that confidence is necessary to both claim and express this voice in scholarly environments, in written and verbal forms. The third key feature that sets postgraduate writing apart from undergraduate writing is the *sophistication* expected by readers in how the writer's voice is expressed and how the argument is constructed to make an original contribution to knowledge (see Trafford & Leshem, 2009). Short, simplistic sentences, basic word choices, terminology not explained or used to make meaning—these are all issues that may be focused on in undergraduate writing development, especially closer to capstone level, but there is significantly more pressure on postgraduate writers to write and think in increasingly sophisticated ways. It may also be the case that many supervisors expect their students to be capable of this without extended or overt feedback or development to this effect, given that they have been accepted into a postgraduate degree programme, and have prior degrees (Hill, 2007). To be clear, while erudite use of language is certainly part of this, this is not what I mean by sophistication. By this term I mean, rather, the writer's ability to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the space they are occupying in their field, relative to other writers' and researchers' claims and positions, and their ability to express this knowledge clearly and effectively using disciplinary discourse and language. This is an issue of a writer's ability to read and think in joined-up, complex, layered ways, and implicates epistemology, axiology, and ontology. In other words, success at this level is not just about being a proficient writer in the medium of instruction; it is also about belief in oneself, understanding of the underlying values inherent in postgraduate writing and research, and the ability to manage difficult emotions around writing, feedback, supervision, and knowledge-making at this level.

To connect this all to the focus of this paper, I will move now to look particularly at axiology as an underpinning influence shaping postgraduate writing and education. The focus of the paper is the need for writing support and development work to be able to account for the affective dimensions of postgraduate writing in work with postgraduate writers especially. This implicates

axiology, which creates very different ultimate goals and expectations for writers and researchers working at this level, particularly doctoral students. Axiology can be defined as values and ethics that shape disciplinary research projects, questions, and concerns (Frick, 2011). Linked to ontology (becoming a particular kind of scholar), epistemology (choosing what counts as valid knowledge in relation to the scholarship one is engaged in), and methodology (the means with which that knowledge is obtained), axiology is a crucial part of postgraduate identity formation (Frick, 2011). At the doctoral level, students take on a new scholarly, and also professional, identity: their title actually changes in recognition of the fact that the holder is a different kind of scholar than they were prior. The title assumes a researcher and writer who is confident, a sophisticated thinker, and able to express a range of claims to knowledge with an authentic and disciplinary voice (Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Trafford & Leshem, 2009). This is, I would argue, part of the broader axiological underpinning of postgraduate education: that it enables the development of a scholar that values integrity in research, authenticity, and ethics, and that expresses these values through confident and sophisticated academic discourse.

Axiology is fundamentally affective in nature. It is, of course, connected to epistemology, or knowledge of the world. But one cannot claim a doctoral identity with knowledge alone. Trafford and Leshem (2009) have written about *doctorateness* that doctoral students must have and display to be awarded their degree. This, for these authors, goes beyond knowledge of the field, a competently written thesis, and a basically sound argument: doctorateness is the ability to show evidence, through the thesis, of claiming a doctoral identity and voice such that the student shows they are able to be an independent researcher and a new colleague and peer. I would argue that a doctoral student cannot or will not show evidence of doctorateness in their writing without the three aspects of postgraduate writing this section of the paper has discussed. In particular, students need confidence, which weaves through all aspects of scholarship at postgraduate and further levels. Thus, what I am arguing is that writing development work with postgraduate writers in higher education—implicating writing support work and research supervision—needs to reckon overtly and visibly with these pertinent affective dimensions of becoming a scholar at postgraduate level.

### **Reckoning with the affective in writing development work**

If we accept the premise that all successful writing—regardless of level—has, as a critical part of its endeavours, an engagement with ourselves, and our feelings, beliefs, values, and work ethic, then we have to be serious, and creative, in creating holistic writing support. When we write, whether in the social or natural sciences, we construct the world around us and we make it knowable to ourselves and others. We do this in different ways, and with different forms of scholarly *voice* (e.g., writing in the first person, or the third person). Nevertheless, as Frick (2011) argues, when we write a thesis, we not only construct a complex, sophisticated scholarly

text, we also construct ourselves as legitimate knowers of knowledge and discourse in our discipline, and we communicate a significant part of our scholarly selves to readers. Thus, scholarly writing is fundamentally about engaging the heart—the core of the self—alongside engaging the head and the hand (our knowledge of the field, and linguistic and literacy skill and practices) (see Soëtard, 1994).

At postgraduate level, and then postdoctoral level, the affective dimensions of writing surface more powerfully than in previous degree levels, and can be a significant and often tacit stumbling block in getting writing done successfully. This dimension is often tacit because the focus of a great deal of writing development work at this level, including workshops for supervisors, focuses on getting the thesis done: the research process, writing the different sections, working with theory, conducting fieldwork, managing data analysis, and so on. The focus, in other words, is on the *product*, and the parts of the process that lead to the creation or output of the product. What is often missing from visible and overt consideration is the *person* doing all the reading, writing, thinking, and knowing.

At this point, one may want to counter-argue that in working mainly through one-on-one or small group consultations with writers writing centre or writing development work is all about the person, and *is* concerned with the affective. Here, I want to come back to the idea I introduced earlier about the gap between who and what we say we are and do, and what we are actually able to do in practical situations where we are pushed out of our theoretical or ideological framings into a real world of student (and university) anxieties, writing concerns, and deadlines (see Carter, 2009; Clarence, 2019a). There is certainly a significant focus on the person in writing centre work, particularly, and this is reflected in a great deal of writing centre scholarship, from the United States (Nancy Grimm's and Mary Ryan's work, for example), to the United Kingdom (Lisa Ganobscik-Williams' and Kathy Harrington's work, for example), to South Africa (Pamela Nichols', Arlene Archer's and Laura Dison's work, for example). However, while the focus of conversations in writing centres or writing development work is ostensibly on the student-writer, we need to consider: what is the underlying *basis* for the conversation that shapes its ultimate goal or outcome? Is it primarily the deeper, long-term development of a more confident, sophisticated writer and thinker, or is it primarily the creation and publication of a solidly written thesis? This is an important question because it shapes the orientation of our practice with these students.

If we are focused more obviously on the production of a well-written, technically sound thesis produced in the 'correct' language and form, we may neglect or rush past aspects of writing development practice that could focus on affective issues, such as voice, confidence, fear, and anxiety. We may push the person in front of us into the background, and foreground their writing; writing they may be stuck on because of the issues we have glossed over or cannot focus on because our principal concern is the writing itself. I do not want to argue that we should not do this, or that this is an either/or choice: writing centres are there to help writers create writing that conforms to, and perhaps sometimes challenges, the

standards set within their disciplines. Writing development practice would be remiss in not talking about how to write set texts, like a thesis, in acceptable, examinable, and successful forms. But I do want to suggest that if we keep pushing the *whole* person into the background to focus more narrowly on the writer who has to produce a set format thesis within a set amount of time, we will be limiting writing centres' socio-cultural role as emancipatory, or empowering, spaces for writers. I believe part of the power of the writing centre, harking back to its activist academic development roots (Nichols, 1998, 2017), is its ability to pause the relentless hamster-wheel of academic knowledge production that students and lecturers are all engaged in, and bring the focus to the person in front of us. This means not just or only talking about the writing and its deadline and specific needs, but how the writer feels about writing, what else they are working on, how they are coping. We have a unique and powerful space in which to enact a more humanising, inclusive pedagogy around writing that openly acknowledges the affective and its crucial role in providing access to or enabling deeper engagement with the epistemological and ontological aspects of knowing knowledge and making knowledge in higher education.

### **Some thoughts on how we acknowledge the affective in our practice**

Readers may now be thinking: this is all well and good but what do I *do* differently in my writing development work or in my supervision practice? This section outlines my initial thoughts in response, based on my experiences and lessons learned in working with both postgraduate and postdoctoral writers across several different university contexts in South Africa.

The first sounds overly simple, and perhaps quite obvious, but it can be profound in its impact: acknowledge that writing is hard work, and that not everyone enjoys it all the time. Part of this hard work is the actual writing itself - finding the *right* words and ideas, and expressing them effectively; part of this work is the work of taking on and being comfortable with a new scholarly identity. Many students looking at their supervisors see successful, productive, published researchers, and may feel inadequate and stupid when they think about their own writing as being tough, stilted, and not enjoyable. Many student-writers feel alone in their struggles, and are ashamed of admitting them because they chose to do this degree; they feel they should be able to just get on, and have all the requisite literacies and knowledge in place (see Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Hill, 2007). Hearing from a more experienced researcher that writing is often very hard work, and that even the most productive writers struggle, get stuck, and hate their writing can be enormously encouraging for novice researchers. It also helps students to realise that if they do not already have doctoral (or masters) level literacies in place at the start (cf. Bock, 1988), there is nothing *wrong* with them and they are not stupid or unfit to complete their studies. It is more likely that the process of acquiring and mastering these masters or doctoral literacy practices has not been



made effectively overt, accessible, and learnable, whether through supervision or other forms of writing and research development and support (cf. Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006). Making these literacies, and the work around writing at these levels, open for discussion and critique is an important part of the work students do at this level to take on a new or next-level scholarly identity.

Identity formation at postgraduate level, perhaps especially in doctoral studies, is a struggle. This struggle is marked by (often intersecting) issues of gender, for example, balancing study, work, and home for women students (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013); nationality and language (Manathunga, 2007, 2019); and socio-economic status and *race* (Manathunga, 2007, 2019). The struggles are not the same for every student, and it is important in conversations with writers—and with supervisors as part of their own development—not to reify some kind of homogenous idea of what a doctorate is or should be. Manathunga (2019, p. 1) terms this ‘assimilationist pedagogy’. There are different kinds of doctoral dissertations and arguments created within different disciplinary traditions and ways of working, and part of developing sophistication and confidence is learning to talk about, explain, and relate to these in one’s own work. Thus, talking about the struggles of claiming and evidencing a scholarly identity through writing should be a visible part of writing development work that we make time for, because it is a crucial part of the whole learning process.

The second practice we can engage in with writers is to talk to them about the actual practice of writing. Where and when do they write? How often and for how long? What are some of their most common stumbling blocks that constrain their progress or knock their confidence? Many supervisors and writing development practitioners are likely relatively confident talking about the text itself and what needs to be done to the draft to get it from where it is currently to the next step; we may well be less confident about talking to writers about their writing behaviours, habits, and struggles. It may not even occur to us to have that conversation; this was a learning moment for me in my first supervision experience. But, experienced supervisors have argued that this is crucial to whole-candidate development (Kamler & Thomson, 2006), especially when you consider that the current doctoral student you are working with may be someone’s supervisor in a few years’ time. What can current students learn about writing that will benefit their own future students, and their own ongoing self-directed learning and writing?

This is a point to consider carefully, in both supervision and broader writing development practice: that we are not just trying to help a student complete a thesis. We are also trying to help a postgraduate student find and develop a new scholarly voice, express it more ably and confidently, and make a sophisticated argument that contributes valuable knowledge to their field of study. To enable this to happen successfully, we need to help students reflect on their own development as writers and thinkers: they need to think about their own writing process, and what shapes it for better and worse. This may involve, for students, supervisors, and writing development practitioners, sitting with some discomfort as certain academic or

scholarly practices may invoke difficult emotions around how a scholarly voice is expressed, how language is made appropriate and inappropriate in certain contexts, and how some academic writing practices work to silence parts of a student's sense of self (Thesen, 2013). Ideally, this kind of meta-awareness will enable postgraduate student-writers to work on maximising the practices that work, and trying to minimising those that are less helpful (Clarence, 2019b). This meta-awareness may also help students and supervisors to more openly talk about the risks involved in some aspects of postgraduate writing, and the emotional labour involved in managing and mitigating these risks (see Thesen & Cooper, 2014). This will be constant work, as it is for all writers (Sword, 2017), but the work may only begin in earnest when this meta-level is made visible and open to analysis and change.

A third practice, focused more on those who work with writers, such as writing consultants, supervisors, and critical readers/friends, is to have frank conversations about their own affective experiences as scholars who are also researchers and writers. If you are reading this from the perspective of a supervisor, or writing tutor, consultant or advisor, consider some of the issues you have with voice, confidence, and creating more sophisticated, layered arguments in your own writing, and what helps you to move forward productively. Create an open-ended list you can keep collectively adding to that offers you ways into similar conversations with students, and also possible advice, tools, and practices they can try to get their own writing moving again. These can be adapted for masters and honours students as needed, given that the requirements around sophistication and originality in the thesis are less demanding at these levels. They can even be adapted for undergraduate students, especially those working on mini research projects (often at capstone level), and can deepen a university writing centre or student support unit's repertoire of student-centred developmental 'tools'.

It is important to keep these conversations open, and to focus on critical engagement and reflection. There are few *right* answers when it comes to how to write successfully; for example, Boice (1985) argued that you have to write habitually, daily, to be productive, whereas Sword (2017) argues that a good time for writing and reading is a time that works for you, and that writing every day is not a requirement for success in academic scholarship. What we are looking for here is not positivist notions of *best practice* that can be measured as more or less successful than others. Writing—especially doctoral writing—is a highly personal as well as scholarly endeavour. Given that the Master's or doctoral thesis will be published, and for many students (although this differs by national or regional context) lays the foundation for an academic career, the thesis may represent a scholar's beliefs and to an extent their passions, reflected in what they have chosen to research and write about, and how they have done this. That is personal, and so is the process of creating it, especially when you consider that many students are what I have termed 'part-time students with full-time lives' (Clarence, 2014, para. 2) and that many women, students of colour, working class students, international, or immigrant students have varied experiences of postgraduate studies, as noted

earlier in the paper. Drawing on these students' experiences and feedback about how they navigate writing at postgraduate level in ongoing work with student-writers, lecturers and supervisors can connect the scholarly, academic and the affective, personal dimensions of writing work in powerful, and necessary, ways.

A final thought is that writing centres or writing development units could create an alternative series of workshops, lunch-time sessions, and writing circles and invite postgraduate students to sessions ranging from facilitated inputs on different aspects of writing—both more technical and epistemic as well as more affective—to writing circles where writers can share and talk about their draft texts (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Wilmot & McKenna, 2018), as well as issues related to the processes and practices of writing, reading, and getting feedback. Making the invisible, behind-closed-doors practices and processes that go into creating a large, significant text such as a thesis more visible and open for debate and discussion can go a long way towards raising the profile of academic writing not as a set of skills *good* students should have, but as comprising different sets of socio-cultural, value-laden, disciplinary practices, and ongoing work (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). This may be able to powerfully counter notions that students are somehow at a deficit if they cannot already read, write, and think at postgraduate level without help or guidance, as students themselves will be able to challenge this through their own changed experiences of writing.

## **Conclusion**

The argument I have made in this paper is that writing development work, whether through a writing centre, a student-facing support structure, or within a supervision setting, needs to pay closer, more overt attention to the affective dimensions of writing at postgraduate level. This claim, and my suggestions for shifting or augmenting current writing development practices with postgraduate students, is in no way meant to suggest that there is little or no acknowledgement already of the affective dimensions of scholarly writing. But, it has been my experience, working with many different postgraduate and postdoctoral writers and supervisors across several different South African universities, that the affective dimensions of writing are under-theorised and under-considered in a great deal of writing development and supervision work. The powerful emotional labouring writers have to do to access and make the most of their practical writing time and practice needs to be more openly thought about, theorised, and incorporated into writing development work with students, and with supervisors.

This relative silence, or occlusion, around emotional or affective labour has significant implications for the holism of writing development and supervision work. In bringing this aspect of scholarship more to the fore, students, supervisors and those who support them can push back against current higher education discourses that reduce whole people to metrics, such as how much grant money they can win, how many papers they can publish, and how many students they can

help or graduate (preferably with excellent marks, so throughput rates grow). Ultimately, I want to suggest that visibly bringing the affective, human, messy emotional labour behind the texts writers create into the open, showing student-writers that all writers struggle and need help, but that writing can be pleasurable and productive, is important work within current outcomes-driven university environments. When writers encounter and take on emotional stumbling blocks they can often find creative ways back into their writing, and move forward. They can learn not only about what successful writing looks and sounds like, but also what a successful writer feels and thinks and does to remain successful, and happier in their *writerly skin* (see Sword, 2017). What counts as success, too, can be understood in more holistic and balanced ways that take both experienced and novice scholars beyond citation and publication metrics and narrow productivity measures. Writing development practitioners and research supervisors can lead the way here, and change the ways in which we talk about and do academic writing work in higher education for the better.

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## **Author biography**

*Sherran Clarence* is a Research Associate in CHERTL, at Rhodes University, South Africa. She works primarily with postgraduate writers around thesis and research writing, and writing for publication. She was the coordinator of the Writing Centre at the University of the Western Cape from 2009 to 2014, and her work on academic writing, as well as academic development work, has been published in *Higher Education Research & Development*, *Teaching in Higher Education*, *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* and in several edited volumes. She writes a regular blog for postgraduate writers and supervisors: <http://phdinhundredsteps.com>.

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# **Research or teaching? Contradictory demands on Swedish teacher educators and the consequences for the quality of teacher education**

Petra Angervall, Richard Baldwin, Dennis Beach

## **Abstract**

*Based on a policy analysis and interviews with assistant lecturers and lecturers (with a PhD) who are heavily involved in teacher education, the present article addresses contemporary tensions and challenges in Swedish teacher education. The point of departure is the theoretical framework of mission stretch and the third space professional in teacher education with the aim of investigating how teacher educators experience and navigate their daily work. The findings of the study illustrate the tensions teacher educators experience between research and teaching tasks, between a constant flow of tasks, large student groups, and demands of high-quality teaching. The findings also show a gap between the practical anchoring of some research in teacher education and feelings of tension between teaching practices and the value of research. In conclusion, teacher education would seem to be developing into a cluster of tasks, challenges, expectations, and skills. This indicates that teaching and research are not the only missions and cannot be taken for granted in light of how teachers struggle to define their professional knowledge and value with respect to increasingly strong competitive demands for research performance.*

*Keywords: teacher education; teacher educators; teaching work; research; professionalism*

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*Received 30 August 2019; revised version received 28 November 2019; accepted 4 December 2019. Corresponding author: Richard Baldwin, University of Borås, Sweden (richard.baldwin@hb.se).*

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## **Introduction**

The pressures on implementing a more developed, efficient and specialized academic work force has increased, as have demands on the academic profession (see Government Bill, 2007: 98). This has contributed to a rethinking of the balance between the two major university functions; research and teaching, and their interface (Leisyte, 2007), which in turn has created a differentiation in building legitimacy and prestige on the globalized academic market. Jacob (2009) also argues that this differentiation can be explained by a long-term shift in system

norms and in institutions, and is resulting in a potentially forceful cause of normative pressure.

In Enders and De Boer's (2009) study they describe this kind of academic shift through the concept of 'mission stretch'. The term addresses a process in which growing and (partly) contradictory demands and expectations, related to teaching and learning, research and community engagement, are put on the university. Mission stretch puts focus on some of the core values, but also contradictions in academic work, for instance varied framing related to 'elite' and 'mass' higher education, 'diversification', 'equality', 'stratification', the 'profession-based university', or the 'research university'. A consequence of these changes is that the privileges once enjoyed by members of the academic profession in an elite higher education system have increasingly come under pressure. As a result of these changes, academics today generally are more likely to concentrate on management or on teaching and research, while teaching and research themselves represent a further division of work (Enders & Musselin, 2008). This process has led to a situation where, for many academics, the scope for research time has decreased, leading to what academics generally experience as a decline in the status of their work (Ahlbäck Öberg et al., 2016). Mission stretch has also created ambiguity and uncertainty for many academics, with some staff working in new environments, often driven by both public service and market agendas. Whitchurch (2013) has used the concept of 'third space' to describe new roles; comprising elements of both academic and professional activity. These third space activities might take place on parallel tracks to formal structures and processes and are characterized by paradoxes and dilemmas. The space can be a place for reflection and at the same time can be both a safe and risky place to inhabit. The space can, for example, offer opportunities to be creative, build new forms of expertise and to form new relationships. On the other hand, the lack of clear boundaries can be threatening and create feelings of frustration and isolation.

In several studies these changes become especially apparent in semi-professional education programs such as teacher education (Beach & Bagley, 2012; Beach et al., 2014). In Sweden, teacher education is currently characterized by having a large group of staff who are employed as adjunct teachers (assistant lecturers) and who most often do not have a PhD, but a degree from teacher education as well as a master's degree or similar in a specific subject area. They are often employed in teacher education due to their specific skills or because of the general lack of teachers who have a PhD. Many of these teachers have a large teaching load and as a consequence have less possibilities to take part in research. Coupled with this, new financing regulations in the 1990s also negatively influenced the possibilities for teacher education staff to carry out research (Kallós, 2009; Lindberg, 2004; Government Bill, 1999: 63). The current state of Swedish teacher education means that it has a weak research base, a point taken up early in 2019 by the Swedish Research Council (VR), which reported on the current dilemmas connected to a weak research base in teacher education and the lack of scientifically trained academics (Swedish Research Council, 2019).

It has been argued that higher education institutions characterized by an emphasis on teaching are more prone to academic drifts than others (Gardner, 2013). In addition, several studies show how an academic drift or stretch has created divisions of work (Angervall & Beach, 2017) and more unclear career paths (Acker, 2014). Keisu and Carbin (2014) have shown how positions and competences are distributed, related to stronger demands of performance indicators and how they have encouraged processes of self-monitoring in which the individual academic becomes responsible for their own knowledge production and well-being (Keisu & Carbin, 2014). The consequences of low performance within these systems can have consequences in terms of lower salaries or even job loss (Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016).

While many academics have had little choice but to comply with these changes, many are critical of the consequences. Archer (2008), for example, found evidence of both younger and senior academics attempting to resist drives for performativity and adopting similar critical positions in relation to dominant practices. They identified with the core values of intellectual endeavour, criticality and professionalism.

The need for a strong critical and a scientific base has long been expressed in connection with Swedish teacher education (see Beach, 2011). There has been a long-term political commitment in Sweden to research-based teacher education, as well as good support in studies on teacher education to give credence to the value of this ambition (Bagley & Beach, 2015; Kallós, 2009; Lindqvist, Nordänger, & Carlsson, 2014). Government reports from the 1940s to the early 2000s have argued that future teachers should be provided with research-based professional knowledge and research skills as a way of supporting their work to develop their profession, their schools and their teaching practices in the interests of the realization of a political vision of ‘one-school-for all pupils’ (Government Bill, 1948: 27). However, that vision has proved to be very difficult to fulfil in practice. One reason is the policy history of Swedish higher education, such as the Higher Education Act of 1977 (SFS 1977: 459) and the LÄTU reform of 1986 (Government Bill 1980: 3). Professors and Associates were removed from undergraduate teaching and teaching-only lectureships were created. Other reasons are the functional and financial division of education and research at a system level and organizational level since the 1970s (Bienenstock et al., 2014), as well as the attitude of Swedish universities, where universities have been described as not having recognized the strategic importance of teacher education and not providing opportunities for the development of research or necessary funding (Åstrand, 2006).

These problems have also been exacerbated following the recommendations of the latest teacher education commission (Government Bill, 2008: 109) and other political changes regarding higher education funding (Beach, 2019), which may have made the possibilities for a research-based content in teacher education delivered by a research-competent staff even more difficult (Allan, 2014).

Swedish teacher education illustrates well the growing pressures created by a performative culture (Beach, 2020). Education science faculties illustrate some of

the general tensions and conflicts within the university of today, for example those related to relationships between the discipline itself and praxis, between science as a subject and teacher education (i.e. professional training) (Trowler, Saunders, & Bamber, 2012).

The present article gives analytical attention to the implications of a so called 'mission stretch' for teacher education. In particular, its aim is to focus on the questions of how research about teacher education, just as the need for research in the teacher profession, is regarded and understood by Swedish teacher educators today. There has to date been a dearth of research looking at how those engaged in teacher education perceive and experience the value of research and teaching. This research is a response to that gap. Three main questions are posed and concern: How is work in teacher education organized and influenced by the idea of 'research-based'; how do teachers describe the relationship between research and teaching; why and what are the implications for the quality of teacher education and its staff?

### **The division of work in Swedish higher education**

The general division of roles and responsibilities in Swedish universities can be traced to the Higher Education Act from 1977 (SFS, 1977: 263), which increased student numbers by 46,000 (33,000 women, 13,000 men) and the LÄTU reform of 1986 (Government Bill, 1980: 3) which together created the research and teaching responsibilities associated with the new positions of professor, lecturer, and assistant lecturer (adjunct) in Sweden.

Before the 1977 and 1986 reforms, the post of senior lecturer was introduced in 1958, following a proposal from the 1955 university investigation (Högskoleverket, 2006: 3R). The position was for teaching only and the motivation for the position was the large influx of university students in the 1960s and 1970s. The change also released professors from undergraduate teaching for research and supervision work in postgraduate education. The number of senior lecturers increased from 3,700 in 1984 to just over 6,300 in 2004. But on two occasions the number decreased. This was firstly in connection with the LÄTU (appointments) Reform in 1986 and later the 1999 Promotions (befordrans) reform (Högskoleverket, 2006: 3R).

The proposals from LÄTU (Government Bill, 1980: 3) meant that a more uniform service structure was introduced into the academic field (SFS, 1985: 702) to enable more flexible work planning where teachers and researchers could be assigned varied tasks in teaching, research, and administration. This need had, to an extent, its historical foundations in the Higher Education Act of 1977, when professional training institutes were incorporated into the higher education system. This brought a large number of non-PhD teachers into the academic field and the number of assistant lecturers expanded dramatically. However, despite the charge of creating scientific fields and research to generate scientifically qualified lecturers in the new areas, the number of junior lecturers has not significantly decreased.

Indeed, there have been temporary increases and some have become more or less permanent. One increase was in 1997. It was partly due to nursing colleges becoming incorporated into the university field. The proportion of junior lecturer posts also rose in proportion to the number of lecturer posts and this worsened after the Promotion (befordrings) Reform in 1999 when the number of professors increased through promotions from lecturer to professor.

In 1984 there were 2,000 junior lecturers without a PhD in state universities and colleges. LÄTU affected this number by incorporating several other staff groups under the designation of a junior lecturer and the number therefore rose by more than 1,000 full-year employees between 1986 and 1987. This number has, however, continued to increase, more so in some subject areas than others. As mentioned above, the increase was noticeably large when the nursing colleges were included, but a similar (if longer lasting and now really semi-permanent) situation exists in the Education subject areas, where the number of junior lecturers is much higher than the number of senior lecturers.

### **Academic work in teaching or research**

Changes in higher education governance have led to changes in the balance between higher education and research. While market forces have encouraged universities to produce more research-minded and research-active professionals (Garrick & Rhodes, 2000), there is evidence of unequal access to the resources available and a widening of the gap between the research 'haves' and the 'have-nots' (Enders & Musselin, 2008). The combination of unequal access to funds and the fact that academics' career prospects are now largely dependent on the quality of their research activities has led to an increased division of labour between staff (Leisyte, 2007). The hierarchical nature of relationships between academics, as well as the control systems put in place in universities, reinforce the status and power of those deemed to be high-performers and exclude others (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016).

Policy developments have also put pressure on the traditional ideal of a close relationship between teaching and research (Jenkins & Healey, 2005) and the idea that all academic staff should be both teachers and researchers (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009). Furthermore, it has been shown that staff engaged in teaching are undervalued and, in some cases, marginalized, compared with those concentrating on research (Lucas, 2006). The fact that women in higher education are a group that does more teaching and service (Misra et al., 2011) makes the gendered nature of a focus on research more apparent. Despite efforts to reduce gender inequality in European academia, figures show that the number of female researchers is still disproportionately lower at every step of the academic career ladder than the number of male researchers (European Commission, 2016).

A number of studies have addressed how changes in the balance between teaching and research are perceived by those working in higher education. In a study of higher education in Scotland, for example, Drennan (2001) found that

academics did not believe that staff could move beyond a senior lecturer position, without high-profile research activity. Those responsible for the management and development of quality in learning and teaching continued to regard research as the main route for career advancement. Furthermore, the prioritization of research was reinforced by the discrepancy between large institutional awards for excellence in research and much smaller rewards for excellence in teaching.

In another study, Leisyte, Enders, and De Boer (2009) found that Dutch and English academics had a dislike for the increased separation of research and teaching, suggesting that the two spheres should be tightly coupled. The participants mentioned increased competition between teaching and research time, leading to conflicts in their work situation. Academics experienced increased levels of competition, and reported long working hours and short holidays. Changes in the institutional environment, including intra-university policies using rewards and penalties via financial incentives and staffing policies were perceived as contributing factors.

Finally, in a survey of higher education employees at three research-oriented universities in Sweden, Geschwind and Broström (2015) found that participants felt it was difficult, although not impossible, to strike an even balance between teaching and research at an individual level and in terms of time-management. Many of the respondents felt that demands on researchers were ever increasing, which strengthened the conflict between teaching and research in the daily academic schedule. Teaching for more than 10–20% of working time was seen as threatening to an academic research career, especially if the teaching had a loose connection to ongoing research. More generally, quality in research was significantly more rigorously evaluated and reviewed than quality in teaching. Research needs took priority over teaching needs and in response to external research funding, managers often delegated the bulk of teaching activities to less research-active staff, having continuity as their main priority. As such, management strategies reinforced existing patterns of division of labour between academic staff. In the context of teacher education, this is even more difficult, due to how teacher education historically has been placed, as less scientific, but also in regard to the aspects of research integration and funding (Swedish Research Council, 2019).

### **Tensions in Swedish teacher education**

Swedish teacher education produces less research and also involves more adjunct teachers (without a PhD) than any other semi-vocational program (National University Board of Higher Education [UKÄ], 2018; Wahlström & Alvunger, 2015). This can be identified in terms of the proportion of doctoral theses and national research grants awarded to educational science research and that students from teacher education are less likely than students from other semi-professional programs to go on to do research after their studies (Wahlström & Alvunger, 2015). The weak connections between research and teacher education has led to an alleged

continued devaluation of education. Nilsson Lindström and Beach (2015) argue that critical research knowledge is not being funded, nor communicated as examined knowledge, in Swedish teacher education today.

Kallós (2009) points to the difficulties of creating a research field in the area of Swedish teacher education. Despite government intentions, Kallós argues that teacher education research funding in Sweden is characterized by massive underfunding and low levels of research and teaching cooperation between universities and university colleges. Rather than strengthening the necessary relationship between research and teaching at individual universities, as well as cooperation between universities, he also argues that government measures concentrate on increased competition for funding instead.

Teacher education in Sweden often lacks stable research environments and research education (Kallós, 2009; Lindberg, 2004). Research possibilities within the field of teacher education are increasingly restricted to a small number of universities, specifically the six more research-intensive universities in Sweden, in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Umeå, Uppsala, Lund, and Linköping (Swedish Research Council, 2019), whilst external research funds are lacking in smaller colleges (Angervall, Gustafsson, & Silfver, 2018). To reach national status and influence as a researcher, connection to one of the six relatively research-intensive universities is decisive (Swedish Research Council, 2019). External research funds, access to nationally as well as internationally influential networks are lacking in smaller colleges, although there is also room for research merit (Angervall et al., 2018). These realities highlight the added pressure on researchers to perform in universities outside the group of six if they are to keep in step with their counterparts in the more influential, high-status universities.

At the same time as there are reduced possibilities for research within Swedish teacher education, there has been a toning down of the value of pedagogical research and studies for teachers in favour of subject content knowledge and generic professional knowledge and skills (Government Bill, 2009/10: 89). New quality assurance models of organizational control place specific knowledge needs on teachers and teacher educators that are often more immediately experienced than the needs of research skills and research-based knowledge. Female-dominated areas of teacher education aimed at the teaching of younger children, for example, tend to have lower status than those areas relating to older students and in which a greater proportion of men work.

## **Method**

The study referred to in this article uses two main approaches. By first using a policy ethnographic approach, we aim to make visible how policy discourses and practices are brought together, negotiated, and adapted (Beach, 1995, 2013). The approach we used is also inspired by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005). Through interviews and other documentation, institutional ethnography brings to

the fore relations of power and expressions of agency, such as those which might be suggested in acts of resistance or compliance when research-promoting activities are introduced. The approach shows how people interact and interpret meaning, bringing forth patterns of behaviour, categories of identification, modes of management, as well as exercises in power.

The article is mostly based on data produced within a previous large Swedish research project called 'Gender and Career' (see Öhrn & Lundahl, 2013). This project investigated the level of interest that primarily doctoral students (late in their research studies) and junior researchers had for research and a research career. The project also investigated the opportunities and barriers connected to a research career, to career opportunities, and the strategies used to navigate the terrains in which the respondents worked. The importance of gender issues in these areas was also investigated.

The project generated a substantial amount of research insights, for example concerning the basis for gender divisions in educational sciences; why women do teaching and men research, but also insights on the implications of policy change on academic work practices. During the project, 120 interviews were conducted between 2010–2011, followed by a small sample of additional interviews conducted between 2017–2018 (10 interviews). The findings presented here are premised on the idea that the main data used is still valid even though several years old. This data has, however, been compared with more recent data, as well as with other research. We find that the data used here is still valid as a base for this kind of analysis. All the respondents were active as lecturers or assistant lecturers in six education faculties at Swedish universities.

In this specific study, interview transcriptions of 10 assistant lecturers (teachers without a PhD) and 10 lecturers (who have PhDs) have been re-read. All were employed on long-term contracts (a minimum of four years) or on permanent contracts in two different education faculties. This group was selected based on the criterion that they were heavily involved in teacher education, despite their slightly different backgrounds (as teachers and researchers). The group spent the majority of their time teaching, even though a few also participated in research studies, part time. The lecturers or senior lecturers who took part, who were qualified to carry out research, were mostly involved in teaching (in teacher education). The respondents were all women (over 80% of the total workforce in teacher education are women). The interviews were semi-structured, about 90 minutes in length, audio-taped, and transcribed. They were all carried out in Swedish by one of the authors in this study, who also did the transcriptions and preliminary analysis.

The interviews are characterized by an in-depth approach and the use of targeting questions, employing intensive questioning relating to specific aspects of policy, teacher competence, experience, and professionalism. During the interviews, several questions about research and teaching were discussed, as well as the relationship between teaching experiences and a scientific degree. The focus was mainly on the everyday practices of lecturers and teacher educators and what, how, when, where, why, and to what extent research and teaching are part of those



practices. The respondents were asked to describe important aspects for the ‘professional’ teacher in teacher education and why they were regarded important. The respondents were also encouraged to reflect on their own practices, how their practices were influenced/affected or not by the discourses, policies, and strategies they encounter regarding research and research-based teacher education, and what this means for them as teacher educators. The interviews also included questions about the teachers’ relation to research or research-based teaching and how their actions enable and constrain the practices they identify (implicitly or explicitly) as influencing their practices.

As a result of the re-readings of the interviews, which were done jointly and discussed between the authors of this paper, the following themes and issues arose; the importance of research to teacher education, the relationship between teaching and research, the importance of teaching experience, the competitive nature of research (compared to teaching), as well as how work time issues impinge on research work opportunities. Below, these themes are expanded into two main sections in order to illustrate our findings: ‘Working as a lecturer in teacher education’ and ‘Values and divisions between research and teaching.’

### **Working as a lecturer in teacher education**

In the study, several of the lecturers had strong ideas about their need for better support in their teaching work, their priorities in teacher education, but also their status and constant lack of research funding. The importance of teacher educators, carrying out research, as well as using research as a knowledge base for their teaching was, for example, mentioned explicitly by all number of the respondents, but in slightly different ways.

#### *Perceived priorities for teachers in teacher education*

Several of the lecturers described how departmental leaders continuously expressed a growing need for employing more teachers with a PhD. The departmental leaders and programme coordinators also often mentioned the lack of research quality in teacher programmes and how having lecturers with research competence would change that. Several of the respondents also saw research as an important quality measurement. Maggie (assistant lecturer) for example, argued that ‘It is important to engage in research, not least to use that knowledge in teaching.’ Lisa (lecturer) too explained that she wanted ‘...to be a researcher: that was why I went through graduate school.’

However, another respondent, Jenny did not feel it was important to carry out research in order to further her career. She explained that

I work mostly in administrative contexts and with some assignments and so on, and strategically I need to be in those contexts. To get a permanent position in teacher

education it is important to show that you are in an important role, that is needed here, and in this respect getting a PhD has never been that important to me. (Jenny, assistant lecturer)

Jenny points to the fact that for her work in teacher education it has been more important to conduct teaching and to act professionally in her teaching assignments, than to carry out research. She illustrates what many of the respondents talk about during the interviews. They express being aware of the strong interests behind keeping research and teaching apart, as if they are clearly different and unrelated.

Gwen also expresses the view that there would be a negative consequence for those who spent too much time working with teaching or administrative tasks. She explains that:

One is not successful if one engages too much in administrative work or in teaching. There is a kind of hierarchy here, that also exists throughout the academy. Research has higher status than teaching... (Gwen, assistant lecturer)

Gwen points to how different work tasks give staff a particular work identity, which is valued in different ways. According to Gwen, researchers with a PhD are positioned as more successful and therefore higher in the academic hierarchy than teachers.

Sinead refers to the importance that management attaches to her doing research but that 'expectations are very double, ambiguous really...' She went on to explain that

I have a broad position in teaching and administration, which means that I can be in several places and do many different tasks. [...] but I like to do different things and then sometimes it is too much [...] and yes, I will work weeks that are long, maybe 50-60 hours a week may be normal. (Sinead, assistant lecturer)

Sinead identifies a lack of time for research work opportunities and refers to the work task structure that is based on a division between different tasks, where research is structured in a different way than teaching and administration. When struggling to get time for research the amount of work hours risk becoming too heavy. Two other respondents, Maggie and Lisa, also point out that being engaged in research when working in teacher education is not to be taken for granted. Often other work demands and pressures get in the way. Maggie explained that:

I am very interested in teaching, but when I see my work situation, I realize that it just does not add up. What to do then? It is important to engage in research, not least to use that knowledge in teaching, but I cannot do everything!  
(Maggie, lecturer)

Lisa described her own situation as follows:

...even if I really stick hard to keep my hours for research, I have to do as much teaching I can to fill my schedule, so it sometimes becomes difficult. I am forced to work very long hours, at least 50 hours a week, because of the normal teaching load. The hours we get per course do not cover the amount of time we spend on the job. (Lisa, lecturer)

Lisa and Maggie describe a situation where heavy work responsibilities in teaching mean that they are forced to work long hours and therefore risk losing parts of their research opportunities. There is basically too little time left over for research work, due to an overload of teaching assignments. Their descriptions suggest that they seem burdened by an underestimation of the time needed for teaching assignments, and that this basically ‘eats up’ their chances of doing research.

Another respondent, Lucy, explains how her position is totally dominated by teaching:

I have a temporary appointment, which lasts six months at a time. My work is also entirely devoted to teaching, and I really have very little time to do anything else. [...] I like to teach and I think that my teaching qualifications will help me, sooner or later, to get a permanent position in teacher education. (Lucy, assistant lecturer)

In the short term, it seems as if teaching, and not research, is a way to get a permanent position at Lucy’s department. One can see also how this creates stress and frustration. Elisabeth explains something similar that the often-raised expectancies of doing more research creates worries about increased workloads. She said:

I would like to focus more on research, but there are so many things you should have time to do and are expected to solve. I have no time to work on research, it is that simple. (Elisabeth, lecturer)

Elisabeth’s response reflects some of the problems that appear through multiple functions of the modern and expanded university (Archer, 2008). Others too

express similar issues connected to the realities of ‘mission stretch’ in terms of contradictory demands and expectations.

Several of the lecturers and assistant lecturers illustrate an engagement with research and feel that research is important, in order to act professionally. Only one or two directly referred to not being in need of doing research work. However, several claim they would like to do more research, just as engaging more in their teaching work, but that there is simply no time. Their responses give an indication of the hierarchies and contradictions within teacher education, where research and teaching create conflicting expectations and demands. This mission stretch in turn seems to create competition and value confusion between groups of lecturers and assistant lecturers, which we partly think concern gender (see Angervall & Beach, 2017; Archer, 2008).

### **Values and divisions between research and teaching**

The relationship between research work and experience-based practice was discussed as rather complex by all of the respondents. The value of professional experience was for example taken up as an important part in terms of adding quality to the job. Sara explained that

My research work is so closely tied to teacher practice, that I see it as a clear advantage to have that experience behind me, plus that I am still active in the schools out there. There is another researcher here who has an area very much close to mine, but I don't think she's been out (in school) much at all and I feel that I have a big advantage in that respect.  
(Sara, lecturer)

Sara’s work as a teacher educator keeps her involved in teaching practices, both within and outside of teacher education, which she thinks is good in order to update her experience.

Birgitta (assistant lecturer) too took up the importance of the ‘practical’ aspects of teaching for the quality of teacher education. She refers to the fact that many teacher educators with a PhD seldom have ‘hands on’ qualities, and wondered whether ‘...any of those who had a PhD in our field know the practical aspects at all.’ Her response suggests that practice is seen as something different to research, and that teacher educators are either involved and experienced in more practical areas *or* in research.

Also Nina discussed the different expectations on research and teaching when saying:

There are so many teachers without a PhD who have wide experience of working in teaching. They say to me: ‘Your

research, Nina, is very interesting, but has no bearing on reality. What use is it? (Nina, lecturer)

Nina's response illustrates a kind of division between those who work as assistant lecturers without a PhD and those with it. For example, her reference to 'reality' seems to include 'hands on' experiences and insights into everyday practices that, according to Nina, those teachers with a PhD do not necessarily have. Nina's ideas about educational research seem to be that it is conducted elsewhere and is not necessarily relevant for teacher education. This expression connects to a rather specific understanding of scientific knowledge that possibly does not include developmental research areas such as action research or ethnography. It is almost as if she points at a division, not necessarily related to specific research interests, but to a power relationship between those in or outside the classroom (see Drennan, 2001).

Others referred to what they perceived as differences between teaching and research, and especially the competitive nature of research. Rakel, for example, explains that

I have always had a lot of teaching assignments, even during my own research studies. People have been able to rely on me to take on courses and supervision even though I have been in the middle of my own research studies. That is how we always work, try to help out and share assignments [in teaching]. What I have learnt is that between research studies and teaching assignments it's like two different worlds. In research nobody helps others out really. (Rakel, lecturer)

Veronica shares a similar view. According to her teaching work is often less competitive than research work. She explained that

Sometimes I really think that in research they should work more on collaboration, as we do in teaching. We are good at collaboration in teaching, but poor at that in research. Many even think that the kind of collaboration we have in the educational context is old-fashioned. Working in a research team means something different. (Veronica, lecturer)

Veronica, here, refers to the importance of collaboration for research quality, but also to the different rationales that tend to be involved in teaching and research work. She suggests that teaching and research are part of and create different work cultures: one that is flatter and more collaborative, and another that is more hierarchical and competitive. This illustrates also another part of the tensions within

mission stretch. Lina points to how work cultures can create power relations influencing work on a daily basis. She argues that:

The system here [in teacher education] is unclear. You don't know what to think sometimes... On the one hand, you are expected to get research merits and your PhD and if you don't you might risk losing your job, but then, on the other hand, if you work in teacher education, you are also expected to represent a kind of scepticism towards science and the academy. (Lina, lecturer)

Just like Lina, several of the respondents illustrate some of the dilemmas in expecting teachers to be hands on and 'practical', but also be active in research work and to keep up with research insights.

Teaching and research are perceived to be different spheres at times, with teacher educators belonging to one sphere or the other. We think this illustrates how the realities of mission stretch play out for staff in terms of the associated demands and expectations. Either you work heavily in teacher education and have 'hands on' experience in 'reality' or you work mostly with research and lack this experience. This means that the mission stretch risks creating or imposing on ideas about academic identity and knowledge, seldom something in-between that could be more reflective (see Whitchurch, 2013). This obviously creates problems in acting professionally, where many teacher educators are unable to fulfil the demands for research-based teacher education.

## **Discussion**

In this article, we have addressed questions concerning the so-called mission stretch in teacher education and how it plays out for lecturers and assistant lecturers in their daily work. In particular, our aim has been to raise issues about the need for research in the teacher profession, and how that is regarded and understood by Swedish teacher educators today.

The findings illustrate that there are lecturers and assistant lecturers who understand research and practice-based teaching work as going hand in hand, as needed and fruitful. There are also those who argue for a more research-based teacher education and that this also seem to influence many of the respondents' ambitions to engage in research. However, several of the respondents described levels of confusion, which we interpret as part of the mission stretch dilemma of double expectations and demands (see Enders & Musselin, 2008). In particular, these experiences were described by the assistant lecturers. In general, the idea of the professional teacher educator almost appeared as in a loop. Several of the teachers talked of the expressed need for more research-active staff but also about research as something in the hands of a teaching rationale with a strong time

structure, closely related to administration and learning outcomes. One or two even mentioned what they see as a necessary division between research and teaching as if based on different rationales. These descriptions are similar to the paradoxes and dilemmas found in Whitchurch's (2013) study on the third space professional; where some academics express feelings of frustration and isolation. They also reflect other findings that show that the scope for academic research time generally has decreased, leading to what academics generally experience as a decline in the status of their work. (Ahlbäck Öberg et al., 2016.)

The messages about the value of teacher education research expressed by the respondents also, at least partly, match the findings of previous research showing that parts of the measures put in place, to improve teacher education, have led to more restricted views of quality and professionalism, and where teacher expertise is regarded as less and less valued and increasingly distanced from the national policymaking processes (Savage & Lingard, 2018). The descriptions given here also seem to reflect other consequences of mission stretch. Coupled with the models of organizational control put in place as a result of increased governance, we have a situation where teacher educators are less able to influence the content of their work, but at the same time also express feelings of a growing pressure and lack of work value.

However, the expressed desire to take part in research and to get involved in research education was also mentioned by almost all of the staff interviewed. Several expressed ambitions to get more involved in research, but at the same time mentioned the burdens of teaching and other responsibilities, which often hindered research participation. For a number of the respondents this leads to feelings of frustration. As the majority of the respondents in this study are women and engaged in high levels of teaching, these findings cannot be separated from issues of gender and as such reflect the findings made in previous research (Angervall & Beach, 2020). Research by Angervall and Beach (2017) has shown, for example, that women tend to spend more time on their teaching and have heavier teaching loads than men. Women are more engaged in teaching and service and in so-called 'striving environments', where teaching and service are considered 'lesser' than the domain of research (Boyer, 1990). Women often find themselves in an inferior position, given the increasing demands to both do research and at the same time maintain a high teaching load (Henderson & Kane, 1991). Finally, as Gardner (2013) has shown, higher education institutions characterized by an emphasis on teaching are more prone to mission drift than others. As women comprise the majority of the workforce in these types of institutions, the findings here strongly reflect the implications of this reality.

The replies from the lecturers and assistant lecturers also highlight the perceived importance of practical experience, especially when carrying out research. Many of the respondents also expressed ideas that there is sometimes a gap between the practical anchoring of some research in teacher education and feelings of tension between what one of the respondents described as the 'two different worlds' of teaching and research. A number of those taking part took up

issues of competition and lack of cooperation in the area of research, which they did not feel was the case in teaching. Similar themes are taken up by Wallace et al. (2018), who describe a situation where academics admitted seeking individual achievement over team accomplishment, and where work-avoidance took place in relation to some aspects of the academic job (i.e. teaching and administration), in order to create time for other areas of work, specifically research. The study suggests that such behaviour is exacerbated by positions of power and that managerial practices, and the culture of the organization were also contributing factors. These points resonate with the replies presented here; they also point to power relations and a culture of work that is based on competition and which ultimately only tends to exacerbate the already weak connections between research and teacher education.

The descriptions of daily working conditions which come across in the comments given by the respondents demonstrate the effects of a mission stretch, the processes in which growing and contradictory demands and expectations are put on the university (Enders & De Boer, 2009). The results show clear evidence of the growing demands on the university, with the respondents describing the situation where they have too much to do and as a result less time to carry out research.

As a result of the above changes, including the limited opportunities to carry out research, a perceived dichotomy seems to have been created, where the connections between teaching and research are no longer seen as self-evident. The division between assistant lecturers and lecturers illustrate this, as do the divisions between teaching and research. Opportunities to take part in research has become more and more restricted to a privileged few. The power aspects that lie behind these trends have been presented by Alvesson and Spicer (2016), who describe a situation where the hierarchical nature of relationships between academics, as well as the control systems put in place in universities, reinforce the power position of high performers. This small group have been able to transform their power into favourable conditions that enable research (such as lower teaching loads and low levels of administration.) The gap that has been created between research and teaching has created a culture of competition, and an unjust situation where many academics find themselves overburdened by teaching and administration. These trends would seem to only further weaken the connections between research and teacher education, and have even more negative consequences for the quality of Swedish teacher education.

## **Conclusion**

This study concerns the mission stretch of teacher education, namely the growing and (partly) contradictory demands and expectations expressed in but also forming the everyday work of teacher educators. Through this 'mission stretch' we have been able to put focus on some of the core values, but also contradictions in teacher



education, for instance related to ‘third space’, ‘knowledge’, to ‘elite’ and ‘mass’ higher education, ‘diversification’ and ‘equality’ and the ‘profession-based university’ or the ‘research university’ (Enders & Musselin, 2008; Whitchurch, 2013).

The results show that the need for a research-based teacher education is felt strongly by the participants in this study; both for the quality of teacher education generally and for their own professional development. However, at the same time the respondents express feelings of frustration due to the fact that teaching and other work responsibilities partly prevent research participation as teaching and research are perceived as two different worlds. This was particularly emphasized by assistant lecturers without a professional research(er) education. The results, hence, illustrate that a research-based teacher education cannot be taken for granted, or can be perceived differently. One group that particularly seems affected is women, and we plan to write more in the future focusing intensively on gender and profession in teacher education.

The article shows that the daily reality for teachers in teacher education appears as somewhat convoluted and does not directly match the policy rhetoric of a research-based teacher education. It also offers clues as to how the situation might be improved. We believe that a change of attitude within Swedish universities is needed. The strategic importance of teacher education needs to be fully recognized and measures and funding provided to provide the opportunities for the development of the research that is strongly desired by the respondents in this study and that is suggested by the study to be fundamentally important to professionals’ policy interpretations and enactments.

## **Author biographies**

*Petra Angervall* is Professor of Education situated at the Department of Educational Development and Research at the University of Borås, Sweden. She is currently involved in research concerning higher education policy and gender equality, gender and leadership, just as critical perspectives on international partnerships. She is also the leader of the research group 'Higher Education, Politics and Praxis' at the university.

*Richard Baldwin* is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Librarianship, Information, Education and IT at the University of Borås, Sweden. He defended his PhD thesis in 2013, which looked at the re-contextualisation of the Bologna process in teacher education in Sweden. His research interests include aspects of change in higher education, as well as issues relating to second language learning.

*Dennis Beach* is Professor of Education at the University of Borås, Sweden and the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His main research commitment is towards questions of educational justice and equality, the sociology of education and ethnography. He has published extensively in these areas.

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# Learning of academics in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic

Ela Sjølie, Susanne Francisco, Kathleen Mahon, Mervi Kaukko,  
Stephen Kemmis

## Abstract

*This article explores academics' learning. Specifically, it focuses on how academics have come to practise differently under the abrupt changes caused by responses to the Coronavirus pandemic. We argue that people's practices—for example, academics' practices of teaching and research—are ordinarily held in place by combinations of arrangements that form practice architectures. Many existing practice architectures enabling and constraining academics' practices were disrupted when the pandemic broke. To meet the imperatives of these changed arrangements, academics have been obliged to recreate their lives, and their practices. We present case stories from four individual academics in Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Australia. Building on a view of learning as coming to practice differently and as situated in particular sites, we explore these academics' changed practices—working online from home with teaching, research, and collegial interactions. The changes demonstrate that academics have learned very rapidly how to manage their work and lives under significantly changed conditions. Our observations also suggest that the time of the Novel Coronavirus has led to a renewal of the communitarian character of academic life. In learning to practise academic life and work differently, we have also recovered what we most value in academic life and work: its intrinsically communitarian character.*

*Keywords: practice architectures; practice theory; professional learning; Coronavirus pandemic; higher education*

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Corresponding author: Ela Sjølie, Norwegian University of Science and Technology,  
Norway (ela.sjolie@ntnu.no).*

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## Introduction

On April 29, 2020, the Johns Hopkins University Novel Coronavirus counter reported 3,132,363 cases worldwide of COVID-19 (the disease caused by the virus), and 217,947 deaths. At the time we wrote those words, we were aware that Death stalked our streets, our supermarkets, our hospitals. The health crisis triggered an economic crisis expected to be more severe than the 1929-1934 Great Depression. Millions were thrown out of work, as enterprises were starved of

supplies, customers, and clients. Almost everyone was required to make changes to the ways we lived our everyday lives.

In this article, we focus on the *practices*: that make up the everyday lives of academics, at home and at work. We follow Kemmis (2018, p. 2-3) in defining a practice as:

a form of human action in history, in which particular activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of particular ideas and talk (sayings), and when the people involved are distributed in particular kinds of relationships (relatings), and when this combination of sayings, doings and relatings ‘hangs together’ in the project of the practice (the ends and purposes that motivate the practice).

We know that changing established practices can be difficult (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Practices can be resistant to change; we may reproduce them in new situations, although we also vary them to meet changing conditions (Kemmis, 2020). Sometimes, when conditions require it, however, our practices can be transformed; sometimes, they evolve into new species.

In our view, people’s practices are ordinarily held in place (enabled and constrained) by combinations of arrangements that form *practice architectures* (Kemmis et al., 2014) which together establish the ways they unfold. These ideas are informed by the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon, Francisco, & Kemmis, 2017). This is a form of practice theory (Nicolini, 2012) which holds that people encounter one another and the world in their practices, as they happen, in three dimensions of intersubjective space. These dimensions are (1) semantic space, where we encounter one another as interlocutors (in the medium of language); (2) physical space-time, where we encounter one another as embodied beings (in the medium of activity and work); and (3) social space, where we encounter each other and the world as social beings (in the medium of solidarity and power).

As indicated in Kemmis’s (2018) definition of practices quoted above, the theory of practice architectures presents practices as composed of (1) sayings, (2) doings, and (3) relatings that hang together in the project (purpose) of the practice. These three elements of a practice are always combined in a practice; they do not appear separately or alone. They also correspond (respectively) to the three dimensions of intersubjective space noted above, and are enabled and constrained by three different kinds of arrangements found in or brought to a site (Schatzki, 2002) of practice. These are (1) cultural-discursive arrangements (e.g., languages, discourses), (2) material-economic arrangements (e.g., office spaces and furniture, classrooms, digital technologies, disease), and (3) social-political arrangements (e.g., hierarchies, collegial relationships, government-university ties). In various kinds of combinations, these three different kinds of arrangements can together form practice architectures that enable and constrain the ways practices unfold. If



our practices were like a flowing river, then these practice architectures would be the bed and banks that direct the river's flow. But, just as the river in flood can reshape its bed and banks, so, too, practices can reshape the practice architectures that enable and constrain them.

The Novel Coronavirus pandemic disrupted many existing arrangements in academics' work and lives, obliging academics to recreate their lives and their practices, and in some respects to reorient, or create new, arrangements. Through case stories, we describe some of the abrupt changes that occurred in the working lives and academic practices of four individual academics in Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Australia (four of the authors of this article). The changes demonstrate that academics learned very rapidly how to manage their work and lives under significantly changed conditions. This article explores this learning.

We take a particular view of learning. While some regard learning solely as 'the acquisition of knowledge' (e.g., Schatzki, 2017), we regard learning as also *coming to practise differently* (Kemmis, 2020). In our view, learning is evident in changes in *other* practices. Kemmis et al. (2014) wrote of learning as 'being stirred in to practices' or (following Wittgenstein, 1958) as 'coming to know how to go on in practices'. Kemmis and colleagues (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 58; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, pp. 116-120) take the view that knowledge (and learning) arises from, represents, recalls, anticipates, and returns to its use in practices. Given its origins in social practices, knowledge is not the accomplishment or property of lone individuals; it is historically, culturally, materially, and socially constructed.

In this article, then, we show academics coming to practise differently, that is, learning. We see that their learning is *situated* in the particular sites (Schatzki, 2002) and circumstances of their everyday work and lives. Following Lave (2019), we understand their learning as shaped by the historical conditions in which their practices occur. These conditions leave indelible marks on *what* changes in people's practices, *how* they practise, and *why* they practise as they do. While Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning is *situated*, Lave (2019) critiques and renews the notion of situated learning. Her view is that learning is evident in, and shaped by, people's everyday life and practices; it is also shaped by people's participation in communities of practice, for example, in workplaces, families, and educational settings; and learning occurs in relation to the changing cultural, material, social conditions under which people participate in everyday life; so that people's very identities bear the traces of how and what they have learned under those particular conditions.

Building on this rich view of how learning is situated, we explore academics' learning as they come to practise differently under new conditions. In the next section, we give a general context for how the four countries are handling the Coronavirus crisis. We then present case stories showing some of the things four of the authors learned in order to do our work under changed conditions, also putting this on the historical record while we are still in the thick of the Coronavirus crisis. Then, we use the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014;

Mahon, Francisco, & Kemmis, 2017) to show how academics came to practise differently, and consider some implications for future practice.

### **Case stories**

Our case stories come from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Australia. Norway registered the first case of COVID-19 on February 26, 2020, after which the number of cases started to increase rapidly. On March 12, Norway introduced what Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg called ‘the strongest and most sweeping measures Norway has seen in peacetime’<sup>3</sup>, closing schools, universities, and other public places. About a week later than in Norway, Finland followed the Norwegian trend in cases of COVID-19, and in public and official attitudes in responses to the virus. The virus arrived in Sweden at approximately the same time as its neighbours. The Swedish government’s measures were not as restrictive as those in Norway and Finland, and were based more on public recommendations than extensive regulations. Like Norway and Finland, Australia also went into near-total lockdown after March 15, closing public spaces, prohibiting meetings of more than two people, and limiting travel to and from the country as well as internally. This article was written between March and June 2020. While the situation was constantly and rapidly changing, and the outcomes were as yet unknown, we could already predict that the pandemic would have long-lasting impacts in our societies.

The case stories are *our* stories (Ela’s, Mervi’s, Kathleen’s, and Susanne’s); that is, they are the stories of particular persons, rather than generalisable accounts of what is happening in the relevant countries as a whole. In writing these accounts, we acknowledge that the impact of the pandemic on our own lives has been relatively minor compared to the impacts others have endured, including health care workers who were working daily to support the sick and dying (many living apart from their families to avoid infecting them), those grieving the loss of loved ones, and the precarious situations of others (like people trapped in abusive households) who did not have safe places to retreat to. As narrators, we draw on our everyday lives in the way Camus described in his novel *The Plague*, originally published in 1947. ‘The present narrator has three kinds of data: First, what he saw himself; secondly, the accounts of other eyewitnesses ... and lastly, documents that subsequently came into his hands’ (p. 6).

Constructing the stories as they are presented in this paper was a collaborative process. In the first versions of the stories, which formed the initial corpus for analysis, authors wrote in detail about the current situation from their own perspectives, highlighting the impact the pandemic had on teaching and research practices, community engagement, and personal situations. These versions were loosely informed by the theory of practice architectures (a theoretical framework that guides or scholarship), although explicit references to the theory were not included. Each story was then iteratively developed, redeveloped, and condensed in relation to the others. Individual re-writing, a form of analysis in and

of itself<sup>4</sup>, was interspersed with analytical discussions among the five authors, as a team. In these discussions, we asked each other questions and acted as ‘mirrors’ to each other’s stories (cf. Sjølie, Francisco, & Langelotz, 2019). Again, informed by the theory of practice architectures, we also identified patterns and points of difference in relation to emerging themes. Thus, the stories contain traces of the original data that we collaboratively analysed and built on through a reflexive analytical process, and they are products of that analysis<sup>5</sup>. The stories serve as cases of learning in the time of the Coronavirus pandemic; of changed or new academic practices.

Some of the major changes to our academic practices during the pandemic are highlighted in the following stories in relation to changed practice architectures (e.g., doing academic work from home, teaching online) that shaped and were shaped by those practices.

#### *A story from Norway*

What has become clear to me through the Corona situation is that academics are able to change very quickly when circumstances require. What seemed impossible just a few months ago is now reality. Overnight, teachers all over the country were pushed into the world of online teaching, with highly varied experiences and expertise. In a matter of days, my university created online resources for faculty staff, and the unit I work in was strongly involved in this work. My unit is responsible for a Teamwork course that all master’s students go through, in total 2,700 students. The course is organised in 100 different classes of about 30 students with groups of 5-6 students working together. Fifty per cent of the grade is assessment of collaborative skills (shown through reflection in a report). Students are observed and facilitated, to stimulate them to reflect on (and possibly change) their collaboration while they’re working. The course is taught each Wednesday all day, combining activities in the class and in the student groups. The core of the course is that students meet face to face and that they are observed by trained facilitators. Until recently, it was seen as impossible that this course could be done any way other than meeting face to face. Two years ago, however, my university merged with three university colleges. One of these colleges conducts large parts of their teaching online, and we had a small project developing a version of the Teamwork course for a virtual learning environment. The facilitators observe and intervene via digital platforms, which naturally calls for quite different practices. The experiences from this project turned out to be crucial when the campuses closed on March 12, 2020. In a matter of days, a ‘training program’ for academic staff was developed, and from the first day of teaching after the close-down, all 100 Teamwork classes were taught in a virtual learning environment. Most of us (if not all) would have said that was impossible two years ago.

This is just one of many examples of joint efforts to adapt to the sudden changes introduced by the Corona crisis. Around the country, we see signs of increased community spirit. Our change efforts have been helped by the Norwegian tradition of *dugnad*—a term for voluntary work done together with others. It is most

commonly identified with outdoor cleaning in housing co-operatives, but is also used in many other settings. The word *dugnadsånd* is translatable to ‘the spirit of willingness to work together for a better community’. During the Corona situation, the word is ‘everywhere’ and countless new combinations of the word have been created (for example *Corona-dugnad for digital teachers*). The word is also frequently used by politicians and media. Our prime minister repeatedly calls the response to the crisis a *nasjonal dugnad* to emphasise the importance of everyone doing their share. The voluntary nature of *dugnad* might, however, be better described as quasi-mandatory, since not participating does have social consequences. *Dugnad* is therefore also used as a way to monitor each other, for example, in social media.

The biggest change to my work is that I now work from home, meeting and communicating with colleagues (and friends) entirely online. I have no access to campus unless I need to get something from my office. The impact of this change is perhaps also the most surprising. To work from home has usually been an enabler for me to do research-related work. The home office has worked as a welcome contrast to busy days in the office. When the Corona crisis hit, one of my (selfish) thoughts was that it might actually lead to some extra time. However, working alone *from* home is of course very different from working *at* home in the same space as the whole family of five, and it is no longer a ‘distraction-free’ zone. Work efficiency dropped considerably, and I have had to work on recreating some functionable working arrangements. We have created five working stations in the house, and each morning my husband and I synchronise today’s meeting schedule (which meetings require the office, and which can be done in the living room or in the bedroom if some of the kids have moved to the common areas). Most importantly, however, I try to define in my daily schedule when it is time for work, home schooling, meals, exercise, and family time. I also need to be very aware of when to read news (and when not to read). This all sounds good in theory, but it is not always easy to follow. Many days I find myself in a blur of work and household activities, leaving me with a feeling at the end of the day that all I do is work but at the same time feeling that I have achieved very little.

If I look at my practices, many of the things I do can still be done almost as before, for example, research activities with international colleagues. Also, in my unit, we already had well established digital collaboration practices after we started to use Microsoft Teams about a year ago. Although this was a major advantage, we have still had to make some changes when we suddenly lost the possibility to meet each other in person, in particular how we conduct and chair meetings. We have learned to use more of the available digital tools provided by the video conference platforms to engage participants. Also, digital meetings need a tighter structure, and generally the meetings have become shorter and often more effective, in that we are clearer about what we have achieved and how to proceed after the meeting. Within the new conditions we have been forced to think more about how we do things rather than just continue to do as we usually do.

I do, however, find the lack of human connection challenging. Without the possibility for a chat at the coffee machine or a laugh around the lunch table, I feel kind of drained of energy. The informal meeting places have been partly replaced by a social channel on *Teams* to share ‘fun stuff’ and *Zoom* coffee chats, but it does not replace the energy I usually get from meeting colleagues and friends face to face. I am also often too tired from the day’s digital meetings to join the zoom chats (another digital meeting). As many of my colleagues are feeling the same way, we have just introduced walk-and-talk when the meeting form allows it. While this might be a reasonable temporary replacement, I cannot wait to be able to return to my office and meet my colleagues again.

*A story from Finland*

My job includes managing an art-research project looking at *relational wellbeing* in the lives of young refugees in Finland, Norway, and the UK. Many of the practices of starting a project have been unchanged with the COVID-19; I can continue writing ethics applications, refining research instruments, and contacting stakeholders and gatekeepers as usual. Some other practices have needed rethinking: I have had to plan how to recruit without meeting participants; how to appear as a nice, approachable, and friendly (i.e. human) researcher virtually; and how to move art-making online, if needed. These are manageable challenges, but the situation has also pushed me to rethink some of the more fundamental questions related to the substance of our study. As people’s ‘real’ relationships turn into virtual ones, I am learning (but I don’t know yet) what happens to the relational wellbeing. Will people’s relationships reduce in quality and quantity or will they just change their form? What kind of wellness can virtual ties create, and for whom? Perhaps most importantly, I will probably find out what this forced physical distancing may mean for our research participants, young refugees who have already been forcibly moved from their home countries and away from their relationships. On the other hand, I have often felt that the gap between my experiences as a privileged white Finnish woman, and of those who participate in my research, is too big to allow us to fully understand each other. Now I feel, for a moment, that the experience of the Corona puts us on the same boat: the everyday practices that matter for us all, of being with others, have equally changed for us. So, while my immediate learning has changed the practicalities of starting this research, enabling us to launch the study in the best possible way, the more interesting, yet-to-come changes might fundamentally change my understanding of the focus and my positionality in this study.

Another big change is that my work has moved home. Like many other academics, I homeschool, feed, and care for young children during the days. Things got easier when most Finnish schools started providing lunches for students. Microwavable lunches add an hour of work time, but they are also crucial for many families’ wellbeing. The days start by going through the timetables and tasks for us all. Then, after breakfast, we withdraw into separate corners, getting on with our meetings and online tasks as much as our shared wifi allows (not enough). Most of

my time is spent hopping between the four children making sure all understand and stay on task. Then, if things go well, I might sneak in some work time before preparing lunch. Zoom-meetings offer welcome punctuation for the days, as physically distant colleagues enter my living room. My children, dog, and partner also make involuntary visits to these same meetings. This all has blurred the boundaries between free- and work-time, family- and work-communities, and, overall, my public and private life.

The situation has condensed most of my work into short bursts of activity, taking place in early mornings and late nights, and my desire or need to work at any other time makes me almost feel guilty. Chats with colleagues in other life situations remind me that during COVID-19, our everyday lives really divide us more than before: some feel they now have more time and space for creative work. Others are struggling to keep their heads above water. For parents with young children, the requirement and the will for being creative and productive may be the same, but space and quiet time enabling this is gone.

While most of the work gets done online, sometimes in the wee hours, I have realised getting work done is not enough. The situation highlights how the communal aspects really make this work worthwhile, and how we *feel* about the work we do. I miss spending quality time and properly meeting, in person, people I enjoy meeting. I miss being able to supervise doctoral students face to face, reading their body language and other non-verbal cues of how they are doing. I am privileged to have colleagues who I want to be able to get together with, shake hands (without gloves), hug, eat together, have a beer together, sit at the same table, and work closely together, but this is now gone. Strangely, this forced distance feels particularly hard in our international Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) research network, which functions largely online anyway. Although the relationships in PEP have a long history of maintaining their high quality without frequent face to face meetings, knowing that we *can't* meet makes me feel the loss in new ways. How long will this situation last? Do we learn to keep important work relationships alive and functional with only virtual connections? We don't know, but we are doing our best to change our practices to adapt to the new arrangements. So, the most significant changes brought by the COVID-19 are the practical challenges of starting a new research project, the blurring lines between private and personal time/space/community, and the lack of physical contact with people I enjoy spending time with. How leaders in different universities understand these changing conditions seems to differ. In one big university, staff were urged to take advantage of the 'newly freed time' to read books, write articles, and apply for grants. Understandably, this caused reactions among staff whose time was reduced rather than freed, and who thought that reading, writing, and applying for grants should be part of the academic workload anyway. In my university, it is acknowledged that some of us might need to prioritise and do only what is needed. I can also see collegial helping unlike before: people with more IT-skills to assist in online teaching, or people in easier home situations who step up to help those in need. The spirit referred to as *dugnad* in Norway gets reawakened in Finnish crisis

times too, under the title of *talkoot* (unpaid, often semi-mandatory work for the common good). My university's staff meetings also reveal the anxiety of people in managerial and administrative positions, who on the one hand face the struggle of the workers at the moment, but on the other, understand the even greater struggle that the declining economy will cause. The common message seems to be that universities' functions will be secured; that teaching, research, and engagement will continue; and that we will get over this. I recognise that I am in a privileged position to be able to collaborate with people I like and, while distance does not stop it, distance does take some of the fun out of it. We are all learning how to make research network meetings collaborative and fruitful when working from a distance and across different time zones. We are also considering what we can let go while still keeping what matters in our shared work. At the same time, I am hoping that the rapid changes in arrangements that have been imposed on us by the crisis will push us to learn more environmentally-sustainable practices that we can maintain after the crisis passes. And I will enjoy work even more when we return to the communal aspects of life in the face-to-face world, or if I can learn to be equally satisfied with meeting my communities online.

#### *A story from Sweden*

A few months ago, the words 'green level', 'yellow level' and 'red level' meant nothing to me. Now they signal how dramatically daily operations have changed at my university, like elsewhere in Sweden. My university is officially operating, for now at least, at a 'yellow level' in a three-level system put in place locally to signify the level of response to the virus. 'Yellow level' means that activities shift to online mode where possible, and the campus is closed to the public. So, university activities are continuing on a very restricted basis, and my colleagues and I are primarily working from home, while students are studying at a 'distance'. Staff and students were receiving regular updates from the University's 'crisis group' (established to make decisions about the University's response to government measures and advice), but there have been very few updates in the past three weeks, suggesting that we have now settled into new routines.

When the decision was made to move to 'yellow level', there was a mad flurry of activity to digitise all classes and interactions with students. For those working in some discipline areas, online mode is the usual *modus operandi*, but for many others, digital lessons are a very new phenomenon. The sudden shift to digital education thus sparked frantic efforts to become familiar with a whole new set of technologies and ways of teaching. All this was aimed at allowing students and staff to continue working/studying safely at a distance, so students would not miss a beat in their education.

I work in an education department that is responsible, among other things, for professional learning opportunities and pedagogical courses for university staff. Those in my department specialising in digital education found themselves, not surprisingly, working around the clock to support others who were completely new to the world of online learning and teaching. Despite having some

previous experience myself of online teaching in a former workplace, like many of my colleagues across the university, I took online ‘crash courses’ and did all manner of things to help make a very quick transition to ‘distance’ mode. This included reading what I could about, and experimenting with, online lectures, using ‘breakout rooms’ for group work in Zoom, and using the tools in my university’s learning platform more creatively, for instance. It also included developing some video-recorded lectures for which I hope course participants will forgive me, and that I never want to look at again. I have been lucky in a sense that assessment and many activities in the pedagogical courses I teach are somewhat manageable in an online environment. Those teaching in subjects that rely on laboratories, specialist equipment, community engagement, and/or industry/practicum placements, for instance, have had the added challenges of working out how to foster learning, assess students fairly, and make it possible for students to meet course requirements without access to certain resources, people, and experiences. Despite the challenges, and perhaps past reservations and nervousness about online learning, it seems that my teaching colleagues and I are just getting on with the job of digitising almost everything. People are doing the best they can.

The directive for staff to work from home *if possible* came some time after we had been on ‘yellow level’. I believe the idea behind it was to allow those who need to work on campus to do so without coming into unnecessary contact with others. I have been one of those needing to work on campus occasionally, for example, on days when I have needed stable, reliable internet connection for extended periods (i.e., all day teaching in Zoom). I am not the only one, it seems, and when I have encountered others (mostly administrative staff), the short conversations at a ‘safe distance’ have been very strange indeed.

Coping with the lack of regular face-to-face contact with colleagues has been the most challenging part of the working-at-a-distance experience. Our relationships at work, and our collaborative endeavours, have, traditionally, been an important part of what makes our work meaningful, sustaining, and fun. ‘Online *fikas*’ (morning/afternoon coffee) emerged in the early ‘yellow level’ days as a new arrangement for catching up socially and for light relief from the gravity and isolating effects of our circumstances. My immediate supervisor introduced daily online *fikas* each day via Zoom, and staff are welcome to drop in online if they wish. This perhaps provides a way for him to ‘check in’ on his staff and make sure that all are OK, in the way he might have formerly popped his head into people’s offices on his way through the corridor of an afternoon, but I am sure it has been an important opportunity for some to stay connected with others during this time of profoundly changed arrangements.

Researching-at-a-distance has not meant such a significant shift in practice, partly because much of my research work is with international colleagues, and we already rely extensively on digital communication. However, research activity locally has been slowed somewhat because people’s (collaborators/potential collaborators) workloads have intensified, and their priorities have changed. My own research activity has also been squeezed even further into late night and



weekend spaces in favour of urgent teaching tasks. A further change has been widespread cancellation of conferences and national or international meetings, and for some conferences, a speedy conversion to digital mode. I never thought I would consider it myself, but there I was, late last week, with colleagues (online) trying to work out how we can turn an annual face to face symposium later in the year into an online event. We hope it won't come to that, but we will probably do it (if it becomes necessary) rather than postpone and lose the momentum created by previous years' symposia conversations.

*A story from Australia*

For people living in Australia, the Coronavirus came shortly after the most destructive bushfires the country had ever experienced. From December through until the rains came in late January, there were out of control bushfires in at least one area of Australia and often hundreds at the same time. About seventy people died, thousands of homes were destroyed or damaged, and most of the population was impacted to a greater or lesser extent by smoke that was hundreds of times above safe levels to breathe. At our university, all-staff bushfire messages finished in late January, to be replaced by all-staff COVID-19 messages from February 17. Australians had thus been emotionally impacted even before we were faced with the impact of the Coronavirus.

I began to work from home two weeks before it was required. Permission was required to do this. However, there was no resistance to my decision, I just needed to fill in some related documentation. This is indicative of changed administrative practices that have occurred during the pandemic. Practices that had in the past been difficult to change because of administrative constraints have now become more flexible. I soon realised that it would be easier to work if I took home some equipment from my university office (an ergonomic chair, two screens, a docking station for my laptop). Because I'd moved early there were no restrictions on returning to the office to get what I needed. In the past, I worked on the kitchen table when working at home; once the arrangement became more permanent, I was able to turn a spare room into an office relatively easily, knowing there would be no visitors for some time.

I usually teach entirely online, and so have not experienced the difficulties related to a rapid move to online teaching that others have. Where appropriate, I have assisted others to make the transition to online teaching, but this has not been demanding because the university has a strong online learning support system of people whose role is to help academics teach online. These education designers are now being overloaded, and are working long hours to try to meet the changed needs. Discussions with people from other universities reveal that some academics are finding themselves entirely on their own in navigating the move to online teaching. I live three hours' drive from the city where the rest of my school is located (my 'home campus'—my office is at a different campus of the university, in the city where I live), so am accustomed to limited face-to-face interaction with my work colleagues. Over the years, I have managed this separation through travelling to my

home campus about every six weeks for four days, and maximising interaction during those times. All other interactions were via irregular phone calls with my teaching team, or Zoom meetings with my research teams. During the Coronavirus pandemic, my colleagues are finding themselves more isolated, and have arranged Zoom meetings and Zoom 'coffee chats'. As a consequence, on a day to day basis, I am having more interaction with colleagues than ever before.

Prior to the pandemic, I had just begun to re-establish productive working strategies after the impact of the December-January bushfires (our holiday house was partly burnt in the fires, and we are still working with insurance companies and builders to manage repairs). These re-established strategies were beginning to secure the exercise I needed, the meal arrangements that worked for me, and the work that I needed to complete. The changes to these arrangements as a result of the pandemic caused further disruption. Especially in the beginning, motivation became an issue. I was also not getting the exercise I needed, meal arrangements had altered, and in the short term my productivity decreased.

Some prior research plans have needed to be altered. Rather than trying to undertake site visits in alternative ways, I have postponed them. Depending on how long we are impacted by the changed conditions, this might mean the research timeline is extended. I am focusing instead on analysing other forms of data gathered. Our university is providing research grants for Coronavirus-related research, and so this has provided other opportunities.

In the first draft of this case story, I did not include the emotional and motivational impact of the pandemic and the associated changes. On reflection, however, it became apparent that part of the changes that have occurred involve the blurring of the personal and the professional. There have been a number of personal things that have impacted on my ability to fulfil my role as an academic. Time is now being taken up in different ways. Mundane day-to-day things are impacting on the time available for other things. For instance, after an unsuccessful foray into online grocery shopping, time now needs to be devoted to sometimes waiting in line outside the supermarket so that spatial distancing can be maintained inside the supermarket. Then when the shopping is brought home, all items need to be washed down. Supporting adult children to manage their own changes at this time takes time and emotional energy that might otherwise have been devoted to my work (I am not suggesting that I regret this, just identifying it as a relevant factor). The death of a previously fit and healthy acquaintance due to COVID-19 was a shock that impacted on my motivation to work. In this time of lockdown, where most other activities are curtailed, I find myself intermittently in the garden throughout my working day. This has led to insights that have informed the writing and teaching that I have been doing, and I suspect these insights may not have emerged otherwise.

At a broad level the economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic is impacting on arrangements within the university where I am employed, as well as across the Australian university sector more broadly. Some universities are decreasing the availability of internal research grants, and together with the

expected decrease in grants from government and business sources, these changes will impact research for some time to come. Management across the Australian university sector are also identifying the likelihood of staff layoffs, decreased hours for some staff, and an across the board salary reduction for all staff. Academics are aware that if they lose their jobs at one university their chances of getting one at another university are minimal. These discussions increase the uncertainties inherent in the present environment.

### **Practising differently amidst existing and changed practice architectures**

In these four case stories, we see how profoundly the *everyday lives and practices* of these academics changed in the time of the Coronavirus. In the discussion that follows, we explore these changes, and the academics' learning, in conversation with the theory of practice architectures. We focus, in particular, on working from home, working online, some new discourses framing our work, and changed relationships.

#### *Working in alternative spaces (material-economic arrangements)*

An obvious change to the everyday life and practices of these four academics was related to working from their home rather than from a university office. For many academics already doing some work at home, the physical transition was relatively easy, helped by the fact that the protagonists in our four case stories had infrastructure in place that could, generally speaking, accommodate the move to a home office and online teaching and collaboration. The material and relational affordances of each individual's home as a workspace varied considerably across cases, however. In relation to physical arrangements, this included basic furniture such as a suitable desk and chair, adequate computer equipment, and adequate wifi sufficient to meet needs for internet access for two adults and several children working and studying from home. It also included access to a physical space where work could be undertaken. From the perspective of the theory of practice architectures, then, everyday academic practices were no longer enabled and constrained by the arrangements found in academics' university offices, amidst the resources, facilities, and equipment provided by the university. Instead, academic work was conducted in competition with the everyday practices of home and family life: making meals, watching TV, using social media via devices, getting children out of bed in the morning, and so on.

The practice architectures that provided conditions of possibility for academic work in the office were replaced by practice architectures designed to support the practices of home life. And so academic practices were *practised differently* from home—for example, to fit around home schooling and family management practices through which parents supported their children. In two case stories, working from home under these circumstances meant that people had to create new arrangements to accommodate all members of the family, such as a

coordinated timetable for work, homeschooling, meals, and social time. These changed practice architectures reshaped the sayings, doings, and relatings of academics' practices: what was said, and how it was said, in academic practices; where and when things were done, and the ways they were done; and how people related to one another and the world around them. There were new limits on how teaching was practised, for example, when a university teacher could now connect with students only in the late evening or the early morning.

There was variation across the case stories in the extent to which the university supported academics working from home. The academic in the Australian case took an ergonomic chair, computer monitors, and other office equipment home to support working from home. The academic in the Swedish case still had access to her university office, with the usual university infrastructure; she divided her time between the office and home. The Finnish academic could book a time to go to the university to print documents, but work had to be done from home. The Norwegian academic (like the Australian), had no access to university offices except under special circumstances. The onus was on the academics to ensure they could work effectively from home, with appropriate ergonomic furniture, computers, monitors, and wifi infrastructure—that is, the universities expected that the relevant academic practices could be transferred to academics' homes (perhaps even expecting the same work capacity), but they did not unambiguously take responsibility for ensuring that the appropriate practice architectures were in place to support working from home. (Some private Nordic firms, by contrast, paid staff working from home an amount of money sufficient to ensure that they could purchase needed equipment, furniture and infrastructure.)

Perhaps the most dramatic shift caused by the pandemic, was the shift to working almost entirely online. The Swedish case story describes how many academics had to change from teaching almost solely in face-to-face mode to teaching completely online, some for the very first time, and some with students who were not familiar with formal online learning arrangements. By contrast, in the Australian case story, teaching was already entirely online. In the Norwegian example, there was a shift from just a few staff, to all staff teaching online; that is, the practice architectures of a small-scale project exploring digital teaching prefigured the response when all teaching had to go online. In the Finnish case story, doctoral supervision was no longer conducted face-to-face, but instead online. The shift to working online meant that some academics were being stirred into (Kemmis et al., 2014) a new discourse about teaching online (sayings), new ways of using technology for the various aspects of educational work (doings), and new ways of relating to students, colleagues, and others digitally (relatings). Others, by contrast, were already experienced in teaching online, and did not need to modify their teaching practices to the same extent (although some now became facilitators of learning to teach online for their less experienced online colleagues).

In all four case stories, meetings with colleagues shifted online; indeed, most collaboration and communication with colleagues occurred via digital platforms or by phone. This led to changes in the frequency, structure, and formality

of various kinds of meetings, with more explicit practices of managing participation than in the former physical meetings.

One might say that the online shift led to some of our academic practices—teaching, researching, working with colleagues—becoming ‘disembodied’ to the extent that we lost the tactile, face-to-face, aspect of the practice. Non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, and body language were now processed via video on a computer screen with possibly blurry images and ‘hakkete’ (Norwegian for ‘breaking up’) sound due to unstable internet connections.

*New discourses framing our work (cultural-discursive arrangements)*

In a very short space of time, the discourses framing our working lives changed. In addition to the online discourses mentioned above, one obvious example is the academic language of *epidemiology*. People were required to learn about epidemiology (and the meaning of the word for a start), for example, to understand what Novel Coronavirus and COVID-19 are and mean. The specialist discourse of public health, unfamiliar to most of us just two months ago, became part of our everyday language, such as ‘social distancing’, ‘self-isolation’, ‘flattening the curve’, ‘herd immunity’, and the basic reproduction number  $R_0$ .

We also became familiar with languages of *crisis management* and emergency response. That the Swedish university raised its emergency level to ‘yellow’, that Norway and Finland introduced the ‘most serious restrictions ever in peacetime’, and that ‘lives and livelihoods’ could no longer be taken for granted (Australia) reminded us that we were in a global crisis. It also reminded us that the crisis was managed by politicians and leaders and that our task was to stay up to date and comply with the changes required.

Part of the language of crisis management was language used to build community spirit and to emphasise the importance that each and everyone participates. In Australia, the expression ‘we’re all in this together’ was used; in Norway, people and politicians used the word and tradition of *dugnad* to justify the restrictions that closed down the society, but also to monitor that the restrictions were followed. The Finnish word *talkoot* has a similar meaning, and was appropriated for the COVID-19 discourse. In Finland, nationwide *talkoot* was previously called for mostly in times of war, most famously during the Winter War of 1939-1940 with Russia. In Sweden, there is no exact equivalent for *dugnad* or *talkoot*, but leaders appealed to citizens to use ‘common sense’ and take ‘individual responsibility’. These are examples of known words and expressions that have been politicised, or given new inflections of meaning, during the Corona crisis. It might also be the case that *dugnad* or *talkoot* or ‘being in this together’ were not voluntary at all, but rather were aimed at achieving a kind of ‘forced solidarity’ so populations would comply with the new restrictions. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the crisis brought out extraordinary voluntary expressions of community spirit and communal care from people acting with great compassion for others.

*Changed relationships at work—and at home (social-political arrangements)*

Almost overnight, we academics were obliged to relate to others differently. We met our colleagues only via digital technologies, and spent most of our time with the family (at least mostly being in the same physical space). For some working relationships, collaborating digitally was the norm since before the Coronavirus crisis, as was the case for our international collaboration through the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) research network to which we all belong. Most of our other academic relationships, however, were previously based on face-to-face collaboration and meeting colleagues in the staff room or corridor (for example). Creating conditions of possibility for continuing collegial friendships and academic solidarities through the crisis time involved creating digital replacements for on-campus social spaces (Zoom coffee breaks, for example) and new ways of meeting (such as walk-and-talk).

The changes in relationships accompanying the pandemic threw into sharp relief the amount of *emotional work* academics was obliged to do to cope with the crisis. One aspect of this was the greater attention university teachers gave to looking after students, responding to their situations and vulnerabilities, and trying to help them towards success in their studies. Likewise, those of us who do research with vulnerable populations, such as refugee children and youth, now sensed that their vulnerabilities were heightened, and felt responsibility to look after them.

Another aspect was supporting colleagues, for example those inexperienced with online teaching. But there was also recognition that some academic colleagues live alone, and may have found isolation ('iso' as it is sometimes called in Australia) challenging to endure; many people stayed connected to ensure that isolated academic colleagues did not become anxious or depressed.

Still another aspect was looking after children at home, while working from home, and while working early mornings and late nights to get academic work done. Established patterns of working relationships were disrupted, and it required a considerable emotional investment to maintain or retain the kinds of relationships we previously took for granted as appropriate in relation to students, colleagues, and family.

*The boundaries between the professional and the private*

Working from home meant that the boundaries between the professional and the private became blurred, which in turn led to changed relations. Video conferences brought us directly into people's home offices, living rooms, and even bedrooms, often with a child, a spouse, or a pet sneaking into the picture. That might not have been very different from how we previously connected with some of our closest colleagues, but the difference now was that all meetings potentially brought what was previously private into a public space.

There was also something socially- and psychologically-flattening for each of us as we participated in all meetings, with everyone, from the same physical places at home. (No wonder that some people wear silly hats to meetings to break

the monotony! Or that some people have found the benefits of virtual backgrounds in Zoom!) ‘Zoom fatigue’ was a trending expression through April—describing the draining effect video meetings have on us.

Despite these changes, we were aware that we were privileged to have work, to be able to work from home, and to have the facilities available to us that enabled this to happen.

### **What have we been learning?**

It is clear from the case stories that we as academics were learning many things in order to continue our academic practices through the crisis, but we also learned to *practise differently* under changed conditions. A few of the many things we learned to practise differently include:

- to adapt to not being able to meet colleagues face-to-face, and instead meet and understand them in online spaces;
- to facilitate student and staff teams not in person, but in online mode;
- to use new technological tools (like breakout rooms in Zoom instead of breaking up into small groups in a classroom) to support effective teaching that facilitates students’ learning;
- to recruit research participants not in person, but through phone and video meetings;
- to do our work not from our own offices and workplaces, but in workspaces at home which are shared with partners and children; and
- to support our children’s learning not just before and after they go to school, but also through the working day - and to facilitate their home schooling.

The work sites, composed of previously taken-for-granted practice architectures (offices, infrastructure, etc.), changed, and we were obliged to adapt our practices to working from home, with its different, and sometimes inferior (e.g., wifi and internet speeds) practice architectures. Nevertheless, the academics in this study were largely successful in making the transition, although not without some missteps (for example, in hesitantly learning to use new online tools), and with some regrets (for example, missing working alongside colleagues in familiar workplaces).

In some ways, our learning in this time could be viewed as somewhat instrumental since, at least initially, it involved reacting to changed conditions and the focus was on things like the technical aspects of online learning. But our learning endeavours aimed beyond merely having the next lesson prepared, or finding the most effective tool to complete a job. Rather, like many of our colleagues, we were committed to holding on to what is most important to us in our work as academics—doing meaningful, productive, praxis-oriented work, and interacting and connecting with people in meaningful ways, even when our

conditions were turned on their head. This was evident in what we tried to recreate in our altered arrangements, and the new or reoriented practice architectures that emerged. The learning we have described was guided by deep underlying commitments to the people with whom and for whom we work, and a motivation to do the best job we can in our circumstances, whilst also maintaining the relationships we hold dear in our personal lives. This is why we are now trying to understand what has happened and what we have been doing. Although, in some respects, we did what we were told to do, we found ways to act with the choices and capacities we have to fulfil our commitments, despite the tensions, and not dismissing the possibility that we could continue to fight for what will remain important in our work when we emerge from the Coronavirus crisis. In this way, our sense of self as academics has been strengthened by what we have experienced.

### *Resituating learning*

In the introduction we referred to Lave's (2019) view of learning. Her view is that learning (1) is evident in, and shaped by, people's everyday life and practices; (2) is shaped by people's participation in communities of practice, for example, in workplaces, families, and educational settings; and (3) occurs in relation to the changing cultural, material, social conditions that prevail as people participate in everyday life; so that (4) people's very identities bear the traces of how and what they have learned under these cultural, material, and social conditions (shaping their language, their activities, and their ways of relating to others and the world). Lave claims that knowledge, or, better, knowing, is a social process, and that it is *situated* in everyday lives; in communities of practice; that it is embedded in cultural, material and social conditions; and that it shapes and reshapes identities.

On the basis of the case stories and analysis presented here, we also see learning going on in order to *resituate* practices into new or changed practice architectures, and dramatically changed times and circumstances. Resituating practices may be on a spectrum that goes from varying a practice a little, for example, to play this tune on a different piano keyboard, to varying it very significantly, like playing the tune on a trumpet instead of a piano. Many of the transitions we have considered here are examples of significant variations. Academic practices were uprooted from their usual sites in the office, classrooms, and research sites of the university, and transplanted into our homes and virtual space. Sometimes the shift was not too onerous (as in the shift to Zoom meetings when we were already adept at Zoom meetings), but sometimes the shift was more precarious and less guaranteed of success (for example, when people without a history of online teaching were thrust into it, or when research that depended on warm personal relationships with refugee children had to proceed not in person but rather via more impersonal means like telephones and video-meetings).

We know that a tree or shrub that prospers in one location in a garden may take years to recover when transplanted to another location, perhaps with a different orientation to the sun, different patterns of sun and shade, different soil, different



exposure to winds and cold. We think there is power in this analogy for academic practices: what went well in the office or classroom may not go so well from home or online. Yet the academics in the case stories did their best to learn *to practise differently* under the new circumstances of the time of the Coronavirus, and they did their best to *resituate* their practices so they could be sustained in new sites in ways that do not diminish *the meaningful* in academic work.

But we could argue that this is exactly what is demanded of academics in non-pandemic circumstances: to be responsive to changing conditions and circumstances (even if the changes are less visible or less profoundly disruptive) and to create conditions of possibility for learning and human flourishing (including in the face of adversity). We suggest that this is part of what it means to engage in academic practice as ‘critical pedagogical praxis’ (Mahon, 2014): a kind of practice aimed, among other things, at creating spaces in which untoward or unsustainable practices and arrangements can be ‘understood and reoriented, and in which new possibilities for action can emerge and be enacted’ (Mahon, 2014, p. 4). That the unthinkable so quickly became realities in the corona pandemic, highlights not only how responsive, resourceful, and proactive academics can be, but also that university practice architectures, which appear to be unchangeable and inevitable, may be more malleable than we think. This is a source of hope for those deeply concerned about the present state of affairs in higher education and striving to change prevailing conditions.

## **Conclusion**

Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, many academic practices were rapidly transformed. In our case stories, we saw academics becoming more acutely aware of the need to connect and communicate with, and to contribute to, the students, disciplines, professions, and communities they serve. In the pandemic crisis, we saw academics self-organising so that the real work of the university—teaching, research, and community outreach—would survive and flourish in the time of the Coronavirus. This required unforeseeably rapid change in what we do and how we do it, and the associated learning to enable those changes to take place. Within the rapid changes needed to ensure that we were able to continue to do our work, we both experienced and witnessed academics recovering not only the lifeworlds that make academic work meaningful, efficacious, and valuable, but also the forms of collective decision-making that historically preceded the rise of executive management and decision making in the contemporary neoliberal university.

When the crisis of the pandemic passes, and we return to working from our offices and other spaces in the university, what features of our resituated practices will we preserve from the working-from-home time? For example, the pandemic has shown us that we may previously have taken our collegial relationships for granted; we have learned to value collegial solidarity more greatly since we have been obliged to endure the disembodied communication of the

working-from-home era. We have experimented with online seminars and conferences that have proven to be fruitful; perhaps this habit will stay, reducing our need to travel.

The case stories reported here suggest that the time of Coronavirus has helped renew the communitarian character of academic life in the contexts in which we work. In learning to practise academic life and work differently, resituating our practices to work from home and virtually, we also recovered what we most value in academic life and work: its intrinsically communitarian character. This is a timely reminder that academic work is founded in communities of practice in the disciplines, in the professions, in our work with students, and in academic communities within the university and in the local and global communities beyond. Our hope is that, as the pandemic crisis passes, and drawing on what they have learnt in the crisis, academic staff in universities will further nurture and develop the praxis-oriented, communitarian character of academic life.

## **Author biographies**

*Ela Sjølie*, PhD, is Associate Professor of Education at NTNU, Norway working in the area of teaching and learning in higher education. Her research interests include student active learning and collaborative learning, as well as student learning in higher education more broadly. Ela is involved in several international projects and networks, including the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis research network. Her international work focusses particularly on practice theory and action research, and academic practices in higher education.

*Susanne Francisco* has worked in universities, schools and Vocational Education and Training organisations, and now works as a teacher educator in Adult and Vocational Education at Charles Sturt University, Australia. She has also held research positions and professional development roles in the Australian Commonwealth government. Her research interests include: workbased learning; mentoring; Continuing Professional Learning; the learning of casual employees; and leading teaching and learning in adult and vocational education. Susanne is a member of the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis international research network.

*Kathleen Mahon* is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Librarianship, Information, Education and IT at the University of Borås in Sweden, and an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia. She has taught in universities, secondary schools and outdoor education centres in various Australian states. Kathleen is a member of the Pedagogy Education and Praxis research network and is actively involved in cross-national projects related to teacher education and higher education. Her research interests include educational and research praxis, higher education pedagogy, the professional learning of teachers, and practice theory. Kathleen's doctoral research examined how critical pedagogical praxis is nurtured in higher education.

*Mervi Kaukko* is an Associate Professor at Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University, Finland and a Docent at Oulu University, Finland. Mervi's current research projects focus on Relational Wellbeing of Young Refugees in Finland, Norway and the UK, and the Practice Architectures of multicultural schools in Finland. Previously Mervi has worked as a lecturer at Monash University, Australia and University of Oulu, Finland.

*Stephen Kemmis* is Professor Emeritus in the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia. He is co-author with Wilfred Carr of *Becoming Critical: Knowledge, Education and Action Research* and, with Robin McTaggart and Rhonda Nixon, of *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. His recent writings on practice theory and the theories of practice architectures and ecologies of practices include Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Grootenboer, P. and Bristol, L. *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Stephen was one of the co-founders of the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis international research network, and continues to be a member.

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