

Editorial

Building Supportive Research Communities

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Writing and literacy skill development are continuous learning processes that require ongoing support and mentorship. The understanding that we are always developing new literacy skills and that we are always in need of supportive communities needs to extend to postsecondary education, and to graduate and postgraduate studies in particular. The challenge is that seeking academic support is often framed around a deficit model of learning where there is a flaw or ‘problem’ (Wellington, 2010) needing to be mediated or fixed with the student and their ability to write and/or conduct research when they seek guidance. A more progressive, developmental, or even constructivist approach to learning, where skills can be nurtured through mentorship, is a more supportive and productive strategy.

From my experience working with hundreds of graduate students over the past few years, there appears to be a gap between what is expected of students and the academic support systems that are in place at universities to ensure that students can succeed. I have noticed that many graduate students struggle with writing and in many different ways. However, students are identifying a lack of academic support services necessary to help them develop, improve, and practice their research and writing skills. It is generally assumed that students arrive at graduate school with the necessary skills to complete their thesis, write proposals, and publish articles, as well as many other genre-specific tasks. However, the level of training required to effectively write a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation is not usually effectively incorporated in one’s previous undergraduate studies. Whose responsibility is it to help prepare students for the literacy demands they might encounter at different stages of their life and in different environments for many different purposes?

Communicating through multiple modes and for different audiences is not an intuitive practice for many people. It is very difficult to transfer knowledge and skills from one context and/or environment to another (Rogers & Rymer, 2001). There is always a need for a supportive community in academia, even for professors (Grant, 2006). Students in particular though are always learning new genres of writing and new ways of communicating or engaging with others. Graduate students are continuously entering into new discourse communities (Bean, 2008) and/or transitioning between ones that have firm roots and foundations. Having a supportive and productive group of motivated and curious individuals beside you, or navigating through a similar process as you, can make this a much less intimidating adventure. Literacies are collaborative and community-based activities, and being surrounded by others, even if in silence, can often help someone get beyond that stuck moment, the procrastination, or the fear of confronting feedback from reviewers or a supervisor. The reality is that all students at all levels of study can greatly benefit from having an ongoing supportive research community of fellow learners who are on a similar learning adventure.

As someone highly involved in my graduate student community, I have organized numerous academic events for graduate students on my university campus, including writing retreats (both on and off campus), writing blocks (where students meet routinely to discuss their work and then work independently in a supportive and productive space), a writing consultation program (where graduate student Writing Advisors are available to meet with other graduate students that have questions about their writing by appointment for a one hour meeting on campus), conversation groups (where students work on improving their French and/or English oral communication skills), interdisciplinary conferences, and series of academic events filled with workshops and a variety of innovative activities focusing on everything from mindfulness practices and mental health to open access publishing, citation

management tools, research ethics, and academic integrity. Throughout all of these activities, I aspire to reach many of the same ideals that you might find in literacy programs aimed at helping students excel, including fostering supportive and ‘safer’ spaces, providing resources that students can self-select, offering opportunities for autonomy and self-directed learning which is balanced with peer-to-peer support and instructor-led interventions. I also strive to offer students tools that can promote self-reflection and goal-setting, such that they can continue their practices outside of the environment we create collectively. Modelling how supportive learning environments function can help us better understand how self-regulated learning takes shape and what life-long learning looks like.

While developing these activities, I consulted a diverse body of literature on writing groups for graduate students and the need for pedagogy to support doctoral students’ dissertation writing. Much of this work highly correlates with the work I aim to do through this journal. Researchers exploring the academic needs of new scholars have considered, for instance, academic literacies and writing as a socially-situated practice (Aitchison, 2009; Maher et al, 2008), the roles of ‘communities of practice’ and needing a supplement to the student-supervisor role (Cotterall, 2011; Li & Vandermensbrugge, 2011), the importance of feedback (Cotterall, 2011; Ferguson, 2009; Li & Vandermensbrugge, 2011; Wang & Li, 2011), how to increase productivity and develop a positive sense of self as a writer (Ferguson, 2009; Grant, 2006; Maher et al, 2008), the challenges of entering into new discourse communities and engaging with genre-specific writing (Bean, 2008; Beck & Jeffery, 2009; Carter, 2011), how learning to improve one’s writing can be challenging for graduate students (Diezmann, 2005; Wellington, 2010; Wisker & Savin-Baden, 2009), and the different approaches graduate students use during the writing process (Gill et al, 2008; Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007).

There can be quite a bit of pressure to publish in academia (Lee & Kalmer, 2008), but not all students have access to the resources that can help them develop and fine-tune their writing skills, and eventually publish and disseminate their research. As a doctoral candidate myself, I am actively working towards building supportive research communities in my faculty, my university community, and in the educational research community more broadly, since I think they have immense potential for all participants. What I appreciate about la *Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheur.e.s en éducation* / the *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education* is that graduate students and new scholars can submit work that is in development and in need of additional direction, guidance, and support prior to publication. This journal is an innovative environment for these conversations and exchanges. It is an interesting learning experience to have the opportunity to discuss research that falls outside of one’s typical areas of interest with an author. Being able to navigate the representation of that research together requires a relationship of trust and respect. Together with and as new scholars, we can discuss how to effectively introduce what might be a new context or aspect of educational research for many readers and how to communicate and share a researcher’s position and experiences. Perhaps more importantly though, we have a chance to discuss how an author can give a glimpse into a researcher’s data collection process, how an author can bring someone along through the sharing and unpacking of findings, and the importance of noting possible contributions of the research to different individuals and communities, so that connections can continue to be made by readers who can now extrapolate from the work and apply what they have learned to other contexts.

In This Issue

In this issue, we are presenting the work of a group of graduate students and new scholars that have participated in a mentorship process to help develop their skills as writers and researchers. However, we have been working with over 50 English manuscripts, and have many others that are nearing publication. We will be presenting their work gradually over the next few issues. Some of the research being shared in this issue is still ongoing, and these scholars are working hard to develop their research skills and to enter into critical discussions about issues they are passionate about and invested in. Much of the research being shared here offers some of the first steps into starting a conversation about these new scholars’ research.

Mandy Frake-Mistak’s literature review, entitled “Teaching within a Consumer Model of Higher Education,” addresses how teaching is changing in response to students’ changing demands as consumers who are considering the labour market and how a degree can feed directly into a profession. The author address both the implementation of revised educational policies and the consequences of a modified curriculum resulting from changes to university teaching. Frake-Mistak is calling for a conversation and a form of discourse to be able to address the many

significant changes taking place in postsecondary institutions as a result of this positioning of the student as consumer.

Renée Bourgoïn's literature review, entitled "Inclusionary Practices in French Immersion: A Need to Link Research to Practice," addresses the need for an inclusionary French immersion program that is able to accommodate the needs of all students. Bourgoïn points out that denying a student access to these programs, as a result of a learning disability, is a violation of a student's educational rights. Bourgoïn highlights that it is problematic that there are not enough services in place to support the needs of all students, such that they can pursue French immersion. Referring to current research, Bourgoïn emphasizes that all students are capable of learning another language and the language of the course does not create additional barriers that merit denying students the opportunity to learn in French.

Cara Zurzolo's literature review, entitled "Concepts of Teacher Professional Learning Opportunities and Social Justice Practices: A Literature Review," explores how and why much of teachers' professional development, especially social justice practices, is developed through informal learning opportunities, rather than the formal professional development provided to teachers. Zurzolo explores the limitations of, and alternatives to, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), while emphasizing the benefits of educational networks. The author asks that greater attention be focused on teacher-initiated networks.

Erin Sperling's and **Jesse Bazzul**'s position paper, entitled "New Science Education Researchers in Dialogue: Impressions of our Field," also offers readers a highly reflexive process of engaging with one's practice as a science education researcher. Sperling and Bazzul outline how conversations with a peer through graduate studies can greatly enhance one's understandings and also challenge one's assumptions. The authors explore their identities as researchers, their previous experiences as science educators and how those experiences are informing their research interests and approaches to research, as well as their interactions at conferences with other scholars, and how such a process can continue, all the while reflecting on the intriguing logistics and dynamics of their relationship and process of intellectual exchange.

Laura Teichert's and **Tess Prendergast**'s position paper, entitled "Questioning the Universality of Storybook Reading: Examining Diversity in Family Literacy Practices," presents a critical review of the literature on storybook reading in the context of the authors' own experiences and views about literacy experiences starting from a young age. The authors argue that storybook reading is privileged in schools, and that schools are not effectively taking into consideration the many different home literacy practices of families, especially those from non-Western cultures.

James Eslinger demonstrates a self-reflexive examination of what it means to teach science with an awareness of social justice issues in his research study, entitled "'Don't You Know Only White Kids Like Science?': Currere as Critical Autobiography." Eslinger uses William Pinar's method of "currere" to navigate his personal experiences with science as a student, a teacher, and a Ph.D. student researcher. As outlined by Eslinger in the four regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetic moments, social justice has entered his practice in different ways over the years. The author explains that this self-reflexive method could be helpful for pre-service teachers.

Tricia van Rhijn's research study, entitled "Barriers, Enablers, and Strategies for Success Identified by Undergraduate Student Parents," explores the experiences of ten undergraduate students who are parents, in order to better understand the different barriers these students deal with including: time, stress, lack of resources, and social exclusion. The author identifies multiple factors that enable these students to persevere in their studies. Numerous strategies that are helping these students succeed are identified, as a result of this research, including effective scheduling, seeking help when needed, and managing the completion of their schoolwork effectively with a variety of family activities, incentives, and personal sacrifices. van Rhijn's research calls for more research into the experiences of student parents and opens a conversation about how campuses can better meet the needs of this particular population of students.

Taunya Wideman-Johnston's research study, entitled "The Academic Journeys of Students with Chronic Gastrointestinal Illness: Narratives from Daughters and Their Mothers," explores the challenges of pursuing an education while coping with a chronic illness through the experiences of three students and their mothers. Wideman-Johnston addresses issues students with chronic illnesses face, as well as the relationship between student, parent,

and teacher, and the coping mechanisms that are used by participants (and parents) to help them succeed in their studies. This study highlights the need for effective accommodations in the classroom and contributes to the ongoing conversations on the topic by sharing the stories and perspectives of a few experienced students.

Bruce R. Maxwell's and **Kian Grenier**'s research study, entitled "The Effects of Metacognitive Treatments on the Academic Performance of Students with Learning Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis," explores the need to focus on both the content and processes that students are learning, in order to help students with learning disabilities succeed in school. The authors outline their inclusion and exclusion criteria to contextualize the results of this meta-analysis of six research studies. Maxwell and Grenier conclude by outlining implications of their findings for practice, as well as providing a few recommendations for future research to assist in continuing these conversations about the academic performance of students with learning disabilities, since as they noted in their analysis, there are many variables that they were unable to include because of a lack of available research.

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It is an honour to get to work with so many amazing graduate students and new scholars. I have learned a lot throughout this process, and think it is great to have the chance to collaborate with others during the editing process. There are multiple benefits for all members of the editorial team that get to participate in the mentoring and editing processes (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). There is a level of reciprocity in editing work in terms of what reviewers/editors and authors all gain on a personal level of individual learning. Editing is both a critical and a reflective process. This makes participating in this project much more meaningful and valuable for all involved. A peer-to-peer model of support is an incredible service to be able to offer, and I am happy to facilitate this process through my work with this journal. Thanks everyone for your volunteer contributions! I am pleased to share some of the research that is now emerging through publication with the RCJCÉ/CJNSE. I am especially proud to be working with an open access journal.

Thank you, and happy reading!

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