

Navigating a Pathway for Individual and Collective Well-being—Academics Speak Out

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ABSTRACT: Navigating the challenging terrain of academia either as a new or seasoned academic takes thoughtful and purposeful intention. In this manuscript, two pre-tenured and two tenured faculty members at a research-intensive university engage in deep dialogue to explore challenges and opportunities whilst navigating this terrain, with a focus on supporting individual and collective well-being. We assert that *surviving* academia is not enough. Rather, we aim to *thrive* in a challenging culture, and maintain that our goal is to contribute to the personal *and* professional well-being of ourselves and our colleagues. Guided by auto-ethnography and dialogue, we share our storied experiences. Findings illuminate the importance of co-creating tangible spaces to support, encourage, and celebrate meaningful relations and academic work.

Keywords: Academia, Well-being, Dialogue, Autoethnography, Higher education, Culture

RESUMÉ: Relever les défis de l'académie par un universitaire, soit quelqu'un d'expérimenté ou tout nouveau, demande une intention réfléchie et ciblée. Dans cet article, nous présentons un dialogue profond entre deux universitaires permanents et deux universitaires qui ne sont pas encore permanents, qui travaillent tous les quatre dans une université axée sur la recherche, pour explorer les défis et les possibilités qui se présentent pendant qu'ils naviguent ce terrain en gardant un œil sur le bien-être individuel et collectif. Nous constatons que *survivre* la vie académique n'est pas suffisant. Au contraire, nous visons la prospérité dans une culture de défi, et nous soulignons que notre but est de contribuer à notre bien-être personnel et professionnel ainsi qu'à celui de nos collègues. Nous partageons nos expériences au moyen de l'auto-ethnographie et du dialogue. Nos conclusions expliquent l'importance de la co-crédation des espaces concrets pour

soutenir, encourager et célébrer les relations significatives
et le travail académique.

Mots-clés: l'académie, le bien-être, le dialogue, l'auto-
éthnographie, l'éducation au niveau supérieur, la culture

Overview

Either as new or seasoned academics, we experience academe as a terrain contoured with liberties, complexities, challenges, opportunities, and tensions. Navigating this terrain auspiciously and in a manner that supports well-being requires commitment, thoughtful intention, and support from colleagues, institutional structures, and processes. By engaging in deep dialogue and guided by auto-ethnography as methodology—a process of making deeper meaning of the contribution of individual stories and experiences to a shared understanding of *academic culture*—we share stories, reflections, and insights gained from our individual and collective journeys. Our intention is primarily to support the well-being of self and others in our work and learning community. In our quest to *thrive* as faculty members in a school of education at a research-intensive university, we are continually challenged to negotiate a shifting culture shaped, at times, by competing, insatiable demands on our teaching, service, and research commitments. Two of us experience the additional pressure of being pre-tenured faculty members. When demands are at their highest, we question the likelihood of cultivating and sustaining personal and professional balance within these complexities while negotiating the many demands of our professional and scholarly roles. Palmer (1990) referred to being caught up and trapped in “doing,” resulting in a life that leaves many feeling fragmented, divided, and drained. We turn to a life of alteration—we take action; we feel exhausted; we try to rest; we feel exhausted; and so it continues. Palmer and Zajonc (2010) advocated that if we are to cultivate and sustain personal and professional well-being, we need to live an integrative or “undivided life where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge” (p. 56).

In the search to achieve a semblance of balance and well-being, we remain cognizant of everything that attracts us to this place and space. Herein lies the tension, as academia is also a place of privilege where we are given many opportunities to delve into our respective passions, to journey with like-minded souls—colleagues and students—as we explore, inquire, and collaborate.

Indeed, it is in this space where we experience the privilege of advancing the good works that feed our souls. The fulcrum continually shifts, however, as we straddle the tensions between energy depletion and nourishment of soul.

In this manuscript, we discuss what it means to live undivided or integrative lives. We seek, therefore, through dialogue and story-sharing, to reveal problematic structures in our university setting. We also seek to identify ways in which our context might support the personal and professional well-being of ourselves and colleagues.

Literature Review

Researchers examining spirituality and well-being in the workplace (English & Tisdell, 2010; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Groen, 2002, 2004; Mitroff & Denton, 1999) noted the significance of work-life balance and collegial connections. Groen (2002, 2004) also noted the importance of realizing the purpose in their work against the backdrop of a supportive and collaborative community setting. In terms of higher education, Berg and Seeber (2016) indicated that academics are already intrinsically motivated, excited by the possibility of teaching and generating new ideas. And yet, they pointed out, “the irony is that the more committed we are to our vocation, the more likely it is that we will experience time stress and burnout” (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 17). What, in our university setting, are the contributing factors?

Although we realize there are competing demands inherent in the life of an academic, we are convinced that there are factors at play which lead to a disconnect between our ideals and our lived experiences. Our work is divided into three areas: research, teaching, and service. The way these professional expectations unfold is based on institutional emphasis (Clark, 1987; Wolf-Wendell & Ward, 2006). Ylijoki and Mantyla (2003) maintained that negotiating responsibilities in these areas has become increasingly difficult as workloads grow and we spend more time in isolation, engaged in busy, fragmented work that has little to do with our original purpose. By taking up an auto-ethnographic approach, we examine whether and how we can increase our well-being as academics in the challenging context of the university.

Research Design

Our research design was guided by auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography “seeks to describe and systematically analyze

personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, *History of Autoethnography*, p. 1).

Auto-ethnography is permeable, flexible, and not bound by rigid definition (Clews & Furlong, 2006). According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), when we render ourselves vulnerable by reflecting on and sharing personal stories, feelings, and experiences, we “write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (2. *Doing Auto-ethnography: The Process*, para. 5). By reflecting on and sharing our own experiences, we gain insights into self–other interactions.

Method and Analysis

As either new or seasoned academics, we engage in dialogues with one another in search of a shared understanding of what it means to work, learn, and thrive in academia. Dialogue is “a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring” (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991, para. 3). It is *not* the same as conversation. Conversation may prompt others to see things from *our* point of view. Dialogue, in contrast, welcomes a space free of tightly held notions, assumptions, and agendas. The essence of dialogue is space *to learn* (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991)—to gain new and shared understanding and perspectives.

Giving thought to our own learning journeys in academia, we engaged in reflective writing to capture the meaning of our important learning moments as new and seasoned academics. We encouraged one another to write freely about transitions, tensions, and opportunities realized when navigating this challenging terrain. Soon after, we came together for two to three hours on three occasions to read aloud our reflections, respond to one another, and to prompt deeper, critical reflection. We listened openly and attentively. We sought to protect a space for sharing and resisted filling this space too quickly with assumptions and interpretations. In the ensuing dialogue, we each had a chance to delve more deeply to achieve a richer understanding of how we navigated our lives as faculty members. This experience contributed to our well-being in the sharing of stories, engaging in dialogue, and feeling an emotional connection with each other. We began to experience community—a facet of well-being we see as the basis of our ability to flourish.

Co-creating and living in a vulnerable and evocative space of sharing required foundational trust to *enter* and *remain* in this

space to do the work we were committed to. A basis of trust was established prior to taking up our research. We were guided by our daily work of sharing resources, peer-reviewing draft manuscripts, collaborating on courses and service work, and co-supervising graduate students. It was *during* and *between* these activities that we sought out one another to celebrate achievements, explore tensions and, at times, share tears of frustration when navigating daunting expectations. Our formation of trust was organic, not contrived. In retrospect, we shared basic beliefs and values—a way of viewing and being in the world based on the importance of “the relational.” It was a shared commitment to support and sustain healthy relationships and a culture of individual and collective wellness.

Within the safe space and through sharing our experience of support (or lack of support), our dialogue about challenges, tensions, opportunities, and our need to thrive in a supportive academic community deepened. We spoke of a *community of care* and *compassion*, where interactions extended beyond performance, production and the associated metrics for institutional reporting. Data analysis included a discussion of dominant themes and subthemes that emerged from our reflections and dialogues.

Auto-ethnography and Dialogue as “Third Space”

Auto-ethnography and dialogue provide a *third space* in which perspectives and responsibilities may be reinvented (Taylor, Klein, & Abrams, 2014). *First space* and *second space* refer to physical and social spaces where we interact and would include home (conventional knowledge) and school (academic knowledge) (Soja, 1996, cited in Oxford Reference). Creating a *third space* supports a sphere within which complex relationships may be negotiated (Whitchurch, 2010), a place where relationships more than structures are the primary focus. In urban contexts, third space refers to community spaces where people gather voluntarily to provide support without constraint (Oldenburg, 1999). In an educational context, Wilhelm (2010) referred to classrooms where “third spaces can be seen as more democratic and dialogic spaces than a traditional classroom, as well as a metaphor for a space in which new, hybrid, and challenging discourses and real-world knowledge and applications are created” (p. 56). It is within these spaces where potential resides for co-creating knowledge in support of collaborative, engaging, learner-centred communities.

Our dialogues contributed to the co-creation of *third space* where challenging discourses emerged and power differentials were diffused. We drew from the reciprocity of support, care, and a commitment to the well-being of selves and one another, which

represents an ethic of care (Held, 2006). In a dialogic space of caring, we shared our narratives in a quest to create and nurture a sense of both collective and individual well-being.

Narratives

Patricia

After 10 years in a similar position at a mid-sized university, I decided it was time for a change and accepted a position at a larger institution in Alberta. When I moved to Alberta, I didn't know a single soul and I found that simple welcoming gestures from others made a significant impact on me. At first, I was excited to be invited to work with others—I said “yes” to every invitation to join a research project, attend a conference, or participate on a committee. One of the benefits of working at a larger institution is the variety of opportunities and the learning that accompanies it. For example, over the past two and a half years, I have learned how to teach online and, much to my surprise, I embraced it. Accompanying my eagerness was a growing awareness that as part of my performance reporting, I would need to detail what I had accomplished over the year and this tally would mean I was compared with my colleagues in the same classification. To meet these commitments, I often worked through the weekend and on vacations. Over time, I began to feel overtaxed; I questioned how I would keep up.

Throughout, I continued to indulge my passion for connecting student teachers with Indigenous schools. I had met with some success in this area in my previous position and hoped to further it in my new role. I connected with a colleague who had similar interests and, in time, I began to realize that the work we did together was creative, exciting, and enjoyable. We began to work together daily on everything from grant applications to conference presentations, writing articles, developing programs, and expanding our research. Now I look forward to those discussions whereby we work together to build on one another's ideas and, in doing so, we deepen our own knowledge. There is an excitement created when, through our discussions, we can view existing knowledge from a different viewpoint and perhaps add to it. This relationship and others I have developed with my colleagues help to energize me.

However, my non-stop work commitments began to take a toll on me. I knew I needed to make some changes to survive in an academic role at a large institution. I had to shift my perspective away from trying to please those around me to focus on what was

bringing me fulfillment. I considered what was essential to meeting the demands of my role and what was extraneous. I began to pare down some of my commitments, with the realization that this might not be what is best for my career. I knew that what I was doing was not sustainable in the long term. I began to focus on the work that created energy and turned away from those commitments that did not.

As our performance is reviewed annually, I am not sure what the impact of “paring down” will be in terms of my appraisal. What I do know is that I have learned a great deal about how to survive and I hope someday to thrive in a larger academic institution. Some of that learning was not easily arrived at. I have learned that doing more is not necessarily the key to success and that small gestures can mean a great deal to someone who is trying to find their place at a new institution.

Yvonne

When the phone rang in my Edmonton office in 2013 to tell me I had been selected for an interview in an education faculty back home, I was thrilled, excited, anxious, and relieved. After 12 months of travelling back and forth between Alberta’s two largest urban centres on often highly treacherous roads, living out of a suitcase, away from my family, home, and husband of 30 years, I was ready to move back home. While I loved my job working in an Aboriginal organization, I found that trying to meet the demands of constant travel and living away from home, coupled with being solely responsible for managing the mandate of Métis education across an entire province was far too daunting and risky, on several accounts. Three years later I am now in the fourth year of my tenure-track assistant professor role at one of Canada’s top research-intensive universities and things have not changed much in terms of risk.

One of the primary reasons I was excited to join this new faculty was my passion for teaching. In my former full-time position, I opted to take on a sessional instructor contract to meet my desire to be in the classroom. This experience reaffirmed my love of teaching and, in truth, was one of the factors that inspired me to apply for the education position in my hometown. My present faculty position allows me to continue good work with the Métis community and to work alongside pre-service teachers, graduate students, and colleagues who share my belief in the exciting possibilities of transformative education. Although these individual accomplishments are satisfying, it is the growing collegial and personal relationships that have truly sustained me. My colleagues routinely extend their support and mentorship to me

and, through their generous sharing of time and expertise, I am gifted with hope. I have hope that I can move through the tenure process, that working together will yield much more than the individual accomplishments that we annually report on and, just as importantly, that our shared visions may one day become reality. Many of these collegial relationships have now deepened into lifetime friendships. Our collaborative work represents some of my greatest moments of joy, pride, and awe for what is possible when good people work together.

Yet, as with any new learning journey, there are also times of serious doubt and questioning. Pre-tenured staff are asked to submit annual performance reports in which we must detail individual accomplishments balanced neatly between the areas of teaching, research, and service. These reports are subsequently evaluated and ranked by senior faculty members through a single-point merit assessment. As I understand it, the evaluations are meant to acknowledge our previous year's accomplishments and to encourage growth in those areas seen as lacking. From my vantage point as a pre-tenure scholar, the extraordinary efforts exerted over the past 12 months are distilled into three summative paragraphs that serve to rationalize the single-point merit ranking that we are awarded, and encourage our academic growth. Given this form of feedback, I maintain the latter goal is stymied.

As Brookfield (1995) maintained, educators are typically self-motivated lifelong learners trained to evaluate both themselves and others. A risk occurs when we accumulate our own critical reflections alongside those of senior leadership who may have access to detailed snapshots of our workloads but who are nonetheless not privy to the complete story of our efforts. The constructive criticism, surely meant to motivate, can dominate summative evaluation of this type. Further, without any easy opportunity for meaningful dialogue on the feedback, we are often left wanting to know more. Solace seems to be gained primarily from other colleagues similarly disappointed in the evaluation process. The alternative is pursuing what seems an even riskier route of meeting with leadership where questioning could be misconstrued as a challenge.

Colleen

My career began in social work, working with children and youth, unmarried moms, abuse victims, and with individuals on social assistance. After working in crisis contexts for almost 10 years, I accepted an instructor position at a vocational, post-secondary institution. I accepted this role because I believed that education might provide a preventative pathway, giving me

additional resources to support others *before* they spiralled into crisis. I aimed to support the well-being of others beyond the provision of basic, tangible resources. Support included attending to the *relational needs* of others. It required deep engagement and appreciating that all human beings need to feel valued and welcomed in our diverse work and learning communities.

I was privileged and humbled to journey with many who were marginalized because of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, and low literacy levels. I was in awe of their courage, determination, and drive, and they inspired me to be the best self I could be. At the same time, I was a graduate student. Looking back, my motivation to complete my doctorate was *never* fuelled by the desire to be an academic. Rather, I was passionate about learning; I simply couldn't stop! Shortly after convocation, I was offered an assistant professorship at a research-intensive university.

Academia is a complex culture, at once compelling, invigorating, imposing, and intense. The terrain is contoured with chasms and challenges juxtaposed against privileges and possibilities. It is constantly *reshifting*, *reshaping*, and *reforming*. Expectations are high; the workload is heavy. Teaching, research, and service expectations compete for limited time and energy. Balance and overall wellness is elusive. I live with this tension, often feeling intoxicated and overwhelmed. Notwithstanding, I also experience great solace from my work, continually reminded that challenges provide moments for reflection and learning opportunities that contribute to something so much bigger than myself. I remain humbled.

Now an associate professor and associate dean, I am preparing to submit for full professorship. How will I be affected by this shift in responsibility and expectation while attending to my own well-being? Will expectations increase? As I ponder, I am reminded of a conversation with a seasoned faculty member, a senior mentor who had been 25 years in academia. Reflecting on changing expectations, he said:

I have lived the life of an academic for over 25 years. Expectations have changed significantly. Now ... I feel expected to "shovel more" ... I want to remind senior management that I and my colleagues may not "shovel more," we may simply "shovel differently." ... In higher education, we have a responsibility to support our colleagues, particularly new academics ... to contribute to their growth and well-being. There is important work that we do that will never be captured in the APR [Annual Performance Review]. (Personal communication, Sept. 7, 2009)

I often reflect on these powerful, poignant words. As an academic for much longer than I, his wisdom resonated deeply. I came to understand *shovelling differently* as multi-faceted and extending beyond the number of publications and research grants secured. *Shovelling differently* encompasses the “relational” and includes care for students, colleagues, and for ourselves in our day-to-day lives. *Shovelling differently* is typically not captured by quantitative matrices. It recognizes the human needs that connect us all. *Shovelling differently* includes contributing to a culture of care, compassion, and inclusivity, i.e., to a “well community” versus a machine-driven culture and dynamic riddled with discord fuelled by competition and contention.

Janet

A few months ago, with mixed feelings of relief and trepidation, I finally submitted my application for promotion to full professor. In the academic world, being promoted to full professor is considered a milestone, symbolically demonstrating that one has arrived at the peak of one’s career, and attained a certain fullness. Fullness, although a lovely word that offers an image of someone taking the time to bask in the glow of achievement, can also be challenging. It may be equated with the notion of capacity, causing one to consider just how much one is capable of doing. Prior to submission, I already felt that I was performing at full capacity, doing my best to juggle complex and diverse teaching, research, and service demands that come with the territory. Balancing all these things with the quest to diminish fragmentation and to cultivate a feeling of coherence in my work has been a constant tension through all phases of my career. Now, I wondered, how in the world was I going to load up my plate even more as a full professor? It was already full! My worry, as I prepare to move to this final academic rank, is not a figment of my imagination; rather, it is shored up by concrete evidence in our university and faculty that the expectations increase as one moves from assistant to associate and finally, to full professor. For example, the number of students we supervise and the number of articles expected in annual peer-reviewed publications increase with each promotion.

At the cusp of moving to full professorship, it is not my desire to simply do more. Being more efficient and productive, although questionable goals at any time during one’s academic career, feel increasingly hollow the longer I’m in this career. I am also very clear in my commitment to have other important dimensions to my life that include family, friends, interests and hobbies, and a commitment to my personal health and wellness. In summary, the push to increase the capacity and efficiency of

academics is not sustainable either for the short or the long term. Rather, it may result in valuable people in this important senior phase of their career stepping away far too early.

In my quest to sustain my well-being in the next stage of my career, I need to anchor myself in what motivates me in my work. I also need to trust that the voice that worries about “how much I produce” will take care of itself if I remain concerned with the bigger picture. What anchors me as an academic is partially answered in a statement I included in my application for full professor:

My overarching purpose has been and will continue to be as follows: to create and participate in inclusive collaborative communities of inquiry in order to contribute, mostly within the field of adult learning, to knowledge and practices that work toward personal wellness, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

As I revisit this statement a few months later, it still resonates with me. I see the opportunity to continue the quest to do good work “where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 56).

Making Meaning—Insights Gained

As we reflect on cultivating well-being, we recognize that, in addition to similar themes that emerged for all four of us, the stage of our career trajectories has influenced our perspectives. Two of us are at the pre-tenure career stage and the other two have been faculty members for over a decade. The deeper learning for our two tenured faculty members has emerged through the repetition of experiences. One was the typical annual or bi-annual reporting cycles of the academic world that have delivered important lessons. Each time the formal faculty evaluation process is repeated, some insight or learning is gained that allows the faculty member to self-assess more realistically. The associated learning deepens to become multi-layered and multi-faceted (Hyland-Russell & Fraser, 2011). In the competitive culture of academia, the sharing of lessons learned and the mentoring of junior colleagues by more experienced faculty members is viewed as a generous act. We believe that mentoring is not just a generous act, but is vital and contributes considerable value to the wider academy.

We acknowledge that each of us has a personal life that counterbalances our professional lives. As parents, spouses,

friends, and daughters, often with extended family commitments, we strive to balance our personal commitments with those of our professional roles. Interestingly, and notable in its absence in our narratives, we seldom considered how familial and personal roles affected our professional lives. It was as if our personal lives could not, perhaps should not, cross the boundaries of our professional lives; yet, we all know full well that they do, at times, most vividly. The same could be said of our physical and spiritual well-being. Berg and Seeber (2016) reminded us that as academics we often deny ourselves the right to balance in our lives. Although many academics consider themselves spiritual and committed to a search for purpose and meaning in their work, very few of us share this aspect of ourselves with our colleagues or our students (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). By denying our community insight into our struggles, we unconsciously model a divided self and not a whole person (Palmer, 1990). In turn, we diminish the opportunities for authentic community with our colleagues to know us beyond our professional roles.

As we turn to explore the challenges and opportunities afforded us in our quest to experience well-being in our university, our insights reflect diverse spirals of learning associated with the varied stages of our journey as academics and as everyday people.

Current Realities

As mentioned, being successful in an academic role necessitates commitment to an academic lifestyle that affects all aspects of our life. In our respective narratives, we acknowledge that we have had many wonderful opportunities to live out our vocation as academics by deepening our knowledge and experience in the areas of research we are passionate about and through cultivating our craft as educators. Moreover, we are all surrounded by supportive students and colleagues, many of whom nurture our academic quest on a daily basis. In our reflective dialogue sessions that ensued from sharing our narratives with each other, we discussed if and how our roles in teaching (learning), research, and service translated into a sense of meaning, purpose, and well-being.

The reality of an ambitious and growing university where the leadership aspires to become one of the top five research universities in Canada by 2022 (University of Calgary, 2017), means our roles are in a state of constant pressure and flux, with a particular emphasis on research. As a result, we feel an ever-increasing pressure to produce more: more publications, more presentations, more committees, even more Tweets. The inescapable pressure to quantify our work is realized in annual or

bi-annual performance reports. To elaborate, all faculty members at our university must fill out a performance report that describes their teaching, service, and research contributions once a year for pre-tenured academics and every second year for tenured faculty. A faculty-appointed committee reviews these reports and merit raises are granted based on their assessment of performance, subject to the dean's approval. The process of review is competitive, as each person's productivity and merit raise is assessed and compared with those of their peers. The resultant tension is based on the time-intensive aspects of our work not easily (or at all) measurable. These aspects include the extended process required to establish relationships and build trust with community partners, the multiple administrative tasks and increasing clerical work, and the exclusion of failed grants or publications that require as much work as the successful attempts (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

In sum, by *shovelling more*, a more integrated and wholesome existence seems to be beyond the reach of many (O'Reilly, 1993). At the same time, regardless of the level we are at in our career, the desire to make an impact through our work persists in each one of us. In each of our stories, the same question was posed: "Am I doing enough?" But how we perceived the accuracy of our response varied depending on the stage of our career. For tenured participants, this question emerged from their shared desire to thrive in a situation where they could continue to grow and contribute new knowledge. For them, an offer of full professorship will not always equate to additional work. Instead, a higher rank might afford the opportunity to commit more deeply to what drew them to this challenging work, returning them to the ideals associated with their chosen vocation.

For our pre-tenured colleagues, the question "Am I doing enough?" reflected something a little different such as the need to survive, often clouding their ideal vision of fulfilling vocational aspirations. The undetermined expectations of their role have fuelled moments of self-doubt. In this state of uncertainty, questions arise such as: How can I maintain such a frantic pace while also nurturing a sense of well-being and a balanced lifestyle? Will annual performance appraisals indicate whether enough of the right kind of work is being done to survive and, ultimately, thrive? If I choose to do less in an effort to maintain balance, will I do this at the peril of losing my career? These questions disrupt any lasting sense of well-being at an unproven stage of a pre-tenured career. In seeing the risk inherent in these questions, we are motivated to consider the questions from a procedural level. Is it

possible to gain immediate and continuous formative feedback or even engage in dialogue where the probability of remaining motivated and focused on achieving important goals is more likely?

As we consider the importance of tending to our vocation as academics through all stages of our career and determining how to balance not only our role as faculty members but our broader role outside the academy, we realize that we cannot do this alone. Interwoven throughout our reflection is the belief that a fundamental aspect of our well-being is having a collaborative and supportive community. Indeed, as educators in a School of Education, we bring this message of collaboration and community into our classrooms. Tellingly, in the collaborative process of writing this article, we deepened our sense of community and experienced a sense of renewal.

As described earlier, however, our belief in the power of collaboration conflicts with competitive academia. The reality of competing with our colleagues in the annual performance process can sever or disrupt valued and collaborative relationships. Keenly aware of this reality, we continue to hold tightly to the belief that our academic work benefits from the sharing of diverse talents, ideas, and expertise while navigating the perils of a competitive post-secondary environment.

Moving Forward with Care and Intention

As academics positioned at different stages of our academic career, we explored how we might better support *thriving*. We see a process where a feeling of being fragmented and unfulfilled shifts to a more integrative and meaningful sense of self even in the competitive culture of academia. Central to our discussion is the role of metrics as a measure of our professional worth, seen only as “productive.” The metrics captured in our institution’s academic performance reporting structure attempt to assess our performance and productivity. This lens proves inadequate, however, because it falls short of valuing the time, energy, and commitment needed for the authentic engagement that supports the good work we do. The structure also excludes time spent on unsuccessful attempts at grants and publications that may be just as time-intensive as our winning efforts. As we see it, viewing the current assessment process through an ethic of care could broaden the feedback process to include dialogue and formative assessment (Held, 2006; Sawyer, 2007, p. 42). This type of shift would do much to signal the importance of faculty well-being in our existing university structure.

Our ability to create a sense of community relied on the deliberate creation of space in our workload—a “Third Space” where we could come together as whole persons to engage in authentic and democratic dialogue (Wilhelm, 2010). To flourish as academics means we must prioritize the creation of times when we can support, encourage, and celebrate relationships with our colleagues (Whitchurch, 2010). We need to recognize how care, compassion, support, and mentoring of one another improve well-being at work. As we see it, our individual well-being is connected to a sense of collective well-being in our workplace. At these times, dialogue serves as a pathway for sharing ideas, sparking innovation and creativity, and co-creating knowledge (Taylor, Klein, & Abrams, 2014). Yet the reality is that we are often far too engaged in our short-term quest to produce as much as we can and, as a result, we miss out on valuable opportunities to learn from one another.

Notably, we view the quest for individual and collective well-being across academe as a shared responsibility. As scholars who are deeply committed to doing the best work possible in collaboration with valued colleagues, our institutions must support our well-being as well as our productivity. Beyond our responsibility for self-care, we believe institutional structures must allow for the limits of human capacity in relation to workload expectations.

In his book, *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration*, Sawyer (2007) discussed key elements necessary for maximizing our creative potential where a sense of deep accomplishment is experienced. In this work, Sawyer (2007) advanced the concept of “group flow” where a group performs at “its top level of ability” (p. 43) because “many tensions are in perfect balance” (p. 56). In our collegial collaboration, we have experienced glimpses into the power of this approach as we work to balance our individual interests with that of our colleagues.

In sum, our experience with one another was powerful. Our dialogues were authentic and our commitment to one another unwavering. As a result, our personal and professional connections strengthened. We lived what we were researching and writing about. Through the value of our interconnectedness we offer readers the hope of realizing their own culture of well-being.

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