SURVIVING and THRIVING in ACADEMIA

DOCTORAL STUDY AND GETTING PUBLISHED

NARRATIVES OF EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

EDITED BY

RICHARD FAY • ACHILLEAS KOSTOULAS

DOCTORAL STUDY AND GETTING PUBLISHED

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Narratives of Early Career Researchers

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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DOCTORAL STUDY AND GETTING PUBLISHED: NARRATIVE AND ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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For early career researchers (ECRs) to thrive in academia, the challenge of publishing begins during their doctoral studies. Publishing during and from a doctorate can be seen (Håkansson Lindqvist, 2018) as part of the rite of passage, and as a liminal stage in the researcher's development from doctoral student to ECR. It is a process of academic becoming, one which ECRs face both on their own (perhaps fighting with imposter syndrome) and also with others (perhaps with their mentors and alongside their fellow ECRs). Challenging, often frustrating, but potentially also deeply rewarding, this stage in their academic trajectory brings with it expectations (both their own and those of potential employers for example) and benefits (such as increased employability). It is a process for which many may feel under-prepared, a situation this volume seeks to address by bringing together the experiences and wisdom of 'old hands' from one research network. What were the publishing successes and failures of these ECRs? And the challenges they faced and

the rewards gained? And their doubts and insights? What can be learnt from those who have gone before?

This book has a strongly narrative dimension. It curates the stories of a group of ECRs as they, in their own voices, reflect on the experience of trying to be published. There are two main reasons for the book's narrative foregrounding. First, 'the narrative mode of discourse is omnipresent in human affairs' (Nash, 1990, p. xi), and 'we spend our lives immersed in narratives – every day, we swim in a sea of stories and tales that we hear or read or listen to or see . . .' (Berger, 1997, p. 1). ECRs are no exception. They swim in a similar sea of stories. Second, narratives are not simply omnipresent – they also have a valuable function for those telling them as well as those listening. We 'give meaning to [our] lives and relationships by storying [our] experience' (White & Epston, 1990, p. 13) since narration is 'an ongoing process of making sense of our experience' (Stephenson, 2000, p. 12). The ECRs whose stories are presented in this volume are making sense of their experiences of publishing. As we engage with their stories, we are immersed in the sea of their meaning-making and are beneficiaries of their storied insights.

RICHARD AND NARRATIVE

Thirty years ago, when I (Richard) became a Lecturer in Education, having a PhD was not required. In fact, I did not gain my doctorate for another 10 years, and my early publications were unconnected to any doctoral aspirations. So, my publishing story is not as closely entwined with doing a doctorate as it has been for the ECRs in this volume. But, as I near the end of my career, and as I have become more involved in supporting ECR colleagues, I am curious about

how they survive and thrive in an academic world in which PhDs and publications do so much to frame professional development, job security and career advancement.

My doctoral story does, however, have one important connection to this volume. During fieldwork, I became aware of the explanatory power of narratives as my colleagues made sense of their experiences in the international education project I was researching. This encouraged me to embrace the methodological potential of narration. Although the 'narrative turn' (Goodson & Gill, 2011) was clearly evident in the social sciences when I was completing my thesis (Fay, 2004), narrative methodology was in its infancy in my department. Since then, it has become a major strand in the work of our Lantern network (see below). It made sense to keep this narrative anchor for the publishing experiences of ECRs from this network.

The methodological embrace of the sense-making power of narration and narratives can be traced, in the English-medium literature for sure, to the latter part of the last century (Bruner, 1991, 1996; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 2000; Cortazzi, 1994; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Gergen, 2001; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; McAdams, 1993; Mishler, 1995; Mitchell, 1981; Nash, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). At its heart lies a realisation of the research value of the seemingly universal habit that humans have of making sense of their experience through the stories they tell others about that experience. Whereas courts seek 'the truth and nothing but the truth' in the testimony of witnesses, 'narrative truth' is highly situated – stories are told:

- at particular moments in time – when they are retold later, details may and almost invariably do change;

- in specific contexts – when told in an interview, work experience details may differ from when told at home;
- for particular people – when told to researchers, details may vary from when told to colleagues; and
- for specific reasons – when told to make someone laugh, details may be different from when sharing something similar which has happened to you.

Nonetheless, there are insights to be valued in storied sense-making in the moment as articulated through narration and captured in the resulting narratives.

The researcher stories presented in this volume are situated in *time* (the authors are ECRs), in *context* (the stories have been written by members of the Lantern researcher network, as stimulated by the opportunity of this volume), in *relationship* (the stories have been commissioned by editors (well) known to the writers, and as written for an imagined readership of researchers seeking support to thrive in academic life) and in *purpose* (the authors seek to share personalised insights from their experience of publishing during and from a doctorate). This situatedness is, we argue, part of their strength – they have plausibility, they speak to other ECRs and they articulate what we might describe as narrative truth.

ACHILLEAS AND ECOLOGICAL THINKING

Many doctoral stories begin with a more or less clearly defined future possible self (Nurius, 1986) as an academic. Mine (Achilleas) is different, in that my PhD (Kostoulas, 2014) was driven more by intellectual curiosity than future career ambitions. While working on my master's dissertation, I took an interest in complex systems theory, which had just made a

tenuous foothold in applied linguistics (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). There was still much work to be done to 'nativise' complexity thinking into language education, and I enjoyed the challenge, which eventually led to Kostoulas (2014, 2018), a worked example of how to use complexity thinking to describe a language school.

The school I described was one with which I was deeply familiar, and one very closely connected to my professional identity. This meant that as I strived to study its unseen dynamics, I was constantly confronted with how whatever I observed in its activity was entangled with my past actions and my developing identity. This brings up an important point that runs throughout the book: the narratives we tell, and the ways in which we narrate ourselves, all connect – sometimes in unseen ways – to the complex web that connects the context and time in which they are articulated, the relationships within which the narrative act takes place and the purposes that the narrative serves, and the storyteller is hard to extract from the story.

These are the seeds of the ecological perspective that holds this collection together: a perspective that places the individual in the centre of an 'ecology of ideas' (Bateson, 1972/2000) and views meaning-making activity and meaning structures in the ecology as being in constant interplay. Describing this theory briefly is a challenge for which an introductory chapter such as this is not particularly suitable (but see Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021, 2024 for more). When applied to the topic of this book, its starting premise is that all the activity that connects our early selves, as aspiring doctoral students, to our future selves as mature academics is a process of *becoming*. In addition to the acquisition of writing, research, and teaching skills, academic becoming also involves changes in our identities, cognitions, and networks. The academic becoming trajectory takes place within a dense web (or 'ecology') of interconnecting expectations, routinised practices, interactions, resources and more. Different configurations of the

diverse elements in an ecology will give rise to specific opportunities for action (or 'affordances'), some arising spontaneously and others being produced by our action. For instance, the availability of funds, a supportive mentor, and institutional pressure to increase research output can come together to produce an affordance for writing an article. In this sense, academic becoming emerges from the environment. But at the same time, the emergent activity reshapes the meaning structures around it. For example, dealing with reviewers and editors becomes easier once one has published several articles. Academic becoming, then, is this reciprocal relationship between meaning structures that generate activity and meaning-generating activity, which preserves our identity as agentic beings.

LANTERN

We can think of academic becoming as being situated in an abstract 'ecology of ideas' (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). For many doctoral students and ECRs, this ecology can also take a more concrete form, as they might belong to, identify with and participate in one or more researcher networks, which may have institutional, disciplinary, professional, geographic or other anchors or be more distributed. As academic life ebbs and flows, network membership can be quite fluid, and periods of intense network activity may be followed by quieter ones. And as researchers' doctoral studies progress, their participation may peak and then fall away. Nonetheless, such networks, like supervisory relationships, can be powerful shaping influences on researchers and helping them to thrive, not just survive, in academic life. They may shape their experience of publishing and much else besides.

The researchers in this volume have some connection with one such network. Its name, Lantern – LANguage Teacher Education Researcher Network – is more of an indication of its origins than it is a statement of a tightly delineated research area. In some cases, the contributors' association with Lantern has been substantial and long-lasting, in others briefer and more tangential. Nonetheless, Lantern acts as an anchor for the volume, providing a contextual coherence to an otherwise diverse set of researcher narratives. It has its particularities but, in some ways, it stands for all such networks.

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

This volume consists of 15 narratives, which present diverse aspects of academic writing and publishing and academic professional development. These are organised in five thematically linked parts, as well as theoretical contributions that introduce and conclude the volume. Each narrative begins with a short contextualising section, by the editors. Other than that, we have encouraged and respected the various ways in which authors narrate their experiences, resulting in a polyphonic exploration of early researcherhood. Each section concludes with a brief ecologically-framed commentary, which attempts to tease out commonalities and salient themes in the narratives.

The first substantive contribution in the volume is an overview (by Jane Andrews) of the influences that shape the academic publishing trajectories of ECRs. Her chapter surveys the literature on early career publishing and discusses the pressures to publish and the challenges ECRs face as well as good practices that may support them in their endeavours.

Part A of the book focuses on the process of academic becoming. The two narratives, by Magdalena De Stefani and

Eljee Javier, showcase how academic becoming involves (re-) constructing one's identity. For Magdalena this process involved accepting the entanglement of her professional and academic identities, and building on this hybrid identity as she worked with teachers in her professional setting and published in (and with) the academic community. Eljee's narrative explores the complexities of being a native-speaker of English and also a member of a visible ethnic minority. It alerts us to the fact that academic becoming may involve reconciling conflicting perceived identities.

The narratives that make up Part B bring to the fore diverse ways in which ECRs experience writing for publication. The first narrative, by Jessica Bradley, provides insight into how public and private writing helped her to develop her 'writerly identity'. Next, Edd Aspbury-Miyanishi tells the story of how his PhD by publication organically grew in ways that had little resemblance to his original research plan. Magdalena Rostron concludes this part with advice from her writing and teaching experience. Together, they illustrate how the writing process emerges from shaping influences in the environment.

Part C extends this discussion, by looking into the collaborative aspects of academic publishing. In Siti M. Fitriyah's narrative, we follow the publication of a collaboratively written article and gain insight into team dynamics involving seniority, gender, and 'newcomer' status. The following narrative, by Dylan Williams, tells the story of a series of publications that began before his PhD studies and traces the influences from colleagues that shaped his publication trajectory. In the final narrative of the section, Sutraphorn ('Khwan') Tantiniranat tells the story of how her academic network provided support as she experienced the ups and downs of academic publishing. In doing so, these three narratives provide us with examples of how the processes of