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Editor's Introduction

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second 2013-2014 edition of *le/the Journal: A Publication of the University of Ottawa Education Graduate Students' Association (EGSA) / Une publication de l'Association des étudiant.e.s diplômé.e.s en éducation (AÉDÉ) de l'Université d'Ottawa.* This issue both celebrates the diversity and excellence of the Faculty of Education's graduate student research activities, and offers insights on successfully negotiating certain steps of the academic journey.

Our first author, Veena Balsawer, speaks eloquently of the link between personal identity, epistemology and choice of methodology in qualitative research, while Graeme Lachance explores the educational possibilities of tabletop role-playing games in the identity development of youth. Hélène Vachon discusses some of the advantages and limits of using constructivism as an epistomelogical lens as well as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of adults. Catherine Vanner reports on a research project highlighting the importance of high school Gay-Straight Alliances that is centered on the role of education administrators in the establishment of these support and advocacy groups.

The second part of this issue focuses on academic success and offers graduate students practical advice on the writing of an interim report (Dr. Claire Duchesne), the process of developing an excellent thesis proposal (Dr. Maurice Taylor) and the benefits of conference attendance (Rebecca J. Hogue).

As our learning community at the Faculty of Education continues to flourish, I would like to thank each of the authors for their contributions to *le/the Journal* and the community at large-this vibrant community is only possible though your continued engagement.

I also invite each of our readers to participate in making *le/the Journal* an ongoing success by responding to the next call for papers in an upcoming edition of the EGSA Newsletter.

Wishing everyone continued success in their academic journey.

Joanne M.C. Lalonde
Doctorante
Society, Culture and Literacies

Introduction de la rédactrice en chef

Chère lectrice / Cher lecteur,

Voici la seconde édition 2013-2014 de la publication *le/the Journal: A Publication of the University of Ottawa Education Graduate Students' Association (EGSA) / Une publication de l'Association des étudiant.e.s diplômé.e.s en éducation (AÉDÉ) de l'Université d'Ottawa*.

Cette édition met en évidence, d'une part, la diversité et l'excellence des activités de recherche entreprises par les étudiantes et étudiants gradués de la Faculté d'éducation et , d'autre part, offre un aperçu sur l'art de négocier certains étapes cruciales du cheminement académique.

En première partie, Veena Balsawer, nous informe de façon éloquente sur le lien entre l'identité personnelle, le cadre épistémologique et le choix de la méthodologie en recherche qualitative. Pour sa part, Graeme Lachance explore le développement de l'identité chez les jeunes par l'entremise de jeu de rôle sur table. De son côté, Hélène Vachon discute des avantages et des limites du constructivisme dans son aspect épistémologique et comme outil pédagogique quand utilisé en éducation aux adultes. Catherine Vanner fait état d'un projet de recherche qui met en évidence l'importance des alliances gai/hétero à l'école secondaire. Sa recherche se penche particulièrement sur le rôle des gestionnaires des écoles secondaires en matière d'implantation et d'appui à ces groupes de pression.

La deuxième partie de cette édition met l'accent sur le succès académique en tant que tel et offre, aux étudiantes et étudiants, des conseils pratiques sur la rédaction d'un rapport intérimaire (Dr. Claire Duchesne), le processus requis pour la conception d'une excellente proposition de projet de thèse (Dr. Maurice Taylor) et présente les avantages de la participation à différentes conférences (Rebecca J. Hogue).

L'épanouissement constant de notre communauté d'apprentissage à la faculté d'éducation repose en grande partie sur la contribution des auteures et auteurs à cette édition de la publication le/the Journal, je les remercie sincèrement. Quant à la communauté elle-même, son développement et sa consolidation sont le résultat de votre engagement continuel. De cela je vous remercie aussi.

J'en profite pour vous inviter à participer au succès de la publication le/the Journal en soumettant une réflexion ou un document lors de la ronde d'appel à soumission qui sera proposée dans le prochain numéro de l'infolettre de l'AÉDÉ.

Bon succès à chacune et chacun d'ente vous dans vos cheminement académique,

Joanne M.C. Lalonde
Doctorante
Société, culture et littératies

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Part 1: Articles

Exploring the role of Feminism in the narrative/autoethnography movement

Veena Balsawer

Blurred Genres

Social, cultural, and technological transitions in the world have changed people's worldviews, or the way people see themselves, and the world in which they live. We are in a "post-discourses" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) age, where epistemologies like postmodernism, feminism, and post-structuralism have raised questions about the authoritative and absolute knowledge of science. Lather (2007), calls this the "'post' turn in the human sciences" where "epistemological indeterminacy" (Lather, 2007), or a refusal on the part of critical researchers to privilege any single method or theory, has led to blurred genres and new ways of researching and writing in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lather, 2007; Richardson, 1994).

Some of these "critical, interpretive, qualitative perspectives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) or new/experimental forms of writing include auto-ethnography, hermeneutics, phenomenology, cultural studies, feminism, narrative, performative, visual, ethnomethodology, and social action research. The qualitative researcher who chooses to use these experimental forms becomes a "bricoleur" or a creator/artist, and learns to borrow from many different disciplines in order to produce a "bricolage", or a methodological piece (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kincheloe, 2001).

These blurred genres have produced a "crisis of representation" with researchers trying to locate the *Self* and *Other-* knower and teller - within their research (Behar, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lather, 2007; Richardson, 1994). The researchers become critical, interpretive or self-conscious and are aware of their "ideological and epistemological presuppositions [their subjectivities] that inform their research" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p.305). Behar (1996) maintains that the observer's subjectivity influences the course of the "observed event" where both the observer, and more "profoundly", the observed are "vulnerable" (p. 24). Ellis (2003) says that many critical researchers and feminist writers prefer to start with their own subjectivity/story to situate themselves in their research project.

My Story

> *I am intrigued by how people construct their identities through their personal narratives and stories. I am also interested in exploring the notion that by listening to other people's stories we are better able to understand ourselves and the world around us (King, 2007; Trinh, 1989). This interest leads me to my PhD research where I hope to gather the lived experiences/narratives of other immigrant women, who like myself, have had to re-invent themselves, and their identities with/in this new sp(l)ace called Canada. My search for a qualitative research methodology to (re)present the women's stories in their own voices has led me to Autoethnography.*

In search of Auto-ethnography

Autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology has made me aware of the different interpretive and artistic forms researchers have used to present qualitative data in the participants' own voices. This paper is an attempt to delve further into autoethnography to understand it better, and to explore if and how feminism might have been instrumental in the narrative/autoethnography movement.

Autoethnography is…

According to Reed-Danahay (1997) the concept of autoethnography reflects a "postmodern/postcolonial conception of self and society" which symbolizes multiplicities of identities, cultural (dis)placements, and shifting politics of power and representation. *Who speaks on behalf of whom? Who's story is being told (represented) and by whom?* These questions are constantly being raised in this genre because the auto-ethnographer is constantly shifting/crossing the boundaries between auto-biography and auto-ethnography. She/he is a "mestiza" (Anzaldúa, 1987), at once the insider and the outsider, and has "the ability to transcend/(re)write the self and the social" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.4).

> *As an immigrant and a visible minority, at times, I feel like a hyphe-nated-identity, a*
>
> *mestiza, and I feel as if I live in the hyphens. My interest in collecting women's stories is*
>
> *to explore how other women 'confront' their multiple identity issues (if at all). What*
>
> *kinds of stories might I hear? Will they resonate with my experiences?*

Ellis (2003) refers to autoethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 37). For Denzin (1989), who seems to echo Ellis' statement, the autoethnographer incorporates elements of his/her own life experience when writing about others and he/she employs a "hierarchy of voices to identify the indigenous voices" (p.246). Thus autoethnography can be said to be a "form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). Writing becomes a process of discovery of the self /selves that could sometimes turn out to be a "messy affair" (Guba and Lincoln, 2003, p. 210).

The many forms of Autoethnography

In her methodological novel about autoethnography, Ellis (2003) explains how over the years, autoethnography, which is part auto (self) and part ethno (culture) has expanded to include various disciplines like anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication, thus leading to different writing styles:

> Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language (p. 38).

Autoethnography by any other name…

Ellis (2003) also gives us a history of autoethnography telling us that it has been in use since 1975, except that it has been called by different names by different researchers. This also shows the messiness of the genre and the overlap with other disciplines. Some of these names are "autobiographical ethnography, critical autobiography, emotionalism, ethnic autobiography, memoirs, narrative ethnography, native anthropology, native ethnography, narratives of the self, personal ethnography, personal narratives, phenomenological ethnography, reflexive ethnography, self-ethnography," (p. 40). She goes on to tell us that autoethnography has now become the "term of choice" (Ellis, 2003, p. 39) with researchers and even with former critics of this genre who have given personal narrative a genre status.

I will cite a few examples of the different autoethnographic styles:

Ruth Behar (1996) in *The Vulnerable Observer* describes how the sense of loss, our memories and emotions play a role in our research. She also calls for a sense of reflexivity and vulnerability as opposed to authority when we journey into our research fields.

Barbara Duarte Esgalhado's (2003) article *The Ancestor Syndrome* is an example of her experience of gaining a new understanding of herself and others through the autoethnographic process as she creates a 3-dimensional book she calls *The Ancestor Syndrome*. This book is made up of tiny wooden boats to represent her own and her ancestors' experiences of moving and (dis)locating, of immigration, and, of loss and gain in the process of all these transitions.

Carolyn Ellis (2003) in her book *The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography* combines elements of ethnography and narrative fiction. She uses her own experience as a professor to write this fictional book as if she is conducting a class on autoethnography. She also talks about her own learning and understanding as she watches/observes herself and her fictional and not-so-fictional characters/students as they go through their autoethnographic journeys.

Cynthia Morawski & Pat Palulis' (2009) article *Auto/ethno/graphies as teaching lives: An aesthetic of difference,* is a performative text which uses multi-voiced, fragmented and layered writing, which they call "messy (w)rites of passage" (p. 13) to talk about their lived experiences in the world of academia.

Power of Stories/Narratives

The common thread in these examples is that they are all narratives of the authors' lived experiences, yet they are all unique in their own ways and show how narratives of women's lives are "often neither chronological nor progressive but disjointed, [and] fragmentary" (Krieger, 1983, as cited in Tedlock, 2005, p. 468). Since autoethnography is the ability to rewrite the self and the society, these auto-ethno-graphers/researchers, through their narratives, are trying to make sense of their experiences with/in the self and society. Narrative inquirers on the other hand, "describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences" (Creswell, 2005, p. 490).

Narrative comes from the word to "narrate" or "to tell a story in great detail" (Creswell, 2005, p. 474). We make sense of our world through the stories we hear, and as Ellis (2003) reminds us, stories are not unique to autoethnography. Our stories are our experiences and our identities because our stories define us. Therefore, Baldwin (2005) compares our life to a narrative braid of stories. Like any good story, narrative has a plot, character, and scene setting. Narrative, like autoethnography comes in many forms: short stories, poems, myths, history, paintings, conversations, novels, music, art, life writing, autoethnography (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2005; Ellis, 2003). Again, the writer/researcher can claim any of these forms as autoethnography, and at times some autobiographies are treated as autoethnographies but some others are not (Ellis, 2003).

Jones (2005) claims that "the interest in personal narratives as auto/ethnographic texts owes a clear debt to the long-standing practice of telling personal stories among women anthropologists and the traditions and conventions of feminist ethnography" (p. 785). I think it is not just the women anthropologists or feminist ethnographers, but people in general have used personal narratives to understand each other and the world. Gossip was probably the first form of personal communication! Even in this technological age, there are blogs, emails, text messages, social networks, twitter, and other ways people can share their personal stories. For Minh-ha (1989), "The story began a long time ago…it is old. For years we have been passing it on, so that our daughters and granddaughters may continue to pass it on" (p.1). This brings me to the very gist of this paper to understand how and why feminism might have played a role in the narrative/autoethnographic movement.

Feminism(s)

This striving for equity and liberation marks feminist research indelibly.

Crotty, 1998, p. 182

Feminism or feminist theory has played a major role in the "post-discourses" (postmodernism and poststructuralism epistemologies). Epistemologies like critical theories, race theories, feminist theories, and queer theories emerged from the social advocacy movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) have criticized the fact that women's unique ways of knowing have been neglected by the dominant ideologies of our times. Thus as critical researchers, women have questioned the status quo that exists in society and to that end have contributed to the proliferation of blurred genres in terms of research and writing. Neuman (2006) says that women use "multiple research techniques, and attempt to give voice to women and work to correct predominant male-oriented perspective" (p. 103) Questions about reflexivity, agency, identity, values and issues of lived experience and meaning also become the focus of their research. Thus feminist researchers are not detached; they collaborate and use their research participants as co-creators in their research project.

Feminist research is concerned with the creation and presentation of knowledge, therefore they ask questions like: *Whose knowledges (stories)? Where and how obtained and by whom?* Olsen (1993) posits that feminist inquiry is "dialectical with different views fusing to produce new syntheses that in turn become the grounds for further research, praxis and policy" (p. 236).

Postmodern feminists regard "truth as a destructive illusion" (Olsen, 2003), and favour the multiple stories/perspectives women tell about their knowledge(s) and experiences. The other noticeable trend in the 'post' period is the writings by women of colour, postcolonial feminist thought, globalization, lesbian research and standpoint research. Due to the emerging

complexities, and the shifting boundaries in women's experiences, places, and spaces, there is an emphasis on discourse, narrative and text, and experimental writing amongst feminist researchers (Olsen, 2003). I think this is one of the reasons that has prompted Ellis (2003) to state that "feminism has played a role in the narrative/autoethnographic movement... [and] has contributed to legitimizing the autobiographical voice" (p.47). This goes back to the question about whose voice and whose stories and the feminist struggle with making their voice heard in the world of research and the world in general. Most feminists prefer to do a qualitative study and listen to their participants' stories/narratives/experiences. Qualitative research, feminism, and narrative/autoethnography are counter-narratives to hegemonic discourses/narratives.

Conclusion

The popularity of postmodernism, feminism, and poststructuralism has made it possible for researchers to move away from the rigid forms of positivist research. This has led to the blurring genres phase whereby researchers are experimenting with new and exciting forms of research and writing. Autoethnography is one such form which can be both a research method as well as a research methodology. I have only just skimmed the surface of autoethnography and feminism in this paper which was an 'experiment of sorts' to understand how feminism and feminist thought might have had an impact on the narrative/autoethnography movement with reference to works by Ruth Behar and Carolyn Ellis. The different strands and threads that constitute feminism(s) and feminist thought are constantly evolving and new ideas and new paradigms are opening up spaces for other research.

As a postcolonial feminist scholar, I plan to collect and braid / weave immigrant women's stories in the interval/interstices between/amidst different cultures and languages. How might the stories I collect reflect the (de)(re)construction of the women's identities and their world views?

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TRPGs and Youth Identity: Thoughts for Educators

Graeme Lachance

You find yourself on the dirt road, tired after three hours of waiting for your contact. Lutz said his man would meet you here with two barrels in exchange for what you know of the Earl's missing daughter. Without warning a shot is fired at your feet, spraying dust and stones into your shins. From behind you, a deep, raspy voice pipes, "Get on the ground, now!"

What do you do?

Introduction

It is unlikely that we will be faced with the kind of conspiracy and backstabbing found in a tabletop role-playing game, though the above descriptions reveal a lot of what it is like to play one. Taking place in groups around a table space, these are games where players craft characters (not unlike an author crafts a protagonist), which they then embody during game-play. These characters hope to find adventure, rewards, and experience as rogues and thieves, elves and wizards,[1] whether famous or scorned by the rest of the fictional lands they inhabit. By role-playing–acting as the character would act–the players guide their characters through a narrative, led by a central narrator, called the game-master (GM). Characters are forced to make difficult choices, struggling through traps and deception, fighting their character's values, for good or for evil, for their lives.

There is no winning the game, in the traditional sense, and therefore no losing either (Waskul & Lust, 2004, p.336). Rather, quests and challenges are completed with better or worse consequences. Campaigns are endured, often for years of the players' lives. Characters can die, and players may leave the group, but despite setbacks, the game narrative continues to unfold. Without a rule-bound conclusion, success in the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) is often felt intrinsically. It is up to the players to define their own successes, sometimes as a team, sometimes individually.

For these reasons, TRPGs remain a form of entertainment unlike any other game that exists, and offer a richer, and arguably more interactive gaming experience than computer and console role-playing games. While the latter has been the focus of numerous academic studies since their inception, its predecessor remains virtually unstudied (Snow, 2008, p. 63). The development of characters and their progression through a co-created, evolving narrative (Waskul & Lust, 2004;

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[1] This article will concern itself with the fantasy genre of the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG), though it should be noted that for every fiction genre and trope imaginable (sci-fi, western, zombie, horror, vampire), there is a TRPG to suit that interest (Cover, 2010, p. 9).

Snow, 2008) offers a mimesis to youth development that can be beneficial to adolescents looking to find their way in a world that so many think is out to get them.

Writing this article is informed by numerous personal experiences (a) as a tabletop role-player, both as a game-master and player; (b) as a researcher, having completed a qualitative case study on TRPGs as part of graduate course work; and perhaps most importantly (c) as a secondary school teacher imagining a world where dragons and classroom teaching find some common ground. What follows is an attempt to widen the academic literature on TRPGs and discuss their associative benefits for youth development and education.

What's in a game?

Pinpointing a universal definition for the word game has eluded academia. Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous conjecture that the word game encompasses too many activities to ever be definable typifies the trouble in categorizing the TRPG, as well. Rather, he claims that at best we can study a game's structural similarities, that he names "family resemblances" (as cited in Cover, 2010, p.9). This inherent ambiguity is important as it asserts that the line between game and not game is more difficult to discern than we might have thought. It pushes us then to reconsider their importance; no longer is it a viable option to call something *just* a game. Thus, a space opens for tabletop role-playing games to be studied and taken seriously, where previously they have been ignored or even demonized (Schnoebelen, 1984; Waldron, 2005).

However, this ambiguity does not contribute to a player's confusion between TRPG game-play and real life. Players know when they have set out to play; gathering around a central space where the game-master begins to narrate the session is one indication that they are involved in game-play, however, as will be discussed, restricting oneself to playing a character in a game is not always easy to accomplish. Uncertainty, does inject itself into game-play, whether in the chaos of a drawn-out knife fight between two characters, or in the interplay and shifting between *player*, *person*, and *persona* that exists when we play roles (Waskul & Lust, 2004). Characters may be gaining experience points, but players gain experience by learning about themselves and how they act and react to situations beyond the scope of their everyday lives. For the typically young consumers of these games, that means the exploration of the identity of a persona other than themselves, while at the same time controlling that persona's actions.

Most tabletop role-playing games require the player to at the very least customize their character in terms of physical characteristics, gender, dress, and personality, but players are then encouraged to develop a character's history and reason for existing in the narrative (Heinsoo, Collins, & Watt, 2008). It is entirely possible, then, that players create characters with the purpose of experimenting with a specific personality that they themselves are not. What would it feel like to be

morally questionable? A murderer? A thief? How is using a bow and arrow different from using a sword, and which is better? Whether consciously or not, by forcing players to role-play, they end up slipping into identities different from their own. Although any player would tell you that this is difficult to accomplish, it allows for an experimentation with individuality that provides valuable insight into other, previously-unfamiliar worldviews.

Exploring and breaking the boundaries between player, person, and character.

Creating and playing a character requires negotiations between a player's own identity and that of the character she hopes to create. Waskul and Lust (2004) summarized the boundaries between player (as someone who knows the rules of the game), person (as the individual attending the game sessions, with his own life history and self-hood) and persona (their term for character, created and then embodied by the player). Their study concludes that although bracketing these individual roles for different scenarios is important to proper game-play, boundaries ultimately fail as the separation between persona, player, and person cannot be successfully achieved: "There exists a multiplicity of 'you's' and 'me's'. It is not always clear which 'you' or what 'me' is being evoked" (Waskul & Lust, p. 347). Calling on Mead's (1934) distinction of the *I* and the *me* the authors demonstrate how role-players exist and take action in the cracks where the walls between player, persona, and person wear away (Waskul & Lust, p. 352).

Žižek's Lack and Gamer Identity.

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek contends that when an agent identifies with an external image, it "leads [them] to a misrecognized sense of unified selfhood, and an emphasis on surface rather than depth" (as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 65). Žižek, drawing on Lacan, reminds us that no matter how much an individual experiments with identities, they will always feel incomplete when trying to identify with external images. Individuals see their flawed selves reflected back at them, thus frustration becomes inevitable, leading to changes in behaviour and action.

This is particularly significant as adolescents develop into some of the largest consumers of pop culture products, including music, television, and branded clothing (Dretzin & Goodman, 2001). That they continually consume, moving from brand to show to artist to brand, is a demonstration of the kind of identity-lack that Žižek discusses.

Here too, tabletop role-playing games offer an alternative for negotiating Žižek's lack for adolescents frustrated with the process of identity building. Performing actions as character-personas gives the person respite from his or her own social agency, as well as a chance for them to evaluate how it feels to act in the way that their persona would act.

As Waskul and Lust (2004) point out, bracketing different identities during a role-playing session is impossible. Žižek and Lacan would argue that while reconciling encounters inside of a

game setting, players develop experience in manoeuvring between the identities of player, persona, and person. They are building an identity that is more equipped to deal with the frustration associated with identity-lack. Tabletop role-playing games offer a safe experience where Žižek's flawed reflections are visible to each person around the table and understood as a healthy example of game-play.

Role-playing Games and the Classroom Landscape

Educators should consider the benefits to youth identity building that are experienced during tabletop role-playing games. If we can believe that TRPGs offer a chance to gain a better understanding of the individuals of the world, it then becomes possible for educators to harness their popularity for use in their curriculum.

Even the dynamic relationship between the game-master and players in a tabletop role-playing game shares similarities to that between the teacher and their students. The teacher, similar to a GM, creates an extended narrative campaign (a year-long plan), that is then broken into multiple sessions (teaching units) and individual encounters (daily lessons). As the game-master's campaign narrative is co-created with their players, based on the choices and interactions that the player-characters have with each other and the narrative, so too is a teacher's campaign narrative between him and his students. Both TRPG players and students are tested throughout the campaign.[2] In TRPGs, players are tested in encounters by posing and answering questions, demonstrating their abilities, and resolving conflicts. Classroom students are similarly tested, with the achievements from their recorded assessments influencing the direction of their own future narratives. Ultimately, the teacher-as-narrator is in the position to provide and describe environments to the students so that the transmission and creation of knowledge, learning becomes possible. Where player-characters in RPGs typically collect experience points used to gain levels which influence the character's abilities, students collect knowledge and increase in grade levels.

Youth development necessitates identity experimentation through interaction with the world at large. James Côte's theory of identity capital refers to the resources that individuals access in order to help build their identities. These are acquired through social interaction and linked together by a continually growing self-concept (in Jones, 2009, p.81). Adding to this, Jean Baudrillard argues that because of the proliferation of signs in the consumer society, we are living in a world of hyperreality, where the world exists as a hyper-real simulation and an aesthetic superficiality makes up our day to day lives (in Jones, pp. 67-68). These ideas link heavily to Lacan's mirror-stage theory, where identities are merely reflections of what is already-present in society.

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[2] Some tabletop role-playing games go so far as to label the process of resolving encounters, *tests* (Pramas, 2011, p.6).

Seen through these lenses, the link between identity building in tabletop role-playing games and in real life becomes illuminated. In day-to-day interactions, we rely on our abilities, developed over time, honed as skills, in order to navigate our way through the world. Perhaps, then, as adolescents experiment with life in and outside of the classroom, they are playing hyperrealistic characters of themselves. By interacting with the world at large they are amassing identity capital, in the same way a character-persona amasses experience points. They cast superficial reflections of what the world has presented them. An authentic personhood of a growing teenager hides behind shifting personas dictated by the social experiences and expectations that they encounter, much like the shifting characters of a role-playing campaign.

"The conclusion is clear: to some extent we are all participants in fantasy role-playing games" (Waskul & Lust, p.340).

If it is true, as Jones (2009) contends, that youth are most fragile to the experimentation with seduction of the outward (p. 67), educators need to be aware of this experimentation, and the interplay between the superficial, character-like selves that adolescents are building, and the more authentic instances of self-hood.

If the average teenage life is a mirror, reflective of their unique experiences, it is a teacher's responsibility to ensure that mirror does not shatter. This infers using sensitivity and discretion in the classroom. Furthermore, it demands that educators project traits and characteristics that they want youth to reflect back at them, such as kindness, generosity, compassion, and empathy, so that those traits are likewise reflected back into society.

While some continue to see tabletop role-playing games as merely a pastime, this article demonstrates that they are a powerful example of how youths can develop their identity. They are not the only way, but they are one way. Knowing this, educators, as professionals that attempt to foster and facilitate positive identities in youth, have the chance to harness the potential for role-playing games to make significant impacts in their teaching.

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Le constructivisme : l'application d'un courant pédagogique en andragogie, ses avantages et ses limites

Hélène Vachon

Les idées conventionnelles quant à l'acquisition des connaissances furent rompues par Jean Piaget, il y a de cela plus de soixante ans, lorsqu'il s'est mis à décrire sa théorie révolutionnaire de la connaissance (Von Glasersfeld, 1994). En effet, la théorie du constructivisme s'est développée à partir, entre autres, d'une question que s'est posé Piaget, soit « Comment un enfant peut-il arriver à ce que nous appelons "connaissances" ? » (Von Glasersfeld, 1994, p.21). Je tenterai donc d'expliquer en quoi consiste cette approche en donnant un exemple quant à l'éducation des adultes ainsi qu'en énumérant quelques uns de ses avantages et ses limites concernant l'apprentissage.

Le constructivisme

De prime abord, il importe de mentionner que l'approche constructiviste est issue du cognitivisme (Duchesne, 2010). En effet, la construction de la conscience ou de l'intelligence (concepts cognitifs), selon l'approche constructiviste, s'effectue par l'entremise d'interactions de l'individu et de son milieu (Poissant, 1998). D'ailleurs, la conscience d'un individu lui permet d'agir et de s'adapter en fonction de son environnement (Poissant, 1998). Piaget a décrit le concept d'adaptation comme étant une résultante de l'opposition entre deux forces cognitives, soit l'accommodation et l'assimilation (Poissant, 1998). Ainsi, l'assimilation « concerne la tendance de l'intelligence humaine à assimiler ou à faire siennes les informations provenant de l'environnement physique ou social, de façon à les faire correspondre à des structures de connaissances ou à des schèmes préexistants » (Poissant, 1998, p.393), tandis que l'accommodation se résume en la capacité d'accommoder ou de modifier ces schèmes de connaissances afin d'être en mesure de prendre en considération de nouvelles informations, lesquelles viendraient autrement en contradiction avec les structures de connaissances préexistantes (Poissant, 1998).

Piaget a, de surcroît, affirmé que l'esprit humain rencontrait une seconde contrainte, c'est-à-dire que le développement cognitif s'effectue par une alternance entre les processus d'équilibration et de déséquilibration (Poissant, 1998). En effet, un apprentissage réel entraîne, sur le plan cognitif, une forme de déstabilisation, ce qui assure également le développement de l'intelligence (Poissant, 1998). À l'inverse, il y aurait arrêt du développement cognitif si l'état cognitif s'avérait stable (Poissant, 1998). Puisque l'esprit humain est également attiré vers des états stables, il est donc nécessaire de faire un choix, c'est-à-dire de décider si l'information déstabilisante devra être incorporée aux schèmes de connaissances déjà existants ou devra être rejetée de notre conscience, et par conséquent, éviter de ressentir une source d'inconfort ou une dissonance (Poissant, 1998).

Vygotsky a d'ailleurs nommé cet équilibre entre les connaissances antérieures et les informations nouvelles le concept de zone proximale de développement (Duchesne, 2010).

De ce fait, le constructivisme « fait l'hypothèse que l'organisme vivant survit et s'adapte à son existence en donnant au flux de l'expérience des formes qu'il est en mesure de manipuler » (Pépin, 1994, p.65). En d'autres termes, afin d'être en mesure de survivre et de nous adapter à notre milieu, nous devons réussir à associer une forme viable à notre expérience, en plus d'établir des liens entre celle-ci et nos structures de connaissances (Pépin, 1994). Une connaissance non viable est donc synonyme d'échec, tandis qu'une connaissance menant à l'atteinte d'un but visé est considérée comme étant viable, et ce, même si elle peut paraître erronée selon un autre point de vue (Pépin, 1994). Dans ce sens, l'échec « signifie que le monde ne peut se plier à la forme que nous voulons lui donner, du moins quand il s'agit d'atteindre ce but particulier » (Pépin, 1994, p.66) et favorise ainsi le processus d'accommodation. Effectivement, le fait de ne pas réussir à créer un monde à notre image selon les structures de connaissances que nous possédons déjà nous forcent à procéder selon une déconstruction et une reconstruction du monde que nous avions envisagées antérieurement (Pépin, 1994).

Ceci étant dit, pour être en mesure d'apprendre, et par conséquent, de modifier la façon dont nous comprenons le monde, ou un sujet en particulier, et notre manière d'agir face à celui-ci, nos connaissances antérieures doivent échouer (Pépin, 1994). Autrement, nous apprenons tout simplement que la manière dont nous construisons le monde est viable et produit les résultats escomptés (Pépin, 1994). En outre, il importe de mentionner que le développement de nouvelles connaissances doit se faire selon certaines constructions antérieures et non dans le vide, c'est-à-dire qu'une connaissance ne peut être construite si elle ne peut être associée à une expérience déjà construite (Pépin, 1994). En effet, s'il n'y a aucun schème de connaissances existant, nous n'aurions aucune connaissance antérieure à déconstruire pour ensuite reconstruire de manière davantage viable (Pépin, 1994).

Ainsi, de manière plus spécifique, le constructivisme « affirme que l'humain construit sa connaissance dans le processus même de son adaptation et que la connaissance n'a de sens que dans la mesure où elle résout des problèmes rencontrés lors de la poursuite de différents buts » (Pépin, 1994, p.69). Bref, cette approche consiste au développement de nouvelles connaissances à partir des connaissances antérieures d'un individu en traitant et en organisant l'information, en éliminant les données non nécessaires à l'apprentissage, en sélectionnant les données significatives et en interprétant l'information afin d'être en mesure de lui donner du sens et de se l'approprier en tant que nouvelle connaissance (Duchesne, 2010).

Son application en andragogie

Les adultes apprennent tout au long de la vie, et ce, pour des raisons professionnelles et/ou personnelles (OCDE, 2003). D'ailleurs, une grande proportion des apprentissages à l'âge adulte sont réalisés dans le cadre de mises à jour de leurs compétences professionnelles (OCDE, 2003). De nos jours, un grand nombre de « systèmes éducatifs ont fait du constructivisme leur "théorie de référence", en orientant dans ce sens la formation des maîtres, la rédaction des programmes, la conception des moyens d'enseignement, voire les outils d'évaluation » (Perrenoud, 2003, p.3). De ce fait, il importe de reconnaître que les étudiants contribuent aux apprentissages des enseignants, ces derniers étant eux aussi des apprenants (Larochelle et Bednarz, 1994). En outre, il est important pour un enseignant d'établir un lien entre son apprentissage en salle de classe et son apprentissage avec ses collègues de travail (Hord, 2009).

La qualité de l'enseignement, étant le facteur le plus signifiant quant à la réussite académique des élèves, s'améliore par des apprentissages professionnels continus (Hord, 2009). Or, le contexte favorisant davantage la formation continue des enseignants est par l'entremise de communautés d'apprentissage professionnelles (CAP) (Hord, 2009). Effectivement, une CAP permet aux enseignants de les responsabiliser quant à l'apprentissage de nouvelles stratégies d'enseignement afin d'augmenter leur efficacité en tant que professionnel, en plus de les conscientiser quant aux problématiques rencontrées dans leur école (Hord, 2009). Bref, ils apprennent à apprendre en collaborant entre eux (Hord, 2009).

Dans ce sens, une CAP fonctionne d'après un modèle d'apprentissage auto-initié tout en favorisant la collaboration entre collègues de travail, c'est-à-dire qu'elle préconise une approche constructiviste (Hord, 2009). En effet, le constructivisme reconnaît l'apprentissage comme étant un processus durant lequel nous devons donner du sens à l'information et aux expériences (Hord, 2009). De plus, apprendre selon une approche constructiviste exige un environnement où l'on peut travailler en collégialité et s'investir dans des activités et contextes authentiques (Vygotsky, 1978; cité par Hord, 2009). Bref, un apprentissage s'avère plus efficace lorsqu'il est réalisé en contexte social (Hord, 2009). Une CAP peut ainsi permettre aux enseignants de partager leurs expériences vécues en salle de classe, de discuter de leurs approches d'enseignement employées, de réfléchir quant aux problématiques rencontrées, et ce, tout en développant des processus d'accommodation, d'assimilation et de rejet afin de construire de nouvelles structures conceptuelles, des représentations significatives ou de nouveaux modèles cognitifs (Hord, 2009). Ceci s'avère donc un excellent moyen, pour le personnel enseignant, de modifier et de mieux adapter leurs méthodes d'enseignement en fonction de ce qu'ils apprennent au sein d'une CAP.

En somme, les enseignants opérant selon une CAP se servent des nouvelles informations recueillies afin de prendre des décisions concernant ce qu'ils devraient apprendre, la manière dont ils devraient s'y prendre pour acquérir ces connaissances, comment les transférer et les appliquer en salle de classe, et enfin, comment évaluer leur efficacité (Hord, 2009). En procédant de cette façon, ils sont amenés à modifier leur savoir pratique selon les buts pédagogiques déterminés par la CAP et apprennent lorsque leurs objectifs échouent (Pépin, 1994). Ainsi, les enseignants doivent également construire « dans le processus de leur adaptation globale, non seulement la réalité de leurs pratiques d'enseignement […] mais aussi les problèmes pratiques de leur propre survie dans le contexte » (Pépin, 1994, p.78), dont ce qui leur est demandé, leur propre évaluation en tant qu'enseignant ainsi que les contraintes qui s'exercent sur eux tant au niveau interpersonnel qu'institutionnel. Enfin, si certains décident de ne pas modifier leurs pratiques, « c'est que le savoir pratique qu'ils ont de l'éducation est encore viable dans leur contexte » (Pépin, 1994, p.78).

Ses avantages et ses limites

Tout d'abord, Hord (2009) a affirmé qu'un élément important de l'apprentissage selon l'approche constructiviste était les interactions sociales que celle-ci exigeait tout en introduisant diverses perspectives et en partageant nos réflexions avec d'autres. Vygotsky a d'ailleurs mis l'accent sur l'importance ainsi que l'influence de la dimension sociale quant au processus de construction des connaissances en élaborant le concept de zone proximale de développement (décrit ci-haut) (Duchesne, 2010). Ce dernier mentionne également qu'il est préférable de travailler en collégialité afin de recevoir des explications sur les démarches mentales de d'autres individus, ce qui permet à l'apprenant d'adapter ces propres conceptions et de construire de nouvelles connaissances (Duchesne, 2010).

En outre, l'approche expérientielle que propose le constructivisme encourage les enseignants à poser des questions aux élèves plutôt que de leur fournir les réponses sans y avoir d'abord réfléchi (Duchesne, 2010). Cette approche encourage, de surcroît, les apprenants à interagir (socioconstructivisme), à développer leur créativité et à penser à plus d'une réponse possible pour une même problématique (Duchesne, 2010), ce qui favorise « l'actualisation de l'étudiant qui développe ainsi un profil de connaissances et de compétences s'appuyant sur son individualité propre, ses priorités et ses aspirations » (Benny, Bégin et Mongeau, 2004, p.206). Bref, le constructivisme accorde énormément d'importance aux expériences vécues et s'intéresse aux processus menant à l'acquisition de nouvelles connaissances plutôt qu'aux résultats obtenus (Duchesne, 2010). De ce fait, ce processus vise à une reconstitution et non à une photocopie du savoir (Perrenoud, 2003).

Enfin, grâce au constructivisme, plusieurs méthodes actives se sont développées au cours des dernières années afin de favoriser l'apprentissage des étudiants. Effectivement, malgré le fait que certains démontrent une facilité à accéder rapidement aux opérations de reconstruction des connaissances, plusieurs apprenants, pour mieux comprendre, nécessitent le besoin d'agir sur le réel (Perrenoud, 2003). Par conséquent, les pratiques d'enseignement sont maintenant davantage diversifiées et proposent différents matériaux et contextes d'apprentissage afin de produire une action efficace ainsi que pour faciliter la construction de nouvelles connaissances (Perrenoud, 2003).

Quant aux limites du constructivisme, Perrenoud (2003) affirme que l'apprenant est laissé à lui-même pour effectuer ses propres constructions des connaissances ainsi que ses représentations du monde, c'est-à-dire que l'enseignant « ne peut que stimuler cette activité, lui donner du sens, l'étayer, la rendre plus rapide, plus sûre, moins décourageante » (Perrenoud, 2003, p.2). Dans ce sens, il est difficile d'évaluer les connaissances développées entre l'enseignant et l'apprenant (Perrenoud, 2003). En outre, la possibilité qu'un apprentissage corresponde de manière exacte aux attentes du formateur est peu probable (Gilly, 1980; cité par Pépin, 1994) puisque les connaissances doivent être construites individuellement et ne sont donc pas transmissibles (Von Glasersfeld, 1994). D'ailleurs, ce processus de construction de connaissances n'est basé qu'en fonction de l'expérience subjective de chaque individu, ce qui signifie que chaque interprétation sera unique (Von Glasersfeld, 1994). Il est donc important pour les enseignants de considérer les interprétations divergentes des étudiants et leur permettre « de s'expliquer quant à l'itinéraire conceptuel qu'il[s] on[t] effectué pour arriver à une réponse différente » (Von Glasersfeld, 1994, p.25).

Par ailleurs, l'approche constructiviste ne nous permet pas de construire des connaissances qui pourraient s'avérer utiles qu'ultérieurement (Pépin, 1994). Ainsi, seules les constructions déjà existantes et nos expériences passées peuvent nous être utiles quant à l'atteinte de nos buts actuels (Pépin, 1994). Enfin, en ce qui a trait aux savoirs d'autrui, un apprenant les considérera seulement s'ils peuvent être utiles à ses propres apprentissages, c'est-à-dire qu'ils seront en mesure de constituer un savoir pratique selon son point de vue (Pépin, 1994). Selon les constructivistes, c'est d'ailleurs le savoir pratique et non le savoir scolaire ou formel qui permet à l'apprenant de « survivre, de réaliser ses projets, ou de composer avec son désir » (Pépin, 1994, p.71).

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'Helping Kids' through High School Gay-Straight Alliances: A Narrative of Support

Catherine Vanner

The rates of harassment, victimization and violence that sexual minority youth face in schools in North America far exceeds that of their heterosexual peers, making schools sites of institutionalized heterosexism, complicit in violence that they do not act to stop. Increasingly, educators and students are refusing to accept this, and various initiatives are being undertaken to make schools more welcoming and supportive environments for sexual minority students. The most prominent of these initiatives are gay-straight alliances (GSAs). GSAs are school-based clubs that are "partnerships between sexual minority and heterosexual students with the purposes of promoting sexual justice, supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students and their allies, and promoting positive change in the school climate" (Russell, Murasco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009, p. 892). There is extensive literature demonstrating positive effects of GSAs in creating supportive and safe school communities in the United States. The following draws upon this literature to provide a rationale for supporting GSAs in public high schools. I then analyze GSAs in the context of Ontario public high schools through the narrative of an educational administrator with a long history of supporting GSAs in urban Ontario schools. The purpose is to illustrate ways in which educators can support GSAs and, by doing so, support sexual minority students in their schools. The narrative indicates that educational administrators can play a vital role in supporting GSAs by establishing themselves as visible supporters, advocating on behalf of students, linking the GSAs to school-wide initiatives and managing school and community dynamics.

The Need for Gay-Straight Alliances

Sexual minority students form a population that spans all races, ethnicities, socioeconomic status and geographic boundaries. They resist definitions and classification systems, yet are constantly establishing and validating new identity categories. Despite inspiring examples of resilience and dramatic surges in the visibility and acceptance of sexual minority individuals in mainstream hetero-normative society, sexual minority youth continue to face higher rates of exclusion, harassment, violence and marginalization in schools, leading to mental health issues and social maladjustment at higher rates compared to their heterosexual peers. Extensive evidence demonstrates that public high schools are sites of discrimination and violence for sexual minority students, who report significantly more at-school victimization than heterosexual peers (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Williams, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2005). Pervasive verbal discrimination includes both direct verbal harassment and passive anti-gay comments. In one American study, half of sexual minority young adults surveyed reported to having been verbally

harassed in high school (D'Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberger, 2002). Another study found that the average student hears an anti-gay comment every seven minutes and, of these incidences, a teacher intervenes in only 3% of cases (Carter, 1997), demonstrating tolerance on the part of school staff to anti-gay language. Violence against sexual minority youth often occurs in physical and/or sexual ways, and 11% of 350 sexual minority youth surveyed by D'Augelli et al. (2002) reported being physically attacked in school. Sexual minority youth are also more likely to be sexually harassed in schools by having sexual rumours spread about them, by being grabbed or touched in sexual ways, or through extreme forms of sexual violence including rape (Fineran, 2001; Reis, 1999). Often, the violence and harassment has significant long-term effects on the victims' socialization.

Unsurprisingly, the victimization of sexual minority youth frequently leads to significant negative mental health consequences and reduced educational attainment. In comparison to heterosexual youth, sexual minority youth report increased incidences of clinical depression (D'Augelli, 2002; Fergusson, Howrood & Beautrais, 1999), problematic substance abuse (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Corliss et al., 2010) and *suicidality* (Jiang, Perry & Hesser, 2010; Silenzio, Pena, Duberstein, Cerel & Knox, 2007; Zhao, Montoro, Igarta & Thombs, 2010). These negative health consequences can be directly linked to anti-gay harassment (Reis & Saewyc, 1999). Harassment is also linked to lower educational attendance and attainment among sexual minority youth, who are more likely to skip school because they feel unsafe and are twice as likely not to attend university (Kosciw, 2004). A safe school is necessary to facilitate the health and educational success of all students, and particular efforts are needed to combat anti-gay violence and harassment and provide support for sexual minority youth.

The Contributions of Gay-Straight Alliances to a Safer School Environment

There is no recipe for establishing and operating a GSA; generally, they are student-initiated but they can come from a teacher or administrator. The size, activities and objectives that the GSAs play vary by school, categorized by Griffin, Lee, Waugh and Beyer (2004) as playing four roles: 1) providing counseling and support, 2) providing a safe space, 3) acting as the primary vehicle for increasing awareness, visibility and knowledge about sexual minority issues in school, and 4) being part of broader school efforts to increase awareness, visibility and knowledge about sexual minority issues in the school. The presence of a GSA, regardless of the size or purpose of the organization, contributes to the development of a safer school environment for sexual minority students. This is because they provide increased individual support to sexual minority students, create an improved school climate or do both (Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2010). Schools with GSAs, or GSA positive schools, are more likely to be considered by students to be welcoming environments, as illustrated by Szalacha (2001, 2003) who demonstrated that students in GSA positive schools were three times more likely to agree that sexual minority students can be open about their sexuality and

significantly less likely to hear homophobic comments in schools; they were also less likely to be directly harassed and victimized because of sexual orientation (Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011).

Sexual minority students at GSA positive schools also experience lower rates of mental health problems and higher academic success rates than sexual minority youth at GSA negative schools. Sexual minority youth at GSA positive schools demonstrated lower rates of alcohol abuse and reduced rates of depression and psychological stress (Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011). Remarkably, they were only 29% as likely to make multiple past-year suicide attempts as sexual minority students at GSA negative schools (Goodenow et al., 2006), indicating a significantly reduced risk of suicide simply by having a GSA in the school. Perhaps due to the reduced incidences of mental health problems, sexual minority students at GSA positive schools also perform better academically. Walls et al. (2010) recorded the following dropout rates among sexual minority students in high school and university: 11.2% in schools with no GSA, 5.08% in schools with a GSA but they were not a member, and 0.92% at schools with a GSA where they were a member. They also found that sexual minority students at GSA positive high schools and universities had higher GPAs and were less likely to skip class, evidence that is supported in studies by Kosciw and Diaz (2006) and Goodenow et al. (2006). These improved mental health and educational outcomes create a strong case for establishing and supporting a GSA or similar club in schools to provide a safe learning environment for all students.

Gay-Straight Alliances in Ontario

The right of all Ontario high school students to have a GSA and the requirement of the school and the school board to support it was passed into provincial legislation with Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, in 2012, which serves as an amendment to Ontario's Education Act. Bill 13 requires schools and school boards to:

> support pupils who want to establish and lead activities and organizations that promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others and the creation of a positive school climate, including ... activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012).

This groundbreaking bill that explicitly mentions GSAs is preceded by Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) which encourages support for sexual minority students and GSAs more indirectly. The Strategy encourages a system-wide approach to "promote inclusive education, as well as to understand, identify, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit our students' prospects for learning, growing and fully contributing to society" (p. 11) and lists

sexual orientation as among the many dimensions of diversity. School boards have been encouraged to push the Strategy into action but, even with the new Bill, educators at the school level still have a large role to play in supporting GSAs and similar support and advocacy groups.

Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances in Ontario High Schools

At a school level, the role of education administrators in supporting the establishment and operation of GSAs is critical. To better understand this role and identify the ways in which administrators can be effective allies, advocates and advisors, I interviewed an educational administrator with a long history of supporting GSAs. Janet[3] is currently an Ontario high school vice principal, and has previously worked as a curriculum consultant and a teacher. She has been involved with GSAs since 1996. An initial individual interview took place in February 2013, and we subsequently met three times to discuss and validate the analysis. Janet is, above all, a supporter of students. She recognizes the marginalization and victimization that sexual minority students often experience in high school and has become devoted to supporting various forms of GSAs. Her interviews reveals four different elements of support an administrator can play in supporting the establishment and operation of GSAs: being a visible ally, advocating on students' behalf, linking GSAs to broader school initiatives, and managing school/community dynamics.

A Visible Ally

The majority of GSAs Janet worked with were student-run and student-initiated, however, like all school clubs, they need an adult advisor. Janet believes she has been approached by students to be the advisor because students know she is nonjudgmental and supportive of sexual minority students. Janet has both intentionally and inadvertently taken actions that contribute to building her reputation as an ally, including speaking with students individually about sexual orientation struggles and publicly declaring herself as a supporter. She states,

> The kids know that I'm a supporter. One of the ways that we show support as an administrator is to have a little rainbow on our window or something that says 'safe space' so that kids know that... you know, if they come and they say 'I'm gay' we're not going to be going 'What?!' or 'I can't deal with this.'

Advisors of GSAs like Janet act as visible supporters of sexual minority youth within the traditionally heterosexist school environment (Adams & Carson, 2006; Macgillivray, 2005). They are a beacon that sexual minority students can be comfortable turning to and confident that they will be supported. Advsiors' involvement with the GSA enhances their visibility as a friend and ally to sexual minority students. Having the ability to identify supportive teachers and administration is shown to positively impact the academic experience and outcomes of sexual minority youth (Heck et al.,

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[3] The name Janet is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the individual and her students and colleagues.

2011). Janet's involvement with GSAs makes her even more visible and accessible to students, feeding into her reputation as an ally.

Advocating on Students' Behalf

As a vice principal, Janet is in a position of authority in the school, but must still contend with the authority of the principal above her. In a study by Watson, Varjas, Meyers and Graybill (2010) on the role of GSA advisors, they found that administrators could be both barriers to or supporters of GSAs but, when they were the latter, their support was critical to establishing a safe and supportive school climate for both students and advisors. Janet explains that she has had a variety of experiences with principals, some who were very supportive of GSAs, some who had to be convinced, and one who led to the club's ultimate collapse. She describes the following instance of activism on behalf of students in the face of opposition from the principal:

> ...the kids wanted to have a GSA and it became a huge discussion point whether or not we were going to actually do this... we're still having conversations at this school with this particular principal about whether or not our parents would agree to this... even 'I don't think we have any gay students at our school...' Lots of those sorts of things. And we pushed and eventually we got a GSA going at that school.

Her activism, along with that of another teacher, led to the establishment of the GSA requested by the students. Griffin and Oullett (2002) describe GSA advisors as serving as a bridge between students and the faculty, staff and administrators. In this instance, Janet was able to leverage her position of authority in the school and convince the principal to permit the establishment of a GSA. While it is no longer legally possible for administrators to prevent the creation of GSAs in Ontario public high schools, GSAs and sexual minority students will continue to need adult supporters such as Janet to advocate on their behalf. In Watson et al.'s (2010) study, administrators' actions that opposed GSAs made discriminatory comments and restricted GSA activities. Supportive actions included encouraging comments, such as positive verbal recognition for the role of the GSA, allowing and facilitating training or services on sexual minority issues and fielding parental complaints about GSAs. These are all actions Janet has taken in her work.

Managing School and Community Dynamics

Janet's support for GSAs sometimes involves managing opposition to the clubs from the school and broader community. She describes experiencing frustration that, despite having made progress, delicacy continues to be necessary:

The wording had to be carefully couched. It's always so not to offend people who don't agree with gay rights. It is kind of sad in a way, we've come a long way but there's still restrictions and there's still always that eye that seems to be looking around at whether or not somebody's watching... if somebody's going to take what we as a board say the wrong way. And the same thing on an individual school level.

Janet's work recognizes the diversity of schools and communities, and tries to support sexual minority students in different ways depending on the school dynamic. She describes a vocational school where the students were not ready to talk about gay rights openly, and so she and the principal supported a teacher's establishment of a Respect Club where the dialogue centered around being accepting and respectful of all students despite differences. She hoped that this would still be a safe place where sexual minority students could take comfort and that it would also make the broader school safer for them. Janet's analysis of school and community dynamics involves factors including its location, demographics, primary religion and the attitudes of students, parents and the principal. She considers these factors to establish a service that meets the needs of sexual minority youth: "It was taking all of those things into account and coming up with something that worked." While she struggles with obstacles, in the end she believes her work in support of GSAs has a very straightforward mandate: "We're helping kids."

Linking GSAs to Broader School Initiatives

Janet's administrative role allows her to connect GSA activities to broader school initiatives to enhance the visibility and understanding of sexual minority issues in the entire school population. Initiatives include health fairs, where LGBTQ community organizations are invited to have a booth, and a discussion of discrimination and resilience of sexual minority students during the school's anti-bullying and mental health week. The positive effects of GSAs are most sustainable when they are part of a broad, ongoing organizational plan within the school that affects institutional policies, programming and practices (Jackson & Holvino, 1998; Lecompte, 2000; Oullett, 1999). By linking GSA activities to broader school activities, Janet fosters an openness in the school that refuses to make sexual minority issues invisible, taboo or marginalized. Janet describes GSAs as creating a school environment, which allows her to discuss these topics. By talking about them at the school level she builds an environment that is further supportive of GSAs, establishing a virtuous circle of dialogue.

Conclusion

GSAs are the most prominent and well-known means of formal group support for sexual minority students in schools, but supporting them remains a delicate task. Given the proven benefits of GSAs for sexual minority students, a great stride towards institutionalizing supportive and safe school environments was taken with the 2012 Accepting School Acts. Despite this, sexual

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minority students will continue to need adult supporters within the school to empower them, leverage their voices to counter opposition and spread a message of acceptance among schools. Janet's stories serve as an example for other administrators. Through her initiatives to establish herself as a visible supporter of gay rights, advocate on students' behalf, link GSAs to broader school initiatives and manage school dynamics, she has established safe and supportive spaces for sexual minority students at school after school. These efforts were never independent but always the result of collaboration within school staff and communities. Griffin et al. (2004) describe GSAs as replacing students' isolation with connection and providing opportunities for positive risk-taking. Discrimination of sexual minorities has been called the equity issue of our time; Janet and educators like her are fighting this battle alongside sexual minority students on a daily basis. They are connecting students together and ensuring that all students in the school get the message that intolerance is unacceptable and that celebration of diversity and respect for others is the only suitable behaviour in school.

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Part 2: Supporting Your Academic Journey

Cinq conseils pour réussir son rapport intérimaire

Claire Duchesne, professeure à la Faculté d'éducation

1) **Choisir avec soin son directeur ou sa directrice de rapport intérimaire**
   Choose carefully your director for the interim report

   - Choisir un professeur que l'on connait (si possible), avec qui on se sent à l'aise et avec qui on aime travailler.
   - Discuter avec lui de sa disponibilité à superviser un rapport intérimaire et de la façon dont il souhaite travailler.
   - S'entendre sur le choix d'un projet qui intéressera les deux parties.

2) **Établir un plan de travail réaliste et le respecter**
   Establish a realistic plan and stick to it

   - Rédiger un plan de travail, conjointement avec le directeur, en y explicitant les tâches qui devront être effectuées, les étapes à franchir et les dates à respecter (prévoir deux ou trois semestres).
   - S'entendre sur les rôles et responsabilités de chacun dans la mise en action de ce plan.

3) **Faire preuve d'initiative et d'autonomie dans son travail**
   Have initiatives and be a self starter in your work

   - Poser des questions à son directeur de rapport intérimaire, lui demander des rencontres au besoin.
   - Discuter avec son directeur, régulièrement, à propos de l'avancement du plan de travail établi. Autoréguler au besoin.
   - Agir, se mettre au travail, ne pas attendre que le directeur nous invite à le faire. Manifester de la discipline et de la rigueur dans son travail.

4) **Se former à la méthodologie de recherche**
   Learn about research methods

   - Discuter avec le directeur de la possibilité et de la pertinence de s'inscrire à un cours de méthodologie de recherche.
   - Lui demander des suggestions de lectures sur la méthodologie.
   - Participer à des formations ou présentations sur ce sujet.

5) **Adopter une attitude gagnante**
   Adopt a winning attitude

   - Accueillir de façon constructive les critiques et les conseils.
   - Regarder l'ensemble du chemin parcouru, pas seulement les étapes les plus difficiles.
   - Avoir toujours à l'esprit que l'on est en apprentissage et que si c'était facile, cela signifierait que l'on apprend peu.

What makes an excellent thesis research proposal?

Maurice Taylor, Professor in the Faculty of Education

Over the past years I have had the pleasure of helping a good number of MA and PhD students cross that finish line with a successful defence. And as we can all imagine it is a day of penultimate celebration for everyone who has hand in supporting that journey. When you think of it the official beginning of any particular MA and PhD project, always starts with the thesis proposal and getting out of the gates. Looking back over my own student successes, I believe that there are 4 common features that distinguish a well written proposal from an excellent proposal. Those areas are; a critical appraisal of the literature review; the alignment of the conceptual or theoretical framework with the methodology and methods, the clear articulation of the researchers' assumptions and presuppositions and the final overall significance or contributions of the research.

If I may I would like to say a few words about each of these sections that require a deep commitment to the drafting process of a proposal. Concerning the first quality of **critical appraisal**, we are all very good at summarizing studies into neat paragraphs and placing them one after another under a sub heading and then stringing our sub headings together in a section of the proposal that we call a literature review. Performing a critical appraisal of the literature is really your first piece of original writing inside the plan. I often tell my own students that there are two important elements for this appraisal; the first one is determining the paradigmatic approach that is inherent in each study cited and the methodological limitations of each study that is being referred to. Understanding the paradigm or worldview that is being espoused by authors is often tricky because it is sometimes hidden and can only be read " in between" the lines. To be able to discern these philosophical underpinnings of a study requires the writer to feel confident in their own epistemological stance and to have an appreciation of epistemological diversity. To determine the methodological limitations of cited works requires a knowledge base of analysis in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research. Being able to distinguish how your project topic has been studied through different ontologies and methodologies help to develop your argumentation and rationale for your choice of research design. This leads me to my second point- alignment.

An excellent thesis proposal has **alignment.** What this means is that a reader should easily see the symmetry among the sections of the proposal. Each section lines up, builds on the previous one and allows the reader to see the project unfolding with confidence. This alignment begins with a clear depiction of the concepts and ideas that have been cited in the literature review, the actual visual configuration of the interplay of those concepts in a theoretical or conceptual framework and the exact manner in which those concepts will be used in the research design. Taking these sections

of the proposed study together is like developing the strategic lines of the inquiry between the conceptual or theoretical lens and the methodology. It means that your framework has helped to nest your research questions. It means that you have determined the appropriate research design to answer those questions and it means that you have chosen the best ways of collecting information to seek what you set out to find. This is an important aspect of the writing exercise because at the end of day you need to make sure that your data sources and data analysis path all line up to answer your questions.

Assumptions and presuppositions of the researcher refer to the axiology that accompanies the entire research process of the study. For me, it is the essence of our awareness of ourselves as researchers and the statement of our positionality as we conduct the project. It is like a contract and a warranty statement that we make with a reader that describes our ethical and moral behaviours. It should be written like a code of ethical practice that brings into account how the research will be conducted. It defines the integrity of the project. Writing this important section means that we need to do a deep reflection of who the "self "is as a researcher and who the "self" is in relation to the other people involved in the study. This reflection helps us to know ourselves, our situations and our experiences in a novel way. I like to see this statement being made early in the proposal as it guides how the study will be done.

My last point is related to how we think we will be communicating out findings to different audiences and communities and touches on the rhetoric that we will be using. An excellent proposal identifies **contributions to theory**, **practice, and policy** and requires some forward thinking about how this will happen. In my own work with students and their various drafts, this last section of the proposal is often tired sounding and resembles proposal fatigue. Think about what scholarly contribution your project will make to the advancement of knowledge. And here there are multiple definitions of what knowledge means drawn from the paradigm that you are working from. Think about how your project findings will re-shape certain aspects of practice. Identify those types of practitioners. Also think about the notion of reciprocity or how you will be giving back to the participants that contributed to you work because they were the cornerstones of your study. Think about what policy actually means to your domain area and how policy is formed and at what level in that process your findings can have an impact. Consideration of these areas will help you to think through your dissemination strategies. View this section as the place where you write your authentic signature.

In sum, developing an excellent thesis proposal prepares you for other types of writing. With competition for external grants even more rigorous today, project proposals of any kind need to have that added value that stands out from the others. Having sat on a good number of SSHRC adjudication committees there is always a common remark made about those proposals in the top 5% and that is how the writer has been able to "feed" the reader with a story containing all of the parts.

Best of luck on feeding your supervisors and thesis committees.

Thank you.

Maurice Taylor

November 16, 2012

Confessions of a Conference Aficionado

Rebecca J. Hogue, PhD Candidate and Part-time Professor

I have to confess, I really enjoy presenting at and attending academic conferences. My first conference as a PhD student was in the last semester of my first year. A paper that I co-authored was accepted to IAMLEARN's mLearn conference in Beijing. The paper was scheduled for presentation on the first day of the conference in the very first time slot. I had never been to an academic conference. I had no idea what to expect or what was expected of me. I was a nervous wreck. Fortunately, I was not presenting alone. I was presenting with one of the other co-authors of the paper – who I met face-to-face for the first time the day before! When I look back on that presentation, it certainly was not one of my best performances, but the paper itself actually won a Best Paper Award. The opportunity to meet people 'like' me from around the world got me hooked.

My biggest discovery at that conference was the sense that I was not alone. At the University of Ottawa, I often feel alone. My background is more technical than anyone that I work or study with. My peers do not understand what I do, or the type of research I do. I often suffer from bouts of 'impostor syndrome' as a result of not being part of a tribe when I am at school. So, for me, conferences allow me to find my tribe and to confirm that I am not an impostor within my field of study (at least sometimes – not all conferences have this effect).

As my research is pragmatic and practical in nature, so too is this paper. The purpose of this brief paper is to (1) provide tips for meeting cool people at conferences, (2) provide University of Ottawa Faculty of Education graduate students with information on where to find funding to support conference attendance, and (3) provide money saving travel tips.

Tips for meeting cool people at conferences

I always come home from a conference reflecting on all the cool people I met at the conference. The people I meet usually end up part of my 'personal learning network' (PLN). After the conference we continue to connect, share resources, and have interesting conversations. So, how do I meet cool people at conferences?

(1) ***Introduce myself***. One of the primary reason people attend academic conferences is to meet other people. I have learned to not be afraid to initiate a conversation by introducing myself. Whenever I am standing in a line or sitting at a table with other people, I start the conversation with "Hi, I'm Rebecca". I usually follow up with one of: Where are you from?, What do you do?, What brings you to this conference? How is the conference going for you?

These conversations begin in the line for registration and continue throughout the conference. Once I meet someone, I try to say hi the next time I see them.

(2) ***Join informal gatherings***. It isn't always easy to find the informal gatherings at conferences (Twitter helps), but the hotel bar is often a good choice. What is nice about this, is that it is usually a group of core people, but also includes several who are lurkers in the conversation – which allows you to choose whether you want to join in or be a fly on the wall. I've been part of amazing academic dialogue/debate over a beer in the bar at the end of the conference day.

(3) ***Sit with people you don't already know***. At lunch, I often join a random table, with people I don't already know, or perhaps only one person that I already know. This allows me to introduce myself and meet new people. If you stick to sitting with people you know, you don't meet new people. The only time this has backfired on me is at multilingual conferences, where I often choose a random table only to discover that I don't understand the conversation because I don't speak the language!

(4) ***Use Twitter to initiate connections***. A few days before a conference, I try to see if anyone in my Twitter world is attending. Even if I don't know anyone, I can usually connect with someone via Twitter such that I do not need to eat alone. I throw out open invitations and am often pleasantly surprised by the response. Wonderful people use Twitter!

Where to find conference funding

The purpose of this section is to describe the various sources of conference funding available to the University of Ottawa Faculty of Education Graduate students. As a conference aficionado, I have learned of several places to find funding, but also worked on strategies to maximize my conference funding. That being said, I think of conferences in the same way I think of taking courses at other institutions, with the expectation that I will need to fund at least a portion of the conference myself (usually about $500/conference).

Most conference grants require that you are the first author for a presentation at the conference. Most conference organizers understand this. Typically, the easiest way to get into a conference is to submit a poster (although, posters cost an additional $100-$150 to print). You can create and submit proposals based upon literature reviews that you have done and conceptual frameworks you have created. You do not need to wait until you have collected data in order to present at a conference!

In order to maximize your travel grants, plan out which conferences you plan to attend over the next couple of years. Look at where the conferences are typically located. Some conference will tell you a year or two in advance where the next conference is. Others will wait until the current year's conference is over before they announce the following year. Looking at where the conference

has been previously will give you an idea of where the conference is likely to be in the year you wish to attend.

With the exception of the Graduate Student Association (GSAED) grant, all grants must be applied for in advance of the conference. I strongly recommend applying for grants immediately upon receiving acceptance to the conference. When you travel, be sure to keep all your receipts, as they are required to receive the funds. Typically, a grant will reimburse the amount you actually spend up to the maximum amount of the grant. Many (but not all) of the conference grants can be combined in order to increase the amount of funding for a specific conference.

A word of caution: be mindful of where you are in your program, as some of the grants expire after you have completed a certain number of sessions. I have identified the following sources of conference travel funding for students at the University of Ottawa: (1) Faculty of Education, (2) Faculty of Graduate and Post Graduate Studies (FGPS), (3) Graduate Student Association (GSAED), (4) your supervisor, (5) CUPE: the TA/RA union, and (6) APTPUO: the Part-time professors union. I describe each of then in the following sections.

(1) **Faculty of Education**. The Faculty of Education offers a competitive one-time travel grant of up to $500 called the 'Dissemination Assistance Fund for Graduate Students Registered in Graduate Studies Programs in Education (MA, PhD). Details of the fund can be found on the Faculty of Education Website under Research and Development Assistance Programs: http://education.uottawa.ca/theresearch/guide?lang=en. If you are not applying for this grant, but are applying for the FGPS grant you need to have funding from the Faculty of Education to qualify. To meet this requirement, the Faculty of Education will provide $100 in conference funding for any FGPS funded travel.

(2) **Faculty of Graduate and Post Graduate Studies (FGPS)**. FGPS provides Conference travel grants for thesis students (http://www.grad.uottawa.ca/Default.aspx?tabid=1471). The number of grants and amount provided depends upon which program you are in and the location of the conference. Note that these grants expire after you complete a specific number of sessions (for example, 6-sessions for MA, 15-sessions for PhD).

(3) **Graduate Student Association (GSAED)**. GSAED provides funding to support accommodations at conferences with the GSAED Academic Project Fund (http://gsaed.ca/en/financial-aid/ of $100/day up to $400 per conference, which you can access once (Masters students) or twice (PhD students).

(4) **Your supervisor or other professor.** Any professor you do RA or TA work for may have conference funding available. If your supervisor has received a research grant, they may have set aside funds for conference travel. Your supervisor may have funds that they can use to support your travel, meals, conference registration fees, and even poster printing. Don't be afraid to ask!

(5) **CUPE.** If you work as an RA or TA on a CUPE contract, you can apply for a grant from the CUPE conference fund (http://2626.cupe.ca/rights/conference-fund/) once per school year. You must be a first author on a presentation, and your presentation must NOT be related to your thesis work. If you do a poster based upon RA or TA work, you qualify for the CUPE travel grant. The grant is competitive in that they only have a certain budget allocation per year; so you are better to apply for conferences in the early part of the year or apply immediately upon having your presentation accepted. You can apply for one grant per academic year.

(6) **APTPUO**. If you teach in the Faculty of Education as a member of the Part-time Professors Union, you have access to the APDF-Travel grants (http://www.aptpuo.ca/en/faq/grants/conferences-publications-recherche/54-apdf-travel). They have grant categories for presentation at conferences as well as attending conferences, and your presentation can be related to either your teaching role or your research. You can receive two grants per academic year. The amount of which is paid is dependent upon the budget you provide in your application. The maximum available per year is $2500.

Money saving travel tips

You have now had a paper accepted to a conference, and received some funding for the conference. What can you do to reduce the amount of money you are spend to actually attend the conference? In this section, I provide a few money saving travel tips.

(1) **Investigate flights** using hipmunk.com. Hipmunk.com is a website that searches most of the air carriers and provides you a listing of the cheapest flights. It also allows you to sign up for alerts, so you know when tickets go on sale. When I submit my abstract (or when I receive acceptance), I sign up for Hipmunk.com alerts for my flights. After monitoring for a few weeks, I learn what a good price for a ticket is, so I can recognize a seat sale. When I see a seat sale, I buy my tickets.

(2) **Investigate alternative accommodations**. Often the conference hotel and posted rate is not the best rate (even at the same hotel). I've been able to get less expensive rates by going to the hotel's website and checking for sales. Sometimes there are additional hotels across the street from the conference at a reduced rate.

(3) ***Check your email in the lobby***. Expensive hotels have expensive in-room Internet. Interestedly, less expensive hotels often have free in-room Internet. Most hotels provide free wifi in the hotel lobby. You can save the expensive in-room Internet fee by checking your email in the hotel lobby/bar/coffee shop where the Internet is free. This often also provides you with a way to meet other conference attendees (just leave your badge on so you are easily identified). If you recognize someone, remember to say hello.

(4) ***Bring your breakfast***. I have found that most free breakfasts are just sugary pastries. These never set me up for a productive day of learning and networking. Real breakfast at the hotel is usually excessively expensive. An easy solution are the instant oatmeal cups you can now buy at most grocery stores (or Starbucks). All you need is hot water and you have an inexpensive breakfast that also sets you up for a productive day.

Conclusion

Conferences provide great opportunities to find your tribe, share your research, and network. I have found that throughout my degree, my focus for conference travel has changed. In the beginning, I went to conferences to help battle 'imposter syndrome'. After the first year, I found myself going to conferences to meet or interact with specific people. As I approach the later part of my PhD, my focus of conference attendance had changed yet again. I'm now seeking out conferences to network with the purpose of finding post-graduation employment. In this paper, I've provide tips for meeting cool people, information on where to find money, and tips for spending less. Together, this information has allowed me to maintain my conference habit. I hope it also helps you!

Part 3: Bios

Author and Editor Bios

Veena Balsawer

Veena Balsawer is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education in the Society, Culture and Literacies stream. Her research interests are auto-ethnography, curriculum studies, language and literacies, impact of (im)migration on children and families, (multi)cultural studies, narrative inquiry, post-colonialism and feminism, and women's issues.

Claire Duchesne

Les intérêts de recherche de Claire Duchesne portent sur les questions associées à la formation, à l'apprentissage et au développement des adultes, à l'apprentissage transformateur, à la formation initiale et continue des enseignants ainsi qu'à l'insertion professionnelle des nouveaux enseignants issus de l'immigration.

Rebecca J. Hogue

Rebecca Hogue is pursuing a PhD in Education at the University of Ottawa. Her professional background is in instructional design and software quality assurance. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Distributed Learning (Distance Education), and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science. Her passion is for teaching learning professionals how to integrate technology into their teaching practice. Her research involves creating faculty development resources for integrating tablet technology into university teaching.

Graeme Lachance

Graeme Lachance is a full-time Master of Arts in Education student, in the Society, Culture, and Literacies stream. His research interests navigate the sometimes turbulent waters of alternative education and alternative curriculum models, in particular the unschooling and self-directed learning movements. Raised in Montreal, he has taught in public, alternative, and international schools and is currently volunteering at a center for self-directed learning in Ottawa.

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Joanne Lalonde

Joanne M.C. Lalonde is a PhD candidate in the Society, Culture and Literacies stream of Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. Her research focuses on the evaluation and enhancement of ethical reasoning, moral imagination and leadership capacities of service learners and student volunteers. Her thesis work examines the transformative possibilities of volunteering on individual ethical development with the goal of establishing best practices for the preparation of university students who work in local communities and/or volunteer internationally. She holds a BA in Conflict Studies and an M.A. in Public Ethics.

Maurice Taylor

Professor Taylor's three main research tracks include adult literacy and basic skills, workplace education and adult learning. His Canadian research work has been funded through provincial governments and agencies and federal granting councils while his international research has attracted support through the Commonwealth Foundation and International University Councils. He has edited six books. In addition to numerous publications, Professor Taylor has been invited as a consultant and expert for such organizations as the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the National Literacy Secretariat, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Human Resources Partnership Directorate, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Judicial Institute and St. John Ambulance.

Hélène Vachon

Hélène Vachon est doctorante à la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université d'Ottawa. Détenant un baccalauréat en psychologie ainsi qu'une maîtrise en administration éducationnelle, ses champs d'intérêt de recherche comprennent l'administration scolaire, le leadership des directions d'école en contexte de valorisation culturelle et linguistique, les relations avec la communauté scolaire, les communautés d'apprentissage professionnelles et la psychologie de l'éducation.

Catherine Vanner

Catherine Vanner is a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. Her research interests are gender equality, children's rights and child protection in education, both in Canada and internationally. Previously, Catherine worked as an Education Specialist at the Canadian International Development Agency (now part of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada) providing support to bilateral education programs. She has a M.A. in International Affairs from Carleton University.