

Paying the piper: the costs and consequences of academic advancement

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In many professions there are qualifications to gain and professional standards to achieve. Lawyers pass the bar and doctors pass their boards. In academic life the equivalent is a doctorate, closely followed by a profile of peer-reviewed publication. To hold a doctoral degree is the common requirement to become ‘academic’ but does it prepare individuals to advance in an academic career? In choosing the idiom ‘paying the piper’ (i.e. where one must pay the costs and accept the consequences of one’s actions) we recognise that in seeking to develop our scholarly profiles we had to choose to adapt successfully to global workplace expectations, modify our professional aspirations or refuse to participate. In this paper we examine the challenges we faced as academics in physical education as we progressed from beginning to mid-career stages. We focus particularly on challenges related to seeking external research funding, exploring our assumptions about academic life and the perceived expectations that lie under the surface around research funding, teaching and service. Through the use of self-study we demonstrate how our perceptions of academic career progress meant paying personal and professional costs that we were largely (and perhaps naively) unaware of when we entered the academic workforce. Data consisted of Ashley’s reflective diaries generated over the past six years, which were analysed deductively based on an understanding of salient experiences of academic life, most notably, those related to the pursuit of funding and its relationship to academic advancement. Tim played the role of critical friend by asking probing questions, relating personal experiences to instances in Ashley’s data, and offering alternative interpretations of Ashley’s insights. By sharing our experiences we hope early career academics (ECAs) may relate to and learn from our naivety. In this way, there may be implications for the induction and mentoring of future ECAs.

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In May 2015, Tim contributed to a workshop for postgraduate students on preparing for employment beyond graduation. We assume quite a few readers may have presented at similar events. Apparently, obtaining an academic position served as

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evidence Tim had successfully ‘begun’ his academic career. At that workshop he shared strategies about the job search and suggested some key experiences and achievements that helped him in becoming employed at the university. Much of the information was framed by assumptions of what is currently valued and expected of an academic worker by universities as outlined by those who govern the institutions. That is to say, very little of what he shared was encouraging resistance to academic institutions or forging one’s own path as a scholar-teacher.

Using this anecdote as an illustrative example, Tim’s socialisation could be described as conservative and custodial: his employment (to date) had come as a result of following—and certainly not questioning—the norms and expectations of university workers in the current neoliberal climate that pervades global higher education (Connell, 2013). Such a climate encourages efficiency, independence and the production of knowledge that has financial and technological ‘impact’ for universities and societies (Morley, 2016). For academic workers, Ball (2012) suggests:

... Neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others. It is about how we relate to our students and our colleagues and our participation in new courses and forms of pedagogy and our ‘knowledge production’, but it is also about our flexibility, malleability, innovation and productivity in relation to these things. (p. 18)

Our purpose in this paper is to reveal the tensions and uncertainties in our socialising experiences as early career academics (ECAs) who are now navigating a transition to ‘mid-career’ (for which there is no clear boundary marking the entry or exit point) in the current neoliberal climate of globalised higher education. We use a version of the idiom ‘paying the piper’—where one must pay the costs and accept the consequences of one’s actions—as an underlying metaphor to help think about our socialisation. According to Atkins (2003) and Helterbran (2008) there are two versions of the idiom. One version (the earlier) refers to using wealth to pay for privilege, as in ‘those who pay the piper can call the tune’. However, the version we use is considered to be the later version that is in more common use today and acknowledges that there are consequences for actions (e.g. ‘I’ve put off going to the dentist long enough, now it is time to pay the piper’).

By suggesting we are ‘paying the piper’, we seek to expose some of the changes we wrought in how we viewed and approached academic work and the consequences of those changes. By doing so—and like Tannehill (2016)—we articulate what we have learned about becoming academics with the hope this resonates with readers so they may similarly learn. In particular, we present our lived experiences as evidence of ways in which current systems in higher education are arguably in need of change for the benefits of academic workers and the disciplines in which they work. As such, the results of this study are offered as a potentially influential contribution to critical debates about the current climate of higher education governance, policy and practice, particularly in physical education. The question guiding our research is: *In the current neoliberal climate of higher education, what socialising experiences (i.e. professional beliefs and expectations, and personal actions) have shaped our transition from early to mid-career academics?*

Occupational socialisation in higher education

Occupational socialisation is defined as the processes through which individuals learn values, attitudes, norms, knowledge and behaviours that allow them to be accepted into an organisational culture (Austin, 2002; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Tierney, 1997; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). In turn, the socialising experiences of an individual serve to shape their own beliefs, values and behaviours about and towards their work. According to Gardner and Blackstone (2013), socialisation in academia occurs through both implicit and explicit actions.

In considering an individual's socialisation as they move from doctoral study to postdoctoral employment McAlpine (2016) argued that PhD graduates experience a key shift as they seek to construct an appropriate 'identity-trajectory' (p. 50). Such an identity-trajectory seeks to integrate 'a unique intellectual profile within and recognised by a growing network of local and international colleagues'. This type of network acknowledges that an individual academic's identity-trajectory is not just bound by his or her academic institution but is also bound by the academic network globally. Put differently, the workplace of the academic is 'glocal'; that is, defined by both local and global considerations.

Much of the literature on academic socialisation has focused on the intense socialisation of ECAs as they begin working life in a university (Tierney & Perkins, 2015). Part of the intensity, particularly in the North American context, comes from being on the 'tenure track', when ECAs are building their profile and demonstrating their professional value to their academic workplace so as to gain tenure (Tierney, 1997). Acker and Armenti (2004), and Acker, Webber, and Smyth (2012) described this period as particularly stressful, draining and demanding for ECAs. As one participant in Acker and Armenti's (2004) study stated: 'I had such anxiety about tenure, I was so afraid. It was a visceral, palpable fear inside me' (p. 12). These fears were driven by a perception of being closely scrutinised, monitored and assessed for one's worth. Similar anxiety is generated through processes such as probation, or the award of temporary adjunct contracts (Kosnik & Beck, 2008).

On the path to tenure and/or promotion, new recruits begin to establish firmer beliefs about what they need to do in their roles. Importantly, such beliefs tend to reflect those held by their departmental (local) and disciplinary ('glocal') colleagues, even when those group beliefs stand in contrast to one's own (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). New recruits are likely to pave a path close to departmental and/or disciplinary norms because their socialisation is deemed to have been 'successful' if they meet the pre-established benchmark (s) for success (Tierney, 1997). In such 'glocal' settings, the challenge with across-the-board benchmarks is that they fail to acknowledge that no one recruit is the same; a point of increasing importance when 'the avenues for entry to the PhD have expanded and there is now a larger, more diverse population of doctoral students' (Craswell, 2007, p. 384). A 'striking feature of the employability discourse' in doctoral training and academic socialisation, Craswell (2007) argued, 'is the absence of employer responsibility' (p. 383). She suggested much of the training received by doctoral students, and we would argue ECAs, comes from supervisors and established colleagues and is often

implicit (Craswell, 2007) rather than explicit. The question is, can implicit learning help ECAs be successful in continuing their journeys in the academy through their mid-career where they will face circumstances where their skills need to be adapted to new imperatives and demands? It is, after all, upon their abilities to adapt to institutional demands and values that an ECA's worth will be judged beyond their induction and through the tenure/promotion process.

Lawson (1991), who was an early supporter of conducting research on occupational socialisation in physical education in higher education, believed such work would generate deeper insights into how academics' work developed the profession. Since Lawson's (1991) foundational work there has been relatively little response to his call for this type of research. Tellingly, McEvoy, MacPhail, and Heikinaro-Johanssen's (2015) recent review of the literature on physical education teacher educators included only 15 articles that focused on socialisation in the past 25 years. Of these, most were concerned with the nature and extent of preparation to become teacher educators, either in postgraduate programmes or in the early moments of their academic careers (cf. Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Dodds, 2005; Fletcher & Casey, 2014; Lee & Curtner-Smith, 2011; Parker, Sutherland, Sinclair, & Ward, 2011; Williamson, 1993) with few exploring experiences beyond induction.

Socialisation beyond induction in higher education

Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, and Moretto (2008) suggested little had been done in terms of researching the experiences of mid-career academics (MCAs) across all university disciplines (including physical education); a point echoed by McAlpine (2016) with regards to the postdoctoral period. Of the small body of research that has considered the socialisation of physical education academics beyond induction, most are represented as retrospective accounts of notable scholars in the field. The general purpose of these papers has been to describe how the authors got to where they are and what they learned in the process. For example, Cutforth (2013), Kirk (2014), Lawson (2009), and Tannehill (2016) described their respective experiences as they moved from beginning to established physical education academics. The focus of Kirk's (2014) paper was on how he managed his varied role as an academic worker in the corporatised, neoliberal contexts of higher education over 30 years. In the other papers, each author focused on a particular aspect of their academic work. Lawson (2009) provided a reflective account of the progress of his career as a researcher to show how his socialisation was influenced by socio-cultural forces; most notably the existing paradigms in physical education research. Tannehill (2016) addressed her career-long experiences of becoming a teacher educator. She described and shared her ongoing experiences of learning to teach teachers using social learning theory and, by doing so, aimed to help others (particularly beginning teacher educators) learn from those experiences. Cutforth (2013) articulated his experiences as a community-engaged scholar who worked closely with individuals and organisations in local communities.

While the analyses of these retrospective, reflective papers provide important insights into the lives of established physical education teacher educators across their respective

professional careers, we are still missing the voices of those who might be making the transition to MCA or who might be considered actively in their mid-career.¹ Amongst this group would be those physical education academics who have negotiated the intensity of their early socialisation but who are now experiencing different stages of socialisation. Importantly, we lack descriptions and interpretations of socialisation *as the academic experiences them*. That most accounts of organisational socialisation—the last and longest of the socialisation stages (Lortie, 1975)—have been provided by senior academics suggests a degree of risk in sharing the doubts, uncertainties, confusion or points of contention in the work of academics. In this paper we take on this risk by exploring our socialisation experiences as ECAs and examining them as we enter into, or embed them, in our mid-careers. We admit the ways in which we have had to ‘pay the piper’ in seeking academic advancement, and examine the costs and consequences of these actions.

Methodology and methods

Analysing and sharing the uniquely personal perspectives of our socialisation requires a similarly personal methodological approach that allows the articulation of feelings of vulnerability in an honest but rigorous way. For this reason, self-study of practice methodology guided our inquiry. Self-study is a form of practitioner research that focuses specifically on the self-enacting-practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Ovens & Fletcher, 2014). Although self-study researchers have an explicit focus on the self, ‘the purpose of self-study [is] to move beyond the particularities of practice by making public the developed understandings (through conference presentations, research reports, journal manuscripts) in order to make them informative for others and available for critical debate’ (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 509).

According to Ovens and Fletcher (2014), self-study researchers share a common set of characteristics and dispositions that enable their work to be identified as self-study. First, they are members of a professional community of practitioners who share, research and evolve their own practice. Second, each takes an inquiry-oriented stance towards researching how she or he thinks, knows and acts in the contexts in which they practice. Third, by turning the focus of inquiry onto the self, the self-study researcher implicitly expresses a desire to be more, to improve, to better understand.

Although most self-study researchers identify themselves as members of the self-study of teacher education practice community, for the purposes of this research we wish to expand the boundaries of the self-study community. Specifically, we prefer to describe our particular approach as self-study of *practice* rather than self-study of *teacher education practice*. Both labels are specific to practice so the distinction rests upon the contexts in which the self-study is taking place. Because most self-study research has been conducted in teacher education settings, there has been an explicit focus on the practices of teacher educators with the aim of developing and articulating pedagogies of teacher education practice (Loughran, 2006). However, teaching practice is but one of the roles of an academic (Boyer, 1990).

In seeking to build knowledge of the practices of academics through self-study of practice, our research design was guided by LaBoskey’s (2004) five criteria: (i) it is

self-oriented and -initiated, (ii) it is improvement-aimed, (iii) it is interactive at some stage of the process, (iv) it uses primarily qualitative data gathering methods, and (v) it relies on readers to determine and validate the findings based on trustworthiness.

Settings and participants

Ashley lives and works in the United Kingdom and ‘became’ an academic either in September 2009 when he joined the staff at the University of Bedfordshire as a Senior Lecturer or in January 2010 when he received his PhD—deciding when he became an academic depends on the reader’s judgment of whether or not one can be identified as an academic without a PhD. In March 2014 he joined Loughborough University as a Lecturer in Pedagogy and he has recently taken on the role of Senior Lecturer. Tim lives and works in Canada. He formally entered academic work in August 2011, at which time he started a position as Assistant Professor (equivalent to lecturer in most contexts outside of North America) at Memorial University of Newfoundland. In August 2013, he took a position as Assistant Professor at Brock University, where he has worked since.

Data sources and analysis

Data consisted of the open-ended reflective diary Ashley has been writing daily since 5 September 2009: his first formal day working in a university. This reflective diary, which at the time of analysis contained more than six years (2190 days) of daily reflections, offered a space in which to generate a narrative of his diverse experiences working in the university environment. Elsewhere (Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Fletcher & Casey, 2014), we have described how our respective reflective diaries serve as an archive or ‘literature of place’ (Kelly, 2005). Ham and Kane (2004) suggest that reflective diaries and other forms of self-generated data act ‘as an ongoing stimulus to even more data’ (p. 114). That is, re-reading previously written reflections at different times and in different contexts to when and where they were originally generated can offer new perspectives to shape future reflective writing.

Self-study of practice requires researchers to have a general question or research problem guiding the inquiry and with this in mind, many of Ashley’s diaries have been written with the intent of helping him improve his understanding of the ways in which the contextual elements of his work shape his practice. Some of his diary entries have focused on his teaching, research and service requirements, respectively. Although Tim also keeps a consistent habit of reflective diary writing we did not use these for this paper (although we have used them previously) because his reflections focus only on his teaching practice and do not consider other aspects of his academic practice or experience in a broad sense (such as research and service requirements).

To avoid self-study of practice researchers being overly solipsistic in their inquiries, interactivity is a crucial element to establish rigour in their research (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Tim’s role in this study was that of critical friend to Ashley;

someone who could ask provocative questions, contribute and examine data from another lens and offer a critique of a colleague's work (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Critical friendship enables the challenging of assumptions, confrontation of realities and identification of new ways of thinking about practice in its various forms (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009). Tim's role as critical friend was important given our perceived challenges of articulating our struggles as academic workers honestly to a third party, particularly when that third party may be one of the departmental or disciplinary gatekeepers discussed earlier. Because we had conducted collaborative self-study research in the past, we both felt comfortable expressing our respective vulnerabilities, fears and doubts with each other, which we believe adds to the trustworthiness of our claims.

There were six main steps in the analysis. First, all diary entries between 5 September 2009 and 25 March 2015 (2029 days inclusive) were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word from Ashley's handwritten entries and then uploaded into the NVivo Software programme. Second, given the sheer volume of data (522,908 words across the 2029 days) and the need for self-study researchers to have a general question or research problem guiding the inquiry (LaBoskey, 2004) an *a posteriori* approach informed the analysis.

Securing research funding before seeking tenure/promotion was significant in our lived socialising experiences as ECAs, which informed our *a posteriori* analytic approach. Consequently, in the third step we used the 'word frequency' function in NVivo to produce a list of the 1000 most frequently used words in the diaries. This list was then substantially reduced through our *a posteriori* analysis and word frequency was determined for words relating to our lived experiences (see Table 1). The combined total of 2273 occurrences of the terms in Table 1, however, meant that further refinement was needed. Therefore, a 'paired word' search using NVivo's text search function was undertaken as the fourth step. In this search, combinations of words (e.g. funding *and* application or grant *and* proposal—see Table 2) were used to refine and focus the scope of the search. This search revealed 62 occurrences of paired words relevant to this study.

Fifth, using the list generated in Table 2, Ashley identified and shared what he felt were the 30 most representative excerpts with Tim. Tim responded to each as a critical friend, asking questions, probing, sharing comparative examples from his own experiences (e.g. observing similarities and differences), and/or offering alternative interpretations of the excerpts. Last, we jointly identified examples that we both found meaningful, insightful or that highlighted an aspect of our socialisation as academics. In carrying out this step, we sought to identify and express tentative themes we felt would resonate with readers from the academic community, who might therefore be able to assess the trustworthiness of our claims and interpretations based on their own experiences (LaBoskey, 2004).

Our initial analysis revealed two themes: (i) doing unfunded research and (ii) shifting from doing research we felt valuable and interesting to doing research we thought might be fundable. However, in the process of writing this manuscript we came to see how both themes could be collapsed into one: the costs and consequences of seeking

Table 1. Single word frequency results

Single word	Frequency
Application	135
Applications	41
Deadline	45
Expectations	78
Frustrating	85
Funding	138
Grant	199
Grants	72
Money	99
Opportunities	156
Priorities	46
Priority	47
Promotion	67
Proposal	62
Recognition	38
Reputation	49
Research	875
Socialisation	41
Total	2273

academic advancement by conducting funded research (which is encapsulated in the idiom ‘Paying the piper’). In the results section that follows we discuss ‘paying the piper’ under two sub-themes: (i) Research agendas in a brave new world and (ii) Socialisation in ‘glocal’ higher education. This is done in an effort to demonstrate the shift we experienced in moving from ECA to MCA.

Table 2. Paired word frequency results

Paired words	Frequency
Funding application	2
Funding grant	1
Funding opportunities	1
Funding proposal	3
Grant application	12
Grant funding	14
Grant opportunities	0
Grant proposal	2
Research application	1
Research funding	17
Research grant	9
Research proposal	0
Total	62

Results: paying the piper

We came into our academic roles with no funding and an assumption that we could establish research programmes based on our own interests, which at that stage were closely tied to our teaching. Metzler (2010) described himself and some other physical education researchers as ‘blue collar scholars’ inasmuch as they studied their own and others’ teaching and programmes and yet received little, if anything, in terms of financial support from external funding bodies. Along these lines, we thought we would get to study the complexities of our teaching practice.

In moving from ECA to MCA, one of the main shifts we observed was our realisation that research could not solely be seen as an end in and of itself. We had entered a ‘brave new world’ where doing research (in any form) was no longer enough, nor did it serve to identify either of us as academics. Increasingly, we found ourselves socialised into a ‘glocal’ way of thinking about research as a conduit for attracting funding and ultimately furthering our ambition to gain promotion. We felt increasingly pushed by the implicit and explicit socialising processes of the neoliberal climate in higher education to do research that could attract funding.

Research agendas in a ‘brave new world’

Having the autonomy to decide their own research agendas is something many academics hold dear, including those in physical education. However, in the context of a neoliberal university our postdoctoral identity-trajectory suggested things would be otherwise. Gard (2008) questioned an academic environment where others decide what should and should not be researched in universities and yet our findings suggest that was our reality. Moving away from the comfort or safety of our PhDs and into our respective careers as academics created new, previously unseen (at least by Ashley) dilemmas around the sequencing of research interests. These dilemmas were framed by decisions Ashley had to make about whether to pursue: (i) a research problem (which could possibly be funded) or (ii) a call for proposals by a funding body who identified the research problem themselves. Previously the choice was easy: choose a problem and study it. Now the decision-making process emphasised getting money to pay for studying a problem the researcher may or may not be wholly interested in. In the following diary excerpt, written just days after his PhD Viva Voce/Oral Defence, Ashley reflected on this new decision-making process. What was previously seen as one thing was now seen as multiple things:

I am in a brave new world in terms of research. Before when setting up a new project I knew that my budget was zero. Now I have a slim possibility of some funding.
(Reflective Diary, 20 December 2009)

Here Ashley saw himself in a brave new world but was, perhaps unsurprisingly, unsure how to act in this world. The need to conduct research that was funded or fundable was a distinct priority for his university, and, in turn, for him as an academic. More specifically, it was important for Ashley to demonstrate to his university that he

was being ‘successfully’ socialised according to ‘glocal’ criteria and could generate the income and prestige they desired (we will discuss this more fully in the next sub-theme). This reflects Ball’s (2012) notion of performativity in the neoliberal university, one indicator of which is a shift towards ‘pedagogical and scholarly activities ... which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes’ (p. 20).

Reflections that referred to seeking and attracting funding were apparent from the first days of Ashley’s appointment and continue to the present day. This is not an issue that has ever gone away. The following two excerpts (written two years apart) highlight the consistent presence of funding expectations in Ashley’s academic work:

There does seem to be some funding available from [X Organisation] that I need to access—although I must get an idea of how to apply for it. The [Y Charity] is another option and that might be an avenue for anything that I set up with [a colleague]. (Reflective Diary, 21 December 2009)

A good exercise over the last few days writing a funding application. In all honesty I don’t actually have the time to undertake the project I’ve just applied for and in some respects I have to hope I don’t get it. However, it was more of a case that I couldn’t afford not to apply. If I want to be taken seriously by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research I need to be seen to aspire for this sort of stuff. I just wonder at the value of it to my research agenda. I do feel that I have enough to do ... more than enough to do ... already and this does feel like hoop jumping. Still, these are the games we play. (Reflective Diary, 13 December 2011)

Ashley’s reflection demonstrates a desire to ‘be taken seriously’. It is an example of how his own reputation in the eyes of the university was inevitably tied to his potential for internal advancement. While the reflection represents an implicit consciousness of individual and institutional relationships, it does not fully acknowledge the need to ‘pay the piper’ in the accepted currency. In their exploration of academic reputation, O’Loughlin, MacPhail, and Msetfi (2015, p. 815) discussed ‘the relationship between individual, department and institution’ and argued that each was ‘inextricably linked as regards cultivating and managing an institution’s research reputation’. Applying this argument we posit that while this is a two-way link, the flow is predominantly top-down. In response to these excerpts, and in his role as critical friend, Tim wrote:

I wonder about the appeal of seeking funds at that point [of your career]. Was it to help with your program of research (to grow it, to allow you to do things you wanted to do) or was it to meet a potentially important criterion for ‘successful’ academic work? Or both? When I think about my own applications for funding there have been some instances where the application has been to develop my research program—seeking funds to help better answer questions I am really interested in (but which also helps my academic status) but also others where the main purpose has been to tick the [funding] box on my CV. That is, the projects held a slight interest but were not necessarily things I was passionate about or completely invested in.

As part of our critical friend process, Ashley used his right of reply:

I think, as I’ve settled into my career or maybe as I’ve come to understand the expectations that others have of me, I can see a border (a no-man’s land if you will) between what I want to research and what carries the broader research agenda

along. I have learnt to stand a little more on the shoulders of giants and acknowledge that there is a difference between what I want to research and what needs to be researched. At the same time, however, I don't think anyone ever told me this. There was an expectation that I already knew what I needed to do and that it would be teaching 'grandmother to suck eggs' if I was told what to do. Looking back now I do wish I had been treated like a novice. Not like an idiot but like a beginner. I had already begun my career before I realised that, in many cases, I needed to start again and develop a rudimentary understanding of what it meant 'to get research funding'.

Following arguments by Hastie and van der Mars (2014), our self-study process indicated that we had not honestly asked ourselves whether the need to seek and attract funds for our research was a requirement necessary for the research we wanted to conduct. We continued to seek opportunities to fund our research programmes through external grants to the point that it has now become one of our main priorities. As is evident in Ashley's diary entry, he needed to 'be seen to aspire for this sort of stuff', a point to which Tim related from his own experiences. We now realise that gaining external funding was something that would help affirm our positions in our universities and indicate that we were being socialised according to the institution's established processes.

In light of the drive to seek external funding, Hastie and van der Mars (2014) suggest 'current and future [physical education and] sport pedagogy professors will want to engage in some continuing professional development to become skilled in securing external funding from sources to support research on [...] socially significant questions' (p. 342). While our experiences and the challenges we faced lead us to agree with this suggestion, our research has also led us to be mindful of Gard's (2008) query: who decides the socially significant and fundable questions? Many new academics will likely be faced with similar tensions, requiring decisions to be made about pursuing research agendas other than those they are specifically interested in, passionate about, or feel are most valuable. These are decisions made by the individual academics, but those decisions are certainly informed and perhaps driven by key 'glocal' stakeholders.

Socialisation in 'glocal' higher education

Examining our socialising experiences as ECAs has helped us acknowledge many of our assumptions about being academics; in particular, in the way we assumed that what we believe to be good research will be mirrored by what others believe. At the time of assuming our first university roles, we were mostly unaware of our socialisation as it was occurring. Once aware, we acknowledge that one of its most striking features was a tendency to follow fairly unquestioningly the 'glocal' norms of the departments, universities and disciplines we work in or risk being denied advancement. This revealed itself particularly through the seeking of external funding as the indicator of being 'successfully' socialised into the academic workplace, despite what we felt represented personally and professionally meaningful academic work.

The processes of our socialisation from ECA to MCA in a ‘glocal’ university led to a change in the expectations we had of our own research programmes. Apparently research we felt valuable and interesting, that produced new knowledge, and was typically represented through publications was no longer good enough; it had to be special (i.e. fundable). However, the ‘bigger, better’ types of research we were now actively pursuing were at times very different from those which we were engaged with as we began the process of becoming academics. As such, our socialising experiences demonstrate that the consequences of pursuing fundable research meant losing control of our research agendas. It meant potentially letting go of ideas and lines of inquiry we were passionate about when we began our academic careers. An outcome of our self-study was the realisation that in seeking funding we were paying the piper while simultaneously losing our ability to call the tune.

In the following diary excerpt (to which Tim responded as being ‘striking’ and challenging ‘the notion of academic freedom’), Ashley reveals the tension he was experiencing about: (a) doing research he felt valuable and interested in and (b) the pursuit of funding for research. Of particular significance to our discussion here is the perceived lack of freedom to choose one’s own research agenda and the need to be seen in the right light ‘glocally’ by senior colleagues in our institutions and in our discipline.

This [research funding] is something that I have avoided for the first four years of my career as I have been building a research profile but now I really have no choice. The two [funding opportunities] that have come out from the research office recently need to be taken up. It is vital that [a senior colleague] sees me in the right light, especially with a [promotion] application to go in soon. I think he will be sympathetic to any bid I make ... as long as [another senior colleague] backs it ... We will see, but the dodging of this bullet is no longer an option ... the decision is no longer mine. (Reflective Diary, 31 March, 2013)

In addition to what might be interpreted as procrastination (i.e. avoiding funding applications for four years), Ashley’s well-meaning intention to apply for research funding was clearly not enough. In short, it is easier said than done. The dilemma Ashley experienced is represented by the concept of cognitive dissonance, which Festinger (1962) defined as an ‘antecedent condition which leads to activity orientated toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction’ (p. 3). Festinger suggested that dissonance may occur when new information renders existing knowledge problematic or incorrect or when existing understandings are no longer clear-cut. In Ashley’s case dissonance occurred when his desire to conduct research conflicted with the perceived need to have it funded.

Later in 2013 (and along similar lines) Ashley wrote about the frustration he was feeling as a result of pursuing a research agenda driven by external funds:

Not enough funding blah blah ... this is getting annoying but who can I blame? I can blame myself for not getting any funding and for not being in higher education for another couple of years. I can blame the false expectations given to me by [senior colleagues]. I can blame my referees for what ... telling the truth? The fact is I didn’t stand a chance and I let myself be led down the garden path. I need to serve my time and I need to rack up the right experience. It seems that there

aren't any short cuts and my 15 years elsewhere counts for shit in the world of the academic elite. (Reflective Diary, 2 October 2013)

In considering this frank appraisal Tim asked Ashley to consider the different 'glocal' influences on his successes:

So the disciplinary and institutional gatekeepers—those who control who and what goes in and out of universities are really driving the bus. How does this make you feel? You are clearly frustrated—with yourself and with the "benchmarks" or standards but one seems to come as a result of the other (the former comes as a result of the latter). I am also wondering about your professional identity here and how this might influence what is going on. Because the frustrations about funding have been recurring over several years.

Ashley's response suggests that in implicitly hoping he could continue with an unfunded research agenda, he had been naive to think he could buck traditional forms of socialisation and be the exception to the rule. He said:

In many cases we are engaged in our own processes of standardised testing and with so many diverse fields and ideas we need a way to bringing these together and measure our achievements against our peers from other fields. Hal Lawson (see Lawson, 2009) suggested that research into physical education and physical education teacher education could be viewed as collective enterprise or paradigm. Such an enterprise/paradigm both benefits and inhibits the field inasmuch as it keeps everyone focused on the same agenda and extends our worthwhile work while preventing diffuse research agendas and evolution.

There are clear links between Ashley's and Lawson's (2009) experiences. In a retrospective account, Lawson (2009) described his frustration of the departmental and disciplinary socialising processes at his institution:

My senior colleagues' [...] evaluative reviews, formal and informal, were structured to discipline me. At the same time, they threatened the ultimate punishment—the denial of tenure and the loss of my position. Thanks to my senior colleagues, my choice as an untenured, young faculty member was clear and straight-forward. I could employ conventional exemplars and do re-research on PE and PETE programs and practices I did not endorse. Alternatively, I could continue with the new directions I envisioned and accept the consequences. (Lawson, 2009, pp. 109–110)

We anticipated similar consequences to the ones Lawson (2009) was threatened with if we did not follow the traditional path of socialisation. As a result, our socialisation could be interpreted as custodial because we accepted 'glocal' academic expectations. We did not use our agency to push back or reject the implicit and explicit socialising forces we encountered and, as such, take responsibility for our decisions and actions. Although socialisation has been described as a two-way process, we interpret our self-study as a lopsided, top-down experience with little room for us to shape even the local context into which we were being inducted. Lawson (2009) might have argued that we bowed 'under the paradigmatic disciplining ... and [gave] up [our] innovative orientations and competencies' (p. 106). However, we are also conscious that Lawson (2009) wrote his piece retrospectively while an established professor; we write this piece as individuals seeking job security and harbouring ambitions for

potential career enhancement. Yet, in ‘paying the piper’, we may look back on this and wonder about the extent to which our careers were ‘enhanced’ as a consequence of paradigmatic disciplining? They may have been enhanced in terms of our job titles but were they enhanced in terms of engaging in work that was meaningful to ourselves and the professional communities of which we are members? Time will tell.

Conclusion

Our results support previous research on the socialisation of academics in that, as new recruits, we kept close to our departmental and disciplinary status quo (Tierney, 1997). This was largely because we perceived that the benchmarks and expectations set were not negotiable, no matter how much we might have hoped otherwise. That is, in order to be viewed as ‘successful’ in our roles and thus be eligible for promotion and/or tenure, we needed to conduct research that was attractive to external funders and endorsed by ‘glocal’ academic communities. We did try to ‘buck the trend’ (or Ashley did) by maintaining a commitment to our own research interests, which for the most part have been deemed unfundable. However, we question if refusing to pay the piper in the short term might have a cost in the longer term. Should Ashley just have accepted the unpleasant results of doing something he was expected to do, at least by ‘glocal’ standards? Perhaps accepting unpleasant results then may have enabled him to pursue his passions later on in his career? That is, if (we assume) career advancement allows for greater autonomy in decisions around academic work.

Refusing to pay certainly led to feelings of frustration and disappointment. Disconcertingly, we did little to negate these feelings by going about our work in ways that would have been pleasurable and meaningful. Because of this, it should not be seen as an ‘easy way out’, nor the ‘easy way up’. Implicit statements about personal and professional satisfaction were present in Ashley’s diaries over a span of six years as he documented his experiences of being socialised as an academic. Although Tim did not have the ongoing data to support these feelings *in situ*, his role as critical friend allowed him to share and relate to similar experiences had by Ashley. While we acknowledge that each person’s experience is inherently individual based on personal and institutional differences, and expressions of individual agency, our research has shown that Ashley’s case is not an isolated one, nor is it unique to the British academic context.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to help new recruits in physical education and related fields in higher education ‘understand’ what they might expect as they enter the academic workforce in a neoliberal climate of higher education. In addition, the analysis of our lived experiences is offered as evidence to support critical debates about the current neoliberal climate of higher education governance, policy and practice, both broadly and in physical education. Our experiences lead us to suggest that academic workers and their disciplines are at risk of being stifled as long as the pursuit of externally funded research is held as the ‘gold standard’ required (or at least perceived by academic workers to be required) for academic advancement. We understand there will be wide variation in the socialisation of academic workers in

physical education around the world. The expectations of academics can differ from country to country, and university to university.

Despite our respective positions in different countries, however, and in universities with different levels of esteem, through our self-study and working together as critical friends, we found our experiences to be more similar than different. This was particularly the case in terms of the ‘glocal’ value placed on fundable/funded research in the university, and the value given to conducting a certain type of research—that which is attractive and fundable by external organisations. Funding—or at least the drive for it—was present in Ashley’s socialisation a posteriori to our analysis, but our analysis provided evidence of its prominence. As a recurring topic in Ashley’s diaries and Tim’s lived experiences, funding bound together our thinking about being and becoming academics. Until the time of writing (and likely well beyond), the pursuit of funding is, and has been, a constant issue that challenges how we identify ourselves and are identified by others as academics, and go about our daily work.

Despite our similar socialising experiences—and the resonance we felt with some of Hal Lawson’s experiences—we are left to question whether the ‘connective enterprise’ (Lawson, 2009) that pervades the broad field of physical education research is always a good thing. For example, in being promotable according to ‘glocal’ standards, we follow an arguably safer career path but one that puts the diversity (in research, teaching and service) our field needs at risk. The results of our research urge us to continue to ask ourselves as a discipline ‘whether money (and political will at all levels) will be available to sponsor and support the kind of research and relationships that we aspire to?’ (Hastie & van der Mars, 2014, p. 341). In other words, we should continually ask if, in expecting ECAs and MCAs to ‘pay the piper’ we simply perpetuate conditions in the current academic climate and, as a consequence, severely limit the aspirations of our profession.

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Note

1. We follow Hargreaves (2005), who described teachers with 6–19 years of experience as mid-career.

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