

## Shadows and Light: Professional Women Educators Transitioning to Academe

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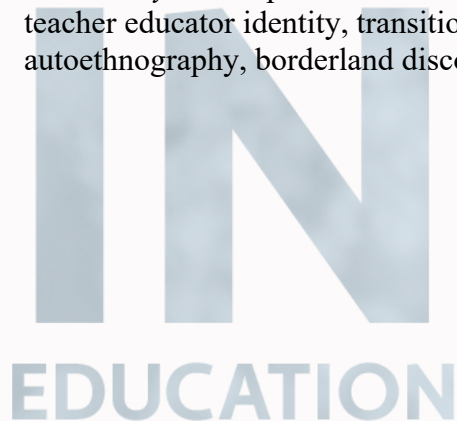
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### Abstract

Many professional women educators make the transition from school settings to academe after significant graduate work in their field(s). This transition, which often occurs on a mid- to late-career trajectory, places such individuals within liminal spaces on many levels as they inevitably must navigate unfamiliar, often alien, territory that frequently does not recognize or respect the experiences with which they enter their new university contexts. The collaborative autoethnographic study we embarked upon involved examining our own experiences of making this transition. By revisiting an academic year's worth of recorded conversations and analyzing them through an ecofeminist lens, we considered the lessons we had learned through engaging in a program renewal process and designing and co-teaching new courses in our first few years as faculty, as well as how these lessons impacted our emerging identities as new teacher educators. Our findings included three broad lessons learned: Beware of Institutionally Invisible Work; This is not High School, Dorothy; and Two Heads and Hearts are One. These lessons taught us to navigate the shadow places (Plumwood, 2008) of academe, including the delegitimization of teaching, nurturing and service *work* and the dematerialisation (Plumwood, 2008) associated with such delegitimization, and to embrace the light we found rooted in interconnectedness, an ethic of care, and our mutual recognition of the other. Moreover, these lessons offer others in the field ways of understanding the difficult transition to academe undertaken by professional women educators and the complexity of academic/teacher educator identity formation.

*Keywords:* professional women educators, ecofeminist, institutionally invisible work, teacher educator identity, transition to academe, program renewal, collaborative autoethnography, borderland discourse, mutual recognition, shadow places, ethic of care



IN  
EDUCATION

## **Shadows and Light: Professional Women Educators Transitioning to Academe**

Philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2008) describes *shadow places* as “places remote from self that we don’t have to know about but whose degradation we as commodity consumers are indirectly responsible for” (p. 147). These places, while primarily discussed in terms of the denial of ecological impacts brought on by consumerism, also exist in any context in which human and more-than-human life dwells, including in hyper-rational, neoliberal, patriarchal institutions such as universities. The question from an ecofeminist point of view, then, becomes what, or who, is degraded within the shadow places of academe, out of the realm of consciousness? Moreover, what follows is how might these shadow places be illuminated so as to bring out of the shadows, the unseen or unacknowledged within the halls of academe?

The study we embarked on sought to examine, through an ecofeminist lens, our own unique experiences transitioning to academe from careers in the field of public education. We were interested in how our knowledge and identities were constructed as new academics and teacher educators, as well as what lessons we carried with us as a result of this metamorphosis. Through our research, we uncovered several shadow places that existed broadly in academe and in our unique, immediate contexts. We were also drawn to the light we found through our work with each other and our interactions with our students.

### **Background to the Study**

In the fall of 2016, one year after we both arrived in academe, our Faculty of Education undertook the task of revamping a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education Integrated Program (IP). Despite the fact that the Faculty had a successful After Degree (AD) program in Education, the IP had been relatively unsuccessful in retaining students due, in large part, to structural barriers in the program and lack of connection with the Faculty of Education (the first year of the program was located entirely in the Faculty of Arts). Alysha, who had had previous experience leading change initiatives in educational contexts, led the program review and re-visioning process at the Dean’s request, taking on a committee of faculty members who had volunteered to take part (including Candy) through several steps: (a) a review of literature in several fields related to teacher education programs, (b) a re-visioning of a new IP based on the research conducted, (c) the drafting and approval of changes to the program at the committee level, (d) approval of changes to the IP at the Faculty of Education level, (e) approval of changes to the IP at the University level, and (f) implementation of the new IP in the fall of 2017.

In addition to several other new features, the new IP included an Education course in each term of the first 4 years of the program in order to foster student connections with each other, with faculty, and with the Faculty of Education more broadly. Within this context, we embarked upon the task of designing and co-teaching two new courses focused on identity for first year students. Through these courses, we sought to help our students navigate the borderlands between student and teacher (Alsup, 2019), recognizing how the complexity of who they were impacted the type of teachers they would become in the future.

Somewhere between the re-visioning of the IP and the designing of two new courses for first year IP students, we began to think about our own experiences of this process as new faculty members coming to academe from the field of education. Having been warned about the dangers of taking on such work as pre-tenured faculty, we wondered both how our identities as professional educators impacted our work as new academics and what the experiences of engaging in program revitalization, course design, and co-teaching offered us as we straddled the borderland between

teacher and teacher educator (Alsup, 2006; 2019). It was this curiosity that led to a collaborative autoethnographic study that was guided by the following research questions: What lessons did we learn through the process of engaging in an IP program renewal, the design of two new courses for IP students, and co-teaching the new courses? How did these lessons impact our emerging identities as new teacher educators in a faculty of education and as professional women educators transitioning to academe?

### **Professional Women Educators Entering Academe**

It is common in many professional fields (e.g. health, education, law, business) for academics to travel first down the road of professional practice, through subsequent education/degrees, and finally to the halls of academe. Many in the field of education come to universities with significant experience in schools or related fields, choosing teacher education as a second or additional career (Acker, 1997). While the move to academe is often viewed as a prestigious step upward, the transition from teacher to teacher educator (and academic) can be a difficult one, fraught with challenges such as imposter syndrome, self-doubt, anxiety, depression, loneliness, uncertainty, lack of supports, difficulties around work-life balance, and stress in relation to tenure and research expectations (Memorial Writing Group, 2017). Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by women educators transitioning to academe. While many of them relate to academics and women academics more broadly, those transitioning from careers as professional educators often experience significant shifts in institutional value systems that impact their professional (and even personal) identities profoundly.

One of the factors impacting the success of professional women educators entering academe is the prevalence of institutional inequities for women faculty. Women faculty have the greatest representation in less prestigious institutions (August & Waltman, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017), lower percentages in higher university ranks (Acker et al., 2012; Cook, 2018; Marsden et al., 2012; Snow, 2017), and disproportionate representation as lecturers rather than tenure track professors (Acker et al., 2012; August & Waltman, 2004; Serrano, 2008; Snow, 2017). According to Gardner (2013), women faculty face underrepresentation in fields such as mathematics and science, lower rates of promotion and tenure, lower pay than their male counterparts, heavier teaching loads, higher service responsibilities, chilly climates, exclusion from important committees and decision-making, trivialization of their research, and issues related to sexist, misogynistic, and/or paternalistic views. Women also, perhaps as a result of such challenges, are more likely to leave academia pre- or post-tenure (August & Waltman, 2004; Gardner, 2013; Gonzales, 2018; Serrano, 2008).

High expectations for performance is a second factor that impacts the success of women transitioning from K-12 educational contexts to academe. The moment new faculty members first set foot on campus, their tenure clock starts; at the same time, they must begin “learn[ing] the ropes” (Acker, 1997) in their new positions. Within a relatively short period of time, new faculty must develop course material for their classes and get research agendas off the ground if they are to be successful tenure applicants. While many institutions openly communicate splits between expectations for teaching attainment, scholarship/research, and service (e.g. 40%/40%/20%), unwritten expectations and rules about what is most/least valued for tenure and promotion linger within academic institutions (and those who work within them). Women faculty, who tend to do more service work, or what Hill (2020) refers to as “institutionally invisible” work, have to be careful that they do not do so to the detriment of their research agendas. Rising standards, sometimes referred to as “academic/upward drift” (Gardner, 2013), continue to make research and

(peer-reviewed) publications increasingly important, and together with ambiguous expectations in terms of tenure requirements, can be a significant source of stress and anxiety for those new to academe who are worried about job security (Acker & Armenti, 2004; August & Waltman, 2004).

A third factor identified in the significant literature around the challenges faced by professional women educators entering academe relates to paid work-family life balance. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2016) suggest that women live “linked-lives” when it comes to career and family, each impacting the other. Despite the fact that the average academic works approximately 55 hours per week (O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005), many women faculty engage in what has been referred to as the “second shift” (Snow, 2017), caring for children or elderly family members, and performing household duties at disproportionately greater rates than their male counterparts (Acker et al., 2016; August & Waltman, 2004; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Snow, 2017). When combined with the increasing expectations for tenure and promotion in academic institutions, it is evident how difficult it is for women academics to “have it all” (Stoesz, 2020). This, perhaps, is the reason why many women academics choose to have children later in life, have fewer children than desired, or choose not to have children at all (Serrano, 2008; Snow, 2017; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017). Those who do have children are forced to face the “greedy” nature of both their academic career and mothering (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016; 2017), finding ways to negotiate both. Sleeplessness, loss of leisure time, stress, guilt, fatigue, and mental health concerns are all cited in literature related to the paid work-family life balance of women faculty, especially for those new to academe and on the road to tenure (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Chambers, 2017; Gereluk, 2020; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Snow, 2017; Stoesz, 2020).

While women educators transitioning to academe experience many of the challenges faced by women faculty generally, they also face unique challenges related to making the cultural shift from professional educator to teacher educator and academic. Often placed in the incongruous position of being both mature educators and novice professors (Block, 2017), professional women educators entering academe must adapt to a new context that is likely to minimize and marginalize their life’s work to that point. According to Acker (1997), “teaching is a job associated with women and children, and thus suspiciously feminine and downgraded when it comes to the competition, hierarchy and power that pervade institutions like universities” (p. 65). Whereas effective teaching, nurturing and service to community are highly valued characteristics of professional educators in K-12 settings, within academia, such qualities are seen as “lesser” than the ability to conduct (and publish) quality research (Gardner, 2013; Harris & Gonzalez, 2012). Moreover, despite the fact that many professional women educators come to academe with many years of successful teaching experience (that helps them engage with teacher candidates and current teachers in the field), professional experience is not always recognized and respected in academic contexts (Acker, 1997; Kornelson, 2017). When combined with other enduring values in academic contexts such as enduring conceptions of the ideal/universal (male) worker dedicated entirely to job-related matters (Acker, 1990; Harris & Gonzalez, 2012; Serrano, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017), preferential treatment and respect for the sciences over the humanities (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012), and immutable notions of what counts in terms of knowledge production, favoring quantitative research and marginalizing (or actively denigrating) methods of qualitative inquiry (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012), it is not hard to see how professional women educators entering university contexts are confronted with opposing values that impact their identities as new academics. While simultaneously trying to honor their previous experience, knowledge and expertise in the field of education, they are forced to develop new capacities and identities as professors, fitting into (and thriving within) their new institutions.

## An Ecofeminist Approach

This research study is grounded in ecofeminism. At its core, ecofeminism is concerned with the inextricable links among social oppressions and the environment. Because we focused on our immersion in a new place and power and privilege as it related to *becoming an instructor*, ecofeminism was an appropriate and insightful framework for our work. By examining what we learned as beginning academics engaged in program renewal, including new understandings of the way domination works to dislocate women from the material conditions that sustain their lives (Plumwood, 2008, p. 141), we were better positioned to critically assess how the associative services we performed, and the multiplicity of our identities were constructed in the university.

As a conceptual framework, ecofeminism effectively troubles the dualisms of reason/emotion and mind/body in Western style education (Taylor, 2020). Our feminist commitments opened space for the emotional dimensions of leading (Farrell, 2020) to trouble the reductionist, hyper-rationalized, neoliberal culture that entangles many renewal efforts in educational institutions. The framework also illuminated, sometimes in uncomfortable ways, our own perpetuation of dualism-talk as evidenced in the good cop/bad cop reference later in the article. More importantly, in the context of this work, ecofeminism attunes us to mutuality among humans and the more-than-human world and constructs subjectivity amidst a complex and generative system of relationships (Martusewicz, 2018). We assume that we learn, grow and change only in relation to others (Farrell, 2022) and that an aim of educational encounters is a recognition of the other. According to Benjamin (2018), this type recognition involves “an affectively meaningful experience of the other not simply as an object of need to be controlled or resisted, consumed or pushed away, but another mind we can connect with” (p. 3). We understand subjectivity as mutually constructed and affectively charged, which is why we characterize our work together as “two heads and hearts are one” rather than using the commonplace phrase, “two heads are better than one.”

We are aware that positioning ourselves as ecofeminists thrusts us into contested space. Ecofeminism is filled with a myriad of “lights and shadows” (Puleo, 2008, as cited in Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018) and it has faced criticism for its early association with women’s spirituality (Mallory, 2010), Eurocentrism (Gaard, 2017), insufficiently describing the work as intersectional (Kings, 2017) and for essentializing femininity (Cuomo, 1998, p. 22). Although exploring the contested history of ecofeminist praxis is beyond the scope of this article, we, along with Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia (2018), Gough and Whitehouse (2020), Mallory, (2018) and Mann (2006), assert ecofeminism has always been concerned with the exclusion and degradation of women’s bodies, other marginalized human bodies, and the more-than-human world. We go even further to echo Mallory’s (2018) claim, that in the midst of the collapse of late-stage capitalism and the ecological crisis we find ourselves in today, “All feminisms, should in some sense, be *eco*” (p. 29).

## Methods

As a method, autoethnography combines autobiographical and ethnographic methods to examine the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the broader culture(s) in which they participate. Bringing together “the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy)” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 46), autoethnographers use their own personal experiences to expand understanding of social phenomena through their writing. As a result, “autoethnography is both a process and a product” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). While numerous benefits have been cited about

autoethnography as a method, including its friendly format for researchers and readers, its ability to enhance cultural understandings of the self and others, and its transformative potential (Chang, 2016), what draws many to its use, including us, is its potential to “disrupt and deconstruct ... cultural and methodological practices” (Denzin, 2006, p. 333). Recognizing the value of personal experiences as a legitimate and needed data source, autoethnography has the power to open dialogical spaces for those previously silenced to speak back (or speak differently) about their understandings and what can be illuminated, or perhaps questioned, culturally through them (Denshire, 2014; Holman Jones et al., 2013).

In the case of this study, we were interested in examining our lived experiences within the context of moving to a new university, joining a Faculty of Education, participating in the creation of a new IP, and contributing to the field of teacher education more broadly. Using a collaborative autoethnographic approach (Chang et al., 2012), we sought to understand the phenomenon of transitioning between educational contexts within/against the professions of teaching and teacher education (Denshire, 2014; Lather, 1991). Autoethnography allowed us to both look inward at our vulnerable selves as they were “moved, refracted, and resisted during the process” (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 24), and to look outward at the culture of the academy for women, for professional educators, and for new academics.

### **Participants and Data Sources**

In order to capture our lived experiences designing and implementing two new IP courses for the new program, we engaged in weekly, recorded conversations (25 in total) from September (2017) through March (2018). During these conversations, we planned for student learning together, reflected on our experiences, and shared our thoughts, musings, and emotions about co-teaching and engaging in programmatic change. The conversations we engaged in were transcribed for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed for through what Chang et al. (2012) refers to as three clusters of data analysis: “(a) reviewing data; (b) segmenting, categorizing, and regrouping data; and (c) finding themes and reconnecting with data” (p. 102). The first step involved a *macro-review* in which the data was reviewed holistically (Chang et al., 2012). During the macro-review, *analytic memos* (Saldaña, 2009) were used to document our reflections and reactions about our experiences, and themes that were emerging as we read. The second step in the data analysis process involved what Chang et al. (2012) refers to as the *micro-review*. In this phase, data were divided up into segments according to general categories and reviewed in these smaller parts. Within each of these smaller segments, data were coded using thematic codes from the macro-review, and codes from the literature reviewed for the study (as initial codes). These codes, in addition to others that emerged during the micro-review were collapsed, grouped, categorized, and recategorized into broader themes or “lessons learned.”

### **Findings**

Three broad “lessons learned” have been used to describe our findings: Beware of Institutionally Invisible Work; This is not High School, Dorothy; and Two Heads and Hearts are One. These lessons (or themes) get at both the shadow spaces associated with institutional blindness to the efforts of women academics who value teaching and service work, sometimes to the detriment of research and publication, and the light associated with claiming one’s space in the academy,

pushing against neoliberal, hyper-rational, and sometimes patriarchal values that do not honor the multiplicity of women's identities, or the interconnectedness of us all.

### **Beware of Institutionally Invisible Work**

One of the most significant themes or lessons evident in the data in the study was the tension that existed in relation to what Hill (2020) refers to as “institutionally invisible” work. Participating in the designing of a new IP; creating, getting approval for, and co-teaching two new 1<sup>st</sup>-year IP courses; fostering the development of support structures for 1<sup>st</sup>-year IP students; creating e-portfolio structures for IP students; designing a micro-practicum experience for IP students; and communicating with faculty about the new IP were time-consuming tasks that did not necessarily advance our qualifications in terms of tenure and promotion. This tension was illustrated explicitly in comments such as “It’s high stakes stuff, but [according to more senior colleagues] it’s not going to pay off in terms of the credits that we need to accrue in order to get tenure really right?” (Alysha, recorded and transcribed conversation, Nov. 21, 2017). The tension also emerged in relation to comments about workload, long hours spent on the course/initiative, fatigue/health concerns, resentment, and even comments about leaving academia. One of Candy’s comments illustrating several of these tensions is included below:

I can’t go into the week without having the teaching part ready to go because I just don’t know what’s going to happen during the week or how I am going to feel. Because I still have some issues with fatigue and things, like still. So, I don’t really know. It’s hit and miss whether I can work in the evening or whether I can’t. And I certainly can’t write the conclusion to my dissertation in the evening. I was really resentful when I had to spend all that time prepping; like you said it’s taking away from me being able to complete this research and I feel this immense pressure to get the research done. It’s like every day somebody is like “Oh, how’s your dissertation going?” ... “It would be going a lot better if I wasn’t teaching four courses!” Like trying to design; we’re designing this and I just think, “Who does this?” It’s awesome and I love it, but I cannot believe the stuff that we are expected to do. Like, it’s just not humanly possible and well, having had cancer ... I go through moments where I think I swore to myself that I would find a better balance in my life ... that I would take better care of myself and I get angry when I can see that it’s just not possible. It’s not possible to prepare for four classes, finish my dissertation, and take good care of myself at the same time. That part I find really frustrating. (recorded and transcribed conversation, Nov. 15, 2017)

As two fairly new faculty members, we found ourselves paradoxically torn between what the institution recognized in relation to the criteria for tenure and promotion, which was primarily research and publications, and what we felt morally and professionally obligated to address in relation to the IP. While we both felt ethically compelled to make changes in the IP to meet the needs of students and to make the program sustainable, the time and energy required to carry through with the 1<sup>st</sup>-year courses (and the IP design) was something that overwhelmed us at times. Intuitively we knew that the work was important; however, we came to realize that even though the dean and our colleagues seemed to value our work, it might come at a price to us personally and professionally in the academy. For one, not all faculty members were happy about the resurrection of the beleaguered IP, particularly when our initiative impacted their workloads, time to conduct research, or personal agendas. This was evidenced in the comments of one of our male colleagues who warned that we were, perhaps, “tall poppies who were in danger of having their

heads cut off by one of the departments.” We found ourselves, as new, untenured faculty, worried about potential conflict with colleagues who we knew would be making decisions about our tenure and promotion applications. In addition, we found our research and writing time compromised by our heavy involvement in IP changes. Throughout the transcribed conversations, these tensions existed, ebbing and flowing through our collaborative consciousness. As we celebrated our victories with the new IP and our new IP students, we often struggled with suggestions that we somehow make ourselves smaller or less noticeable, and lamented the time we felt we had lost in terms of our individual research goals.

### **This is Not High School, Dorothy!**

The second theme or lesson that emerged from the data was our own developing understandings about the differences (and similarities) between our previous professional contexts, and our new context(s) in academe. Learning about institutional structures and processes in our new academic context was vitally important for both our own professional success, and for the success of the new IP. We wrote the following in a memo about our October 26, 2017 conversation transcript:

One thing that jumps out of the data is the level of institutional knowledge we had to develop to make these things happen. We had to learn how to design new courses; get them in the academic calendar through the use of committees, forms and motions; work with the local school division and its teachers to create mini-practicum experiences for our IP students; and work with the university technology support systems to design and create e-portfolios housed within the institution. It is a wonder we were able to figure all of this out within a little over 1 academic year.

While our backgrounds were different in terms of leadership and policy experience (Alysha had significantly more experience through her program development and educational administration background than Candy did, who had been most recently engaged in other areas such as classroom practice, curriculum, and teacher professional development), university policies and processes were new to both of us. Engaging in program development in academe had a steep learning curve, as did the tenure and promotion process. In order to be successful in our new positions and in the tasks we had chosen to take on, we had to become familiar with the policies and processes, or “learn the ropes” (Acker, 1997) in our new institution as quickly as possible.

A second area in which we had to develop an understanding of our new context was in regard to our new IP students, who were both different from and similar to our after-degree students in Education and the previous high school students we had worked with. The IP students were mostly new to university, although there were some exceptions. Many of them were from rural and remote communities in the western and northern parts of the province, and as such, had recently moved away from home. In addition, due to the fact that the IP was designed to have students do a B.A. and B.Ed. simultaneously, as opposed to doing a B.Ed. after a B.A. was already completed, it attracted several students who had wanted to be teachers for a very long time, and who wanted to go right into education. Many of them had volunteered in classrooms, or coached sports or extra-curricular activities in the past, and some of them had a very strong desire to develop experience in teaching.

As we came to understand the demographics and dynamics of the group of 1<sup>st</sup>-year IP students, we found ourselves responding to their needs in a variety of ways. For example, when students were very quiet at the beginning of the course, we took the time to have them meet each



other through a variety of drama-based activities. When it became apparent to us that several of the students were homesick in the fall, we revamped an existing assignment to be a digital story about how home/place impacted their identities as becoming teachers. And when students expressed that they were struggling in some of their math courses, or with personal issues, we connected them with tutors and/or walked them over to make appointments with student support services on campus. However, not all of the adaptation and responsiveness to IP students was easy. At times, we found it difficult to support our IP students at an appropriate level as is evidenced in the following conversation about how much support to provide in regard to course selection:

**Alysha:** It's different, in high school there are many people chasing you around "Do you have the right credits?" You know? I wanted to say to them "It's not like that here. You are in the end responsible to meet your degree requirements. It's hard to make that transition in Year 1, so you have to force yourself to go to these meetings once a year with your advisers and [faculty student advisor] to make sure you are on the right track." We can't do that for them. They are adults, right? So, I also don't want to infantilize them either.

**Candy:** And I can feel that this is part of my high school teacher background that's doing this. Like I can feel it. I can feel like I want to rescue them and I know that that's - I can feel the tension in myself in that particular [way].

**Alysha:** We know about university attrition rates and we are really trying to support them as they get through this 1st year. So, I think we do a nice job of moving back and forth between, "Come on! Get on this!" And then we move to, "Okay, we will help you."

**Candy:** We play good cop/bad cop well [laughter]. Well, not bad cop ...

**Alysha:** Maybe firm cop? Is there something important about hearing your university instructor say, "I don't really care what the issue is, just get it done?" I think about how many incidences that are like that in a K-12 school. So, at some point you have to be able to wrestle with the idea, "I've just gotta get it done. It's my issue to deal with." They have to have some skills and resiliency in that area because schools are going to demand that they have it.

The data in the study, in fact, included many instances like the one above in which we struggled with how much support to provide students. Because we were very concerned about students dropping out of the program, and because we cared about the distances they had traveled and the dreams that our students had, there was a constant tension between wanting to help them be successful and allowing them to develop independence and resilience as young adults. In a memo written about our September 28th, 2017 conversation, we wrote the following:

Our concern about the well-being of students in our first IP class is interesting. Perhaps this was because of the failures of the previous program and our fear of losing students. Perhaps it was because we are both mothers of teenagers, or because we were both public school teachers. In any case, our worry about their experiences and well-being led us to ask them about their other classes, walk them over to counsellors, and sit with them when they were sad, in distress, or stressed out. We wondered if we were mothering them too much, if we were reaching

beyond the role of teacher educator. And yet, why did we feel this way? Where does it say that we should not care so deeply about the well-being of our students?

The memo above illustrates the complexity of understanding and operating within a new context as educators. In addition to struggling with how much support to provide students, we also struggled with differences in values between our previous teaching contexts and academe. While caring about and supporting students were prized values in public education, something made us feel that these qualities were not valued in academe, at least not to the same extent. Interestingly, we both recognized and considered the impact of our experiences as high school teachers and mothers on our identities as teacher educators, something that facilitated our transition to academe.

A final area in which we had to develop understandings about the similarities and differences between our previous professional contexts and our new academic context(s), was in relation to our own skill sets and feelings of efficacy. While both of us had had successful careers prior to taking our first faculty positions, academe was new to us, putting us in the position of being, as Block (2017) suggested, both mature educators and novice professors. Over the course of a year of conversations, a recurring theme of vulnerability emerged in relation to our feelings of self-efficacy, our work together as co-teachers, and the experiences on which we drew. One of the strongest examples of this occurred in a November 21<sup>st</sup> conversation between us in which we discussed some reading we had done about the borderlands that exist for becoming teachers. During the conversation, Candy shared some disparate thoughts she had recorded on a sticky note:

Insecurity,

Imposter.

I don't have what it takes for this environment.

Vulnerability in having a co-teacher to witness my short comings

Want to hold my cards close to my chest.

Why do I feel this way? Is 20 years of experience not enough?

I am learning so much by working with you, the reward outweighs the risk by far.

Why am I so anxious and insecure?

Is this how our students feel in the student-teacher borderland?

How I feel in the teacher-faculty borderland?

This passage in the transcript, which Alysha referred to as a poem, captures much of the internal turmoil we both felt as we navigated the move from highly successful professional careers to academe, an environment in which we sometimes felt like imposters. Learning how to co-teach together, coming to the understanding that previous teaching experience in public education was not always valued in academe, and dealing with our own feelings of insecurity in our new context and roles were all part of the process as we made the transition to academe, one that elicited a raw vulnerability that was still difficult for us to read even after the fact as researchers.

### **Two Heads and Hearts are One**

While we had both worked with others in various ways as professional educators, designing the first two IP courses in the program, and team teaching or co-teaching the courses with our first cohort of IP students was a unique and fulfilling experience that neither of us could have predicted

would be as successful as it was. By working together, we were able to share the load with each other, and draw on the unique strengths we each possessed. For example, Alysha's background in leadership, administration, and program development allowed her to construct, elicit support for, and carry out a process for revamping the IP. Similarly, Candy drew on her technology expertise and professional development background to develop an electronic portfolio structure for use in the new IP. While these are but two examples of how the load was shared through our work together, they illustrate not only how our work became more manageable as a team, but also how two heads worked together due to the various assets we each possessed.

The individual strengths, beliefs, and passions we each embodied powerfully complemented each other in our teaching, as well as in our work developing the new IP. We often referred, in our conversations, to the way our similarities and differences provided us with a broad array of teaching strategies and approaches, and unique perspectives with which we thought about teaching and learning. Alysha brought to the classroom, amongst many other things, arts-based strategies, a strong feminist perspective, and a teaching background that included experience with newcomer students and other young people who are often marginalized in school communities. Candy, who had spent 20 years teaching in three different rural communities, brought to the classroom an appreciation for rural places, a background in mathematics education, and experience planning professional development for teachers. These differences allowed us to provide a greater depth of experience for our students, which was something they shared with us on several occasions.

A third way that our unique differences worked in tandem during the inception of the new IP, was in the way we interpreted our experiences and shared those experiences with each other. The differences between our backgrounds allowed us to provide unique alternative viewpoints for consideration in our reflections with each other. Whether it was how lessons went, behaviours of students, or how to handle decisions that had to be made in relation to students or the course, we were able to look at new situations with two distinct, and often opposing, points of view. This was a common thread that permeated the data in comments such as those made in the following memo: "We balanced each other well with the 'good cop/bad cop' and 'arts/math' dichotomies I suppose. It is interesting how much richer we were together—we helped each other see different viewpoints in every conversation" (recorded and transcribed conversation, Nov. 16, 2017). Within the data, the moments in which these interchanges were most evident were when one of us was feeling vulnerable, or when something rubbed up against our individual or collective values and beliefs as is evidenced in the following memo:

There are several incidences in the transcripts where we talked about encounters in what Alysha referred to as "prickly moments." These encounters occurred when our values and beliefs as educators were challenged by the words and actions of students—when they provided negative feedback about an activity, behaved in ways that we felt were inappropriate or unprofessional, or were not as excited or engaged as we maybe hoped they would (or perhaps should) be. Deconstructing these critical encounters caused us to question our own understandings about teaching and learning, and to engage in psychoanalyzing some of our own actions and contributions to the situation. These moments, when our beliefs and values rubbed up against what appeared to be opposing beliefs and values were key moments of learning for us. Deconstructing them together, we tested out our assumptions and observations with each other, something that was incredibly

valuable and affirming for us both. (memo of transcribed conversation, Nov. 30, 2017)

Being able to share our thoughts and hear the other's perspectives were an invaluable part of our growth. It was through our differences that we were able to offer this to each other, something we would otherwise never have experienced.

Intuitively, we knew that there was something special about our partnership. We often commented about our gratitude for this, noting that we could not have team taught with most (or perhaps any) of our other colleagues the way we did together. For example, Candy wrote the following in a memo:

We constantly worried about the load being equitable when team teaching. There was such a heavy load, and we felt guilt, I think, seeing each other working so hard. We also cared for each other as teaching buddies, offering to do our part, or more than our part. It is so interesting how we complemented each other that way. Other colleagues would not have been so intuitive about their partners, I don't think. (memo of transcribed conversation, Feb. 6, 2018)

While Candy's comments reflect the work distribution and compatibility in terms of the care we expressed for each other, care was also expressed in the ways we compassionately witnessed the struggles of the other. For example, Alysha wrote the following:

Sometimes I would look over at Candy and her face was a portrait of exhaustion. Guilt would leak into our conversations because I worried the splintered girl inside of me, the perfectionist who overcorrects, the one who craves acceptance in unfamiliar spaces, was driving us to the edge of a professional and personal cliff. I fantasized that I was bringing about the final scene of *Thelma and Louise* in our new professional context! (memo of transcribed conversation, Feb. 6, 2018)

In both the conversations and our reflections about them, we saw the precarity of our situation, the difficulties we faced individually and collectively, and the ways in which we were invaluable resources to each other. This was evidenced in comments such as the following by Alysha:

In meetings, Candy's presence was a great comfort. When others wielded a map of the political terrain that was initially invisible to us, she became a steadfast navigator. She would remind me that when trying to imagine a more inclusive IP program, we were bound to find ourselves in contested and even paradoxical spaces. Through her compassion and grace, we shared personal stories to contextualize the embodied curricula we were weaving during the program renewal. As we made ourselves more emotionally legible to one another, our friendship deepened and so did our understanding of the affective dimensions of leading and learning. I wonder if being vulnerable, in our case amid what felt like professional precarity, created some of the conditions for us to enact pedagogy that was grounded in mutual recognition and an ethic of care? (recorded and transcribed conversation, Mar. 15, 2018)

The experiences we shared developing courses and team teaching together allowed us to develop a relationship that many in academe never find. We took care of each other, checked in on each other, witnessed the struggles of each other, shared the load together, and made gentle suggestions that allowed us to make sense of and (re)interpret our values and beliefs, thereby growing as individuals and professionals (Hill, 2020). It was not only the sharing of two minds that made us

successful in our work together, but it was also the capacity of two hearts to care that supported us, through relationship, to grow into our new roles and identities as academics.

### Discussion and Implications

Our experiences as new faculty members engaging in significant program development and faculty service work echoed much of what others in the field have previously expressed. For example, Acker et al. (2016) noted the following:

Our findings on the persistent gendered nature of university service reflect Fitzgerald and Wilkinson's (2010) argument and need to be addressed. While clearly service is a critical part of academic life, how is it that institutions often de-emphasize or do not "count" service in criteria for tenure? If service does not count, why are some junior faculty positioned in such a way that they deploy their most limited resource—time—engaged in activities that will reap little reward to their immediate goal of gaining tenure? Alternatively, should tenure criteria be revised to embrace service as a viable way to spend time and not just as devalued women's work? (p. 16)

In terms of our own careers in academe, we found that engaging in service work was, *at best*, a zero-sum enterprise; what was gained through engaging in service work in terms of the points, criteria, and expectations for tenure and promotion was also lost in terms of the time needed to engage in meaningful research, something universally recognized as being of greater value in academe. Still, we volunteered to do this work, feeling ethically, morally, and professionally compelled to support our students and address the issues with the IP, even at the expense of our careers, health, and well-being.

The lessons we learned through this research highlight the stark separation that exists in academe between teaching, research, and service. This separation, not unlike the mind/body and spirit/matter dualisms described by Plumwood (2008), also separates highly cerebral processes such as theorizing, writing, and researching from more embodied processes such as teaching and providing service to the university, colleagues and students, leading to what Plumwood (2008) describes as "dematerialisation":

*Dematerialisation* (a term I owe to Barbara Ehrenreich), applied to cultures, traditions as well as processes, is the process of becoming more and more out of touch with the *material conditions (including ecological conditions) that support or enable our lives*. Losing track of them means making more and more exhausting and unrealistic demands on them, and being deluded about who we and others are. (pp. 141–142)

We found, over time, that our colleagues and the institution became out of touch with the labor we engaged in as "body people" in the faculty, caring for the program and our students, somewhat in isolation as others turned a blind eye to something that was "beyond their attention" (Plumwood, 2008, p. 142). We felt the degradation associated with our IP work, which while championed by some who benefited from the work, was clearly beneath others who felt their cerebral prowess was far too important to be hampered by what was constructed as the bodily and feminized work of caring for students and programs (Acker, 1997). And where the individualistic aspirations and agendas of the "mind people" (Plumwood, 2008, p. 142) in the faculty were threatened by our work, we were reminded by our colleagues not to stand too tall, for fear of having our poppy heads

cut off. What became clear to us in the examination of the conversations we engaged in, was the multiplicity of ways that that domination worked to dislocate us from the material conditions that supported our lives and well-being. It became apparent to us that the false dualisms that exist in academe, such as mind versus body, rational versus emotional, and even research versus teaching and service, worked to delegitimize the knowledge that we thought we held about what it means to be a good educator, colleague, and human being; making our new contexts foreign to us, despite the echoes we still heard of our former teacher selves. Coming to recognize these “shadow places” (Plumwood, 2008, p. 139) within our contexts, as well as the ways in which we were, in fact, “replicating the discrepancies between men and women academics” (Gereluk, 2020, p. 177) through our complicity, we became motivated to push back against the dualisms that constrained us. In conversations with our colleagues, and in meetings we participated in, we chose to subvert boundaries (Gonzales, 2018), claiming our knowledge and constructing identities for ourselves that embraced our own “linked lives” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016) and the teaching, nurturing, and service *work* we were engaged in as not only legitimate, but powerful and full of light.

The light that we found in our work, like the multiplicity of identities that emerged for us as new academics, was rooted in interconnectedness, an ethic of care, and mutual recognition of the other. We came to understand not only that our identities were constructed in relation to and with each other, but that “relationships bonded by affection, kindness, and care are the source of our intelligence and our strength” (Martusewicz, 2018, p. 26). Such understandings, or light, made the shadow places in academe visible to us, allowing us to illuminate them, push back against them, and stand as tall as our identities would allow. In an article titled “Moths to the Flame Tend to get Burned: Life on the Liminal,” Wallin (2018) states the following:

Regardless of our feminist “learnings, leadings and leanings,” we fly into flames that we know are going to burn us. Sometimes we do so with purpose, strategy, and determination, while at other times we burn as we are distracted by whatever else is going on around us. Regardless of how it happens, feminist leaders emerge from the flames a bit scarred, somewhat disoriented, and forever changed. What is important is how women make sense out of those experiences and with what purpose they then move forward. (p. 121)

The metaphor of a moth being drawn to the flame is an apt one: Light in the form of a flame is both beautiful and dangerous. The kind of work we engaged in as professional women educators transitioning to academe had to the potential to burn us, and may have, in fact, scarred and disoriented us in numerous ways. What we know is certainly true, however, is that we have been forever changed by this work. The new identities we formed as colleagues, teacher educators, and academics will forever be drawn to the flame, though it may be dangerous at times. We will choose to move forward with an ethic of care for our students and each other unapologetically, embracing the light and releasing it on any shadow places we encounter.

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