Research, Writing, and Creative Process in Open and Distance Education: Tales from the Field

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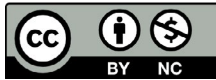

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13. Indigenous, Settler, Diasporic, and Post-colonial: The Identities Woven Through our Academic Writing

Marguerite Koole, Michael Cottrell, Janet Mola Okoko, and Kristine Dreaver-Charles

When I was invited to contribute an article about my writing, my first thoughts were, "Really? Why me?" I was honoured to be asked, but even now I feel like I am clumsy at the craft. Having wasted several months wafting back and forth pondering what I could possibly contribute, I began talking about it to my colleagues. As I shared my writing anecdotes — successes and travesties — they shared theirs. I realized then that it would be interesting to gather our collective stories. Upon completion of the chapter, we all mused how this reflective project was both difficult and rewarding as it forced us to consider our own identities.

Some scholars argue there is a direct link between what and how individuals write and what they become (Gilmore et al., 2019). We suggest that identity and writing co-create each other: our identities are socially constructed through a "complex interweaving [of] positionings" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 10). Just as weft and warp form a woven fabric, our approaches to and perceptions of the writing experience are entangled within our cultural sensitivities. As a diverse group of colleagues, we use this chapter to reflect on our individual journeys as scholars, researchers, and writers. In this way, the chapter is polyvocal. "Polyvocality is the power of many voices to shift and sustain narrative change" (Weidinger, 2020, para. 5), and seemed an ideal

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fit to allow for diverse perspectives while producing novel insights through synthesis. Scholars have noted that this approach aligns with social constructionist perspectives, that it often disrupts traditional hierarchies within knowledge production, and that it provides agency to those with lesser situational power by creating a rhetorical space for "democratic debate, more hegemonic resistance and more openness and honesty among practitioner researchers" (Arnold & Brennan, 2013, p. 353). This chapter, therefore, presents the reflections of four colleagues at different career stages and from multiple cultural backgrounds, but who all share in the process of scholarly writing.

While writing, we each reflected upon our own writing practice and how our identities have been woven into and out of our writing experiences. We considered our backgrounds and training as scholars, our thoughts on identity and voice in our writing, our writing anxieties, and our reflections on our writing processes. Throughout the process, we realized how our positionality and relationships within and outside academia were integral to how we identify, struggle, learn, grow, and progress through the writing experience. It also became apparent that our voices manifest differently depending on our relationship to our readers, to our topics, to the academic world, to our socio-cultural identities, to our communities, and to the larger political processes that shape our existence.

Our reflections and analyses are not intended as a post-colonial critique in which we differentiate colonizers from colonized or raise awareness of social, economic, and material realities (Noda, 2019). Rather, this is a conceptual piece; we are attentive to our larger political and material realities which impact the academy and the writing process. We are interested in how our positionings have shaped our approaches to writing with the aim of learning how to support each other and share what we have learned. Our exploration into writing from the settler, Indigenous, diasporic, and post-colonial perspectives is also potentially useful to students and their supervisors. As scholars, we know that personal narratives of students, which attest to their struggle to write and find their identities as writers, provide strong evidence that scholars should *not only* theorize academic "identity" *but also* strategize how to better support *both* emergent writers (Ivanič, 1998) *and* each other as more or less established scholarly writers.

In discussing our identities and how they interweave through our academic writing, we organized this chapter around Ivanič's (1997) four aspects: 1) autobiographical self, 2) discoursal self, 3) self as author, and 4) possibilities for selfhood. Ivanič describes the autobiographical self as that which is shaped through one's culture and socialization. It is constantly in flux. The discoursal self is the impression that writers give of themselves through their texts. The impression can be multiple, contradictory, and consciously or unconsciously performed. The self as author refers to the way writers see themselves — that is, how they perceive the enactment of their own voice. Finally, and this might be most helpful to writers, the possibility for selfhood refer to how writers may choose from a selection of "subject positions" that are available within socio-cultural and institutional settings. Ivanič refers to these as positionings which allow and/or constrain writers to perform multiple writer identities (p. 27). Co-existence of the different selves may not be harmonious, but they can continuously negotiate boundaries allowing new perspectives to emerge; dialogical interaction across boundaries can be a space for learning (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Through the sharing of our own narratives as academic writers, we hope to create a collegial space that resonates with other writers.

Autobiographical Selves

As Ivanič (1997) defines it, the autobiographical self is shaped through one's culture and socialization. To better understand writing behaviours and attitudes, it is helpful to understand the writer's formative years. Writing is always situated and "multivoiced" (Castelló et al., 2009, p. 1110); it incorporates voices of one's community and prior writings. In addition, the expectation is that it, too, will be incorporated into future writings (Castelló et al., 2009). Therefore, it is a significant aspect of the writer's character.

Marguerite

Having migrated from the Netherlands, then to Iowa in the US, my great-grandfather eventually settled on a farm in Southern Alberta in 1915. It was not until I had completed several academic degrees that I became aware that I grew up on the traditional territory Blackfoot (Siksikaitsitapi) Confederacy (Treaty 7). The farm and surrounding countryside offered an idyllic setting in which to grow up. My brother and I spent our free time digging tunnels in the hills, riding motorbikes in the nearby river bottom, riding horses with my cousins from the farm across the road, constructing contraptions using parts in the wood and metal scrap piles, swimming in the muddy dugout pond, and engaging in all kinds of other creative activities and games. School, on the other hand, was unremarkable and uninteresting for me.

Academically, the turning point occurred in the second half of Grade Ten when I was in a French class. Just after we had just written our first test, the teacher decided to publicly call upon the students in the room and predict the mark each student was going to get on the test. When he got to me, he said, "Marguerite will likely get around 72%." When I heard this, I was appalled. I thought, "I'm not just average." When I received my result, it was 72%, exactly what he had predicted! My sense of my academic self was awakened. From that point forward, I began to study for tests, listen in class, and do my homework. I began to achieve high marks and was on the honour roll every year. My weakest subject was English — and it remained so during my undergraduate degree. Yet I had developed a love of languages — especially Spanish and French — which required the acquisition of some serious knowledge of grammar, sentence structures, and punctuation.

I began teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Spain during the 1990–1991 academic year. Returning to Canada, I then taught English for Academic Purposes at the University of Lethbridge. Working alongside supportive and knowledgeable colleagues, I developed a reputation for creativity in my teaching. At the same time, I continued to hone my knowledge of language structure. However, I was not yet "a writer" per se. My writing, really, began in graduate school where I wrote copious research papers, a thesis, and eventually a PhD dissertation. I am now an Associate Professor in Educational Technology and Design

at the University of Saskatchewan. I can trace my paternal and maternal ancestors back to the mid-sixteenth century, and to the best of my knowledge, I am the first person in my lineage to earn a doctoral degree.

My academic area is educational technology. I approach this area through various perspectives such as the social construction of reality, socio-materialism, and post-humanism. Now, I tend to publish anywhere from three to eight journal articles (or book chapters) per year. My goals are always the same: to write as clearly as possible, to entice readers with a snappy title, to ensure philosophical commensurability, and to contribute something new.

Kristine

I am a member of the Mistawasis First Nation. I grew up in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I live and work in my Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Métis. Books were always readily available, and I naturally developed a love for reading. My parents would often take me to the library and my late grandmother would read to me. I became a teacher and spent my early career teaching in Northern Saskatchewan. I have been working at the University of Saskatchewan for almost a decade. I would say that I am mid-career.

I have had many amazing opportunities in the academic world as a PhD student. I have been fortunate to travel and present at international conferences. I have a few publications and, in the past year, I was the lead author on my first peer-reviewed paper. I felt that was an especially good accomplishment. My mentors are my co-supervisors. As a first-generation graduate student, I have benefited immensely from their time and guidance — including this opportunity to share and reflect upon our writing processes.

Janet

I was born in Nairobi, Kenya to two civil servants who came from two different sub-tribes and spoke different dialects of the same tribe. We still maintain our ancestral home in Western Kenya. I come from a culture that is typically oral; my family was not different. However, I am one of those children who was sent to boarding school at a very early age (age

five) because that was where "able parents" thought quality education was. It also worked well for my parents because of the transient nature of their jobs.

I went to school through a system which I consider to have been inherited from the British colonialists — by choice — because the Kenyans who were tasked with developing a new system during and after independence (known as the Ominde and Gachathi Commissions) felt it was useful to use the model that already existed (Eshiwani, 1993) with English as the official language. When I went to school, as was stipulated in the initial policy at independence, the language of the catchment was the medium of instruction in grades one to four in Kenya, which remains the policy today. This meant that besides learning my mother tongue (Luhya), I had to learn the formal and official national languages, English and Swahili. I am uncertain if the teachers were adequate in their own knowledge or if it was even formally in the curriculum. To further complicate my early years, I also had to somehow learn the native language of the places where my parents moved as well as those surrounding any new school I attended; I changed schools at least twice at every level of education. The result is that, at various points in my life, I have worked with at least four languages concurrently.

My career started with teacher training before pursuing a master's degree in educational planning. My post-graduate experience included working as a curriculum developer and research officer at Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and for a non-governmental education project in Eastern Africa. My work in these positions required me to write formal reports which, in many cases, were very linear, structured, and pragmatic. The purpose of my formal writing was mainly to communicate technical information aimed at influencing policy. Therefore, I approached writing from a realist — or rather, objective — premise because my professional reports were aimed at informing or influencing policy. My research agenda and scholarly work is still based on a pragmatic stance where my focus on seeking answers to practitioner-oriented questions in school leadership drives the methodology, methods, and style of my academic writing.

Michael

I grew up in a large family on a small farm in County Cork, Ireland in the 1960s. In retrospect, I found that contracting rheumatic fever at age three, an affliction which resulted in being bed-ridden for almost a year, was a pivotal event in my life. My mother, who had a great love of reading, helped me pass the time by teaching me to read. So, I cracked the code of reading early, and I revelled in the wondrous stories and exciting worlds that I was able to access through books, sparking an early fascination with Canada. In addition to inculcating a lifelong love of reading, my early exposure to and proficiency with text gave me a huge academic advantage over my peers. School, consequently, came easy to me and, despite the fear-based culture propagated within Ireland's Catholic-dominated educational system, by my mid-teens I knew that I wanted to become an educator. Thanks to a state scholarship, I was the first in my family to go to university, completing a bachelor's degree in history and literature and a higher diploma in education. I began teaching history and literature in a local secondary school. Ambitious to continue formal learning, I then completed a master's degree in history. A serendipitous connection with a supervisor, combined with a desire to come to Canada, brought me to Saskatchewan to complete a PhD in history in the late 1980s.

My research focus and writing has evolved significantly over time, motivated by changing personal interests and occupational/scholarly priorities and requirements. The original focus of my scholarship was the Irish diaspora, but my interest shifted quickly to local Indigenous circumstances as the parallels between the Ireland's colonial history and the neo-colonial dynamics of 1990s Saskatchewan became evident to me. Employment as an instructor with the Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan provided an opportunity to engage with Indigenous history, especially schooling in historical contexts in Canada and beyond. The transition to the department of Educational Administration in 2007 allowed me to deepen my exploration of Indigenous education discourse in historical contexts and to interrogate strategies that might achieve more equitable outcomes for Indigenous students in local and global educational contexts. My positionality is complicated by virtue of having both Canadian settler

and Irish diasporic identities and affiliations. As a citizen of Canada and a member of the White Settler group, I'm well aware of the privilege I derive from white skin and educational advantage. But retaining citizenship, family ties, and cultural affiliations with Ireland still connects me with a Third World heritage and historical experience. I therefore see myself as a member of both a colonizing and colonized group and I attempt, through personal, professional, and political actions — including my writing — to mobilize insights from these complex intersections to advance reconciliation within the academy and social justice with society at large.

Discoursal Selves

The discoursal self is the impression that writers give of themselves through their texts (Ivanič, 1997). We reflected upon how we try to portray ourselves and for whom we write.

Marguerite

Interestingly, it was only upon starting this project that I realized something: I seldom consider my "voice"; rather, my focus is always on how I might make the sentences clearer and on how to best organize the ideas. My apparent lack of voice caught me off guard. What does it mean to have a voice? It means to have a discernible perspective. To have a perspective implies positionality and relationality. Everyone must have a voice in their writing. The inability to perceive one's own voice suggests, perhaps, an affinity within the writing context. Sometimes, one only becomes aware of one's own culture when one journeys outside of it: experiencing alienation, strangeness, or a level of disconnect provides a space for reflection. Objectivity and "placelessness" are Eurocentric attributes. I identify that, in my writing, I conform to hegemonic conceptions of "appropriate" writing — that is, writing that follows the norms and constraints of academia (Kilby & Graeme, 2022) in an effort to portray myself as learned and knowledgeable. Perhaps the technology focus of my work also subconsciously puts me in a mindset that assumes that place/geography is unimportant. Somehow, my

unconscious socialization as an academic has successfully eased my entry into academe and the role of writer.

This chapter is one of my few personal or semi-autobiographical pieces. It is rare for me to share personal reflections, family information, or events in my personal life. Even on social media, I limit discussion of my day-to-day life and my feelings — although I have been known to share pictures of spectacular meals as well as interesting places and events. There are times in my qualitative research where I will discuss my philosophical and professional positioning. However, anything more personal must be relevant to the context of the piece. I seldom feel anxiety about academic writing and even sharing rough drafts causes me little discomfort. The lack of discomfort may be owing to my cautiousness in terms of personal disclosures which are judicially selected and limited, thereby reducing risk of personal attacks or judgment.

Increasingly, I have been incorporating more comments on social justice and the effects of neoliberalism on the field and practice of education. I am, therefore, becoming more sensitive to the political dimensions of my positioning and the potential of my words in influencing other scholars who, in turn, may influence pre-service teachers and practitioners. On a professional level, when engaging in this type of writing, I am mindful of how I use words. I ensure that I offer sufficient support for my statements, and I attempt to maintain a mature, professional tone. On a personal level, I am mindful of potential political blowback from politicians upon me or the university. Although we have academic freedom, there are ways that governments can exert pressure to diminish such freedom. Furthermore, as a female academic, I have watched social media trolls threaten scientists, academics, and health care workers. I am acutely aware of how much power I do *not* have.

For me, readers are an abstraction; they are an unidentifiable amalgam of academics, students, and professors. When I'm writing, I want my writing to be logical and concise. I want my writing to flow from idea to idea but offer a variety in sentence structure and sentence length. As such, I want the reader to feel that I am a logical thinker with a balanced point of view. I acknowledge contradictory points of view whenever possible and ensure there is a balanced and up-to-date coverage of the literature in order to convince the reader that the arguments are sound and based upon prior literature.

As a student, I wrote for my professors. My PhD supervisor was a significant mentor who painstakingly took the time to discuss philosophy, provide feedback on my papers, indulge in recent readings and new turns in the field, and share her knowledge of how to interact in my PhD defence and with other scholars. Now, I write to resolve problems, to answer questions in my field, to explore new and emerging technologies, and to present different philosophical and theoretical perspectives. I think when I write. As each word is set down on the page, it co-constructs meaning. A sensitivity to how the words interact brings about an internal discourse in which tensions between the connotations create new meaning and new understanding. Over the years, exploring different philosophical positions — whether one of the constructivisms (social, relative, or cognitive), the social construction of meaning, socio-materialism, or postdigital thought — has helped me to think through deeper levels of meaning and to harness the possibilities of metaphor and visual depictions of concepts, principles, and theories. I use visual models and depictions heavily to guide my thinking and writing. As I continue to mature as a writer, I find that I write for myself because exploration of the world through prose has become increasingly fascinating.

Kristine

When I write, I write for my late grandmothers, for my ancestors, and for people whom I believe need to read my work and hear my stories. I write for my professors, who do their best to encourage me when I need it. As an educator, I find we are often lifelong learners. I can remember teaching in the north, wanting to take more university classes, and just not knowing what options I had or where to start. So, now that I work at a university, I feel that I am here and I should study, and this includes writing. I have the opportunity when I know there are, too often, Indigenous peoples who do not have these opportunities.

I am now a PhD student in the Cross-Departmental Program in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. When I write, I am trying to convey that Indigenous peoples very much have a place within higher education and that Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing are integral to academia. I am also really interested in space

where Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing connect with Western perspectives. These perspectives do not always weave together easily, but it is a bit mind-bending when it is possible. I like layers and finding connections.

Janet

As a writer, I see myself as a custodian of a message or knowledge that needs to be relayed to a specific audience in a way that is accessible and written concisely. But in almost all cases, I do this in a foreign language — English. In other words, I am always cognizant of my position as a foreign messenger. And based on the transient nature of my career and academic life, I have learned that language and communication is cultural-specific. I have also realized that concepts, words, and expressions could have meanings that invoke political positions. The words and expressions in a given language can have different meanings in different cultural contexts. And so, for me to communicate effectively in any language, I must learn the cultural nuances of my audience. This became even clearer to me during my doctoral programme in Canada and now, as I work with both Canadian-born (domestic) and international students as their instructor and academic supervisor. The cultural experience is compounded by the disadvantage of not having English grammar as part of my basic education curriculum.

As a doctoral student, I became aware of how my cultural socialization influenced how I structured my thoughts, organized my writing, and how it sometimes interfered with the clarity and conciseness of my communication. For instance, I noted how communication in my native language(s), which are mostly oral, differed in the sense that the main meaning of a message is often preceded with an in-depth description of the context, self-identification, and communal location. It is sandwiched between a thick introduction and a brief conclusion. On the other hand, in the Western writing tradition, I have experienced the effectiveness of writing to communicate as providing a concise statement of the "essence" of the message at the onset, followed by elaboration, and a summary in the conclusion. Fortunately, both cultural orientations (i.e., African and Canadian) are serving me well as I evolve as a scholar.

Michael

I greatly appreciate the ways in which contributing to this chapter have prompted me to think about academic writing and my own positionality as a writer more deeply and critically than I normally do and to chart an evolution over time. The disciplinary shifts I have experienced over the course of my career have obviously impacted how I approach the process of writing and have also altered my self-conceptualization as a writer. My doctoral training in history privileged a very formal humanities style, characterized by third-person voice, analytic objectivity, and the Chicago referencing system, heavy with footnotes. Because of this, my early writing, of which I was very proud at the time, now seems excessively formal, depersonalized, and neutral. Shifting from history to education caused some disciplinary dissonance but was also tremendously beneficial in terms of my growth as a researcher and writer. Since history is a largely untheoretical discipline, I was first challenged to engage with theoretical concepts of ontology and epistemology as a social sciences researcher in education. Encountering the works of Paulo Freire (1970) and Franz Fanon (1967) was transformative, enabling me to confront the political dimensions of scholarship and writing, and to articulate an identity and affiliation within my own work informed by critical theory and constructivist assumptions.

Self as Writer

The self as author refers to the way writers see themselves — that is, how they perceive the enactment of their own voice and how they attempt to actively portray themselves.

Marguerite

I am not a natural-born writer. Writing is hard work; however, the more I do it, the more I enjoy it. Writing is a means of continuous learning and honing of critical thinking skills. Although I have been told that I am creative, I see myself more as an explorer who revels in ideas and seeing theoretical connections between ideas — that is, connections that others might see as disparate. Uncovering news ways of seeing the

world offers the potential to find novel solutions and different, if not better, understandings of issues in the field of educational technology. Attempting to break free of disciplinary boundaries and the constraints of conventional, orthodox thought is important for moving the field forward. Exploring new ideas and applying them to current issues would be my intellectual superpower.

Kristine

I would have to say I am a struggling writer. It is not my favourite thing to do. I overthink and procrastinate with an exorbitant amount of skill. About a year ago, I had an "aha!" moment when I realized that, as a PhD candidate, I was really trying to become an academic writer. I am not sure if that realization helped or hindered my writing. But I realize that so much of what I need to do to finish my PhD is to hone my skills as a writer.

In ethnography, there is the idea of researchers positioning themselves as either insiders or outsiders, the *emic* or the *etic*. As an Indigenous woman, I would have to say I am neither and I am both. Sometimes I struggle to find my place in academia. I am not faculty. I am a staff member and graduate student. I am an outsider. The institution is a place that can be too often hostile for Indigenous people. But then, relationality is central to Indigenous ways of knowing, and the relationships I have established through my work on campus also make me an insider. The either/or of this is a construct that does not easily fit. But I also try to focus on the importance of building good relationships through my work in higher education, and this makes me feel like an insider. When projects with faculty lead to writing and presentations I am happy to participate and further develop my skills and it supports my sense of belonging in academia.

Janet

I identify as a pragmatic scholar or writer because the practicality or purpose of what I am communicating with my writing drives the style and tone within it. As a custodian of valuable knowledge that I need to relay to an audience, I have learned to use various aspects of my cultural

experiences to enrich my writing — depending on the purpose and the audience. I am learning to use the experiences from both orientations. This includes working with epistemological lenses and methodological designs that call upon my ability to provide very thick and rich descriptions of phenomena, as well as those that require my writing to be objective, structured, and concise.

Michael

Who do I try to be when I write? My primary influences are socio-cultural and political. My Irish heritage, characterized by a history of struggle against oppression, combined with a liberationist and redistributive political sensibility, position me as an ally to Indigenous peoples in Canada. The bulk of my research and writing is consequently focused on drawing attention to educational disparities which disadvantage Indigenous peoples and on delineating strategies which ensure more equitable outcomes for Indigenous learners. I believe passionately in the transformative power of learning and dialogue to create a more socially just world, and I write to amplify the multiple voices, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, academics, educators, policy makers, and administrators, who are also committed to this work. I continue to be inspired by Freire's (1970) insight that critical scholars do not consider themselves "the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side" (p. 9). In terms of voice, I share with other critical scholars a desire to use my voice and authority to highlight the experiences of those that have been marginalized, disadvantaged, excluded or vulnerable or those who have been excluded or silenced by dominant discourses (Sawchuk, 2021).

Writing Process Challenges

In a light-hearted article about why and how academics write, Badley (2018) refers to academic writers as "rotten" and "stinky" (p. 247). While he explains his point, he suggests that there is space for exploration, faltering, and frivolity. His article ends with him accepting that he will continue to improve. Self-doubt in one's writing ability is certainly one

of the challenges; however, there are additional obstacles, both perceived and real.

Marguerite

What is most troublesome for me is finding the time for writing. As my academic career has developed, it is increasingly difficult to balance committee work, teaching, research, writing, family, and outside interests. As of late, I now manage meetings by scheduling as many as possible on the same days. In this way, entire days can be freed up for thoughtful work. Those days feel luxurious as long as I can convince myself to sit in front of the keyboard. Writing requires unscheduled, flexible, and uninterrupted time. I need to be able to ignore email, hallway conversations, the refrigerator, dust bunnies, the cat, and my husband. My desk and computer desktop need to be cleared of anything unrelated to the writing project at hand. Although I orchestrate this kind of time and space, other obstacles present themselves. When fatigued or unmotivated, I relent and divert my attention to busy work such as answering emails, scheduling meetings, completing paperwork, or simply resting.

When motivated to write, I begin by formulating a strategy and articulating my goal; for some, this is called an outline and thesis statement. My outline, however, is fluid and changes as new ideas and discoveries emerge. The goal usually remains constant. In preparing to write, I gather sources. Ideally, I like to spend time reading around my subject, taking breaks to think. To begin typing, I have to feel mentally settled. I have to get comfortable. I have to have read enough to feel saturated in the topic. I highlight and annotate readings, then gather my annotations, and review them. Often, I take notes and type key sentences from books into MS Word documents. I also read electronically and export quotes that are significant to me. I like having both paper and electronic copies. Paper is easier on the eyes while electronic copies are more easily searchable. When working on complex pieces with many sources, I use Nvivo (qualitative coding software) to categorize snippets of annotations and quotes allowing me to easily locate statements of support later in the writing process.

Early in the process, I like to add the sources to my software referencing tool. The ability to write and cite while automatically updating the list of references saves time — even though, at the end of the writing project, it is still necessary to double check the formatting to correct any errors in the reference and citation formatting. I must discipline myself to complete this final review of citations and references. I sometimes combine it with something pleasurable such as going for coffee with a draft of the paper.

Writing a master's thesis certainly taught me about myself as a writer and prepared me for the PhD dissertation. It is as true now as it was then: starting a first draft is the most overwhelming while editing drafts is the most enjoyable. When I was writing my master's thesis, I lived in a small town in Alberta. There was a lovely little tea house where the proprietor made fresh scones and served them with whipped cream and a strawberry compote. In the mornings on my writing days, I would bring a draft of a chapter, go to the tea house, order a coffee and scone. It was quiet mid-week, so I could sit for a couple hours munching, sipping coffee, thinking, reading, and editing. It would prepare me to return to my keyboard to input the edits. Then, having completed the editing, I would draft the next section and return to the tea house the next morning. I still try to follow this formula when writing chapters and journal articles.

By far, the most enjoyable aspect of writing now is successfully publishing. While I still curse the reviewers under my breath, I have personally experienced tremendous growth working with my anonymous reviewers. Sometimes the learning is in the form of a sudden "aha!" moment such as when a reviewer's comment made me realize the incommensurability particular concepts, for example. At other times, my writing has benefited from working through comments on how to write more concisely or better organize a paper. I have also learned how to hold my ground with confidence in my theorizing and writing skills. Such confidence grows through both experience and, notably, discussions with supportive colleagues who remind me that my work is good. The academic community can be and should be a space of positive growth.

Kristine

I am always trying to find new ways to motivate and better focus. Earlier in the year, in trying to establish a consistent writing schedule, I gathered some jars and rocks to try and track my hourly daily writing. I had enough rocks for each day in the month. Every day when I wrote for an hour, I would move a rock into the other jar. It worked for a while, and I could see the jar fill with my many hours of writing. It created a visual of my efforts and I could see that little by little, I was making progress.

For me, sitting down and focusing is the thing that challenges me the most: I think it is the worry that I will be glued to my desk for twelve to fourteen hours a day. I know I need to put in more time writing, but I am afraid to miss out on life. Writing is isolating. It can too often feel lonely. And that is my struggle. So, I sign up for online writing classes when I can. These classes help me feel connected while I write. The Pomodoro method is another useful technique that I have found. Pomodoro videos and apps are designed to help you focus and write for twenty-five-minute blocks. When I really struggle to write, I challenge myself to do one or two Pomodoro sessions and they often help me to get started.

I like the research that goes into my writing process… finding publications, figuring out who the scholars in the field are. I love to print, curate publications, and order new books. I underline the relevant quotes in printed publications. I also have a sticky-note addiction. So, when I read a book, I put a sticky-note on the quotes that resonate. Then when I need to, I can go back and re-read the entire book in a few minutes by focusing on the flagged pieces. I love the language and how authors put together their words.

When I begin writing, I usually start with really rough ideas. Eventually I try to add some headings. I mix in some quotes and revise, revise, revise until it begins to form something that still feels terrible. It is the agony of my writing. I really wish I was confident and could enjoy writing more. I also recognize that it challenges me because academic writing is a skill that will take me in new directions offering more opportunities.

Janet

There are three aspects that cause uneasiness in my writing. The first is the ability to identify and moderate how I use my strengths, and, in some cases, how I represent the two worldviews that are part of my reality — the world view of my ancestral traditions in Kenya and that of my new academic writing culture in the Western world. I mentioned in the description of my identity that these two worlds reinforce my writing in different ways. The more exploratory, non-formal nature of communicating in my Luhya heritage allows me to take risks, be creative, and provide thick and rich narrative in my writing while the more formal concise and linear nature of Western writing is critical to my scholarly and academic work. Besides balancing the strengths form the two worldviews, being a visible minority, I struggle with the feeling that my audience expects me to engage with the critical approach to discourse. This raises the need for me to attend to any assumptions about any political or cultural views that my work may invoke.

Not having had comprehensive grammar lessons as part of English language learning in Kenya creates some self-doubt in the correctness of my expression; thus, I feel the need to engage an editor in my writing. This self-doubt is also compounded by pressure from the nature of my work as an instructor and academic supervisor of graduate students. As I write, I am consciously aware that my work will be judged by my colleagues, by reviewers, and readers in general. I have a sense of inadequacy that pursues me throughout the process.

Michael

Although I am long-established in the academy, the academic writing process still represents a highly emotional journey. The struggle to carve out time to gather data and begin the coding and writing process leads to the satisfaction of marshalling the data and completing various drafts. Multiple drafts are typically required before I feel ready to submit, and the satisfaction and excitement of submission gives way to the anxiety of knowing that my research and writing — into which I have poured countless hours and significant psychological investment — is now at the mercy of anonymous reviewers and a cold and inordinately lengthy

peer-review process. The roller-coaster continues when the reviews arrive. If the reviews are positive and the recommendation is to publish, I feel a thrill of satisfaction almost equal to the very first time a piece of my writing was accepted for publication over thirty years ago. And if the recommendation from reviewers is not positive, the sting of rejection is still deeply felt. But experience over time helps in anticipating and managing the often-challenging emotional journey represented by writing for peer-reviewed publication within academia.

As with other collaborators in this chapter, the pressures of work intensification constitute some of the most immediate challenges to research and writing. Neoliberal impulses within the academy have resulted in increased class sizes and teaching loads, especially supervisory responsibilities for graduate students; additionally, a corresponding imperative to secure Tri-Council funding pushes us to prioritize research topics that are fundable rather than those for which we feel genuine passion. My role as Graduate Chair in a department with a very large number of graduate programmes and students is also time-consuming, as funding scarcity amplifies the need for advocacy on behalf of vulnerable students. Having said all that, I still feel incredibly fortunate to work in the academy, as I am aware that tenured positions are becoming increasingly scarce and my previous experience in an untenured position alerted me to the uncertainty and tenuousness of part-time lecturers. I am also challenged by the topic of my writing, as Linda Smith (2005) famously described research on Indigenous topics as stepping on "tricky ground." For non-Indigenous researchers such as myself, it is even trickier because of the risk of being accused of voice appropriation, presenting oneself as a "white saviour," or being dismissed as merely performative.

As part of the reflection on my writing prompted by the opportunity to contribute to this chapter, I also noticed very different levels of motivation for writing for publication in peer-reviewed journals and applied or advocacy research. In short, since the latter often has the potential to effect policy or mobilize resources, while it is often unclear on the impact of much peer-reviewed research beyond personal advancement, I am much more highly motivated to initiate and conduct that type of writing for applied or advocacy purposes.

Discussion and Observations

Moving from polyvocality to synthesis, our personal narratives show interesting convergences and divergences. All of us wish to convey knowledge and ideas clearly and concisely. But the most significant themes include boundary crossing, relationality, and contextualization.

All of us are the first in our families to cross (or to be crossing) the PhD degree boundary. Other boundaries were also significant in the narratives. Both Janet and Kristine shared their feelings of "insider/ outsider." Janet noted that in all her writing endeavours, there are language tensions that constantly remind her that she is a foreigner. Kristine noted being simultaneously inside the institution as staff and student, yet outside faculty-level academe. With a lesser sense of tension, Michael balanced his identities of settler, diaspora, and colonized peoples. While Marguerite's sense of being a settler on Treaty land arose late in her academic journey, she expressed the least amount of self-dislocation and least liminality.

A piece of writing can be thought of as an assemblage of words. In this way of thinking, words themselves are assemblages of morphemes, connotations, and denotation. Words as assemblages with the power to shape understanding, shift policy, or mobilize emerged for both Janet and Marguerite, but for different reasons. For Marguerite, words are interesting, and she has become sensitive to their choice and positioning in order to achieve clarity. For Janet, words can suggest different meanings in different contexts. For her, words are problematic, and one must wield them carefully in both a social and political sense. Words can reveal a writer to be erudite or clumsy; they can bring on judgement. And for Michael, words are sometimes political weapons that, when marshalled appropriately, can powerfully alter systems and the individuals that inhabit them, and the way in which they are resourced.

Hyland (2002) sees academic writing as "an act of identity" that exposes our "affiliation and recognition" (p. 1092). As members of communities, writers have many socio-cultural affiliations and discourses that are available to them. Interestingly, Janet, Marguerite, and Michael's narratives suggest that they have significant control over their possibilities for selfhood as writers. As established academics, they indicated comfort over "contesting the patterns of privilege" (Ivanič,

1997, p. 33). For example, Janet explained how she has learned to draw upon her oral and Western styles for different audiences. While we can choose our subject positions, we tend to balance our work alongside current expectations for academic writing in formatting, expression, and organization. As writers, we all view writing as a source of privilege but in different ways. Whereas Marguerite is beginning to critique social structures, Michael has already established himself in that area. Janet sees herself as a "custodian" of knowledge.

Kristine, as student, expressed an underlying humbleness and commitment towards her privilege to study at the PhD level — of which writing is a central aspect. Kristine's narrative suggests she is at the precipice of important boundaries — not only between student and academic but also between cultures. Students and early-career academics may be initially reluctant to take on a strong authorial voice or to expose their autobiographical selves. Not only is there danger in making strong claims but choosing a strong authorial position may alienate the writer from his or her home community. On the other hand, taking an identifiable non-academic voice may alienate them from the academy, thereby reducing access to associated privileges. Furthermore, novice writers often lack the understanding that "the boundary... belongs to *neither one nor* the other world" (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 141). This belonging and not-belonging emerged as a strong theme in Kristine's reflections.

Relationality in writing refers to how writers position themselves among others, among communities, among issues, and even among geographic locations. Marguerite's narrative suggests that her relationality remains controlled and segmented; other than her philosophical perspective, she divulges only what is necessary. Janet now shifts between positions, relative to her intended readers. Michael's writing is heavily influenced by his perceptions of affinity to colonized communities yet remains restricted by tensions arising from boundary maintenance of these communities. For Kristine, relationality is of utmost importance. The anticipated possible impact of her work adds considerable weight of responsibility and anxiety to her writing. Our sense of who we are is highly connected to our home cultures and when this sense of self must conform to standard ways of performing within the academic community, we may experience an "acute sense

of dislocation and uncertainty" (Hyland, 2002, p. 1094). For Kristine, writing is more than an individual endeavour, while Marguerite, consciously or unconsciously, shelters herself from personal harm by avoiding self-disclosure.

The need to contextualize one's work is a significant aspect of writing for Kristine and Janet. Kristine must contextualize her work in order to situate herself. Janet, on the other hand, comes from an oral tradition in which contextualization is expected. Contrary to arguments by Ergin and Alkin (2019) who suggested that non-Western writers must contextualize their writing in order for Westerners to better understand their work, Kristine and Janet's narratives indicate that contextualization is necessary depending upon one's culture and traditions. Regardless of the reason, such practices (i.e., providing robust contextual and relational information) could strengthen writing if adopted more generally in the academic community by supporting more in-depth understanding.

Conclusion

Writing can be both empowering and endangering; it exposes writers' understanding of the world and themselves in relation to it. Academic writers are judged on their writing, which explains why graduate students — and even experienced academics — can react emotionally to critiques of their work. Although academic writers must cross through the "obligatory points of passage" imposed by colleagues and anonymous reviewers to traverse the boundary into the academic community, they can still actively choose their voice(s) and actively manage the boundary between worlds.

The polyvocal approach that we took in this chapter allowed us to share and compare our attitudes, struggles with, and appreciation for writing. More importantly, we were able to expose how our personal journeys have woven into the very fabric our work. An interesting outcome of this chapter is our increased recognition of the privilege we have as writers, our motivations for engaging in the writing process, and how we each bear the weight of responsibility differently. Responsibility, privilege, gender, race, nationality, and geographic location can all become boundaries, creating tension in our writing. As Akkerman and Bakker (2011) write, "a boundary creates a possibility to look at oneself

through the eyes of other worlds" (p. 144). Peering into each other's gaze, we can better see each other's struggles, strategize ways to lighten the burden, and celebrate others' contributions as scholarly writers.

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