

EDITED BY DIANNE CONRAD





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15. A Few Words in Conclusion

Dianne Conrad

It seemed to me that I needed to write a few succinct thoughts to conclude these amazing chapters; but I promised in the Welcome and Introduction not to try to thematize or order them. However, I think it's in our writing nature, as published authors, to try to tie things up nicely at the end. Certainly, as an editor, I've asked many authors to add something solid to the conclusion of their work, something satisfying with which to leave the reader. That said, this will be short!

In a recent publication of my own, *Opening the Online Door to Academe* (2022), I highlighted some of the various paths that academe provides for its scholars... call it, in the style of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) "ways of knowing how to be successful in a challenging and diverse field." The contributors to this book have demonstrated so articulately and thoughtfully their "ways," and I thank them for the forthrightness, clarity, and honesty that hallmark each chapter.

In the book mentioned above, I outlined scholarly, teacher-ly, and administrative routes to academic success. I share with Mark Nichols the experience of "working from the margins"; that is, wearing two hats — moonlighting, in a sense — by taking on teaching positions while employed full-time as an administrator. And while I pretty much stayed on the margins throughout a long career, some of our contributors moved from mainstream institutional life to the freedom of more independent scholarship, building on their years of institutional experience. Perhaps this is a route that is attractive to us "mature" — that is to say, old(er) — folks. Let's keep an eye on some of our younger contributors.

What can the novice, or questioning, or unsure scholar/writer/researcher/teacher take away from these stories of perseverance, experience, and perhaps just plain happenstance or good luck? I think it's important to acknowledge that, as one author wrote and others alluded to, the serendipity of being "in the right place, at the right time" can be very instrumental to the academic journey. And, on the opposite end of the spectrum, careful and methodical planning and decision-making also brings advancement and rewards. The chapters you have already read in the book have detailed some of the authors' arduous journeys either "up the ladder" or through various hardships and hurdles.

Arduous journeys are often assisted by mentors. David Starr-Glass, specifically, foregrounds the importance of mentoring; but several others, including Tony Bates, Jennifer Roberts, Junhong Ziao, and myself, tell stories that highlight the importance to a newcomer of helping hands, sage advice, or even simply kindness or a receptive ear. The lessons here are two-fold: Be a mentor when that possibility occurs and/or be open and receptive to mentoring.

Our contributing authors have broad and varied backgrounds — literature and fine arts, sociology, business, technology and science, teaching at various levels, and even the world of entertainment. This diversity is well understood in our field: as Tony Bates wrote, "No one wakes up at fifteen years of age and says: 'I want to be a specialist in online learning.'" I, too, have written much the same in stating that nobody graduating from secondary school has "adult educator" on their minds. I, myself, grew into that role, bringing with me many years of university education, all of which served me well. Similar stories are detailed throughout these chapters.

As a teacher at graduate and doctoral levels, I have relished the opportunity to introduce many adult learners from many diverse backgrounds to our field. My own education, spanning English, psychology, business administration, and adult and distance education prepared me well for the career that followed and, clearly, my author-colleagues similarly benefited from their preparatory years. Perhaps not all roads lead to open and distance learning, but, as demonstrated in these pages, the roads are wide and varied, offering myriad opportunities to those who are seeking entry to the field.

The roads that our contributors have walked have reflected history, whimsy, determination, politics, coincidence and good fortune, adversity and hardship, confidence, lack of confidence, doggedness, and commitment. Many refer to having suffered Brookfield's (1990) Imposter Syndrome, as I, myself, have done. I thank them all for their honesty and sincerity.

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