“Nurturing” the research spirit: Speaking from the margins of educational research

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Abstract

This paper employs the arts-based representational technique of polyphonic narrative construction to explore my journey as an academic margin-walker, and my process of becoming an educational researcher within (and in spite of) the current academic environment. The first steps in my educational journey involved training as a drama teacher – a role which involves working in the margins (artist/educator; personal/professional) on a daily basis. At the completion of this degree I disrupted the expected career path, moving further into the margins of the educational context, by deciding not to pursue a classroom career, instead engaging in full-time doctoral studies. Rather than positioning me firmly within the borders of ‘researcher’, this decision undermined the credibility and security I held in the full range of educational roles – as teacher, learner, and researcher. My final act of educational transgression is taking place in the present, as I attempt to engage with my role as (post-doctorate) educational researcher within a non-traditional academic role. In this paper, I position this professional margin-dwelling, and these transgressions, as signal moments in my career development, by presenting interweaving narratives of key experiences from each moment. Ultimately then, this paper is about being and becoming an educational [Margin-walkerObserverParadoxNon-participantFraud] researcher.

1. Introduction

As part of the symposium ‘Nurturing the research spirit: Narratives of being and becoming’, this paper represents my personal journey as a beginning researcher. My story here centres on three key periods in my professional life – my training to be a drama teacher, my experiences while undertaking full-time doctoral studies, and finally my current position as an academic in a non-academic unit, responsible for support and leadership in teaching and learning. Each of these narrative ‘moments’ represents a significant choice on my part – my choice to become a teacher; my choice to move directly into doctoral studies rather than pursue a career teaching in primary/secondary schools; and my choice to continue this journey in a tertiary setting after completing my PhD, despite heavy criticism from colleagues in the Faculty of Education. While each choice is significant in terms of my identity formation as an
academic, the responses to these choices by those around me in the professional sphere have been just as significant. My path to becoming a researcher is represented in this paper as a continuing shift between belonging (participating) and not belonging (observing) – forming identity with the support of, and at times in spite of, these ‘others’ in my professional communities. My choice has been, at each stage of my professional life, to walk in the margins of the educational community, and this has been both educative and problematic.

Like the journey itself, this paper is complex and features many interwoven narratives and voices. However, several key design principles underpin this work. Following this introduction, the paper is presented as a polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1973) research text. A polyphonic text does not simply present multiple voices on the same topic or worldview – rather, it presents a range of perspectives, all of which are equally valid, and all of which are essentially irreducible. Rather than presenting conclusions or certainties, a polyphonic text presents interactions. A polyphonic approach is adopted in order to model the complexity of the issue of academic identity formation, which cannot be reduced to simple answers or pathways, and to open up the interpretive space to encourage the reader to participate in a more genuine dialogue. Polyphonic writing allows us to “discover and express the complexity, conflicts and surprises” (Tanaka, 1997, p. 289) that emerge as a result of entering into a genuine conversation with others about their lives. The voices that feature in this paper are my own, from the three moments on my professional journey described above, and those of significant others encountered along this journey. Although these perspectives are at times complementary, they are in essence irreducible – each embodies a moment of dissonance between belonging and not belonging.

The second design principle underpinning this work is the use of artistic modes of representation – for example, poetic structures (Richardson, 1997; Eisner, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 2002) and narrative layering (Richardson, 2000; Barone, 1997). These techniques are employed here as a means of challenging taken-for-granted ways of knowing/understanding the journey of becoming a researcher. Further, these techniques indicate that the fundamental purpose of this work is not to explain, predict, and control the process of becoming a researcher, reducing the uncertainty (Barone, 2001) attached to this process. Rather, this work aims to open up dialogue about a range of possible meanings and processes of becoming a researcher, and therefore laying bare “the questions that have been hidden by certain implicit, taken-for-granted answers about education” (Barone, 2001, p. 25).

The purpose of this paper is emphatically not to find solutions to problems that I have encountered on my journey, but to add the voice/s of a beginning researcher to the developing conversation. In this way, beginning researchers might move from the margins, to the centre of the discussion about what constitutes research and being a researcher. For me, becoming a researcher was about never quite being ‘grounded’ in my professional contexts, instead experiencing a continual oscillation between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status. I first became aware of these two positions during my initial teacher training.

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2. (Not) Belonging

Not Belonging.

I was there when the news came out that a third student had committed suicide. It was my teaching internship at Green College. I remember walking in that morning, along the tiled corridor. Glass windows along one side, looking in to the staff office, nestled in a corner of the main performance area. My footsteps echoed around me, accentuated by the glass and tiles, and I remember thinking how much I sounded like a teacher, in my teacher shoes bought for the occasion. I looked through the windows – was anyone there yet? Or would I have to wait for someone with a key to show up? The air was fresh, cold – even inside this foyer. I adjusted my shirt under my v-neck, still a little unused to the collar.

My two supervising teachers, Emily and Michael, were in the staff room. Nothing out of the ordinary. I opened the door to the performance space: one large room, the small staffroom, and a kitchenette area. My space was upstairs, a desk against the floor-to-ceiling window. The whole area was free reign for the students – working at the computer, making each other coffee, listening to music in the office. The place was usually buzzing, even at this time of the morning. I half expected to see Mark, the student stage manager for the production, typing the script revisions. He was there, but sitting in the kitchen, quiet. He was slowly sipping a drink and he waved back at me. I opened the staffroom door. Emily turned to see who it was. I can’t remember – were her eyes just red, or was she actually crying then? Michael took me outside the room, told me the news. I felt nothing, except absence. I went back to the staffroom, talked to Emily. I know that she was crying by then. She gave me a hug. She was shaking, sobbing. I wanted to say something, to comfort her, but the words fell away before I could speak them. I couldn’t find the words to describe the space, let alone fill it. I said nothing. Upstairs, at my desk, I sat and looked out of the large windows. Students began to arrive. I don’t remember if they were laughing when they came in. I would like to think so. I remember that their scarves, their flushed faces, their gestures, seemed strange to me. Too real, too normal. Like everything about that day.

Later in the day, I sat with a drama class. I read the official announcement from the news sheet, informed them that there were counsellors in the main hall if anyone needed to speak to them. A few hands went up. I would like to say that I spent that lesson with the class talking about it all, discussing how we felt and what we would do. But I didn’t. We didn’t. I felt like an outsider, an observer, watching from the other side of the glass.

This experience was a defining moment for me, in the first stage of my journey to become a researcher. It was at this moment that I discovered there were boundaries between personal and professional, and in the space between, margins. On a day like the one described above, what was needed was a personal response. And the truth is, I didn’t want to share this personal response. I was discovering that life as a teacher involves a continual negotiation on the margin between what is personal, and what is professional. I was not yet ready to cross over this margin.
Belonging.

It is December of my final year as an undergraduate student. In a few weeks I will be one of the many who will line up onstage, wait for my name to be proclaimed, and bow while accepting my degree (my passport my future my career). For now, there is one more step.

There are 14 of us in the front row of the lecture theatre, a small sea of faces behind. We are to present our ‘findings’, those elusive statements we have been pursuing all year so that we might earn the title of Honours. I am second last. Before me, there are 12 PowerPoint presentations – cut from the master template of aims/methods/findings/discussion/conclusions. Some even have animations. One has sound effects. For my work, I have decided to focus simply on sharing what I know now, that I didn’t before. I don’t use PowerPoint. I try to share my excitement about my project with the audience (and not just my mum in the third row). I want them to know that what I did matters; what I found matters. Towards the end of my speech, I realise I have invested in this moment. I want to share how I feel. I want others to care about this in the way that I do. I don’t care if they all ‘get it’ or not – I don’t care if I make a fool of myself. I am present in this moment.

In research,

I play with ideas
let meanings shift
and see words as ripe,

plump with potential.

This is not like teaching at all.

When I teach, ideas crumble
before me,

dissolving like dry
leaves
before the numbed touch
of my words.

I drain them of meaning.

And then the moment is over. Afterwards, one or two people comment on my presentation. Someone suggests that a good PowerPoint (perhaps with some animations) would have made it easier to follow what I had done. Mum tells me I say ‘basically’ too many times. But I am transformed. I am a researcher. Or at least, I want to be.
**Not Belonging.**

I am sitting in room with five other people, listening to a presenter from the Research Office talk about research scholarships for PhD students. It is a numbers game. We will each be reduced to a mark out of 20. Scribbling sums in the column of my notepad, I give myself about a 17. That seems pretty good to me.

Afterwards, the presenter speaks to each of us about our backgrounds, what we might want to study. It is my turn.

Geoff: So Tim, what have you studied?

Tim: My Honours work was in arts education. For my PhD, I’d like to look at-

Geoff: Education, huh? That’s my field. Where have you taught?

Tim: Well, I did my internship at a local college, and before that, I did my pracs at high schools.

Geoff: So you aren’t actually a teacher then?

Tim: No, I was thinking about doing research first, and then maybe teaching later. I thought I should keep going while I had the momentum up.

Geoff: It would be very uncommon for someone who hasn’t actually been a teacher to research education. Why would you want to do that? Don’t you think there is a credibility problem there?

Tim: Well I was thinking that it depends on how you want to study, and what you want to study. I wouldn’t want to tell people how to teach, but-

Geoff: Well you couldn’t tell people how to teach. Tim, I really don’t think it would be wise for you to pursue research without teaching first. What could you contribute?

Tim: …

Afterwards, of course, I replace the awkward pause with a range of articulate responses, about the benefits of a fresh perspective in investigating issues, and about conversations being enhanced through the presentation of new voices. Mostly though, my answer is that I want to be a researcher.

This is my first indication that there are mainstream and marginal positions in educational research, and my first indication of where my decision (and my place in the margins between student and teacher, personal and professional) is likely to place me within this divide.
I apply for a scholarship anyway. A score of 17 is apparently pretty good – I am successful and start my PhD fulltime.

Belonging.

There is a row of four windows, a large corner desk, an old computer (with a disconcerting rattle from the fans inside the case), two bookcases, two filing cabinets, and a balcony. Yes, a balcony. I have two keys – one to open the door to this room, and the other to let me into the building after hours (which I cannot imagine ever needing to use). There is a shiny silver nameplate on the door, with my name on it. My name. That means this is my office. On my first day here, one of my former lecturers shakes my hand, smiles, and welcomes me to ‘the team’. He takes me to the staff lounge (which I had never even known existed), and shows me how to work the coffee machine (a process that will take me three years to master). I am invited to sit at the main table in this lounge for lunch. Every day.

Another former lecturer asks me what I am intending to research. Still wary from my meeting with Geoff, I suggest that although I couldn’t possibly expect to tell people how to teach, I’d like to know more about what it means to teach, and how it might help us to make sense of who we are. She nods, asks if I’ve encountered the work of such-and-such a scholar yet. I haven’t. She offers to lend me a text about identity.

A third former lecturer asks if I have taken up any offers of work. I stumble through a reply about wanting to focus on my studies, and not get distracted by working in schools. “Not there, Tim – I mean here. I’m coordinating a distance unit, and I really need someone to help out with study days. I remember that you did really well in the equivalent unit in your course a few years back. Interested?” I am.

Not Belonging.

When I’m in the classroom at university, working with pre-service teachers, I find I have to fight déjà vu on two levels – first, because of the sheer volume of teaching. After taking the same planned class three times in one day, my struggle shifts from appearing organised, to appearing enthusiastic. Second, because I remember my own recent experiences on the other side of the overhead projector. I am still a student, as much as I am an academic.

I learn how to teach from these students, how to share and relate and understand and communicate and be, in the classroom,
while I talk to them about curriculum and drama. I feel uncomfortable about this relationship. I should have more to offer them. I should be able to deal with those questions:

how does this work with grade 2?
what do you do if the students won’t sit still?
how do you fit this in with literacy and numeracy and ICT and sport and…

But I never quite feel I have it right. The worst questions are the ones that I am asked most often:

where did you teach?
(nowhere)

how long were you out in the real world before you became a lecturer?
(no time)

when did you end your time in the classroom?
(I never began)

These questions shake the foundations of my belief in myself as a teacher. As a student. Most of all, as a researcher. Why am I here? What can I offer these students, who want to know how and what and when (but not why)? What can I offer to teachers, researchers, those who have been there? What use are my questions, about being a teacher? Isn’t it something you do, not something you try to view from elsewhere? What could they learn from a voice in the margins?

What use am I to them?

Belonging.

The room is full of teachers. The chairs are set up in a circle, with the coffee pots burbling away next to the door. A workshop has just finished, and all of the conference delegates have been asked to come in and have a seat before there is a break for lunch. I have only just arrived, and I am reading over my pages of notes about my research project for the fifth time. As the teachers sit and wait, I notice that they treat each other with warmth and respect. I wonder how they are viewing me, how they will. The President of Drama Tasmania (the professional association whose conference I have just gatecrashed) introduces me, states that I am here to talk about my research and ask for volunteers to take part in the project. I stand up, feeling the weight of their gaze, and decide not to read from my notes at all. I pause for a moment and look around the group. I am surprised that I know so many of the people here, as prac supervisors, or former teachers, or from amateur productions. I am also surprised that these people, and a few others, are smiling at me. Don’t they
know I’m an impostor? Don’t they know I’m about to ask if I can take what they know, and have nothing to give in return?

After describing my research, I conclude by asking for those who are interested in participating to meet me in the foyer during lunch. And then I wait. I don’t imagine there will be much response. I should consider myself lucky if one or two are interested or want to know more.

Over the half hour or so of lunch, over ten people approach me about becoming involved. Some of these are people I already know, but most I do not. One of my former prac supervisors tells me she wants to get involved because the questions I have posed as part of my presentation are the same ones she has been asking herself. She wants to know how soon it will start, so that she can block out the time in her calendar. Another teacher (who I do not know) approaches me and says that she has just become involved in formal study again after a long break, and would like to participate because she feels it will help her focus on the aspects of her practice that really matter most.

Returning to my car with a folder full of signed consent forms I realise that, in this case, my background has actually helped me. As I had already acknowledged, the participants could offer me something that I did not have – an inside perspective on the process of becoming a teacher. What I had not realised was that, in turn, I could offer them something that they did not have – an informed outsider’s perspective. I began to see my project, and my role as a researcher, anew. My task was not to take without offering in return – rather, it was to engage in genuine collaboration so that we might see the process of teaching from a range of angles.

I leave the conference with a renewed understanding of what I am hoping to achieve – and one other thing. One person who approaches me over lunch is the President, who offers me a position on the organisation’s executive as Publications Officer. She is impressed, she says, by the way I am able to communicate ideas. I am surprised, genuinely excited, and I sign the form.

Not Belonging.

My teaching at university improves. I come to see that this has a lot to do with my research. By working closely with the drama teachers in my study, I have learnt how to listen. I have learnt how to pay attention. I have learnt how to ask questions when I do not already know the answer. I have learnt how to contribute my own ideas, without taking over the story that needs to be told. Students write encouraging comments in their evaluations of my teaching:

“Amazing ability to keep things flowing and maintain enthusiasm. I hope I can do that when I teach!”

“He treated everyone equally and made drama a comfortable experience.”

“Tim was an excellent teacher.”
In my final year of my PhD I receive a perfect score for two quantitative items on the university’s formal student evaluation of teaching – treating students with respect, and knowing the subject matter. I begin to feel as though I am stepping out from the margins. At this time, I am completing my final draft of my work, and teaching over 20 hours per week in the Faculty as a casual.

A job is advertised in the Faculty, teaching Drama and English Curriculum. It is an academic position – a real job – that would let me continue to research, to teach, to work with students and my colleagues in schools. I download the position description, and work through the selection criteria, imagining how I will answer each one:

“Progress towards a doctoral degree.”
(Yep, am just about to finish.)

“Evidence of a developing research capacity in the area of Drama Education.”
(Tick)

“Evidence of successful teaching at tertiary level.”
(Tick – glad I did those student evaluations)

“Ability to maintain strong relationships with colleagues in the profession.”
(Tick)

“Ability to supervise students on School Experience placements.”
(I guess I can argue that one)

“Evidence of successful teaching experience in Primary/Secondary classrooms.”
(…)

I am shaken by this final criterion. I discuss it with my PhD supervisor, and wonder if my time on pracs would constitute successful experience. I decide to contact a senior staff member in the Faculty, who has staffing responsibility, to ask her opinion about my chances, based on this criterion:

Tim, my advice to you is not to apply, but to go and get some classroom teaching experience. It is really a credibility issue. I don’t think you can go in front of a group of students and claim to have any credibility, and we won’t employ you in that kind of position without any teaching experience. It’s a quality assurance issue for us.

After having this conversation, I don’t have time to process what has been said – to be reminded that my place is at the margins (always, in every aspect of my work), a consequence of my decision to research rather than teach. You see, I have to rush off to class. I have to go and teach drama curriculum for another four hours.

◆◆◆
Belonging.

I was initially surprised when I began finding acceptance for my work within research circles. This reached me sporadically, like the time I received an email from my supervisor, forwarding on a comment from an international researcher who wrote: “Tim’s work is great – I am citing it everywhere!” And then there were my examiners’ reports – both unexpectedly positive:

“A bold and daring piece of work. Accepted without revision.”

“An outstanding contribution to our understanding of what it means to be a drama teacher, as well as to the advancement of qualitative methodology and narrative writing. Accepted without revision.”

And then there were the participants.

I finished my PhD with a distinct awareness that the questions we ask of those who participate in our research journeys have very real consequences for them. I will never forget the words of one participant, who, upon reading her story in my thesis for the second time (and the first while I was present), carefully put down the stack of paper, and looked at me. Not knowing how to interpret these actions, I stumbled through a question.

Tim: I’m interested to know what your first reaction to my story was.

Emily: Honestly, I got a bit teary. It was revealing, it was interesting. It was like looking in a mirror, and it was a clear mirror, it wasn’t a cloudy one. Everything was very clear. That was good – it was good to see myself, but also to see myself as another entity, because by having a pseudonym, I did become someone else. It was really fascinating, because I did see things about myself. It was like looking at myself and realising that my shirt’s only half tucked in. It’s funny, I really wanted to show it to someone else and say: “Have I been too revealing? Have I said too much?” and I read it once and then put it away and now I’ve read it again, and I don’t think I have.

Emily was able to use the research – particularly the life story text – as a way of identifying with her own situation. The ‘mirror of words’ allowed her to see herself more clearly, with more distance. Another participant, in an unrecorded conversation, suggested that I offer this approach to reflection to the Department of Education in Tasmania as a form of professional development for teachers. My interactions, my questions, my concerns, all of these had affected the teachers I worked with, sometimes in significant ways. They had learnt from me, as I had learned from them. My work had blurred the margins between self and other.

This was what I was meant to do. This was where I belonged. There was power in this realisation. There was

hope

in this realisation.
Not Belonging.

I submit my PhD in July, at the end of my scholarship. In October I receive my examiners’ reports, hand over the heavy, hard bound (British Racing Green) volumes, and finish teaching as a casual for the year. Also in October I begin to think about what will happen next. I take my CV to some local schools (but don’t ask to see the principal, or make follow-up calls). I begin to read the Higher Education Supplement regularly, circling those few positions that seem appropriate for an arts education researcher. Those that hold promise, I pursue:

Western Australia. Lecturer in Education (Arts).

Must have: A higher degree; a teaching qualification; experience in teaching arts disciplines; a high level of communication skills.

Perth seemed like a nice idea. I was born there, so I knew what to expect. It wasn’t like it was outback New South Wales, at least. I make the shortlist. Half way through my telephone interview for the position, the panel breaks into fits of laughter. I pause, unsure of what I have said to trigger such an unexpected result. Apparently the watering system has turned on outside, a window was left open, and the entire panel is getting wet. I know I don’t have this position.

Outback New South Wales. Lecturer in Arts Education.

Must have: Doctoral qualifications; teaching qualifications; ability to work as part of a team; modest scholarly achievements; ability to teach online.

Well at least it is still a new environment. I make the shortlist. My videoconferenced interview is held at the local hospital, as they have a facility that happens to be available on the day. In the middle of this interview, a speaker above my head crackles to life, calling for Dr. Smith to come to the reception area immediately. I am shaken, but manage to pull through. A panel member asks me where I see myself, in my teaching and research, in five years. He comments on my age, and that most people applying for positions have more experience behind them. He asks whether I will be able to teach drama online. I know I don’t have this position.

Tasmania. Lecturer in Literacy/Drama Education.

Must have: A doctoral degree; a developing research capacity; successful teaching at tertiary level; successful teaching experience in secondary/primary classrooms.

I figure I will have some chance, given that this is the teaching I have been engaged in as a casual for the last three years. I am not shortlisted.

In desperation, I accept an offer of some work as a research assistant. I work from October to December on a project investigating flexible delivery of university teaching. As I compile literature reviews, and interview people around the institution,
I realise that I don’t care about flexible delivery. I do, however, care about not ending up signing my dole form as Dr. Moss. At one point, as I attempt to discuss interview schedules with two academics involved in the project, I realise that I am the only person working on this project with a doctorate.

Finally, in December, comes an offer of a job for next year. It is not quite what I had in mind – working in the university’s Teaching and Learning centre, running workshops for students about academic writing, and providing learning support for the university’s remote campus. But it is, I am assured, an academic position. It’s a Level A for now, sure, and only 0.6, but once I get some experience up, who knows where it might lead. I am excited to have a future with the institution. I am excited that I will be employed as a ‘real’ academic – for the first time. I am excited that I have been accepted into this community. This means I can continue to do my research, that I will have colleagues who research that I can work with and share ideas. I make my choice – I take the job.

A week later it is graduation. Outside the hall, after the ceremony, I am celebrating with family and friends – showing off my degree (and my floppy PhD hat), having photos taken with my supervisor, shaking hands with the other new doctors. A senior colleague from the faculty comes over to speak to me:

Mary: Congratulations Tim – a fine effort.

Tim: Thanks so much Mary! I’m just glad to have finished!

Mary: And have you found work for next year? I’m sure there are many institutions that would be pleased to have you.

Tim: Actually, I’ve accepted a position in Tassie, working with the Flexible Education Unit, as a student support lecturer.

Mary: … Oh, actually, I meant whether you’d found any academic work.

Tim: …

[Mary smiles at another graduate standing just near me, and moves away to shake his hand.]

Not Belonging.

My life as a Student Support Lecturer is not quite what I had imagined. Being 0.6 involves one day per week working at the remote campus, one day a week running workshops at our campus, and one day a week trying to plan and evaluate these workshops, and keep on top of my email. There doesn’t seem to be time for research. There doesn’t even seem to be the expectation that I will do it.

I ask my boss about this. She tells me that I should have plenty of time on my two days off per week to keep up with my reading and writing. On my other three days, I
should just focus on the practical stuff. Anyway, I’m young so there’s plenty of time for that. I take this to mean that research is not part of my job, but something extra, something outside. But how can I be an academic, if I don’t do research?

I can’t seem to get my hands on any data. I can’t find any colleagues who want to let me in on any work they might be doing. I speak to a lecturer from within a faculty about trying to juggle my practical commitments and still find time to think about research. Her response is, initially, stunned silence. I imagine that she is horrified, that I don’t have time for research. I am wrong. She is instead horrified that I should entertain notions of conducting research at all. After all, mine is a service role, not one of leadership. I would be better to spend that time supporting students properly.

Through my links with staff members in the Faculty of Education, I am able to sign on as an Associate Supervisor for two PhD students. At least in this way, I feel as though I am contributing to research, and keeping myself involved. Six months later, I am informed by the Research Office that under new rules, I will not be eligible to become a primary research supervisor for these students, or indeed any others, for as long as I work with the Flexible Education Unit. It is, after all, an administrative unit, not an academic centre. Oh, and one other thing – from now on, the role of Associate Supervisor is being discontinued.

This same administrative unit is, in the following year, excluded from the university’s internal test-run of the RQF. The few of us in this unit who are academics fight against this, and it appears we will have as much chance as other academics in the years ahead. Except for me – for as I discover soon after, Level A staff will be excluded from this exercise.

Belonging.

A year passes, and things begin to change. Part of what changes is my job. Although I still work for the same unit, our name changes and along with it, the nature of my work. Instead of running ad hoc, generic workshops, I become involved in the development and delivery of units, for both students and staff. I am full-time now. This gives me scope to engage in broader projects, to step outside of the practical – even for a little while. Given the lack of support, I realise that it is up to me to find my own ways to conduct research – and I begin to do this. At first, I work with colleagues from my past in the Faculty of Education, writing about projects that are relevant to both of our contexts. Soon, though, opportunities for broader projects emerge – a collaborative research and teaching initiative with staff from a school within Science.

But it is not just my job that changes. I start to understand that what I have learnt from my journey as a researcher and an academic goes beyond disciplinary boundaries. I have learnt how to ask questions, how to identify problems and think of ways around them. I have learnt about the kind of researcher I want to be, and the kind of research I want to do.
With this understanding comes freedom. I begin to see that working outside of any one faculty makes me an outsider, but that this can be a positive position. I can imagine change, ask questions, make contact, at institutional level. But still, it is starting – knowing where to put my efforts, knowing who can help and what is available – that is difficult. I need support, not just ideas and imaginings.

And then I am encouraged by my links with the Faculty of Education. I am an outsider, who is invited to share what I have learnt from that position. An arts education colleague within the faculty asks if I would be interested in joining a new research group that she is starting up, focusing on the arts, community, culture, and change. I am.

At first we work through readings over lunch or coffee. We discuss ideas, connections to our own projects, ways of using what we have learnt in our research and our teaching. Soon though, we begin to look at the implications across our work, as well as within. We discover that although we are a varied group, we all have one thing in common – we are becoming researchers. Why not investigate this? Again, I learn that my questions are shared. There is a place here, for me to feel that I belong.

3. Becoming

As a researcher,

I wanted to know about the gaps.  
I wanted to ask what others hadn’t known to ask 
To find what others hadn’t even known was missing
I wanted (I chose)
to look within these margins.

I wanted to know question
(hope)
that there was light in these shadows.

I wanted to be challenged
accepted
acknowledged – inside.

But in looking beyond the edge, by reaching too far
I fell in to the gaps.
I became

what I was not –
(teacher academic participant) (fraud observer non participant)

I walked in these margins
I lived in(out)side these
blurred lines
I became –

There is hope here
in the
spaces
between.

Here I am
(researcher).
References


