5. SENDING OUT A TWEET

Finding New Ways to Network in Academia

PRELUDE

When we take into account the history of concerns around stress, wellbeing, work/life balance and sustainability in academic life (Barrett & Barrett, 2007; Edwards et al., 2009; Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010; Kinman et al., 2006, 2008) it is imperative to find new ways of working in this environment. Not only are young academics and early career researchers calling for a change in how we operate, but higher education is changing, and new ways of connecting, collaborating and forming partnerships are being encouraged, as to new ways to disseminate research to wider audiences both nationally and internationally (Carrigan, 2014). As a reflective practitioner utilising Schwab’s (1969) flights, my lived experience as an early career research woman is shared to explore formal and informal connections and networking to navigate the environment of academia. Of particular focus is the use of Twitter and social networking sites as an academic to engage with other academics as a part of a collective process of challenging what it means to be an academic at this current moment in time. The narrative shared highlights how it is possible to seek out academics whom inspire and are being innovative while exploring effective strategies and possibilities of how to be a research active early career researcher.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces my voice and flights connected to finding new ways to network. Specifically my telling and retelling of my lived experiences is closely connected to being the change I would like to see in academia; that is being generous in sharing how to be a successful researcher. The pressures to research and thus publish to disseminate findings have never been more of a focus for higher education. University rankings, strategic and operational plans are all highlighting the importance both for the institutions and the academics on staff. This chapter looks at how I shifted through the barriers and challenges to focus more on my research trajectory post doctoral thesis submission and how I developed a strong writing habit in order to develop my research profile. Key is the shift in how I see myself as an early career researcher who has been able to set goals in approaching networking, both in face-to-face and virtual spaces. This agency has enacted new inclusive ways of working that disrupt behaviours and
values that are both disturbing and confronting to me in academia. The cultivating and seeking out my professional needs has been paramount in navigating the conflicting competitive environment that academic can at times encourage. The personal-professional identity is presented that has had to be addressed to shift this work habit is shared as I, as an early career female academic, manoeuvre the contemporary demands of universities. The reflective nature of this chapter shares how personal and collegial pressure can be both confronting and motivating, and how networking and seeking advice from others both face-to-face and online through social media is beneficial in achieving a successful academic writing habit and finding new ways to be an academic or as Carrigan (2014) calls it being an open-source academic.

WHO AM I?

Through ongoing reflection I position myself as an ever developing woman who balances a life as an academic with personal pursuits of art making, running, Pilates, mountain bike riding, and personal relationships that help me to be a well rounded individual. I am an early career researcher within the academic world striving to find new ways of working that disrupt some of the boundaries that present themselves while being a young woman in my 30s. I engage in social media professionally, both blogging and Twitter, as a way to engage with others who are searching for smarter ways of working and displaying a generosity that supports inquiring into learning and teaching as well as research.

I grew up in regional Victoria in a country town full of its own expectations about what it meant to be a young woman. I left soon after finishing school to study in Melbourne and have thrived in the opportunities that have been forever present. After studying to be a music teacher, and discovering these dreams were in fact not mine, I was drawn to making a difference through research and working with future educators. I worked fulltime in schools across Melbourne and in rural Victoria and Tasmania in the arts and as a generalist primary school teacher while undertaking both my Masters and doctoral studies. A strong drive to look at problems in new and creative ways drives my enthusiasm to be innovative in approaching education and the arts while working with a vast variety of people who continually inspire me to look at the world in different ways. Working in academia feeds this way of working for me and continually inspires me to look at how I can contribute to new knowledge and ways of being.

ACADEMIC WOMEN AND NETWORKING

When we take into account the history of concerns around stress, wellbeing, work-life balance and sustainability in academic life (Barrett & Barrett, 2007; Edwards et al., 2009; Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010; Kinman et al, 2006; 2008), as a young academic it is imperative to find new ways of working in this space. This calls for a consciousness that can observe, reflect, and disrupt (Lemon & Garvis, 2014). Not only are young academics and early career researchers calling for a change in how