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Our Academic Sandbox: Scholarly Identities Shaped through Play, Tantrums, Building Castles, and Rebuffing Backyard Bullies

Denise McDonald

University of Houston - Clear Lake, mcdonald@uhcl.edu

Cheryl Craig

University of Houston, CCraig@Central.UH.EDU


Carrie Markello

University of Houston, cmarkell@central.uh.edu

Michele Kahn

University of Houston - Clear Lake, kahnmm@uhcl.edu

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Abstract

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Keywords

Scholarly Identity, Situated Agency, Storytelling, Metaphorical Thinking, Professional Knowledge Communities, Narrative Inquiry

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Our Academic Sandbox: Scholarly Identities Shaped Through Play, Tantrums, Building Castles, and Rebuffing Backyard Bullies

Denise McDonald

University of Houston – Clear Lake, Texas, USA

Cheryl Craig and Carrie Markello

University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA

Michele Kahn

University of Houston – Clear Lake, Texas, USA

This paper presents four teacher educators' stories that explore their scholarly identity development through an Academic Sandbox metaphor where Play, Tantrums, Building Castles, and Rebuffing Backyard Bullies, serve as creative constructs for describing their experiences of triumphs and challenges in academia. The authors share how a professional learning community (Faculty Academy) functioned as the safe space for "participatory sense-making" (See De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007) where situated agency emerged and became strengthened through the telling of the teachers' stories (Archer, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kligyte, 2011; McGann, 2014; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Stories representative of each metaphorical construct are presented and discussed. Narrative inquiry served as the methodological means in which the authors examined their stories as representative events in identity formation. Keywords: Scholarly Identity, Situated Agency, Storytelling, Metaphorical Thinking, Professional Knowledge Communities, Narrative Inquiry

Four teacher educators, at various stages of their academic careers and at two different institutions share stories of lived experiences regarding their triumphs and challenges in the development of their scholarly identities. The authors, all members of the Faculty Academy, describe their storied experiences framed within a *Sandbox* metaphor which serves as a heuristic template for exploring scholarly identity development and meaning making of formative experiences in academia. As a metaphor, a sandbox has been historically known as a safe place of development for children, one where free play, risk taking, and creative expression support cognitive development, but also where social and affective skills through interactions with others are tested and honed. In the sandbox, sands can be patted, molded, shifted, and raked in order to create new structures, add to existing ones, or even tear down old ones; each grain of sand has potential for a multitude of possibilities that may or may not be realized. Through the sharing and execution of ideas orchestrated by the hands of the creators and their collaborators, the resulting sand creations reflect the personalities and identities of the builders in the personal signatures they bring to the work. The sandbox is also a place where stories told as imaginations are ignited, new ideas are enacted, and sometimes hopes are dashed. The image of a sandbox resonates with the authors as a place to explore, build, develop, and re-group when everything falls apart; as it aligns with our teacher educator stories of triumphs and challenges in academia. We describe our experiences of acclimation to and the ongoing enculturation within academic environments through stories as narrative inquiry.

Background

Faculty Academy, a troupe comprised of inter-institutional and cross-institutional teacher educators (14-20 at any one time), has met bi-monthly in face-to-face meetings at our respective campuses for over thirteen years as a professional learning community. Our hope was to create a trusting, open space for introspection, a teachers' knowledge community so to speak (See Craig, 1995, 2001), where teacher educators, scholars and researchers of multiple methodological interests can enter into sustained conversations with one another concerning teaching and research inquiries in which they actively engage and reflect (Schön, 1983, 1987). There has been an ebb and flow of membership over the years, but one author of this paper is the founding member, two others have participated since the inception and the other is a longstanding member of well over a decade. The ethos, longevity, and history of this professional learning community has proven it to be a safe space for personal meaning-making exchanges regarding our experiences in academia. During our meetings, stories were shared that would not or could not be expressed within members' respective institutions as they often consisted of descriptions of specific, albeit subjectively couched, interactions of perceived "otherness" or as one being disregarded as an "outsider" in their institutional academic environments that often marginalized (or silenced) their sense of self as a scholar or academic. The identity liminality and experience of disenfranchisement in these formal environments in which we practiced spurred the need to privilege our positions in the informal, more collegial setting of the Faculty Academy, through the sharing of personal, frequently emotionally-tinged "secret stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). So, in fact, we created our own accepting "insider" group of scholars who shared experiences of marginalization. De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007) describe this process as "participatory sense-making" where social interactions support individual agency (De Jaegher & Froese, 2009). In both milieus (our respective institutions and Faculty Academy), we have experienced identity formation events, most notably regarding scholarly identity, as relational, discursive, and socio-culturally formed and impacted by intersubjective interactions and exchanges (See Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Understandably messy, complex, dynamic, and not definitive, we acknowledge that making meaning of our scholarly identities "may be in part intentional, in part habitual and less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation, in part a construct of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an outcome of larger ideological processes and structures" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585).

Of significance to the conception of this paper, shared stories of professional exigencies often resonated with or rang true to other Faculty Academy members and stimulated or dovetailed into similar or complementary stories told. Dialogue that unfolded were expressions of members' interpretive understanding of the stories in connection to their own unique experiences. At one point when we recognized the power and cathartic process in the "telling" of our experiences, we were inspired to broaden our stories (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) for analytical purposes as we were grappling to make sense of poignant experiences which we viewed as impactful on our self-views as academics. As a result, several years ago, members began journaling and more fully explicating their selective conversational "small stories" of experience in academia that otherwise may have been lost in our unceremonious, fleeting discussions (Georgakopoulou, 2006). We saw our shared storytelling as an opportunity to not only deepen our understanding and interpretations of our experiences by writing our stories as narratives, but also to generate a data base of experiences for scholarly writings (i.e., research articles that would substantiate the very scholarly identity we were exploring). Our "told" stories manifested into "written text" about five years ago and provided both practical and productive actions (i.e., our narratives) that could be unpacked and reconstructed through a formal analysis process. Initially, there was no set plan for the writing goals other than sharing

stories and experiencing the reflective process with others through dialogue and writing as we constructed and reconstructed our understanding of academic experiences, concerns, trials and successes. But, our core purpose was always to make sense of our experiences, expand our ways of knowing and strengthen our identities as scholars by broadening and deepening our dialogic exchanges and writing. We found the “written texts” inspired a greater identity-seeking commitment. At one point (shortly after we began writing the narratives), we decided to share the scribed stories and distributed them amongst Faculty Academy members for Critical Friends type of comments, affirmations, and probing or critical questions as we immersed in the burrowing, analytical process of exploring the meaning of our professional experiences more systematically and in-depth (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Over the past four years, peers’ comments and discussion aided in the reflective restorying process as we examined and deconstructed our stories for what they might tell us about ourselves, give insight to the actions we had chosen to take during certain events, and better understand how unique, although often parallel, experiences impacted on our identities. Admittedly, self-serving, the Faculty Academy was a sounding board for the sharing of our “sacred stories” (Olson, 1995) so that we could hold hands as we guided each other in crossing thresholds of identity as scholars; stepping both in to and out of our Academic Sandbox.

Perspectives

Scholarly Identity

According to Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), adult learners’ identities are impacted “by their continual need to belong, matter, control, master, renew, and take stock” (p. 58). As teacher educators enmeshed in academia, these motivations exist and impact our identities as academics through the choices and decisions made, actions taken, the interactions selected to engage with others and those dismissed – collectively they present life episodes at which the psychosocial processes of identity formation occur. Erikson (1994), Marcia (2002), and McAdams (2001) all describe identity as a psychosocial construction, one in which identity is “internalized rather than produced” (Thorne, 2004, p. 363) and cultivated by both obvious and subtle social interactions. Smith and Sparkes (2008) describe the psychosocial construction of identity as just one perspective among four others of narrative selves and identities. In recent work, they outline a continuum of perspectives that run from internal self-views (beginning with the psychosocial, moving to intersubjectivity and the storied resource) to more socio-culturally constructed views (as dialogue and performative). We do not claim any one view for framing our discussion as that is not the focus of our paper. We acknowledge though that in exploring scholarly identity, one must not only reflect on the multitude of complex aspects, but also have a social foundation in which to test self-identity theories through stories shared. To put simply, for the authors of this paper, stories shared with Faculty Academy members served as the catalyst (as our Academic Sandbox) for exploring our scholarly identities.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), addresses stories that develop and emerge among people in relationship to others, places, and things (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The methodology recognizes the use of narratives as an integral means for humans to make sense of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative inquiry recognizes and honors multiplicity of voices within a study. It also helps researchers merge understanding of their personal and professional knowledge (Olson, 2000). In relation to the sandbox metaphor, just as the grains

of sand take form at the hands of the creators and collaborators, narrative inquiry's transparent approach also takes shape through the personal transformations, shifting contexts, and merging outlooks of the researchers. In this case, it is through the teacher educators' reflections of their lived stories in academia as they are told and re-told. By acknowledging their personal stories, the expression of the participating teacher educators' personal practical knowledge and understanding of experiences (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985; Olson, 2000) is articulated in conjunction with their stories influencing, forming, and revealing their personal professional identities or "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 14) in narrative terms. Narrative inquiry becomes a viable and resonating means for teacher educators to interact with and understand each other's professional identity and development narratives in a holistic manner.

Teacher educators themselves, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew heavily upon the work of progressive educator and philosopher John Dewey, as well as the work of linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson. Deweyan philosophy (Dewey, 1910/1997, 1934; Dewey & Bentley, 1949) of experience forms a cornerstone for narrative inquiry. In particular, the Deweyan (1938) concepts of experience, that is, interaction, continuity, and situation became the "commonplaces" of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2005). These commonplaces additionally belie the method's historical roots in Schwab's "practical" (Schwab, 1969) and the need to understand situations and experiences lived in one's own terms.

Narrative inquiry is also founded upon Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) concept of embodied metaphors, providing a link to Dewey's ideas on experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are rooted in experience and therefore connect language to our daily lives. They also suggested that if "our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (p. 3). Narrative inquiry, rooted in philosophies of experience and embodied metaphors, provides a strong framework for researching issues concerning identity formation (Craig, 2005, 2012).

Through fluid interpretations and rich, in-depth understandings, narrative inquirers use the analytical tools of broadening, burrowing, storying and restorying to make sense of human experience as lived in context. Broadening is a form of coarse-grained sense-making that enables research topics to be situated relative to their temporal, contextual, and historical backdrops. (We also found that through broadening our stories, although not our conscious intent, we potentially made them more coherent to a larger audience of listeners beyond Faculty Academy membership.) Burrowing is the research means that assists narrative inquirers in unpacking particular experiences in fine-grained ways. (In this meaning-making process, we experienced both dissection and synthesis of our stories, the raising of new questions, and new insights to view stories from new angles and positions not realized previously). As for storying and restorying, it is the tool of analysis that helps narrative inquirers show changes in individuals' personal practical knowledge and the events that unfurl in the professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). (In this phase of our Narrative Inquiry, we examined choices we made, the how and why of these decisions and actions, and how this impacted our identities.) Using these tools of analysis, narrative inquiry provides a viable means for teacher educators to address questions related to their professional scholarly identities and development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as told and re-told, lived and re-lived, metaphorically within the professional knowledge landscape of the Academic Sandbox. (We found that the very act of writing our stories changed us and "added to" our scholarly identities on multiple levels.)

Analysis of Stories through an Academic Sandbox Metaphor

The openness of the writing and sharing process generated synergy and serendipity, as evident through the following turn of events. The sandbox metaphor of stories began when one member wrote an extensive stream-of-consciousness type piece after several experiences of frustration provoked by negative interactions with colleagues on her campus. After sharing the story at one of our many face-to-face meetings and the discussion with Faculty Academy members that followed, she later reflected on direct actions she had taken during the interactions that inspired her writing. She realized that this was an “episode of anger” which reflected her emerging sense of authority within academia, where in the past she would joke with or passively defer to others. This was an eventful realization and significant marker in her identity forming actions as it was her first act of assertion within that setting. She likened it to throwing a tantrum in a sandbox and stomping on the sand (to declare a violation of righteousness rather than for gaining control in the situation). In then reviewing her previous stories for other identity forming actions, she found that several of her stories illustrated humorous acts she employed to deal with confrontational and/or subjugating situations, as well as her use of creativity to construct novel instructional strategies and activities. Other stories explicated actions taken to network and collaborate with trusted colleagues and students on conference proposals and articles; and conversely, how to deal with oppressive power-seekers. Interestingly, during Faculty Academy meeting discussions, we realized that other members’ stories paralleled these categories with similar strands of discussion. Our regular face-to-face meetings presented the context for discussing our stories and narratives which collectively served as our data set for this paper. The first-step analysis process began with noting several cross-story themes regarding the types of actions taken and choices made. For example, there was a saturation of stories regarding challenges to one’s sense of authority where members asserted themselves in specific situations. One story involved a member’s interaction with a student regarding dishonesty, another involved a challenge by an administrator over the member’s decision made, another story told of a deliberate and covert action taken to usurp a member’s jurisdiction over a course and curriculum. Based on members’ actions taken, these stories centered on the theme of assertion of authority. This theme became “tantrums” within our Academic Sandbox metaphor (discussed more fully below). The stories shared in this article are exemplars of the respective themes. Thus, four overarching general themes of stories regarding our scholarly identity formation emerged: (a) creative expression and problem solving, (b) assertion of authority, (c) seeking collegial support and embarking on selective collaborations, and (d) confronting antagonists. Comparable to a member check validity analysis process, there appeared a natural occurrence of similarities and alignment of issues or concerns of the themes within other members’ journal entries and stories (Berg, 2009). The general themes were easily transformed into a metaphorical heuristic template of *Academic Sandbox* for organizing and sharing our storied experiences of *Identity Forming Actions* through specific constructs that fit within the sandbox metaphor (i.e., creative expression and problem solving – *Play*, assertion of authority – *Tantrums*, seeking collegial support and embarking on selective collaborations – *Building Castles*, and confronting antagonists – *Rebuffing Backyard Bullies*). As members’ stories were used as data in the analysis process, extensions of the constructs were conducted and intensified. So, the stories are representative of a narrative inquiry process because they include our stories (and re-stories) shared over several years while we constructed and reconstructed our sense making of experiences in academia.

In the following section, the four Academic Sandbox constructs of play, tantrums, building castles, and rebuffing backyard bullies are explained along with authors’ selected narratives which exemplify these constructs. Lastly, we must share that some macro-level

barriers were common in many of the stories regarding our perceptions of “otherness” within academia which include gender, being perceived as an outsider to the insider power control groups, and our alignment to a qualitative research paradigm. Interestingly, the latter construct of marginalization is the very method utilized in composing this paper where stories privilege our lived experiences.

Academic Sandbox Constructs

To recap, from the story sharing and analysis process, four constructs materialized that captured scholarly identity forming actions. The four emergent constructs of the *Academic Sandbox* metaphor are foundational for examining scholarly identity development: *Play*, *Tantrums*, *Building Castles*, and *Rebuffing Backyard Bullies*. Discussion of each construct with illustrative stories are presented in subsequent sections.

Play

Metaphorically, *Play* symbolizes intellectual freedom and expression conveyed in critical and creative thinking; specifically, in this paper, although not exclusively, through language via interactive dialogue, journaling and occasionally some forms of formal writing. *Play* is a “means over ends” process, often ephemeral, commonly improvisational, sometimes viewed on the surface as non-functional, rooted in the affective domain, but ultimately constructive as a practice-towards-proficiency, trial-and-error progression in which one freely builds personally meaningful knowledge and skills (Harris, 2007; Pellegrini, 2009), often through “spontaneous expression of self” (Billett, 2010, p. 12). Interestingly, although clearly valued “conceptually” in academia, in reality *Play’s* functionality for expressing oneself or resolving issues outside normative parameters is often questioned or dismissed as frivolous or unproductive and rarely acknowledged as essential to academic membership, especially if it involves thinking “outside the academic sandbox.”

The following story exemplifies how one author exercised *Play* to creatively shape academic identity within her institution.

I spent the first year of my tenure-track position acclimating to the roles, responsibilities and culture of academia. Probably typical to most, I was eager to take on certain tasks and resistant to others...pretty sure these choices were guided within my existing comfort zone of identity and efficacy. I remember being warned by the very faculty who hired me “don’t get sucked into too many responsibilities...takes time away from scholarly endeavors.” Basically, several cautioned that it could rapidly develop into a quicksand situation where I would become overwhelmed. It is ironic how those who provided the cautionary tales were the very ones who asked me to volunteer or would nominate me for labor-intensive committees. And although I was warned and aware, it still happened where service committee assignments were tacked onto my schedule. I remember one incident walking down the hall when I spotted a senior colleague staring me down. There was intention in her step and a deliberate attempt to make eye contact. I quickly realized a request was brewing. “Don’t look at her” I thought. My internal thoughts continued, “find a hall to turn into and escape.” Oops, too late! Donning a Cheshire cat smile, she cornered me and shared “the Dean and I were thinking.” Ok, I knew instantly that power name-dropping indicated the seriousness of this pending “request.” She went on, “We always have a suite reception after our monthly

meetings, but have not had it in the new building yet and since you have recently move there, we thought you would be the perfect person to organize and conduct the suite reception for next month.” Although not revealed through facial or bodily expression, my internal voice reacted with aversion and bafflement. Internal thoughts continued... “Why on earth would you ask a less-than-one-year-in, untenured faculty to do this...I don’t know many faculty, don’t know processes, and have no power or influence to ask anyone else in the suite to help with this.” Of course my rational thoughts kicked in and I knew why. No one else wanted to do this. It is an obligatory event that most individuals loath attending and often the event does not really promote collegiality as intended. So of course, the “new kid on the block” should get stuck with a “rite of passage” job. She interrupted my rumination with her next power-punch question. “So do you have any ideas on doing this?” Very quickly I thought that if an inappropriate activity idea was provided, she might rethink asking me to do this. With an earnest and serious look on my face, I responded “You know, our suite is on the third floor of the new building and there is an open atrium which could be a great place to conduct a competitive paper airplane competition.” Temporary silence, as a puzzled and concern frown emerged on her face. For a second I felt this moment of accomplishment...I had succeeded...she bought the feigned incompetency. But the victorious feeling quickly dissipated. My delivery of ineptitude was not convincing enough. The frown transformed into a beaming grin as she swiftly interpreted that I surely must be joking and dismissed my suggestion as clever humor! She carried on with her goal “You are so funny!!! Just think about what you will do and get back with me.” What?!? What just happened? Not even a chance to say “no.” There really was no request; it was a shrewd and polite motherly command. Additionally, I had to run the idea by her for approval, demonstrating micro-management at its best! From my perception, this task was an informal new-colleague test that others would derive important information about me as an institutional collaborator. Was I a game-player? Would I unquestionably accept the responsibility? Could I deliver a productive and appropriate event? Although this challenge had little to do with scholarly prowess, it was a service chore with certain expectations...and collegial judgments on the final product. Whatever was created would impact others’ impression of me and influence my identity within the cast of characters.

I decided that I would embrace this challenge but on my own terms. I obviously couldn’t do the paper airplane activity, but there must be a fun element or activity where I could provide peer engagement “outside the box” of traditional interactions. My identity as a member of this institution was to be determined by what was created and for me it had to be genuine to my social nature. I decided to create an interactive activity of a cross-word puzzle with clues for each colleague. The crossword puzzle was titled – Suite Soiree aka Sweet Swore’ – Where no “crossword” is spoken. The clues were comprised of a play on colleagues’ names as words, brain teasers, or little known information about individuals. To complete the crossword puzzle, information or interest in others was required. It could be completed individually or through a process of collaborative sharing of answers. It was designed to be fun, informative and a little bit challenging, but the process could possibly stimulate group cohesiveness. Here is one example of a clue used in the activity - A colloquial

British term that is a synonym for “frisky” (answer – Randy). Another brain teaser clue – What Adam and Eve did “backwards” (answer – sinned/Dennis). Other clues were provided regarding little known information about individuals (e.g., one colleague went to elementary school with Farrah Fawcett). Creating the crossword puzzle took time that involved getting to know others and/or investing personal energy in generating something unique about each one. So, the assigned task of orchestrating a faculty social provided an opportunity to demonstrate several identity pegs to which colleagues could potentially ascribe to me: clever, fun, social, interactive, personal, risk-taker, and a trouper/trooper. These are not scholarly attributes but to some extent, nonetheless, are important when seeking tenure within a teaching institution. Within academia I face multiple challenges, many of which are not welcomed but often required. In this instance, use of creativity and play helped me address the informal ‘trial’ I was saddled with and served as an emancipatory identity forming process.

Play used in this story to establish scholarly identity is illuminated in two distinct ways: through the use of both spontaneous and strategic humor, and through a creative resolution to the assigned task that is genuine to the storyteller’s own values. She demonstrated autonomy and risk-taking (perhaps a little rebelliousness) in her thinking and actions. And although the parameters of the existing institutional social norms and rules are obviously bent, they are not broken. She responded to normative pressure with attunement to the situation. Flexibility of thinking is demonstrated and inherent to the play construct.

Play was also utilized by authors through creative writing as an emancipatory, self-rewarding activity as shared in the following colleague’s excerpt.

Recently, I had a student turn in a paper which required him to compare and contrast six articles that discussed various aspects of multicultural education. I was delightfully surprised when he used a metaphor by which to show his perspective on the authors’ viewpoints. After some reflection, I realized with some sadness that my surprise and delight was a symptom of what I had been missing, of what I’ve wanted to do but had suppressed and probably was suppressing in my students which is the idea that a certain type of creativity belonged in one particular area. In fact I had been missing it so much that I decided a few months ago to devote at least twenty minutes of my morning to creative writing - what a treat! The idea that I could write in any way I wished was liberating.

Eloquently expressed in this passage, the freedom to write creatively where boundaries of genre, academic voice, set structure, etc. are thrown aside is cathartic and promotes meaningful and unrestrained exploration of one’s “best-loved self” (Schwab, 1954/1978). Creative writing is also playful in that it sanctions and validates the writer’s subjectivity. But as faculty within our institutions, we have received cautionary directives from the dominating number of positivists who spout that creative writing neither grants credit nor receives credence for promotion and tenure as it does not depict scholarship. We find it ironic that the very scholarship we seek to unearth and discover is most honestly articulated and more openly investigated through creative writing (and storytelling), which artistically and aesthetically help reveal our true selves (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Eisner, 1993). As our unique identities are experientially and continually evolving, this type of writing is a complementary method as it is open and idiosyncratic. Also, as a playful action in writing our stories, we are “motivated

by the satisfactions of discovery” as they are “prized for the experience it makes possible” (Eisner & Powell, 2002, p. 134).

Of course, the authors of this paper have deliberately indulged in using *Play* through the Academic Sandbox metaphor (which literally is an environment to play). The metaphor helped us to unshackle the constraining normative language often expected in scholarly writing. Perhaps we are drawing a line in the sand (that is constantly moving) as we play with our scholarly voices.

Tantrums

Extending the metaphor, *Tantrums* characterize individual self-confident decisions made or assertive actions taken based upon perceptions of authority in academia (their own and others). Specifically, authority is examined in relation to aspects of perceived power (i.e., imbalance, shared, imposed, and challenged). This construct delves into how authority identity formation is impacted through affective influences (i.e., stress, anger, insult, etc.) and interactions (i.e., confrontations, oppositions, challenges, petty directives, perceived oppression, etc.) and how individual assertive actions may help build and/or be a result of authoritative realization or growth in a scholarly environment. Often *Tantrums* are the result of perceived unwarranted, imposed-upon authority that counters individual ideologies, perceptions of virtue and justice, or scholarly progress.

Here is one author’s experience responding to violations against her perception of authority as part of her scholarly identity.

The metaphoric tale of the show horses and plow horses goes something like this: Organizations typically have individuals who like the limelight and who take the praise, but who do not do all the work—and sometimes not even their fair share. In fact, it is the plow horses surrounding them who tend to labor and get tasks done. Often, in organizations such as universities—one of the last bastions of tolerated male dominance—females lift “a ton of feathers” or in the show horse/plow horse vernacular, “pull the load.”

Over the past decade, I have been involved in numerous change initiatives in my place of work and in the surrounding educational community. In all of the change efforts in which I have participated, there have clearly been those who worked harder and those who may or may not have worked hard, but were desirous of the praise and would go to any lengths to ensure that the accolades made it their way. In fact, they have been so invested, as show horses, in the altogether human desire to tell a “Hollywood tale” of their pet projects that they would ironically be satisfied with less-than-stellar programs. From where I am positioned, their show horse purview, focused on praise and recognition, precludes them from seeing the role of the plow horse and the significance of plow horses (typically females) in getting work done. It also prohibits their favored projects from improving.

With this background in place, I now launch into my tale. I was invited—in fact, rigorously recruited—to teach in a new degree program designed to prepare practitioners in the field. At the time, I was told that I was chosen because there was strong evidence at every graduation ceremony that my graduate students (master’s and doctoral students) complete their programs. I also was informed that I was selected because “students don’t complain about

[me].” Given that the program involved practitioners and that practical work best describes my scholarly interests, I agreed to participate. Unfortunately, I did not hear in the invitation issued by males that I was being asked to be a plow horse, a role I play exceedingly well at my institution. I also did not see—at least not at the time—that the particular individuals probably perceived themselves—being at similar points in career to me (albeit at a lower rank)—as having put in their time as plow horses when they were “young bucks” [a phrase often bandied about] and having earned the right, on this occasion, to be show horses leading a show program.

A great deal of fanfare was made of the new collaborative effort because it involved faculty from all departments teaching in a unified program. I was personally excited about it as well because I had written three of the course syllabi, which had passed muster with the full College faculty and the State Coordinating Board. Also, my Curriculum Vita had been used as one of the lead ones that secured the program’s approval. In retrospect, I see that I was used as a show horse where the program’s planning was concerned, but was assigned a plow horse role when its implementation was to take place. But I digress...

Upon program approval, I initially found myself sitting in faculty meetings with several other selected professors, all of whom were male: three or so from my home department and about four more from other departments. It soon became evident to me that the voices of three of those males dominated every meeting. If I wanted to add a word to the discussions, I would have to wait for five prior speakers to have their say, raise my hand, and, on two occasions, had to write notes to the leader requesting an opportunity to speak because my eye and hand signals were not allowing me entrée into discussions.

Because I am a program leader and a methodologist, I have previously experienced numerous occasions where I have worked with students beyond what would be my normal assignment. In fact, there were at least two people in the new collaborative faculty for whom I have done this kind of cover work on a regular basis. In fact, this “ghost work” (Craig, 1999) was a “secret story” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) I had been living for some years in my department, a story that had never before provoked an episode of anger on my part.

However, in the new collaborative effort, I was working under new conditions. The students were moving, not as individuals, but as a cohort—and very quickly. Furthermore, I knew exactly who was teaching before me and after me. So, when I received the students in the methods course where they were to write their methodology chapters, it was blatantly obvious to me who had not assisted their students in the completion of chapters one and two. The long and short of it was that I was left with not only covering my own load of five students, four students from two of the professors in my department, and one student for whom I legitimately played the methodologist role, I was also doing ghost work for the male professors from the other departments involving about six other students in all. Still, my ire was not raised. I enjoy working with

students and derive a great deal of satisfaction in helping them thrive. Working with them is what sustains me.

The event that triggered my anger involved a minority female student who held a leadership position, who was raising two children as a single parent, and who was additionally supporting her nuclear family. I worked diligently with this student, helping her to write chapters 1-3 in a collapsed time frame. The student, in turn, submitted her paper to her advisor and he agreed that she was ready to defend. What I did not know was that the student's advisor was highly critical of the work and that he would stop her at the end of every sentence during her oral presentation. Needless to say, the focus on the student and her progress was totally lost. All eyes were on the advisor, who had grabbed front and center stage as a show horse. Meanwhile, I was simmering, but not boiling. However, when I noted that the young woman was on the verge of tears, I knew that some action needed to be taken and that I was the senior faculty member in the room and the only female. Also, the fact that this would be appropriate was supported by the third committee member who had already sent the "looney-tunes" hand signal my way, supported by a handwritten note where he said that the advisor should have shared his criticisms with the student before the defense took place. So I quietly interjected in the defense conversation: "These matters should have been dealt with before this formal meeting."

Soon the defense ended and I thought the situation had been dealt with. The student stepped out of the room and the three of us were left to come to a decision. However, once the door closed, the advisor who had not served the student well turned on me and proceeded to tell me that he could not begin to tell me how angry he was with me. And I retorted: "You have no idea how angry I am with you..." And so the feud began... As I look back on it, I, as a plow horse, had called a show horse on his bluff.

In this story, the author describes experiences of power conflicts, recognition of quality and commitment to her practice, gender subjugation, a clashing of and oppositions to her professional values, and awareness regarding her sense of authority within the institutional milieu amongst various members of different rankings. This historical story describes how over time, emotional tensions built up with respect to perceived injustices against marginalized members (i.e., students and herself), committed freely by those assigned more power within the system. A saturation point of accumulated emotional pressures resulted in a "bloodletting" when she took direct advocacy action for the student. Moments of agency and identity are often incited from altruistic positions where we attempt to impact conditions *beyond* ourselves, by *stomping in the sand* for values and for others who are situationally disenfranchised.

Building Castles

Building Castles embodies how one generates collegial connections, cohorts and networks, as well as the construction of one's own space within academia (i.e., course or program creation, research agenda and articles, and service role selection); thereby, this metaphor represents the constructive and functional process of identity formation and epitomizes application of *Playful* thoughts into actions within the academic *Sandbox*. *Castles* are considered academic creations of individuals (such as articles or course designs), although they can be considered relational or collaborative products with other academics. Frequently,

they are unique professional products which are displayed with pride and closely protected against potential assailants as well as relational supports used to further academic pursuits.

The following experience captures how one author builds their own relational *Castles*, one with colleagues and the other with students.

For me, networking and generating professional identity takes more than one form. One important structure is created through my participation with colleagues in Faculty Academy and another is through building my student relationships through my teaching. Each involves constructing and participating, yet not necessarily in the same way. As I actively build these structures, I am creating my academic identity rather than succumbing to the fears that somehow I'm not worthy to participate. My struggle with the development of my academic identity has to do with my manufacturing of personal prisons or negative self-perceptions about my capabilities in academia. These perceptions were generated in part by my late entrance into academia as an older, inexperienced visiting assistant professor. Since my entry, I have experienced feelings of confusion, anxiety, and insecurity. I grapple with trying to figure out how to fit in, do a good job, and try my best to make sense of the visible and hidden agendas and expectations. Fortunately, the Faculty Academy, has provided a foundation that stabilized my fears and insecurities. While Faculty Academy forms a solid foundation, my teaching experiences have become an important framework for my academic identity formation.

Faculty Academy was a part of my life as a community partner member, while pursuing my doctorate, and now in my work as a Visiting Assistant professor. The group nurtures and sustains me as scholar. The meetings, discussions, collaborative writing, and group presentations were and continue to be invitations for collegial and scholarly interactions and has helped me understand complex and confusing structures found in academia. From the beginning, intense discussions of power and control within departments surfaced periodically. At times, I wondered if academia was the right place for me. While stories of being overlooked or oppressed because of gender or position frightened me, stories shared encouraged a sense of connection among members and helped to lay bare the cover stories. Hearing and sharing stories helped my insecure outlook transform and made my academic life fuller. Through sharing of stories, I learned how some of the concerns, fears and doubts did not solely belong to me; there is great comfort knowing anxieties are shared.

My position as a visiting assistant professor rather than working in a tenure track position has also caused apprehension. As a visiting assistant professor, I'm not expected to do research; instead I am required to focus on teaching and service. The expectations for a visiting assistant are different and sometimes unclear. Faculty Academy colleagues provide support and encouragement for both individual and collaborations to join in and participate in doing the scholarly work. In spite of official job descriptions, tenure track and visiting professors work together and support each other on individual projects and successes, as well as listen to and offer advice for working through problems. My participation with Faculty Academy is an integral part of my identity as a scholar as I am encouraged to participate in research and writing.

As a professor, I am interested in knowing my students, enjoy reflecting on my teaching, and take pleasure in the challenge to figure out how to best create an engaging and meaningful learning environment. While I consider myself conscientious about my teaching, one particular semester brought on additional challenges. Extremely stressed throughout the semester because of my mother's illness and subsequent death, I found myself unsure of how to deal with the demands of teaching and my family's needs. I decided I would tell my students about my difficulties. Throughout the semester, I provided brief updates about my situation and how it might affect my performance as their professor. Many times, I questioned whether or not I could make it through the semester. My students amazed me by their hugs, kind words of comfort, and overall understanding. Students I least expected would make a special effort to let me know of their support through an email, a quote, or a story of a family member they had lost. At times, I felt like my students were my extended family. Relationships had been built and served as support in this trying time.

I realized, in spite of my constant worry for my mother and then experiencing the loss of a loved one in the middle of the semester, I also cared deeply about my students' learning. Even though I felt compromised as a professor, I did not want my students' learning to suffer because of my personal hardships. I know there are things I could have planned and taught better, but a recent conversation with some of my pre-service generalist students made me realize something. Just before class was to begin, a student asked if I would be teaching a "higher level" art education course that she could take. I explained that while I agreed it would be great to have an additional semester to explore art education for the elementary classroom in greater depth that unfortunately, no such course existed. My heart skipped a beat when I heard the request. The students in this particular class are required to take an art education class and at the beginning of the semester many wonder why they needed an art class in their pursuit of an elementary education degree. Then another student, commented, "This is a fun class. I have learned so much in this class. I have learned things about art and I have learned things about teaching. I can use what I have learned in my other classes." I was thrilled by the comments. In spite of a hard semester, the conversation suggested that my students were excited about their learning. They valued what they had learned, desired to learn more, and could see ways to apply their learning outside of class. The conversation was an important moment in the affirmation of my academic identity. I will continue to build student relationships. They sustained and supported me through a tough time.

Ongoing Faculty Academy membership and my recent teaching experiences have fostered construction of new understandings of my academic identity. These experiences are integral to my development, allowing me to better sift through the perceptions of problems, fears and insecurities and the real ones. The building of collegial and student relationships encouraged my productivity in spite of personal loss. The relationships and networking that have been built are still under construction and continue to grow.

We all experience moments of doubt and question our worthiness within socially-constructed professional positions. In this story, challenges and concerns core to the author's experiences sparked reflection and awareness, as well as constructive and enterprising actions

taken to build her scholarly identity within an institutional setting that had “*a priori-tized*” her status. Two specific actions helped to dissuade her alienated feelings of scholarship. First, she gained social affirmation and acknowledgment of her scholarly identity through the sharing of her stories in Faculty Academy meetings (as a participatory sense-making process and experience). Second, she discovered her actions as a relational pedagogue yielded unexpected support from and identity building interactions with her students. The socio-cultural environment created in her practice (her own *Sand Castle*) stimulated personal and professional connections with her students which contributed to her perceptions of scholarly identity.

Rebuffing Backyard Bullies

Lastly, *Rebuffing Backyard Bullies* symbolizes actions taken to counter confrontations, oppositions, and disputes with those perceived as oppressive saboteurs who deliberately or indiscriminately “kick down your sand castle” of scholarly identity. *Rebuffing Backyard Bullies* can involve use of *Play* (through creative thinking of alternative solutions or negotiations with *Bullies*), *Tantrums* (affirmative declarations or actions of authority within the *Sandbox*), and *Building Castles* (displays of proficiency and worth in an academic environment, through excellence in teaching, research, writing, and service). All of these actions support the production of scholarly identity in academia.

This story describes one author’s experience of how “the more things change, the more they stay the same” throughout various academic assignments and how the embedded ranking system inherently generates bullies.

Once, when I was teaching as a “visiting assistant professor,” I was asked by a grant director to attend a planning meeting. I arrived, and there were four participants total. After some discussion of the project, one participant made what sounded to me to be a reasonable proposal, to which I responded favorably. That participant soon left, ostensibly because of teaching requirements. I thought the discussion would continue, but soon one of the remaining participants stood up, began pacing and waving his arms. Suddenly it occurred to me that he disagreed with the earlier proposal, and was resentful and furious toward me for agreeing and supporting it, and perhaps even for speaking. I was so surprised.

After I realized the extent of his angst, I dropped by his office to apologize. I was received coolly, which again surprised me. Apparently he felt that the hierarchy of academia placed a great gulf between us, and that I had overstepped my station. Once I had realized that and made an appropriate acknowledgement of it, I was surprised again that he held onto his displeasure. If he truly believes that my “rank” was too low to be considered in the discussion, it seems that it would not be worth his time to stay annoyed at me. I certainly meant no disrespect; I only came to that meeting because I had been invited by a stakeholder in the grant. I had been invited to be there; I naively thought we were ALL there to examine ideas. While I was admittedly much “lower” in the hierarchy, I now realize that I was probably also the recipient of some displaced anger.

I think that was one of my first introductions to the attitudes of hierarchy in higher education. The angry member remained mildly civil to me, as long as I didn’t participate in discussion in his presence. It seemed baffling and very

uncomfortable. Although that individual was occasionally at odds with others in the academe, the discriminatory attitude towards me as a much-too-junior (untenured) participant was just as real.

But the emergence of that anger started me on an introspective look at the nature of the hierarchy in higher education. I have always felt it frustrating to be pigeon-holed and thereby excluded only on that criterion. I was aware that, while I did lack the years in the academe, I nonetheless had rich and varied experience in and around the field of education. I had contributions, but one must be in the “club” for them to be received. Ultimately, I opted to take the opportunity of a tenure-track position in order to move forward.

I was listening to a podcast recently, and the speaker said that probably the number one fear among us all is the fear of being insignificant. I’ve spent some time thinking about this in relation to the tenure track world. This is probably the root of the senior professor’s anger – it seems that “recognition” reigns supreme, and that somehow, recognition and respect are nearly synonymous in this world. I am learning to look for signs of this. I quickly perceived, in my new tenure track position, that now there are entirely new sets of qualifiers in the institutional hierarchy.

There are a few more opportunities, and much more accessible information. I’ve realized, however, that the attitude of the previous professor described can be found again as easily, in others, and that being tenure-track is not going to make me immune. Although I am now “in the club,” I am a new member. There will still be individuals who guard their perceived positions by the exclusion (even if only inferred) of others. I am seeing that “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Another reality to face is that because I have already had several careers (which I continue to view as an asset) I will never accumulate the number of years in higher education as have people who started this path at younger ages. That divide will remain always.

Hierarchy within institutions often generates oppressive acts because those in power are granted license to call the shots. In academia, there is a built-in tenure ladder that perpetuates the hierarchical power status of individuals within the institutional environment. We know this; we are part of it. But, within socially and normatively set structures, there are ways to interact that involve inclusiveness of diverse voices and perspectives. We attempt to craft this type of interactive, intersubjective, sharing of experiences environment in Faculty Academy. Unfortunately, institutional academic bullies who have drunk the Kool-Aid of power, continue to *kick sand* in our faces. Our goal and actions are to continue to develop out-maneuvering tactics that shield us from unnecessary nuisances.

Discussion

Some scholars claim that professional identity is shaped in relationships with others (Archer, 2008; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). Those relationships run a continuum from supportive colleagues who share one’s ideals to calculating saboteurs who seek to retain existing power within a structured environment. Our identities are shaped by how we navigate through interactions with all players in the Academic Sandbox.

In summary, our own scholarly identity development and formation involves actions that are creative (*Play*), assertive (*Tantrums*), constructive (*Building Castles*) and defensive (*Rebuffing Backward Bullies*) in shaping scholarly identity. Authors have highlighted each identified construct through their own illustrative “storied experiences” with discussion of personal and professional meaning derived from these stories. On a personal level, we can claim that the act of writing, sharing, and examining our stories has been impactful to our professional identities. We hope our stories resound to a larger professional audience and invite others to build their own castles of academic identity.

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Author Note

Denise McDonald, EdD, is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of Teacher Education at the University of Houston – Clear Lake. She teaches pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as doctoral candidates, in courses on curriculum, instructional strategies, critical issues, professional development, and classroom management. She currently serves as chair or methodologist on dissertations of myriad topics, as reviewer for several journals, and as Program Chair for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Special Interest Group (SIG) Portfolios and Reflection in Teaching and Teacher Education. Her qualitative research methods include narrative, self-study, and ethnography. Her research interests explore teacher identity formation, exemplary teaching practices, reflective and relational pedagogy. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: mcdonald@uhcl.edu.

Cheryl J. Craig, PhD, is a Professor at the University of Houston where she coordinates the teaching and teacher education program. Her research interests are situated at the intersection where teaching and curriculum meet. She is an American Educational Research Association (AERA) Fellow and has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from AERA's Division B (Curriculum). She currently serves as the Executive Editor of *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* and is on the editorial review board of *Reflective Practice*. She is presently the Secretary of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching (ISATT). Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: ccraig@central.uh.edu.

Carrie Markello, EdD, is a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Houston where she teaches art education classes to pre-service generalist teachers and art educators. She is an active member of the Houston art community and founding member of Grassroots: Art in Action, a nonprofit organization encouraging connections between artists and art educators. In addition to her teaching, Markello creates mixed media artworks and holds an extensive exhibition history. Markello's artmaking, teaching, and community involvement foster her research interests. Her primary interest is in artmaking as a way of knowing. Markello's research interests also include the professional identity development of pre-service and beginning art educators, and the teaching, community, and artistic practices of art educators. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: cmarkell@central.uh.edu.

Michele Kahn, PhD, is a former Spanish teacher and currently Associate Professor in the Studies in Language and Culture department at the University of Houston-Clear Lake where she teaches courses in intercultural education, language, and communication. She is a frequent presenter on a broad range of issues including gender, sexual orientation, and social justice. Her interests are presently focused on intercultural teacher education, specifically the mind-body connection in teacher beliefs and attitudes. In addition to serving as Vice-President of the International Association for Intercultural Education, she also serves as an Associate Editor for the *Intercultural Education* journal. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: KahnMM@uhcl.edu.

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