

The Vital Triangle': the Inter-Related Roles of Author, Reviewer and Editor in Strengthening Academic Scholarship and Evidence *

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Bernadette Brereton and Karen Dunne began as institutional colleagues in disparate disciplines, became teaching, learning and assessment collaborators, then professional development co-mentors and academic editing partners. This paper presents our personal reflections on our shared journey in friendship and the insights it provides into the landscape of academic scholarship in higher education, where teaching and research need not be placed in opposition but may serve to illuminate and engage each other.

From February 2017, BB and KD co-mentored two combined Professional Development (PD) Pilot groups as part of the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* PD Project. We formed an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional group into one working 'meitheal' called '*Teachers and Researchers*' and for 12 weeks, we met weekly for two hour PD sessions. We used Microsoft Onenote as a project management space to great effect. The meitheal method proved a successful means of engaging with PD in an on-going collaboration.[\[1\]](#)

In February 2018, BB and KD published a co-edited Joint Special Issue of the *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J)* which combined the Irish national expertise encompassed in the *All Ireland Society for Higher Education* ('an independent, membership-based professional society dedicated to the promotion of good practice in learning and teaching throughout the

* URL: [http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/\[367](http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/[367)

island of Ireland’) and the international expertise encompassed in the *European Sociological Association (ESA) Sociology of Education Research Network* (‘*aims at enhancing cooperation between sociologists of education in Europe.... [while providing] a forum for a variety of educational research, ranging from broad comparative research to everyday practices and processes in school, at all levels of formal education.*’) Some members of the PD Project and the meitheal, the national alliance and the international research group also contributed to and collaborated on this project.

During our work with the PD meitheal participants, factors inhibiting research engagement included lacking knowledge (including journal editors, journal impacts etc.); lacking confidence (the ‘imposter syndrome’ frequently being referred to as an inhibitor) and lacking skills in academic authoring, reviewing and editing - ‘the vital triangle’. This paper draws on narrative data and insights gained in the meitheal and Joint Special Issue collaborations to consider the inter-connected roles of the teacher and researcher in establishing our academic identities.

Academic scholarship is an essential pillar of higher education worldwide and serves to disseminate best practice, innovation in approach and diversity of result. It is an important support for the higher education ecosystem and integral to the professional development of HE practitioners. It allows them to keep up-to-date with the latest trends and technologies in their practice and to learn from the writing and analysis skills of national and international practitioners. This research output can also have a defining impact on a HE practitioner’s and an institution’s professional identity.

Success in academic scholarship depends on an inter-connected set of skills in the areas of writing, reviewing and editing but HE practitioners often learn these skills in an *ad-hoc*, piecemeal fashion, co-authoring with colleagues and relying on editors to reach out to them on the back of these collaborations with editors in turn struggling to gain motivated, skilled and experienced academics to give the time required in scholarship work.

While many writers would suggest that writing is its own reward, for those authors who publish in academic journals, there may be additional rewards in professional confidence and reputational standing. Blind reviewing the submitted works of

colleagues in the field (also known as peer reviewing) can provide essential pointers which may enable authors to improve aspects of their work, whether in structure, language or layout. It may also provide the reviewers with important learning in areas such as academic writing and critical analysis skills as well as the latest research trends and buzz words. Many reviewers give generously of their time and expertise in order to aid other fellow authors in their specialist fields, sometimes reviewing several times for each piece they themselves publish.

In addition to these vital roles of author and reviewer, the role of journal editor is the crucial third apex in the triangle. In other words, the editor's role, while it may convey great honour to be associated with widely read work in a specialist field, may also convey great responsibility for the quality of such dissemination as well as the evolution of the discipline, perhaps through editorials and special issues.

The '*vital triangle*' of academic publishing skills lies between/overlaps academic and professional domains and lies in the *third space* of the *blended professional*, cross-pollinating and mixed specialisms in professional and academic activity. As previously stated, meitheal members consider **confidence and knowledge** as key to moving forward and we posit that collaboration and networking could build this *third space* approach; fostering confidence, knowledge & skills so HE practitioners become '*blended professionals*'.

Meitheal membership, mentoring and coaching play an essential role in building **confidence** and strengthening participation in these research activities. The highlighting of aspects of academic scholarship and the publicising and invitation to contribute to up-coming relevant publications can build **knowledge** of how academic publishing works and the benefits of getting involved. Success in one field (such as reviewing) can build familiarity with academic publishing and encourage further engagement (in authoring or editing), leading to improved **skills**.

Some possible benefits of such an approach could include dissemination of best practice, innovation and diverse approaches; enhanced professional confidence and reputation; peer review and feedback enabling authors to improve their work's focus, structure, language, layout or writing approach; and academic editorship bestowing

the great honour, as well as responsibility, for quality of dissemination and evolution of disciplines.

[1] Traditionally in Ireland, a 'meitheal' describes a group of neighbours working together to complete seasonal farm work such as gathering a harvest. The 'meitheal' conversed and worked together to agreed schedules and outcomes.

A 'meitheal' therefore is a team formed for a single purpose (in our case, to examine our PD in light of the NF's PD Framework) which can lead to positive collaboration, technological learning and personal motivation. We aim to demonstrate that in harnessing the strengths of the 'meitheal', our collaboration fostered positivity, creativity and growth.