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CAN I BE A UNIVERSAL ACADEMIC
AND STAY LOYAL TO MY CULTURAL ROOTS?
A DANISH RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON THE CHOICES THIS ENTAILS

ABSTRACT: To write this article, I examined my own educational journey through a series of critical lenses. My intention was to identify and share my experiences of learning to function within the dominant Anglocentric academic discourses when I grew up and worked within a very different cultural tradition, my foundational Danish heritage. I present my 'findings' here as a series of 'Strands' that I had to unpick and then re-twine to understand my story, interspersed by 'Strategies' – pauses where I share the processes I used to enable me to excavate my academic life with integrity and share my ideas with others – as I believe there are many academics working within Europe, and beyond, who will have encountered or be working through or around similar hurdles. There are many like me who lack the privilege that being a native English speaker bestows in a world where this is the dominant lingua franca.

KEYWORDS: anglocentric academic discourse, thinking tools, life choices, positionality, Views of Nature.

Beginning to reflect

This article sets out to examine my own educational journey through a series of critical lenses. My intention is to identify and share my experiences of learning to function within the dominant Anglocentric academic discourses in which I grew up and worked inside a very different cultural tradition, my foundational Danish heritage.

To decide what to write about and how to structure it, I used a series of informal strategies, that others may find useful for similar processes.

Strategy 1: Using thinking tools

I use a range of different thinking tools to gather my thoughts before I begin to write.

If I am pursuing creativity I may start with a blank page and use **Doodling**: This frees the mind totally as it has no rules, no style restrictions, no central purpose. **Jotting**: Scribbling down random ideas is also structure-free, relying on keywords or meaningful text to capture ideas (NB: Those with poor handwriting or who are very cryptic may find the jottings hard to decipher at a later date). **Free-writing**: This involves simply writing without a break or clear sense of purpose to see what appears on the page. It can be done to formal timings if you need a bit more structure, or in

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a group alongside peers if you like to work sociably or find the presence of others encourages staying on task (see Elbow, 1998). **Building mind maps** to link ideas: Doodles, jottings and free writing may lead to this stage, or it may be a starting point for those who already have a clear focus. It may be more productive using pen and paper and working on big sheets, to enable expansion in any directions that develop. But those already familiar with their material may choose to use design apps from the outset. It is advisable not to view the map as a final outcome when it is only a tool. Be critical and prepared to make changes or start over, especially if the map becomes a model with feedback loops. **Comparative tables**: A two-or three column table can allow complex (or numerical) material to be set out logically to gain an overview. Creating a grid offers the option to move material around until the order is satisfactory. This also offers flexibility, but perhaps not the freedom of creating an individualised document that more easily allows highlighting and emphases through changes of style or font. Creating a table as a 'thinking tool', can be invaluable in the early stages of research that even renowned sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu have endorsed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), as such tools compel the researcher to think critically and, through comparison, identify differences.

The tools enabled me to identify key elements that shaped my life choices and positionality as a scholar and determined me to write an account of my academic stepping stones to capture the influences chronologically (Strategy 2) but before I discuss this I think it useful to outline the characteristics that have shaped educational practices during my lifetime (Strand 1) and provide some information about my national context, my family background and my formative educational experiences (Strand 2).

Strand 1: Universal expectations for education

I summarise here, if only briefly, the customary expectations that during my working lifetime have become universally shared (which is not to assume that they are always acceptable to those that encounter them from within or outside the dominant cultures). One notable development was the general pursuit of internationalisation, which unfolded alongside more profound transformations of the structural frameworks in the entire university system. In particular, I see the following three overlapping phases as highly relevant to my professional development as a researcher: emerging interdisciplinarity, research becoming a product rather than an endeavour, and the shifting nature of knowledge.

As I am only presenting a personal perspective, I will show how my experience as a lifelong learner enabled me to work across the disciplines but at times required me

to carefully protect new emerging identities from being misconstrued. It will become clear how my learning to be a civil engineer along with other foundational experiences up to, and including, doctoral level, were immersed in the educational traditions that research was either product-oriented (in the sense of creating a physical outcome) or knowledge-oriented (in the sense of acquiring knowledge for its own sake and maybe adding to specific knowledge banks). With the trends towards credentialism in the 1970s (Brown, 2001) and commercialisation in the 1990s (Williams, 2016), learning became both more valuable and de-valued. Simultaneously, people needed more qualifications to meet threshold requirements as those they held became less prized, and society demanded better and bigger ranges of physical goods. Here, too, my engagement in adult education made me flexible, open to adaptation, thus supporting my goal to achieve academic tenure, become a bona fide lecturer and researcher. Commercialisation, austerity policies and global economic decline and conflict have also created a growing preference for applied qualifications and specialist training over subject-based education as employability and 'real-world relevance' rise to the fore in society and among student cohorts. All of these are relevant to my story; so, too, is my nationality.

Strand 2: The Danish context

Denmark, a small country with approximately 6 million inhabitants, is one of the five Nordic welfare-state countries. It has a political culture shaped by social democratic values, which prioritise the urban working population, and a liberal tradition rooted in agriculture, which dominated the Danish economy until the mid-1950s. Both sides have historically shared an educational philosophy influenced by the ideas of Grundtvig, a 19th century priest and philosopher. Grundtvig valued "enlightenment for life" over formal education, emphasising that discussion and verbal communication would best support democracy (Hall, 2015). Despite subsequent educational reforms, his philosophy continues to influence Danish schooling and adult education.

The sixties, the period of my childhood, were a time of significant societal change. Although agriculture remained the largest contributor to Denmark's GDP, technological advancements in the previous decade had reduced the number of farming jobs needed, and ideas for a more developed democracy brought urban and rural schools closer in line as a consequence. Although working class women always worked, middle-class housewives did not. Their entry into the labour market led to the professionalisation of domestic roles not previously considered formal 'work' – such as child-rearing, care of the elderly and sick, and housework – and also to discussions around the purpose and value of schooling. It was the developing welfare state that oversaw these changes.

Systems for adult education were established, at first targeting unskilled workers, particularly redundant agricultural labourers, later women, who wanted better schooling.

Although not of farming stock, my parents were affected by these changes. My paternal grandfather came from a poor fishing community, where income was directly dependent on the size of the catch; my maternal grandfather was a skilled woodworker who grew up in a brewery factory, where tied housing effectively bound workers to their jobs. They were entitled to a basic school education up to the age of 14 which they completed, had families and created environments that supported each of my parents to complete a basic schooling programme, too. But my parents aspired to better themselves and took advantage of the adult education programmes, taking evening classes for years to achieve qualifications that would be equivalent to a college education today. These were years in which social mobility was put within people's grasp as upper secondary education became more accessible, often through evening classes and by changing the support policies for university to cover living costs as well as tuition fees.

My parents had ambitions for me and encouraged me to develop my own aspirations as much as they were able. I was supported in completing my schooling to take the upper secondary general examination and then embraced the contemporary trend of taking a gap year while I decided what to do next. During this gap year, I worked in a supermarket and for more than a year as an unskilled early-years worker. Here colleagues who, like my parents, were aware of government policies to prevent young people from settling into relatively well-paid unskilled jobs, encouraged me to move on. I relocated to the capital, to see if I could succeed there, and maybe take a university degree.

It is in Copenhagen, as an independent adult, that I start my academic journey and open a new chapter of my life story. Before commencing this new narrative, I shall share the practices that enabled me to decide what to include and how (Strategy 2). However, even before that I want to acknowledge that deciding where to place my own experience within this article was not a decision I made lightly. In many ways, contexts are vital to make sense of my choices, but there is also the need to know a little about my journey before it can be analysed more critically, hence my discussion of the value of thinking tools (Strategy 1). It was hard to get this text underway, knowing that it would not follow conventional article headings as I am writing from an auto/ethnographical perspective, albeit an analytical one which Leon Anderson (2006: 375) describes as: ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.

Strategy 2: Tracing a life chronologically

- **Writing a chronological life account**: This simply involves setting out the relevant life steps in the order they occurred. Not deviating requires discipline and the overall task demands stamina. Even the writer endures stages where they begin to think they cannot keep going and/or have lost sight of the narrative thread along which the story should unfold.

- **Turning this into a life history by adding social context and change**: A broad knowledge of society at global, national and local levels is necessary to ensure that time periods for key changes are reasonably accurate and the judgements that determine relevancy are sound. Constant awareness that the goal is a credible personal life history, not an expert account, is vital. There is always more that could be said, more to soften, as the individual experience rarely aligns neatly with the official record.

- **Creating a timeline**: This is an effective way to share a succinct life history that serves as a reference point for narrative elements in the story. Life events need to be set alongside broader cultural events and the two need to share a single timeline, whether this be real dates, epochs, the individual's actual age, or simply the broader categories that identify stages in the life course (childhood, adolescence (…) old age). It can be individualised further to represent time spent at a certain location or institution, or the time before and after certain key events. Whatever categories are chosen there need to be some overall markers that give the reader a sense of the events in time scales in the real world.

Strategy 2 is presented as a set of stages, but this can be an iterative process or even attempted in reverse, depending on your material, its complexity and your inclinations. I often recommend that newcomers to life story work 'downwards' through the list and on this occasion, I followed my own advice. Writing the account was straightforward, though adding context to turn the educational life story into a life history (Goodson & Sikes, 2001) was more complex as social changes do not neatly align with personal ones and Danish practice needs explaining to people of other nationalities. However, it showed me that some elements were better treated as separate topics later. Sharing the piece with a colleague I trust, confirmed my belief that the single life history was too unwieldy, too descriptive, and unlikely to hold a reader's attention. My colleague explained that she found the account interesting as she knew me well and we had discussed many of the elements on prior occasions (usually over a glass of wine). For her, it was interesting to see them presented in order within a single narrative. However, she was concerned that an audience of strangers might feel the level of detail too much, voicing the doubts I already held. We both felt that a personal timeline would provide clarity and enable the reader to see the overall picture clearly, freeing me to focus more fully on just those aspects that I felt deserved embellishment. It might also be a useful

example for those about to embark on the process themselves, with the warning that everyone should set theirs out in a way that works for them.

It made sense for me to build my timeline around my educational and work contexts after I left the compulsory educational sector. The subsequent experiences took place in very different institutional contexts, and this helped me to recall experiences with some degree of accuracy, more than compensating for the uneven time periods each entails.

My academic timeline

My academic career	Times/dates	Influence on my thinking and practice
B.Sc. in Engineering, Copenhagen Technical College		
Civil Engineering course at a technical college	1980-1984	In this field, it was a given that knowledge was factual. However, personally I began to question the interaction between humans and technology.
B.Sc. in Commerce, Copenhagen Business School		
4 years, part-time, while working full-time	1985-1989	From studying organisational theory, I learned how people can influence social structures. I was deeply engaged in The Danish Society of Engineers, particularly trade union attitudes on youth and gender, a hint of later sociological interests.
Danish 'Open University' course		
3 years part-time, newly set up by Roskilde University with 2 others. Only later validated as an MA.	1990-1993	As I was working within the EU administration in Luxembourg, I was given one-to-one tutoring. I was introduced to Heidegger in connection with my technical background, and within adult education to a German view of life history through Peter Alheit's work, and to Bourdieu (in early Scandinavian translations).
BA and MA in Education, University of Copenhagen		
Traditional Danish 5-year MA in Education	1994-1999	My studies were shaped by the work of Bourdieu, as taught by Staf Callewaert, a Belgian Professor of theology and philosophy (Copenhagen) and Donald Broady, a Swedish literature scholar (Uppsala) schooled me in the work of Bourdieu.
Short-term casual academic work, partly alongside my studies	1995-1997	Part-time teacher, technical college.
	1996-2001	Lecturer, mandatory course on Philosophy of Science, University of Copenhagen (UCPH).
	2000-2001	Short-term contract as Lecturer for new humanities subject, Human-Computer Interaction (UCPH). Also undertook some 2/4-month evaluation tasks.
	2009-2011	Teaching and small evaluation tasks, Danish School of Education (DPU).
PhD Studies in Philosophy of Science at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University		
3-years full-time but extended to enable me to give educational guidance on course restructuring.	2002-2006	Offered a significant encounter with UK- and US-based research. Previously this work had been accessed in French, Spanish, or German translations. I developed a deeper engagement with anthropology and phenomenology and an interest in Views of Nature (the attitudes towards the natural world held by different professional groups).

Assistant Professor in Education, UCPH University of Copenhagen		
3 years, full-time post, research and teaching	2007-2009	From a Visiting Scholarship to England, working under Ivor Goodson, I learnt new approaches to Life History research and was introduced to the European Life History and Biography Network (LHBN) of ESREA.
Associate Professor at Aarhus University, Danish School of Education		
A tenured position, researching:	2011-	Able to develop long-term research interests.
Views of Nature	2011-	For ten years I studied Views of Nature, starting to undertake life history studies of individual professionals and examine the teaching materials used in the natural sciences, but as applied research gained dominance over the philosophical and theoretical, the field began to be flooded by research on sustainability.
Communication Skills	2015-	Experimenting with communication styles and using my technical skills to make podcasts and my life history knowledge to 'write differently' better aligned my work with societal change.
The Retail Trade	2021-	Given the prevailing discourse that society needs 'more' education to solve its problems, I started to question why most government spending is channelled into purely academic studies to the detriment of more practical employment sectors. Training opportunities for those in the trades remain limited, and my daughter's work in retail revealed that this vital sector receives meagre attention. Research in this field would allow me to integrate many of the skills already acquired: relational statistics, sociology of the professions, life story work and non-traditional communication methods. To study 'retail' could potentially benefit my career, the sector and society.

Strand 3: Becoming a University student

In Denmark as elsewhere, university provision had been expanding since the 1960s. Although general and higher education had been unrestricted and tuition-free for many years, it was only in the 1970s that the state began offering financial support for living costs to students from low-income families, making it easier for them to focus on their studies. Expansion came through the opening of new, progressive university centres that promoted project-oriented ways of thinking, challenging the traditional universities structured by discipline (Kolmos, Fink & Krogh, 2004). In these new university centres, student learning was directed towards real-world problems and the students left to source relevant theories themselves.

Technical professions such as engineering, agriculture, dentistry, pharmacy, business *etc*. took place in 'High' Schools, following the German '*Fach*-tradition' and I started

studying by completing a practical building course that served as an introduction to a civil engineering course at a technical college and led to me spending ten years building computer simulations of fluid mechanics for the energy sector. During this time, I also took a part-time BSc in Commerce at Copenhagen Business School and, still thirsty for adult learning, enrolled on a three-year, part-time adult education programme with a theoretical and philosophical framework offered by a Danish university consortium that sparked my interest in educational ideas. Due to the rapid pace of change within the energy industry I was made redundant three times and this determined me to look again at university as an option, seeing a more traditional degree as potentially offering more secure and fulfilling forms of employment.

As a university education at Copenhagen University (UCPH) is highly prestigious (it has been in existence since 1479), I was keen to study there. Like many historical universities UCPH had educated the priests, doctors and lawyers for the King and later the State and had treated students as independent scholars entitled to apply to be examined when they felt ready to do so even into the 19th century by which time their courses had broadened to embrace the Arts, Natural Sciences and other Liberal professions.

I took advantage of the educational reforms of 1993 and enrolled on a 5-year combined BA-MA programme in the department of Education of UCPH that was thirty years old and defined the content of 'educational' education as a blend of philosophy, history, psychology and sociology. The incumbent Belgian professor was a former Dominican monk steeped in the early classics with very strong notions of how teaching and learning should be organised, and we students, his 'disciples', were expected to respect and follow these practices. We were encouraged to engage deeply with texts and read them in their language of origin, if possible, a directive I found hard to abandon later. We learned to understand problems but not how to solve them, to venerate learning and to interpret and herein understand the critique embedded in the analysis, to read in German (educational thinkers such as Humboldt, Herbart and Klafki and philosophers such as Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger), Spanish (Freire in translation), and French, in particular Bourdieu who was becoming recognised as an important thinker. Due to my engineering background, my first area of focus became Bourdieu's statistics, particularly Correspondence Analysis introduced by Jean-Paul Benzécri (1932-2019), a specialism that later opened doors for me. We were encouraged to value serious study over publication, urged to write only when we had something important to say, another 'old school' value that was difficult to shed when I found it antithetical to the expectations of the modern university where significant publication is the mark of a successful academic. In many ways my professor prepared us for an academic life that was fast disappearing.

Coincidentally, almost as soon as I started my studies, the work of Gibbons and his colleagues (1994) on Mode-1 (academic) and Mode-2 (applied) knowledge was published, bringing knowledge production for application to the fore and encouraging researchers to be socially accountable, immersed and reflexive, sensitive to the research process and aware of the dynamics of trans-disciplinarity. I found the concept of Mode-2 knowledge both intriguing and stimulating. With my background as an engineer, I was not unfamiliar with the idea of applied science and could readily appreciate its emphasis on relevance rather than truth. However, I – and many others – also felt concerned that this shift might fundamentally alter the nature of the quest for knowledge, prioritising 'what works' over deep understanding and analysis. I feared that the pursuit of profound understanding, the in-depth study of knowledge, or even the critical challenging of established paradigms would become increasingly difficult to justify, particularly outside the university setting. But I believe that it was beneficial for my development to work within what was to me, the very different Mode-1 culture, and to experience the immersion process in relation to Bourdieu's work as I already had knowledge of more applied Mode-2 ways of working. Yet, I also recognise looking back, that later still, I had to 'unlearn' some of the attitudes that had been presented as signs of the good academic, particularly in relation to breadth and focus, criticality, languages, and publication.

An uncertain interlude

Although I cannot claim membership of the Precariat – and indeed Guy Standing did not coin this term until 2011, following the global rioting by the many who felt their lack of rights, stability, and financial security should be addressed (Standing, 2011) – the labour market was already challenging in the 1990s and this uncertainty was mirrored in my experience of finding work at an 'appropriate' level after achieving my degree. My attempts to find an academic niche resonated with Standing's third variety of Precariat:

the educated, who experience in their irregular labour and in the lack of opportunity to construct a narrative for their lives a sense of relative deprivation and status frustration, because they have no sense of future (Standing, 2015: 8).

Whilst I had been completing my degree I had found some part-time teaching in a technical college and progressed to teaching first a mandatory course on Philosophy of Science and then a new Human-Computer Interaction course and also carried out some evaluation projects for UCPH, as presumably they found my pre-entry background knowledge, particularly of statistics, useful in these areas that were imposed on them at state level. This was a good experience but did not directly lead to a PhD place, and that was what I wanted to do next as this qualification is a prerequisite for applying for

the lowest academic position at a university in Denmark, where the posts are typically divided equally between research and teaching. Teaching courses on ontology and epistemology within the field of Education provided a strong foundation, however, for co-authoring a book on the philosophy of science for education professionals at a later date (Brinkjær & Høyen, 2018).

Remaining at the same institution after graduating was not considered a mark of academic distinction, so I sought to move on. However, this 'time-out' from studying gave me space to observe the changes taking place in society, and to note that from late 2000 the dominant view of education was changing (as reported in the public press, for example, by Bent Winther (2019). Vocational education was coming to the fore across Europe as it was heralded as important for promoting national economic success. After some consideration, I decided to move away from education, at least for a while – and in reality, for longer than I had hoped.

Strand 4: Doctoral study

A PhD student award in Denmark carries full funding, covering salary, tuition fees, and expenses for courses, periods abroad, and attendance at conferences. Securing such funding was not (and is still not) an easy task, and competition among ambitious students for these limited resources was (and is) intense. Eager to follow my interests and drawing on experiences from several disciplinary areas, I wanted to continue to work with Bourdieu's perspectives and through this explore the conceptions of knowledge embedded within different professional domains. This subject suited me on a personal level due to my different background experiences but also prepared me for a future academic career, as interdisciplinarity was already being viewed as necessary to deal with complex problems, and to address these real-world problems already deemed more important than the creation of knowledge for its own sake, or *l'art pour l'art* (Bourdieu, 2014). However, a great deal of energy was being focused on defining the term as people debated the labels between inter-, intra-, and trans-disciplinarity (Frodeman ed., 2017) and considered whether individual researchers would need to develop dual specializations or work co-operatively with other experts, sometimes reducing the arguments to the use of mixed methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). I could already see the potential for a contribution to these debates through later publications.

After submitting multiple applications, I eventually secured funding and chose to become a PhD student in a Philosophy of Science department at a university with a strong focus on Life Sciences. This institution had a research environment that was far more internationally oriented than that I was accustomed to, and although I was not interested in natural science, I saw the value of some of their approaches to research.

At that time, I was unfamiliar with, for example, the concept of a literature review, as literature had always been embedded within the study process and primarily selected for its contribution to knowledge. Maybe a literature review would be interesting to write? Also, accustomed to monographs, I had to decide whether to write my thesis as a collection of articles or a single monograph. I played safe and stayed with what I knew.

Choice of Language

Working alongside scientists at a post-graduate level brought me face-to-face with a new challenge: should I write my thesis in Danish or English? Students in the humanities and the subject-oriented branches of social sciences tend/ed to read texts in multiple languages but frequently wrote in Danish, as their readership was more focused on national contexts. Additionally, their writing style was generally more complex than that typically found in the sciences. This had been my experience when working within education.

In contrast, I found that students in the natural sciences and technology often read texts in both German and English, given Germany's prominent role in the technological sector, but strongly preferred to write in English to align with the international nature of their fields. My supervisor, who was trained in the natural sciences and wrote exclusively in English, framed the choice succinctly: "If you want people in Denmark to read your work, write in Danish. If you want people outside Denmark to read it, write in English". And this advice may be relevant to anyone who speaks a minority native tongue.

While Danes generally read English fluently – I learned English from grade 5 but today English is taught from Year 1 in schools – even in the early 2000s, many still preferred to read and especially to write in their native language. English may be the common global lingua franca but that does not make it easier to do everything in what, for the individual, is a second language. I was already aware that some words do not travel well between languages. A commonly cited example in the field of education is the Danish term *dannelse*, which refers to an individual's process of gaining insight into self-recognition and understanding, against the background of culturally determined values. In English, this term is often left untranslated, as there is no direct equivalent. Therefore, many authors, in English also, stay with the German term *Bildung*.

Another example is the distinction between the concepts of *education*, which in Danish inherently includes elements of *Bildung*, and the English term *training*. For Danes, *training* carries a connotation associated with training animals, such as dogs. Consequently, the phrase *teacher training* or *vocational training* can feel inadequate or even awkward in Danish, as *training* lacks the broader cultural and philosophical dimensions of *Bildung*.

These examples highlight that translation is never a neutral process; it inevitably carries cultural consequences. After much reflection, I decided to write my thesis in Danish, partly due to my lack of confidence in writing in English but also because my data, which included many hours of interview material, was in Danish. However, there was another consideration influencing my choice. This was the potential for social exclusion, for choosing to write in English might have caused me to be viewed as a "technical" person rather than someone grounded in the humanities – an image I had worked hard to move beyond.

Return to the precariat?

Once awarded my doctorate, I had to find permanent academic work. I was lucky to obtain a three-year Assistant Professor post within the Education department at UCPH, a post that is designed to prepare candidates for promotion to associate professor. But although I felt secure that I had short-term stability, in reality my situation was precarious as it was time-limited and offered no guarantee of employment on completion. But I was more fortunate than the contemporary academic precariat where many short-term contracts are as little as three months and interdisciplinarity often requires researchers to constantly navigate disciplinary boundaries. This is equally true for Denmark as for the UK, the source of this information (Enright & Facer, 2017).

During my three-year stint, there was continual pressure to think about what I wanted to do next and which area of research to pursue as a specialism. Did I want to follow a potential funding stream, research into STEM education in schools for which policymakers and industry leaders had begun providing substantial support? Despite feeling competent to do this, I felt it represented too narrow a path to sustain my long-term interest. Could I continue to develop my work on "Views on Nature" broadening the PhD focus on professional communication to encompass, for example, how teachers talked about the natural world in schools? This time out from studying gave me time to consider my options.

Through my position as an Assistant Professor, I was introduced to life stories, an approach supported by Bourdieu's theoretical framework (Bourdieu, 1999) and further informed by the perspective of Ivor Goodson, a British education professor who, among other contributions, wrote extensively about the construction of school subjects (Goodson, 1993). Importantly, during this Associate Professorship I was able to secure a Visiting Scholarship to England, to work with Professor Goodson, which allowed me to spend an entire semester immersed in the English language, which the scientists I worked alongside during my PhD studies had shown me was important if I wished to work beyond the Scandinavian context. Goodson's work directed me towards the Life

History and Biographical Network within ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults) that provided a forum in which I could develop these interests.

Through this network, I began exploring the combination of life histories with a Bourdieusian perspective, aiming to uncover the social structures within professions – a continuation of my earlier work while at the same time expanding it into the theme of "Views on Nature." I was rather glad that I had chosen this route, when the general economic crash of 2008-2009 precipitated a backlash against bankers, but also 'pseudo work' that was deemed to include the 'over-educated', and the 'creative classes', signposting cuts to university Arts and Humanities courses. To survive those lean years following this event, I found some teaching work and small evaluation tasks at the Danish School of Education (DPU), then a secure position in 2011 at the age of 52 but, of course, I had started my university education later than many.

Strand 5: An Associate Professorship

The Danish School of Education was formerly an applied university specialising in further teacher education and later integrated into Aarhus University, a traditional research institution. Here I was able to develop my work on "Views on Nature" through sociological lenses for the next ten years, particularly within educational contexts, conducting research using this approach (Høyen, 2010; Høyen & Rasmusen, 2020), while also contributing to books and articles on the philosophy of science. It was only when sustainability became the latest buzzword that I felt the need to change topic. For environmentalists, sustainability was all important, for me it was just one case among the many views of nature.

I was now directly in line to experience the pressures put upon this sector as the push for international standards and quality assurance pursued its course in Denmark. One of the key consequences felt by us as lecturers was the practice of aligning funding with effectiveness as defined by the number of publications an individual and hence, a department and a university, achieved within a specified annual timeframe. Faculty management began to monitor our outputs, and this caused us concern.

The need to publish

Within the humanities, monographs had always been viewed as the mark of excellence but suddenly we were expected to write articles instead. For the many who, like me, had studied under a traditional regime, the requirement was at odds with our learned beliefs, Professor Caillewart was not the only academic tutor to have taught that one should only write when one had something important to say. Many of us did not really

know what to do. We asked each other questions such as: How is it possible to shorten a text of 250 pages or more into a short article? How can I describe the study's results without describing my theoretical and methodological perspectives? What about the philosophical underpinnings – if they are not communicated, how can anyone then evaluate the result? We had a hard time grasping the idea of articles and had to learn how to slice and apportion different elements of research, how to single out specific arguments to match the aims and scope of particular journals. Indeed, how to find out about which journals might be relevant and which were pitched at a level appropriate for our subject and academic expertise.

Furthermore, should we aim for national journals and write in our native language, publish in the journals related to professional networks in Denmark like *Dansk Sociologi* (Danish Sociology) and *Dansk Pædagogisk Tidsskrift* (Danish Pedagogical Journal), or was it more useful and better rewarded if we wrote in English and published in global journals? Indeed, what made a journal global? And what did 'international' mean? Often, publishing internationally seemed synonymous with publishing in English. However, journals featuring English-language contributions could, in fact, be highly local. Some 'international' journals have entire editorial boards selected from within their own nation. And what if I, as a Danish researcher, published in a German journal? Would this be considered international? Or are only journals associated with publishers that have a global reach, such as Taylor & Francis, Elsevier or Sage Publications, regarded as international?

My experience as a PhD student and my Visiting Fellowship made me more fortunate than some of my colleagues. I could speak some English, I was accustomed to the arguments around choosing English over Danish, and I had contacts working within other European languages with whom to discuss these issues. But I took a while to grasp the importance of acknowledging your 'audience'. With hindsight, I think that, initially, I clung to the style that better fitted the monograph, as feedback I received when I did submit an article usually included comments to the effect that my writing and my thinking were too complicated for the article format.

Working in the humanities brought other concerns about using English to the fore. Some authors argue that the dominance of English reflects and perpetuates its historical and geopolitical prominence, raising concerns about linguistic imperialism (Alhasnawi, 2021), and this is something I needed to consider, for within academia, and as a result of internationalisation, English not only dominates but has also marginalised other languages and some view English as a commodity owned by British and American institutions, as reflected in the past when textbooks were often adorned with symbols like the Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes. The issue of *native speakerism* – a term coined by Adrian Holliday (2006) – arises, for example, when journal reviewers suggest

that a text be proofread by a native speaker and this has been fed back to me even though the work has already been so checked, suggesting that there are power issues being played out rather than concerns about the quality of the language used. Thus, *native speakerism* influences not only language but also professional hierarchies and pedagogical practices. It privileges "native speakers" for teaching roles and leadership positions, reinforcing systemic inequities in academia (Alhasnawi, 2021).

Moving forward

Slowly, as Danish universities succumbed to global pressures to do things in certain ways, our ways of working came under threat. The growing need to be productive encouraged me to experiment with new ways in which I could work. I sought to align my work more closely with societal changes. I learnt to make podcasts to communicate better with students, and to write differently to get my messages across to my audience better. I considered new topics to research and found a niche studying the retail sector as a professional area, for this had the potential to bring my multiple skills together in a way that has relevance in contemporary society and also to combine education and sociology. It offers the chance to work internationally, for in some countries this is already an established field. There is scope to use the traditional methods I know from my technical, scientific and humanities experiences, but also to trial new ones and design my own to suit my purposes. Retailing is traditionally a mainly vocational area, today transitioning, however, into more analytically demanding jobs due to increasing use of new technology, so my work, being inter- or maybe multi-disciplinary, aligns with contemporary academic trends. Yet, I can choose to let the French sociological traditions in which I feel at home help me shape my decisions. There is freedom in finding new research tools, different ways of interviewing and observing to reach beyond the register data and surveys that I started with. I feel confident to make my own decisions rather than following methods outlined by others, yet students still demand such 'recipes' for success and, somewhat reluctantly I admit to co-writing a short 'How to' guide with a colleague (Petersen & Høyen, 2021). As a vocational area, retail has the potential to attract funding, and already I have been allowed a doctoral student to work alongside me, giving me an interested 'other' with whom to develop ideas.

Surely, this is what an academic journey is about. Finding your own voice, making your own decisions, trying out new ideas and growing ever more confident when these work. I thoroughly recommend those still seeking their academic destination, to experiment, to learn through trial and error, to take calculated risks, and seek out others who want to work with you, but most of all to persevere until you get what you

need and where you want to be. It is worth all the effort expended along the way. But the journey need never be over, there is always more you can do.

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