

Voices at the Top: Learning From Full Professors

Joyce B. Castle, Brock University
Alice Schutz, Brock University

ABSTRACT

The lack of information on the professoriate has led to a recent interest in exploring the personal and professional lives of members of the academy. We report here on a study investigating the thinking of one specific group of university professors—those who have reached final career stage and achieved full professor rank. Interviews with 14 full professors in one Canadian university provided insights into how the variable of rank impacted their thinking and work. The themes that emerged offered lessons for others about academic life.

RÉSUMÉ

Comme il existe peu d'informations traitant le corps professoral, on s'intéresse récemment à l'exploration des vies privées et professionnelles des membres de l'Académie. Ici, nous faisons le rapport d'une étude où figurent des professeurs universitaires étant arrivé à la phase finale de carrière et ayant atteint le rang de professeur titulaire. Des entretiens avec 14 professeurs titulaires offrent un aperçu sur la variable de rang ainsi que sur les façons par lesquelles cette variable a touché leurs pensées et leur travail. Les thèmes qui en sont ressortis offrent des leçons aux autres sur la vie académique.

*"Does anyone know what a professor does?"
"Sometimes they do magic tricks," replied the little boy.*

(Nelson & Pellett, 1997)

INTRODUCTION

The call for scholarly work on the professoriate has recently taken a new direction in academia, a direction that seeks to turn the spotlight on the lives of members of the academy. Driving this newer body of work is an increasing interest in the way in which university academics frame their existence, construct their roles, deal with their environments, and account for themselves.

This call for increased attention to the professoriate follows from the view that there is remarkably little known about this collective of individuals. Over a decade ago, Howey and Zimpher (1990) claimed that the absence of work on the professoriate left "major issues which need to be addressed" (p. 359). These issues included defining the roles of professors, exploring their motives related to why they pursue the academy and what they do once there, understanding factors that enable or hinder their effectiveness, examining their rank and its criteria, and exploring the political dimensions of their lives. The literature addressing such issues has grown to include attention to varied dimensions of academic life (see, for example, Axtell, 1998; Boice, 1991; deMarrais, 1998; Freire, 1996; Johnston, 1997; Neumann & Peterson, 1997; Plater (1995); Richardson, 1997; Torres, 1998) and, in the doing, has begun to unravel the personal and professional dimensions of academics' lives and dispel misconceptions about magicians in towers.

This article continues the investigation into "the person the professor is." Our focus here, however, is on one set of academy members—those who have reached final career stage and achieved "full professor" status. More specifically, we report here on an exploratory study undertaken to shed light on the thinking of a group of full professors in one university in Canada. Clark (1987) noted that decontextualized data provide little guidance overall since the problem of defining and understanding the professoriate is contextual, so we included the dimensions of rank and institution to add explanatory power to our findings. Little is known about the experiences and events that are the fabric of professors' lives in Canada (Acker, 1997), and less is known about how professors grow and regenerate, especially once they achieve final career stage of full professor (Cranton, 1998). We hoped to uncover something of how this variable impacts their worlds. We also wanted to explore how professors in a specific setting become successful

academics and how, in the doing, they manage their day-to-day responsibilities. To this end, we asked a group of full professors to reflect and comment on their professional role, identify the values and goals that drive their development and practice, and share with us details about their university careers.

We ourselves are university professors, and in conducting this study we were partially seeking to understand ourselves as much as other faculty. To some extent we broke tradition by studying our colleagues; as Wisniewski and Ducharme (1989) point out: "Professionals seldom study themselves" (p. 6). As well, we are not at full professor rank, and we studied "up" and not "down," as is more the norm in research. And finally, we are female professors of education, which also sets us apart from many colleagues both by gender and academic discipline. Although our background and interests are in education, we did not focus our inquiry solely on education faculty; instead, we broadened our inquiry to include full professors in other disciplines so that we might be able to compare the thinking of others with education faculty. Our unique status allowed us to bring a distinct perspective to the study and to the interpretation of findings, and our insights might prove helpful to others seeking to understand academics.

DETAILS OF THE STUDY

Context

The university in this study was a mid-size institution in central Canada housing undergraduate and professional programs and a small number of graduate programs. There were approximately 10,000 full-time students registered across six faculty divisions—Humanities, Social Sciences, Mathematics and Science, Education, Business, and Physical Education. Across all faculties there was a total of 324 full-time professors. Of the 95 who had full professor rank, 83 of these were male and 12 were female.

Participants

Out of these 95 full professors, 14 participated in this study. The main criterion for their selection was that they be "full professor," that is, have reached this position of seniority in academia and satisfied the requirements for progress through the ranks, at least in this university. As well, we sought to include representation from all faculties and have varied ages and years of experience in the group. It was also important from our perspective to include female representation. We contacted a total of 19 individuals, 14 of whom were available and readily agreed to participate in the inquiry.

Of this group, five were in the faculty of Education, three in the faculty of Math and Science, three in the faculty of Social Sciences, two in the faculty of Humanities, and one in Business. Eight of the 14 participants were male and 6 were female. The larger percentage of females in this group than in the total university full professor pool was intentional; we wanted female voices to be well represented. All participants were white, with the exception of one female of colour, and all were at least first generation Canadian. The ages of group members ranged from mid 40s to mid 60s, with the average age being 58. The number of years at the rank of full professor varied from 1 to 22. The age at which that rank had been granted also varied: four participants had received full professor status in their late 30s, five in their early 40s, three in their late 40s, and two in their early 50s.

The criteria for promotion at this university encompassed the triad of scholarship, teaching, and service. For full professor rank, the emphasis was on the scholarly component, especially as demonstrated in research, publications, and recognition by one's peers, both locally and internationally. Associate professors "applied" for promotion at their discretion, but their application had to be supported by their own department and Dean, as well as five external reviewers, before it was considered by the larger university promotion committee.

Process

We set out to gather and explore data on these professors' perceptions of themselves in relation to their role, their status, the process they had undergone to gain full professor rank, the ways in which they handled their working lives, and the goals and aspirations they had for themselves in the future. Underpinning our investigation was a belief that professional growth and development is an essentially personal event (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992), and that autobiographical data and narrative inquiry are the best sources of self-knowledge and self-reflection (Bruner, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Our data source consisted of in-depth oral interviews. All interviews were individual, lasted from 90 to 120 minutes, and were tape-recorded and transcribed. One of us interviewed eight participants while the other interviewed six, and we followed the same semi-structured format. The interviews were conversational in nature but built around specific open-ended questions intended to encourage reflection. The questions asked were:

- What does it mean to be a university professor? What is the role of a professor, regardless of rank?
- How does being a full professor differ from being an assistant or associate professor?

- Why did you apply for full professor rank?
- Recount the experience (of applying and receiving full professor status). Was this positive or negative? How? Why?
- Did your day-to-day life change after becoming full professor? How? Why?
- How have you (do you) deal with the personal and professional demands of a university career?
- What are your professional goals now? What goals have you set for the future? How do you plan to achieve these?
- What changes have occurred in your understanding of the professoriate and your own academic life?

All interview transcriptions were examined by each of us independently, first to identify issues and concepts in the data, then to categorize these, and finally to summarize themes across categories. Following this we compared our findings and negotiated final interpretations. The transcriptions, along with our identified themes, were then given to the participants as a member check to ensure that their words and our interpretations represented their thinking. Although some word changes resulted in some transcriptions, the themes and interpretations culled from the interviews were uniformly accepted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

These 14 professors offered us the opportunity to explore their world from two perspectives: that of insider (we are university professors) and that of outsider (we are not full professors). In this section we present and discuss our findings. We highlight the six themes that emerged and discuss these in relation to the larger questions of who the full professor is, what the full professor does, and what we can learn from full professors about how to succeed in the increasingly complex university environment that characterizes the new millennium.

Scholarly Commitment

Boyer (1990; 1997) argued in *Scholarship Reconsidered* for a revised conceptualization of the role of university professor. He identified four areas of scholarship—discovery, teaching, integrating disciplines, and application—and stressed the need to re-prioritize these such that equal weighting is given to teaching, curriculum development, and service. Research, he held, should not be promoted before teaching and service. Kennedy (1997), in *Academic Duty*, stressed that the prime concern of academics should be their duty to the university. This, he argued, involves consciously facing daily responsibil-

ities to students, colleagues, the university, and the general public. Kennedy put students first; he saw teaching as the fundamental reason for the university and contended that professional and scholarly commitment to students and mentoring relationships constitute professorial service.

Given these recent calls to redefine the role of professor, the participants in this study were asked how they viewed their role. What emerged initially was a definite emphasis on the varied dimensions of scholarship.

The way I see the role of a professor is . . . to impart knowledge. There are a lot of ways of doing this—teaching, mentoring, working with graduate students and so on, and of course, engaging in scholarship that advances you. All these roles can't be separated. You do them all. (Participant 12)

For me I think it means two primary things. It means first the opportunity to teach and be the best possible committed teacher you can be. It also means you have an opportunity to do research and publish and . . . influence not only your own students but students across the country and indeed, one hopes, around the world, and leave a legacy in that sense . . . (Participant 6)

I'll give you the standard definition—that it's teaching, research, and committee work. Basically I very much believe in that. . . . As far as the teaching is concerned, my role is to push thinking, to make students look at the world through different lenses. . . . Then with the research part, my goal is to challenge others to see things in new ways too. . . . To me, professors have to bring about change. (Participant 7)

These professors' adherence to the triad of teaching, research, and service was not surprising to us, especially since the faculty association in this university had a recent contractual agreement outlining a faculty member's role as constituting 40 percent teaching, 40 percent scholarship, and 20 percent service. But we were less able to explain the strong sense of commitment and duty that surfaced. Each professor personified Boyer's and Kennedy's notions; each talked of having a duty to the university and a range of responsibilities.

Yet while all displayed this sense of duty, not all felt they should be expected to perform equally well in all areas of responsibility; some clearly emphasized different dimensions. All held that scholarship was essential, but then defined their scholarly expertise differently. To some, scholarship equated more with traditional forms of research. A number of those espousing this view had won notable research awards, as well as major grants for research in their areas.

The main reason I came into this profession was to have a solid career as an independent researcher. I don't think there is any other way I could do that. I don't mind teaching—I think teaching is very important, and I do it—but research is my strongest suit. (Participant 2)

Others viewed scholarship as inextricably linked with teaching, and they stressed teaching as the higher value, or at least as the equal to research. This view emerged from individuals across all faculties, not only education. So while previous research (Burch, 1989; Wisniewski & Ducharme, 1989) found that professors of education placed more value on teaching than did colleagues in the rest of the university, this was not the case here. Among the five participants from the education faculty, only one responded that the most important role of the professor was to teach. Those in other faculties stressed teaching more, and several of these professors had, in fact, won teaching awards.

To me being a professor means research and teaching. . . . But while I got my full professorship on the basis of my research, now I'm much more involved in teaching. In the sciences you're often heavily involved in research when you're younger. . . . but now I'm interested in students and how they learn and how I can help them learn. (Participant 5)

Despite placing different emphases on the primacy of research versus teaching, these professors all defined their role as a scholar. This contrasts with findings from Ducharme and Agne (1987), who reported a considerable confusion of roles among professors they observed. They were studying professors of education specifically, but the three roles they described apply equally well across disciplines. First was the "beast of burden," the role played by those flitting from place to place carrying mounds of boxes and data and putting on dog and pony shows. Second was the "facilitator," the role played by those who thanklessly take on the task of bridging the work of others. Third was the "academic" role, filled by those who teach, advise, study, and write, all with rigour and scholarship. No doubt these roles still exist in universities, but it appears from the data in this study that those who become full professor are those committed to the "academic" role.

Even if I only had one day left to live, I would spend it in some scholarly fashion. Put into a nutshell, it's my kind of thing. . . . It's my personal commitment. (Participant 10)

Freedom and Space

A second theme was evident in the responses to the question asking about the perceived difference between full professor rank and other junior ranks. The message was clear.

. . . the difference is that you're less anxious. You're already through the hoops. You don't have to go for tenure any more, you don't have to go for promotion any more. . . . you've reached the highest goal within the institution in terms of your . . . strand of work. (Participant 11)

I don't have to submit to any kind of pressure from let's say, the administration, which says, "You owe us so many hours of service." I've earned my space, and I've earned the right to spend the time as I see fit. Assuming at the same time that what I see fit is indeed solidly within the academic realm. (Participant 10)

You no longer have to say, "Now what are the criteria for my next promotion?" and "How do I meet those criteria?" You've done all those things. Now you can say "What are some things I'd really like to explore that can assist my teaching or advance my research?" . . . So it allows you more creativity. (Participant 12)

Three participants initially claimed that full professors were not different from professors at other ranks and that becoming full professor was not as significant in a professor's career as obtaining tenure. And yet these same professors did allude later to differences in full professors.

When thinking of full professors, I guess I think in terms of leadership . . . the way that they are seen by the university in terms of their contribution to resolving problems or providing leadership. I think there's a real difference there in what's expected from us. (Participant 4)

In universities, there really is a push to be frenetically active, and this seems to be getting worse. And so it's nice when you get that final security because you can slow down and start to do what seems to be much more meaningful work. So in that way they're different. (Participant 13)

All 14 professors, then, expressed the view that full professor rank brought one to a different level—a level of freedom that offered space and fostered creativity. The importance placed on attaining such freedom suggests that they had felt considerable pressure in their work lives while at junior levels and that establishing an identity in an academic setting is demanding. Sorcinelli (1992) reported this to be the case in his research with newer and junior academics; they suffered a high level of stress, especially in relation to the pull between teaching and a need to build research profiles.

The professors in this study emphasized that full professor rank brought not only a sense of freedom, but also a sense of satisfaction with their work lives. An earlier study by Schuster and Bowen (1985) documented problems that had evolved in university settings at that time and noted how this had affected the morale of full professors such that many were “angry, embittered, and feeling devalued and abandoned” (p. 19). Nussel, Wiersma, and Rusche (1988) reported a counterscenario in which faculty life was portrayed as “the good life” and faculty members portrayed as experiencing high levels of satisfaction. In a more recent work, Axtell (1998) also painted a portrait of faculty life in the United States that is highly positive and pleasurable. The participants in the present study echoed the message in the latter works; they described their professional lives as satisfying and exciting. As well, they spoke against any notion that full professors might take advantage of the freedom their rank brings and produce less or lower quality work once they become full professors.

I would feel really badly at this level if I let anybody down at the university, particularly students, and if I didn't keep doing a huge amount of research and publication and so on. I just really feel so happy to be a university teacher. (Participant 6)

I've been here 29 years, 19 as full professor, so the bulk of my work has of course been as a full professor. I could demonstrate easily the increase in the intensity of my involvement in research. (Participant 2)

Recognition and Respect

Also evident in the talk of these professors was their association of full professor rank with respect and recognition from others. Moreover, they were confident in their views of themselves as deserving of the recognition. As one said:

Full professors have a reputation—if they didn't they wouldn't be full professors. (Participant 3)

These professors, it emerged, did not apply for full professor rank solely for the freedom it offered; as well, they sought respect and recognition. And it appears that this need for recognition was directed by a strong personal drive.

The public doesn't differentiate between me being a full professor and somebody being an assistant professor—because we all go by the title professor. . . . So it has to be a personal desire. . . . almost a personal desire for having arrived, for some status. (Participant 11)

It's probably all a function of ego. Within one's own community, in this case, the academic community, full professor status is the highest award you can get. It's the same when I was an undergraduate . . . ego caused me to do everything to be in *Who's Who*; that was status . . . I always went for that stuff and still do. And in terms of academia, full professor is the top. (Participant 8)

Across this group, then, recognition from others was important, and it was recognition from peers, both inside and outside the university, that counted. Peers were also used for comparison and self-evaluation. It was these professors' comparison of their own performance with their peers that often led them to apply for the role of full professor.

I had no problems that I know of [in the process]. . . . I didn't see that there would be a problem. My "cv" was so much better than anyone else's in the department. I always knew I was going to apply . . . and get it. (Participant 7)

In the case of the female professors in this study, their search for recognition and respect seemed to go beyond simply wanting recognition for the rank; they also wanted recognition that acknowledged them as women.

People do view you differently, particularly if you're a woman. . . . I mean, there is prestige associated with it. And so I suppose I always felt that it gave you added credibility. And I think it did for me. (Participant 14)

The females in this study were well aware of the status of women in universities and of what Stalker and Prentice (1998) referred to as the "illusion of inclusion." They also knew that female faculty experience career paths quite differently from their male colleagues (Prentice, 2000) and that few females achieve full professor rank. In the last decade of the 20th century, women in the United Kingdom held only 5 percent of professorships (Kettle, 1996). In 1988 in the United States, women formed 12 percent of the total full professor rank in education (AACTE, 1988). In 1998 in Canada, the average percentage of female full professors in all disciplines was still at the 12 percent level (CAUT Bulletin, 1999). In the university in this study, the percentage of female full professors was slightly higher, at 13 percent, and the females in this study illustrated the confidence that had allowed them to view their work as comparable to male peers and deserving of the same rank.

I looked at my record and I looked at theirs and I thought mine was better. And I was the one that got turned down which really steamed me up. Of course I appealed. . . . I'd begun to learn that women are always accepting second rate—not knowing. And then when you get in the position to know this, you think you have to fight this not only for yourself but also to take a stand for others. (Participant 5)

I think that there were three things that prompted me. . . . One, there were so few women. When I applied there was only one other. . . . The next thing is that there were so few full profs in my faculty. And I guess the third was "Well, where do I go from here? . . . I can move up in terms of rank; I can move into administration, or I can move out of the institution." So given those things . . . and some encouragement from others, I went for it. (Participant 11)

Looking across all the participants' recollections, both male and female, the drive for respect and recognition was clear. What never surfaced was any reference to not being worthy of this respect. There was no talk of Bell's (1990) "imposter syndrome," the tendency to "doubt their own competence, downplay or dismiss their abilities, and subscribe to the disabling belief that they are impostors or frauds or fakes" (p. 55). No one in this group alluded to feelings of unworthiness; the general sense was that they had achieved a good deal and should not downplay their achievement. This confirms Heward's (1996) view that "self-confidence, a positive evaluation of their own academic ability from the outset of their career, is a crucial basis for a successful academic career" (p. 17). Several participants spoke openly about their views of their own ability, and one was candid about needing recognition:

I think I, at least, am motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. Pride, I think, pride in the sense of a proper sense of self-regard for one's performance . . . I think that's an important incentive. Do full profs get enough recognition? I think that most of us think we should get more. (Participant 6)

Self-Regulation

As these professors revealed more about themselves and their university careers, another theme relating to, and flowing from, the three previous themes emerged. They had all sought freedom and space, as well as recognition and respect, in order to ease their work life, alleviate earlier tensions, and pursue the scholarship they valued. In the doing, they demonstrated the ability to self-regulate and control their environments.

Potts (1997) explored this aspect of professors' lives in his book about the socialization of academics in Australia. He explored the notion of tension and how it was that academics had "adapted to their occupational world" (p. 4) from the mid 60s to the 90s, years during which those in the present study would conceivably have been experiencing tension as well. A key finding by Potts related to the deliberate power and control exercised by these individuals; they took actions "to control the nature of their work" (p. 168) and to "maintain a proper sense of identity" (p. 57). There appears,

then, to be a process of situational adjustment that shapes a successful academic's self-image.

As for the present study, the recollections of the 14 professors suggest that they too had demonstrated a high level of control and self-agency during their careers. They had each actively sought out full professor ranking as a way to reduce tension, gain more freedom and space, and achieve working conditions that allowed them to fulfill their commitment.

In many ways I just wanted to get it done with. . . . The idea that I could get it done and then have these other possibilities was very important to me. . . . One day my chief administrator said something about it . . . and just with that little remark I jumped in and applied. (Participant 9)

Oh yes, certainly, I started university with that notion [becoming full professor]. I knew all along that I wanted to go for this "high ranking." I always intended to be full professor. (Participant 12)

In many ways, these professors resembled the "quick starters" described by Boice (1991). Boice described professors who early in their careers had taken some control over their work and life in academia. They had known the elements comprising academic life and had worked to control these elements in line with their priorities. Plater (1995) said that this ability to self-regulate and control time is a key aspect of success in academia. Yet, in order to regulate time, one must have an overall understanding of academic roles and responsibilities as well as university structures. The professors in Boice's study seemed to have this knowledge and this ability. So, too, did the 14 full professors in the present study. All demonstrated that they had defined their academic role early on and then learned to regulate their time and actions to achieve what they wanted. And in doing so, all demonstrated a high level of personal drive and agency. Even when difficulties arose, such as not achieving full professor rank when first applying, they did not allow themselves to be defeated. Instead, they took control and worked harder to achieve their goal the second time around.

It seems, then, that a characteristic of full professors is an ability to self-regulate and adjust one's environment to achieve the sense of freedom and the level of respect they see as necessary to allow them to practise scholarship. All were clear that they had sought out this status and level.

Power Politics

This theme built on the previous theme, but dealt more with the shifting nature of university life for academics. Responses to several of the questions revealed that these professors viewed the university not only as a bureau-

cratic institution, but also as a web of personal interactions, both of which they saw as set within changing circumstances and dictated by politics. All touched, in some way, on how they saw power and politics affecting their and other professors' lives.

To one subgroup of the professors in this study, the politics surrounding changing times in universities were associated with broader social and economic shifts in general.

In my perception, the role of the professor has changed and will continue to change. . . . And the change is that the professor is simply becoming another worker, both in the expectations of the institution and the expectations of students. . . . It's a consequence more of external factors—the whole political social climate. (Participant 11)

This subgroup lamented what they saw as a changing political climate that was bringing about a changing university climate. They alluded to increased pressure on professors to adapt to changes, and they noted increasingly observable shifts in their own working environment, all of which they saw as part of a move to make universities more business-like. In his book *The Corporate Campus*, Turk (2000) explored the shifts occurring in Canadian universities, warning readers that business interests are taking over the public interest in universities. The professors in this study echoed Turk's message, as well as that of Birnbaum (2000), who wrote about the shifts in management fads in higher education and why they continue to fail. What concerned those in this study was the effect that market-driven university structures would continue to have on professors' working conditions and on academic freedom in teaching and research.

The other subgroup of professors in this study focused on distinct occurrences within the university that had related more specifically to personal experiences. In many cases, particular reference was made to how changing times affected applications and promotion to full professor rank.

I do believe that the resume that took me to full professor many years ago would not do today—because I think the bar keeps rising. . . . In my time . . . there was definitely a more relaxed air—there was not this kind of competition and aggressiveness that I see today. (Participant 6)

There was a person on the P&T committee who came to talk to me. She felt that the decision [to turn down my application] was not a good one. . . . She in essence encouraged me to try again. . . . She said that essentially next year would be a different committee and that there were already things in the works to recognize the kind of work I had done. "Don't give up, try again," she told me. (Participant 7)

Others in this subgroup alluded to the need to work within the changing university environment and to learn to manipulate that world. This was not offered as a negative portrayal of academic life, but rather as a realistic view of the world in which academics live.

Throughout my whole academic career I had the opportunity, the privilege . . . to have been attuned to academics . . . those who knew the game, who knew the system . . . who presented it to me as “This is a game, this is how you play it.” And I played it that way right from the beginning. (Participant 7)

Taken together, these comments about university politics and the need for faculty members to have sufficient power to function in times of change suggest that those who come to be full professors have learned to do this. They appear to have been able to analyze broader situations, and their role within these situations, and to have survived the tension and demands. All appear to have used different tactics and strategies, but all did adjust. Some of their comments emerged as advice to others.

I was first in my department and my faculty to apply for full professor. So there was no one in my faculty to watch or tell me what to do to move to the top rank. But I had _____, a role model and colleague in another university. You need to have a role model. (Participant 9)

If I were going to give advice to a young professor, I’d say, “Look, there’s a certain amount you’re expected to do . . . you can’t function as a professor without doing a range of things. But be very, very careful about taking on too much. You have certain hoops to go through—tenure and promotion hoops—and what counts there is your teaching and research. So if you’ve allowed yourself to take on too much committee work or administrative work, it’s not going to pay off. Learn to manage the demands—to balance.” (Participant 14)

Generativity

The term “generativity” entered the lexicon when Erikson (1963) presented it as the antithesis of stagnation. Erikson labelled this as one of his stages of development, the first stage that is not egocentric, and defined it as a concern in guiding and establishing the next generation. Vander Zanden (1978) described it as “a reaching out beyond one’s immediate concerns to embrace the welfare of society and of future generations” (p. 40). As such, generativity is a drive to promote the continuation of the culture, and it can take a number of forms ranging from biological (e.g., having children, parenting) to societal (religious ministry, political office, teaching, mentoring).

This drive to carry on the culture, in this case the culture of academia, came through clearly as the final theme.

I firmly believe in this idea of a community of scholars where you have younger ones and older ones, and where the younger ones are different from the older ones by having less experience. It's up to the older ones to help them make the transition into this community. (Participant 10)

Primarily, as a job, [our role] is to write, publish, and teach. But it's also to . . . help indoctrinate and to help socialize the younger set. (Participant 1)

Clearly, this notion of networks of contacts within the academic community is important, especially in the middle and later stages of academic careers. Heward (1996) claimed that: "It is through the informal networks of subject communities that the values by which members of the academic profession are recruited and promoted are sustained" (p. 20). According to some studies, women benefit less from such networks than men, and often find themselves excluded from male networks (see Bagilhole, 1993). Female mentors for women are fewer in number right from the beginning, and opportunities are not always made known to women, who are left, in turn, to seek out opportunities themselves. Yet the women in this study placed little emphasis on a lack of networks or contacts; rather, most spoke of receiving sufficient support to encourage them and confirm their decision to apply for promotion. Two of the four women, however, did not receive the promotion without somewhat of a battle, and this became an incentive for them to take on a mentoring role themselves.

I felt I had more obligation to people at junior ranks to use the experience I had to help them get through what can be a difficult time. And . . . having been turned down, declared problematic, was a very important experience for me because I realized just how angry you can get and how frustrated you can be. . . . So now I counsel others. (Participant 5)

Every subject in this study spoke of a need to carry on the system, to work with others, to guide others, to help others. Full professors, it seems, have moved beyond the egocentric stage and see themselves as needing to reach out to others and guide the next generation.

Interestingly, however, although all of these full professors spoke openly about needing to work with and guide others, only one referred to the possibility that life within the academy might be better if there were no levels among the professoriate.

I've argued on occasion that an innovative university would not have academic rank—that those with scholarly maturity to be full professors would be recognized for that maturity anyway, without the title. . . . And I got shot down, by the lecturers and assistant professors.
(Participant 3)

None of the others talked of changing the system or of taking on the role of shifting the future environment for their younger colleagues. They did, however, talk of their own goals and of how they planned to continue their present work long into the future.

I retire in a couple of years. . . . Writing another book seems the logical thing to do. . . . I would like to become professor emeritus too. Partly I would see that as recognition on the part of the institution which I think I've served rather well. . . . And then of course this would give me access to libraries and office space. . . . I believe in a structured life, and in adhering to that structure you move from assistant prof to associate prof to full prof and then emeritus. (Participant 10)

I have an artificial goal now I suppose . . . I have 90 some papers at this point, and I want to make it 100. . . . And when I retire, I assume my affiliation with the university will be as professor emeritus. . . . It's a very practical goal. . . . The advantage is that I can remain eligible for grants. I just got a renewal of my grant which already gets me one year beyond retirement. . . . So research wise, I'm set; I'll continue to do the same things. (Participant 3)

I'm pretty content. I've pretty much got what I want. . . . And I'm quite happy to stay, although I have sometimes thought about what I'll do when I retire. . . . Maybe I'll do more creative things. I just love my research so I'll continue to research and write, but maybe I'll expand on other creative activities related to the arts. (Participant 12)

LEARNING FROM FULL PROFESSORS

The responses and personal reflections of these 14 participants allowed both of us to learn a good deal. We suggest here that our findings touch on a number of issues relevant to understanding not only full professors, but also academic life. We share our thoughts in two sections: the first summarizes the lessons to be learned from these full professors; the second raises issues and questions for further consideration.

Lessons about Academic Life

This group of professors presented a picture of academic life revolving around commitment and duty to scholarship. Given a growing attitude that is often critical of university professors and cynical about their contributions, this study provides a positive, optimistic portrait of senior academics committed to serving their university and contributing to their field. These were not unhappy, angry, frustrated professors, but committed scholars who were contented with their environments and dedicated to their work. To us, the themes that emerged in our analysis house a number of lessons about life in academia.

First, it appears that those in the professoriate who are destined to achieve top status are those who are committed to the role of scholar; they ascribe to a professorial role that involves a range of scholarly activities, all centred on creating and disseminating knowledge and fostering learning in others. As well, even though these individuals acknowledge greater ability in a specific dimension, they remain committed to carrying out their duty across all dimensions of scholarship, not only the traditional ones of research and publication.

Second, those who become high-ranking academics appear to adopt the scholarly role early on; they resemble Boice's (1991) "quick starters" from the onset of their careers. They experience the same tensions and demands all junior faculty do, but learn to resolve many of the difficulties and take control over their work. They learn to self-regulate, manage a myriad of demands, and control time. Most of these full professors stated that they had begun their careers with clear goals and had made active decisions at times to focus on the dimensions needed to ensure success in promotion and tenure applications. Those who were not successful in their initial attempts maintained a sense of efficacy and went on to manage their environment in a way that resulted in success.

Third, those in the professoriate who reach for the top appear to be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. They are driven by an inner need to achieve the high goals they set for themselves, but they also strive for recognition and respect from others. A positive self-concept and a high dose of confidence in their own ability to advance their lives and meet their goals appear to characterize this group, as does a desire to be recognized by others for their accomplishments.

Fourth, those who become successful in academia also appear to acknowledge the political dimensions of academic life and learn to deal with them. Some of the professors described this simply as a game you learn to play. Others talked of learning to take on various leadership roles within the

institution in order to become involved in the decision-making process. Still others talked of “not giving up” and “keeping focused on your goals.”

Fifth, those who succeed in achieving top rank also appear to understand the rhythmic dimensions of academic life and to work within cycles to maintain a balance in their work lives. Most admitted to an affinity for particular dimensions of their work, either research or teaching, but they intentionally did not ignore their duty to its other components. Some talked of stages, relating how they had focused more on one dimension earlier in their careers, but now had switched to another. Others talked of working in weekly or monthly cycles to fill all roles and meet different responsibilities. In short, successful academics appear to maintain a balance that is satisfactory to them at different stages in their careers.

And finally, those who achieve top ranking as professors also appear committed to mentoring others in the professoriate and carrying on the academic culture. Female professors in particular appear to consider it mandatory to counsel their junior female colleagues and help ease their paths. Those who become successful, it seems, move beyond the egocentric stage to a stage of wanting to help and work with others.

Issues and Questions for Consideration

All 14 participants had their own stories to tell about how they lived in and experienced their world as full professors. We had expected this; after all, “academic careers are experienced differently by individuals” (Potts, 1997, p. 216). What we had not anticipated was the considerable uniformity that emerged in their views of their professional lives. We had expected greater divergence given the differences in age, gender, and disciplines across the group. As well, we had anticipated that the professors in education might stand apart from those in other faculties given that research on teacher educators has tended to portray them in a much different light than their counterparts across the university (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996).

Yet while the consistency across these professors’ views was initially surprising to us, there are explanations. One interpretation is that consistency can be accounted for by the fact that all of them inhabited the same university culture, and all but one shared the same ethnic and racial background. As Dretske (1995) pointed out, beliefs and views are in part determined by the believer’s environment, and since these professors inhabited largely the same environment, their views had no doubt been shaped by it. Or, alternately, it might be because they possessed the same beliefs and values in the first place that they gained entry into the full professor community. This latter possibility suggests that junior faculty are not likely to become full professors if they do not hold the same beliefs and value structures as full pro-

fessors. This is not a comforting thought for it suggests that those who succeed in academia are those who think alike, rather than those who bring unique ways of thinking to the mix.

We were also struck by the finding that education professors who become highly successful and achieve full professor status do not appear to be living in a world separate from professors in the rest of the university. This is contrary to previous research on education faculty, and suggests that contrasting views and values separating these faculty from others in the university are becoming a thing of the past. We wonder why the education professors in this study did not emphasize teaching as their *raison d'être*? Had they learned to adopt a traditional view that research ranks above teaching as a form of scholarship?

There also remains a concern on our part about what might evolve in universities in the future. The full professors in this study talked of changing times and values, and referred to shifts in the ways in which junior faculty view their responsibilities within universities. Yet only one of them talked of the need to change the system for younger colleagues. We were left wondering whether the views represented here by these full professors will continue into the next generation. We also wonder whether the political environment in universities will continue to change such that junior faculty will not have the same desire to reach full professor status. In our own university's education faculty, for example, although many professors were ranked at the associate level, not one had applied for promotion to full professor in the past 10 years. However, we also recognized a trend reported by Heward (1996) that a number of individuals, mostly females, leave their institutions for others that give them a higher ranking.

These unanswered questions highlight the need for further studies. We have identified some of the issues deserving attention, but other questions that need answers include: (a) What specific reward systems are most highly prized and serve to influence decisions to enhance one's professional ranking? (b) How do the variables of ethnic background, culture, gender, and class affect academics' perspectives and commitments and decisions to continue on a career ladder? (c) What personal difficulties do professors at different stages encounter in their daily lives? (d) How do faculty members juggle work life and family life while struggling to move through the ranks? (e) How can universities promote and encourage professional movement through the ranks in a manner that is less stressful? At the very least, answers to such questions can help explain more fully how to succeed in academia without being a magician.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Joyce Castle is associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Brock University where she is primarily responsible for teaching curriculum courses in reading and language, and working with beginning and veteran teachers to promote professional growth. Her research interests revolve around literacy development, professional development, leadership, collaboration, and gender issues within these areas.

Joyce Castle est professeur agrégé avec la Faculté d'éducation à Brock University, où elle est chargée d'enseigner des cours de programmes d'études en lecture et en langues et où elle travaille avec des enseignants débutants et expérimentés afin de promouvoir l'épanouissement professionnel. En recherches, elle s'intéresse au développement des capacités de lecture et d'écriture, au développement professionnel, au leadership, à la collaboration, et à la problématique homme-femme à l'intérieur de ces domaines.

Alice Schutz is assistant professor in the graduate department at Brock University's Faculty of Education. She teaches courses in Adult Education, Reflective Practice, and Curriculum. Her main interests are in creativity, gifted education, and issues related to adult learning and development, including mentoring, role modeling, and generativity.

Alice Schutz est professeur adjoint avec le département des études graduées dans la Faculté d'éducation à Brock University. Elle donne des cours de programmes d'études, d'éducation des adultes et de pratique réfléchi. Ses intérêts principaux sont en créativité, en éducation des enfants doués, et reliés au perfectionnement et à l'éducation permanente, y compris le mentorat, l'imitation de rôles et le souci de pérennité.