

2015

Editor's Corner: Engaging with Research: A Reflection on Context and Emotional Connections

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Recommended Citation

Lyon, Theresa D. (2015) "Editor's Corner: Engaging with Research: A Reflection on Context and Emotional Connections," *College Student Affairs Leadership*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/csal/vol2/iss1/2>

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Editor's Corner: Engaging with Research: A Reflection on Context and Emotional Connections

In preparation of the release of volume two, issue one, of *College Student Affairs Leadership*, and my first as editor-in-chief, I find myself reflecting on the ways student affairs practitioners and scholars interact with information on a personal level. Whether to research an innovative hypothesis, or follow a social justice issue via *Twitter*, there are countless opportunities to engage with information, with the added challenge of also engaging in critical reflection. Questions such as “why is the subject important?” or “how does the political, social, and economic climate impact the interpretation of the data?” or even “is there such a thing as an unbiased account?” all prompt a level of critical consciousness essential to the exploration of current social and educational issues. This is not to say that we must approach scholarship or our favorite social media platforms with distrust or suspicion, but rather, we must actively and personally engage with information to understand the context and significance of everything from a tweet to a theory.

In Margaret Drabble's (1965) novel, *The Millstone*, the main character notes, “I had always felt for others in theory...but now myself, no longer free, myself now suffering, I may say that I felt it in my heart” (p. 77). This line, though a work of fiction, illuminates the sensitive nature of understanding human interactions and social phenomena, as well as the role emotions and context play in the creation and interpretation of information. It also poignantly highlights how the interpretation of a concept or theory can evolve over time based on personal experiences. This leads me to ponder whether our supports of students and scholarly endeavors have been, as Drabble's character notes, purely theoretical? What would happen if we approached research, our own or otherwise, with what we felt? Would this impede the scientific reliability of our understanding? Can we, as scholar-practitioners, completely acknowledge and explore our personal, even emotional, reactions without being buried by personal bias?

Freire (1993), a staunch supporter of the role critical reflection plays in the development of social theory, notes that “current epistemological and ontological shifts taking place in social theory must be firmly grounded in human narratives of emancipation and social justice” (p. x). I encourage student affairs scholars and

practitioners to not stop there. Ground your research and work with students in their narratives, but also explore your emotional reactions. From there, question the origins of your emotions and explore their context. Engage with research on a personal level without judgment, but with curiosity. In short, be conscious and critical of what you read and research, but do not underestimate the importance of exploring your visceral reactions to your academic and professional pursuits. Rather than suspending our emotional bias, I would like to propose that we engage with it and explore the constructs of our context so that we may better understand the roots of our academic interpretations as well as our work with students.

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