



Dr. Kiran Veerapen, Regional Faculty Development Director, Vancouver Island

1. Tell us a bit about your scholarly work/areas of scholarship interest.

I've never really considered myself a scholar, more as someone who was curious about the areas she found herself in. My attempts at scholarly work go back to when I was a clinician rheumatologist in Malaysia. I found that there were many gaps in rheumatic epidemiology in Asia and in the understanding of clinical expressions in Asians versus Caucasian populations. That was what triggered my interest in research at the time. My clinical scholarship was mostly quantitative and descriptive and largely contextual, dealing with the population at hand.

2. How did you get involved in education scholarship?

When I joined an educational setting on the Island, I was once again curious about the things that didn't seem quite right, or cohesive, for example, there was a lot of emphasis on teaching teamwork, but the PBL cases addressing teamwork seemed to lack depth and detail, the students' answers were correspondingly superficial. There was a sense of dissonance between what we thought we were teaching and what we were achieving. Because I was new to Canada, this made me wonder whether the interprofessional scene here was different from that in Asia. When I set about looking for a topic for my PhD, I decided to research the impact of undergraduate training in medicine and nursing on future collaboration between the two professions. I discovered that the situation is not that different across the world i.e. that while we profess collaboration, the reality in the trenches is often different and variable from place to place and even from discipline to discipline but issues of hierarchy are ubiquitous and the hidden curriculum, unhelpful.

3. How did you go about developing the skills needed to pursue education scholarship?

In quantitative research, you already know the question, whereas with education scholarship, particularly with qualitative research, framing the question is what takes up so much time. It takes you back to conceptual and theoretical bases, which is not my background, but which I find very interesting.

The decision to do a PhD was a natural progression, reflecting both my career objective (I wanted to be credible in education) and my curiosity. The structure of the PhD led me to do courses on research that were not just a “quick fix”. In the past, the courses I had taken on research methodology were about “learning as much as I needed to get the research done” but the PhD allowed me to get a really good grip on the subject.

As someone coming from a science background, the biggest joy of doing a PhD for me was the opportunity to read widely on a variety of subjects such as intuition, personal knowledge, power and hierarchy, etc. in fields as diverse as history, philosophy, religion and spirituality. I had never taken a course in a subject in the humanities. I found it was very enriching. Interviewing nurses, coming to understand their ways of knowing, of how they knew their world was a lot of work, but it was also very invigorating.

4. What do you see as some of the particular joys and challenges of education scholarship?

The joys are obvious and personal – the self-realization, the understandings that one gains, while the challenges are more procedural – e.g. time, energy, ethics approvals, and logistics. In the case of my PhD research, it was about logistics like the numbers of recruits, paying or not paying for parking for interviewees, and going to the UK for part of my research only to find out when I arrived that everyone (Elmeccs Committee) was away on holidays for the summer... You have to think ahead of time about things that can go wrong, and talk to others who have the experience.

Funding can be an issue – I was fortunate for my PhD to receive a 3- year CIHR Banting and Best Graduate Scholarship Doctoral award.

5. Have you done research in other domains (e.g. clinical, basic science)? If so, how (or is) doing education scholarship different?

A big challenge that I see in education scholarship is to translate innovations into scholarly work. This requires (pilot) projects with all the attendant and often difficult ethics approvals, logistics and costs. What hasn't changed for me in terms of clinical vs education scholarship is that it is still all about where the gaps are in my work or current understanding.

6. What do you see as opportunities for education scholarship in the IMP/areas we are particularly well placed to study?

I see a lot of opportunities – not all necessarily specific to the fact that we're the IMP. For example: opportunities around curricular change; interactions with the outside world (e.g. the Flex course will give us the opportunity to look at our impact on the community); our students' choices -how we can encourage and direct people to go where they are needed; and analysing the impact of the broader aspects of curricular and faculty development changes. Some areas would be of local interest, but many areas would be transferable.

7. What advice do you have for potential or new education scholars?

My suggestion is to start with questions you have about what you see around you- what troubles you - and ask yourself why. Find your passion, and be prepared to stick with it. Look at the broader picture from the beginning and then focus on one aspect. Think about dissemination – define the end-point. Then take some time to plan your intervention from the get-go so that it will result in a quality scholarly project. It's an investment of time, not just for doing the study, but for dissemination, preparing posters, submitting publications, etc.

This reminds me of what Glenn always says: if you are going to publish, your work must have more than a local impact; will it result in a conceptual shift? How you frame your question, how you do your analysis, are all important.

Finally, find yourself a mentor or a supervisor you can work with over time.

8. What do you see in your future in terms of education scholarship?

It's still about the things that trouble me in my work, whatever my job is. Why things are a certain way, and if my ideas about how I can improve things in the area I am working in make sense - for example, on how feedback is given by teachers and received by students with very little understanding of each other's perception. Most of the literature on feedback is written from the perspective of teachers, yet when we talk about feedback, it's a mutual process. In education, we could have synergy in more areas than we currently do. I was fortunate to be able to do a project with students and teachers on giving feedback, which has just been accepted for the "Really Good Stuff" section of "Medical Education". I would love to do it in a more structured way with regards to evaluating the outcome of our intervention. We talk about faculty development, but I feel that faculty development without student development will not reach its full potential; they need to go hand in hand. The students need to understand why they are taught a certain way, to get them fully on board and engaged in their own education. I will continue to look for gaps, as well as for opportunities for synergies in medical education. And, maybe in a few years' time, if I have the funding to just do scholarship, I would like to wind up doing one or two good scholarly projects, and then call it a day...