

Humber Polytechnic’s Applied Research Program: An Autoethnography Of Participants’ Reflections And Experiences

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Abstract

As a group of 10 applied researchers, faculty, and essential support staff at Humber Polytechnic, we share our enlightening experiences, working together in a collaborative setting to acquire knowledge on applied research practices. Our work is a testament to the power of collaboration, as we have used a collaborative and engaging autoethnographic model to disseminate our experiences of seven weeks. Although our reflections are independently composed pieces of work, they are observations of the collective work we completed during our participation in the Applied Research Program designed and hosted by Humber Polytechnic in Toronto, Canada.

Introduction

The Applied Research Program (ARP) at Humber Polytechnic, designed and hosted by the Office of Research & Innovation, has intentionally departed from traditional methods of examining applied research and delivery of research methodology, which have long held a prominent position within the field of research. New and innovative techniques have led to the inception of the inaugural ARP program, sparking a new era of research.

Traditionally, research methodology was monolithic, as was the culture of research, which held strict rules that were adhered to by academics. The success of academics was heavily based on learning these rules and using them as tools for conducting conventional research (Bochner, 2016). This autoethnography demonstrates the remarkable shift away from conventional research and towards the interpretive voice, a concept Geertz (1980) objected to. He suggested that an observer is not permitted to hold an interpretive position or voice. This shift in perspective is a key aspect of the ARP program.

This autoethnography sheds light on the transformative journey of 10 diverse ARP participants from various departments and disciplines within Humber Polytechnic, who have immersed themselves in developing their skills and knowledge in

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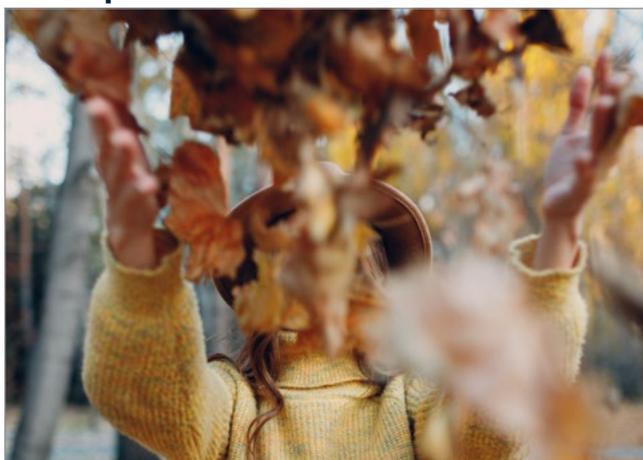
*Essays advance a new idea, summarize a development, or initiate or engage in discussion. They may be narrower in scope than the above categories, but the subject matter should be of general scholarly interest.

applied research over a period of seven weeks. Although autoethnographies take many forms, such as short stories, poetry, fiction, and prose (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), this autoethnography takes the form of a collection of reflections that vividly portray the observations and interpretations of the 10 participants of the ARP program. The autoethnography demonstrates a deep reflection of the experiences and observations during seven weeks and offers a pathway to observe and evaluate the ARP program's effectiveness from the participants' lens. With patterns and recurring themes emerging from the reflections provided by each participant, this pilot program was developed to foster deep learning in the field of applied research and provide an opportunity for individuals to engage in transformative learning methodologies.

Theoretical Framework

This autoethnography has been produced based on Dewey's (1933) reflective paradigm, which suggests that individuals can acquire knowledge when interacting with their environment through a trial-and-error process. Through this learning, they can synthesize concepts and reflect on areas of improvement. The term "deep learning," established by Segú Odriozola (2023), is directly connected to developing values and self-reflection beyond the confines of a classroom. This was not just a theoretical concept but a practical application within the ARP group through reflective practices and an examination of applied research practices.

Autoethnography Reflections Participant 1: Priscilla Enetomhe



A person throwing leaves in the air.

Embarking on the Applied Research Program (ARP) initially filled me with a sense of uncertainty. As someone whose role

had no direct engagement with students, I struggled to see how the program could benefit me or align with my current responsibilities during the first few days. However, as the program unfolded, I experienced a shift in perspective that ultimately made the journey worthwhile.

In the early sessions, I struggled with feelings of inadequacy and questioned my ability to contribute meaningfully. Yet, amidst the mixed emotions, a subtle but profound change began to take place. I found myself increasingly drawn to the idea of making an impact, of uncovering solutions that could address real-world challenges. This transition was accompanied by moments of intense curiosity—what I've come to affectionately refer to as "popcorn brain"—as I sought out more information, data, and insights to guide my journey.

A significant aspect of this transformative experience was the vibrant learning environment cultivated by the diverse team participating in the ARP. Interactions with fellow learners during sessions and informal lunch break walks sparked numerous insights and personal revelations. It was during one such wellness walk that the seeds of my research interest were sown. A casual conversation about retirement and social isolation led to a collective reflection on the importance of cultivating meaningful hobbies. This discussion resonated deeply with me, igniting a curiosity about ways to alleviate feelings of isolation among retirees.

The journey of defining and refining my research interest was further enriched by the guidance of guest speakers like Bradley Schurman, whose insights provided valuable context and direction. His presentation not only deepened my understanding of the research landscape but also inspired me to explore innovative solutions to societal challenges.

However, translating my research interest into tangible outcomes for my department remained a daunting task. The session on storytelling and research was all I needed. A little backstory: from observation, I noticed the underutilized potential of the International Development Institute (IDI) at Humber. During this session, I saw an opportunity to bridge the gap between academia and practice. By partnering IDI with initiatives like SPARK/JIPE, we could showcase success stories and case studies from our fieldwork, thereby raising awareness about the Institute and creating valuable placement opportunities for students.

I really enjoyed the session where we had different researchers coming to share their experiences and lessons learned. It was such an enlightening moment. I am grateful to have experienced this session. Throughout the ARP, the insights gained from guest speaker sessions and interactions with fellow participants have been invaluable. These experiences have not only expanded my understanding of applied research but also instilled a deep sense of excitement about the possibilities for future collaborations.

In conclusion, the ARP has been an instrumental journey of personal and professional growth. As I look ahead, I am eager to remain connected with the ARP community and contribute to the ongoing pursuit of innovative solutions to real-world challenges. I am grateful for the support and mentorship received throughout this journey and excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

Participant 2: Natasha Frank



Popcorn.

Popcorn Brain

Dr. Ginger Grant introduced the term “Popcorn Brain,” which is fitting to describe my state of mind. Someone with a plethora of research ideas and an eagerness to jump on board new projects, like popcorn bursting in a pan. Balance, focus, managing setbacks, disappointments, and shifting priorities have been some of the challenges in my novice research experience. Like the popped kernels, it crowds the mind when too many ideas and projects are going on at the same time. Journaling throughout the ARP SEDA certificate program has been beneficial in capturing ideas and helping prioritize projects. The beauty of the ARP SEDA group is the ability to draw ideas and inspiration from the different faculties in our diverse group. Having representation

in different faculty at Humber Polytechnic allows for an interdisciplinary perspective on a research phenomenon. Innovative approaches and thinking outside of the box are pillars of Humber’s future strategic goals. However, it is challenging to do so when we have been working in silos so far long. Breaking down the silos and barriers within Humber and allowing for this inaugural opportunity has been no small feat for the Office of Research & Innovation team. It is an honour to be part of this community of practice, harvesting the energy and inspiration of all the members of this community.

Specialized Tools

While having access to advanced tools and technology can certainly enhance the capabilities of a researcher, there are other factors that contribute to being a better researcher. Participating in the clay creation activity facilitated by Emma Smith, PhD, and Doug Thomson, PhD, made it evident that having access to specialized tools did not guarantee a better product or experience. Emma and Doug instructed the class to create clay figurines, approximately four inches tall, with faces. One group was provided with specialized clay tools, another had basic wooden skewers, and the last had no tools. Upon examining the finished product of the group with the specialized tools and basic skewers, the completed clay creations were all unique and beautifully constructed. The group with basic skewers were able to improvise and explored creative ways to express their art without a perceived disadvantage. The group without tools at all had an added layer of complexity to the experiment. When a group member completed a clay figurine, the facilitators destroyed it. Unknown to all group members, a tally of the number of finished products was recorded. The group with no tools and facilitator-induced destruction of the completed product was the group to which I belonged. The destruction of our finished product by the facilitators evoked strong emotional responses from my group members. We expressed our frustration, disappointment, and hurt at the unexpected setback. As a result of learning the outcome of our product, our work became less polished, sloppy, and meeting the bare minimal requirement of the specifications. However, our team persevered and continued with the task—creating the most figurines despite the destruction of the finished product. This activity was pivotal to my understanding of the journey of a researcher. There will be setbacks and challenges with research. Sometimes, it might even feel hopeless, but every experience is paramount to the collective understanding and

appreciation of the research process. Sometimes, it is not merely about the finished product but the learning from the process itself. Learning from these experiences will help one navigate the challenges of research. Tools and technology can assist in the research process, but they cannot replace the creativity and drive one puts into one's work.

Participant 3: Mira Kapetanovic



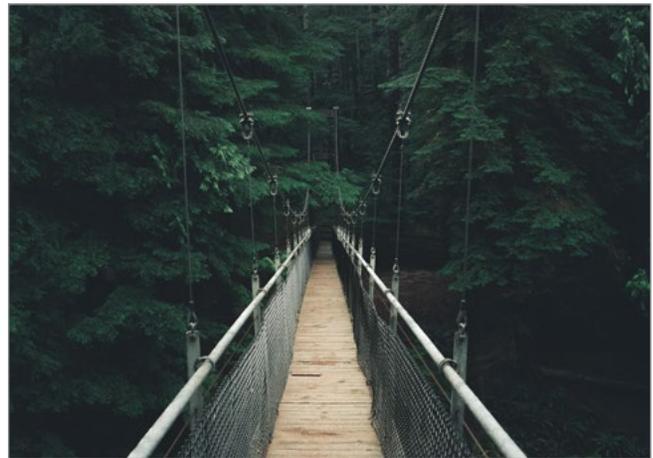
Road stretching into horizon. Photo courtesy of Mira Kapetanovic.

Being one of the 10 inaugural ARP group members and embarking on the SEDA certificates journey has been a truly unique and privileged experience. A recurring theme that has beautifully threaded its way through the ARP is storytelling. In light of this, I believe my reflection should be my story. As I set foot on this research journey, I was filled with curiosity about what this program was about. By the end of the first week, scattered crumbs lured us into the realm of research.

The overall atmosphere of our ARP environment was not just positive but uplifting. It was a space where we were accepting, supportive, and deeply engaged. All the participants, including myself, showed innovation and enthusiasm for our research projects and each other's. Our ARP environment was not just growing but flourishing, and our research interest began to blossom. By the end of the program, we all seemed to have developed a strong, organic, and natural culture with minimal transitional seams; instead, we became a cohesive group of 10 individuals who had come together and begun to develop a community. The conferences and roundtable discussions were insightful and eye-opening, with revelations about the future of industry and employment and applied research. The time used for reflections was overwhelming yet enriching as concepts began to saturate my thoughts and lead my research in

many directions. This program provided me with a road map marked with many directions and destinations. My mind was brimming, seeping and spilling with ideas. My thoughts were quickly recalibrated when preparing my presentation to focus on only one direction, yet I was still drawn to the number of research ideas in my head. Aside from research, I began to observe our group moving from 10 participants in a program into a cohesive community of like-minded researchers. I have developed a connection with my peers and fellow ARP team members, which I hope will flourish well past ARP's last day and ride into the future.

Participant 4: Gurpreet Kaur



Suspension bridge in the forest.

Once upon a time, there was an important program designed for faculty and staff to explore the multifaceted nature of applied research. Faculty and staff from different departments at Humber Polytechnic participated in it with their varying levels of experience in research. Personally, entering the ARP Program was an emotional rollercoaster—confused, nervous, yet excited due to my lack of research experience. Then, on the first day, the program's introductory sessions, including a warm welcome and insightful presentation by Dr. Ginger Grant, eased some anxieties. Gradually, what started as a disparate group of participants began to coalesce into a supportive community. Throughout the program, I learnt about several tools and methods required to conduct and disseminate research. For instance, Camila Perez Peña's session on diversity and the 4MAT framework felt like unlocking a secret to engaging learners effectively. The assignment to uncover my strengths through friends' perspectives was nerve-wracking yet heartwarming, revealing surprising insights. The library field trip, discovering the Idea Lab and Humber Polytechnic Archives, ignited a new

eagerness for research. Anju Kakkar's storytelling techniques and Camila Perez Peña's session on audience connection emphasized clear, relatable communication. The values session by Kenton Hyatt and Cheryl De Ciantis highlighted our diverse yet cohesive group dynamics. Learning about research ethics was eye-opening for me. A significant milestone was achieved when a thematic review presentation on a micro-credential for Applied Research, developed in collaboration with classmates Fatima Momin and Akshay Khosla, garnered positive feedback and instilled a sense of accomplishment. Completing SEDA Certificate 1 brought relief and a sense of accomplishment, readying me for SEDA Certificate 2. In SEDA Certificate 2, learning about challenges in conducting research; Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) practices; academic IP and supervising research was transformative. From the supervising research session, one phrase resonated with me, echoing through the corridors of my mind. It was a quote shared by Emma Smith—a mantra from her supervisor: "Research doesn't have to be great; it has to be done." This simple truth struck a chord within me, for I, too, had been ensnared by the pursuit of perfection, often at the expense of progress. All in all, the Applied Research Program was a journey of learning and self-reflection. It compelled me to navigate the complexities of research while reflecting on my own growth and evolving understanding of the field. The attached image encapsulates my experience. The long suspension bridge symbolizes the adventurous path of learning and discovery, while the dense forest signifies the vast and rich knowledge I gained during the program. The single individual on the bridge emphasizes the personal journey and the focus required to traverse this path.

Participant 5: Akshay Khosla



A plant growing in the hand palm.

Just like the picture, I see my journey through ARP as one that involves me discovering a sense of belonging, growth, and collaboration as the sapling also establishes its roots and grows.

Unlike most other days, this morning was not rushed. I had woken up on time and was on my way without having to worry about arriving late and apologizing. That's how my first day at ARP started. I was very excited about this program because I am in the initial stage of my career, and this was a great learning opportunity for me to base my career as a researcher upon. I remember feeling intimidated yet inspired when everyone introduced themselves. We were a group of 10 individuals. I knew two of them because they were my colleagues, but these seven new people with tons of life and work experience and amazing qualifications made me feel like an imposter. I wanted to stay in my comfort zone and just interact with the people I had known before, but the very first day, Ginger Grant instructed the three of us never to be in the same group.

There were different sessions with research experts such as Ginger Grant, Camila Perez Peña, Müge Abac, Barath Roy Michel, Emma Smith, Doug Thomson, Anju Kakkar, Cheryl De Ciantis, Kenton Hyatt, and many others. Each session had a lot of value and had group activities which encouraged people to interact. Every day, I tried to be a part of a different group and gradually started getting to know others. I was humbled to know that none of the people had an ounce of ego or pride in them. I feared that no one would want to interact with me because I was a project assistant while they all had been professionals for a much longer time frame. However, I was proven wrong, and the resulting conversations created a sense of belonging for me.

I received a major confidence boost when our group was given our first major activity, which was to build a team charter. Usually, I am not someone who would take the lead. I would rather follow what others say, especially when I know they are much more experienced. But this time, I tried contributing to it and was applauded by others for it. I really became a part of the group that day. Also, I noticed that I was not alone, as my colleagues began recognizing each other's strengths and areas of expertise, and ideas for research started bouncing off among them. Real collaborations started to bloom through these group activities.

Participant 6: Kehinde Ladipo



Original painting used with permission. Credit: Jacob Ladipo.

Research ideas Come in Waves: Seize the moment and ask the right questions

Yes, I know! I expressed interest and took the steps to enroll in the ARP. No doubt, I cherish this unique opportunity to participate, but I went into the first session with a lot of anxiety. I began to imagine the value I might contribute to the multi-disciplinary research group with this autoethnography deliverable. My only research knowledge has always been in Mathematics related to computational fluid dynamics and numerical analysis.

Any time I was asked the question, “What are you doing this summer?” my response has been, “I am participating in an applied research program.” This was always followed by the question, “What is applied research?” I determined that, if nothing else, I would immerse myself in the learning so I can take back the meaning of applied research and this new term, “autoethnography.”

As I understand it, applied research is phenomenon-driven research that is conducted with the specific objective of providing solutions or innovative improvements to practical, real-world problems, practices, or services. Applied researchers identify a gap in current practice, design a project to gather data, and propose evidence-based strategies to modernize and improve services based on quantitative or qualitative tools. This seven-week applied research program has harnessed my current skills and has equipped me with tools that open doors to other research opportunities at Humber Polytechnic. As there is no forest with only one tree, collaborative interdisciplinary research is necessary to build a strong, inclusive and cohesive

community. It is my hope that my participation in this program will lead to a new, engaging learning experience among the diverse, mature learners at Humber Polytechnic.

From the first week, I was challenged to find my area of intersection with other researchers in the team. As I listened to the chatter of team members who already have experience in collaborative research, it was difficult to picture how my mathematics skills might be useful in studies related to palliative care, disaster management policies, etc. As the conversations continued, I asked a nursing professor at my table: “How might a nurse practitioner use mathematics to carry out their duties?” Our conversation led to the discovery that mathematics is needed to calculate medication dosage for patients. Studies conducted by many researchers in the past have stressed the importance of computation skills among nurse practitioners, as dosage calculation errors often lead to serious medical consequences. According to the nursing professor, there is currently no stand-alone mathematics course for the nursing programs at Humber. Rather, dosage calculation is embedded into one of their core courses. I understand this may be due to the proven mathematics anxiety among learners. We have started exploring an interdisciplinary project to incorporate dosage calculation training into Humber’s Nursing program in the form of a low-stakes micro-credential. We envision a micro-credential that focuses on computer-based problems that simulate real-life scenarios in clinical settings.

In this paragraph, I reflect on two of the research tools that I have learned in this program. The first tool is the 4MAT Model, which I am curious to learn more about. The 4MAT Model is an instructional design that summarizes four different learning styles in four quadrants of what is referred to as a learning “wheel.” A good lesson plan design that uses the 4MAT model would simultaneously cater to learners in each quadrant of the learning “wheel.” As the lesson progresses through the four quadrants, the 4MAT design lays emphasis on activities that activate learners’ left and right brain functions while addressing the questions of Meaning (Why?), Concepts (What?), Skills Acquisition (How?), and Adaptation (If?). According to the original inventor, 4MAT was intentionally designed to cater to diverse sets of learners at the same time (Bernice McCarthy, 1987). The right-left brain activation in each quadrant distinguishes the 4MAT model from the popular 4As model. The left brain is responsible for breaking down or analyzing information. The

right brain synthesizes or consolidates the information. In the 4MAT model, the learning outcome must be a thread in each quadrant, and the switching between the right brain and left brain in each quadrant is necessary to stimulate higher-order thinking. Another new tool is auto-ethnography. Here is my understanding: Autoethnography is a form of qualitative enquiry that uses self-reflection on a research project. It can be a written personal narrative of my journey or a form of photo journaling. This is exactly what I am doing in this reflection. I have also applied an autoethnography design tool called “Empathy Journey Mapping,” which helps me articulate my thoughts and feelings to structure my next project in order to implement an engaging and effective learner-centred Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex) learning space.

The research facilitators have challenged me to pay close attention, ask the right questions, select a project with deliverables that will lead to change, and equip learners with 21st-century skills. I am seizing the moment, taking advantage of this unique opportunity to look for ways to contribute to knowledge and excitedly looking forward to exploring ways to integrate the new tools into the design of interdisciplinary collaborative research projects that will move my community forward in the right direction.

Participant 7: Georges Livanos



A hiker on a mountain.

Little did I know about SEDA certification when my colleagues and I embarked on this course in May 2024, but certainly, I was confident it was going to be a major benchmark along my journey to help advance applied research in our polytechnic setting. This journey for me started some 22 years ago when colleges in Ontario were, for the first time, allowed to introduce research, which was the privilege of universities

up until then. I happened to be in the right place at the right time, so, as I had a project to propose and an industry partner waiting, I applied for a grant and at the same time, I was invited to sit on the first advisory committee to the President. Within two years, we established the framework for applied research and set the terms of reference for the Research Ethics Board.

In the years that followed, we saw tremendous growth in research, but at the same time, we went through some growing pains. Centres of Innovation got planted and are now blooming. Young faculty brought in brilliant new research ideas. Many new faculty brought with them projects they had started elsewhere and continued them at Humber, transplanting technology, knowledge, and expertise into the institution. However, it did not take long for some new questions to arise. How many of us have time for research these days? How many of the new faculty members who brought in projects have continued to do research, and how many of them went into plain teaching after the completion of the project they brought in? Finally, are long-time faculty finding any incentive to do research, or do they think that research is only for part-timers and newcomers? These are real questions that I wrestled with in the last few years, and I must say from the onset that the prospects of addressing them are encouraging.

Right from the start, I felt that research was the greatest opportunity for professional development. I encouraged younger colleagues to get involved, and I made it a point to introduce them to the Office of Research & Innovation (ORI).

Hand in hand with the questions raised above goes the following challenge for the future: Can we grow and sustain our own research at Humber? Will our research be homegrown, or will it be just a series of unconnected transfusions from other institutions? To address this challenge, ORI has established a system of small grants, such as Seed and Cultivate Research & Innovation funds. It was great to learn more about them in this program. However, the researchers who receive these grants must be a part of a nurturing ecosystem. There must be genuine support for research. Hours must be allocated by the faculties for preparation because even applying for a grant takes time. Recruiting Research Assistants (RAs), searching for industry partners, organizing meetings, etc., takes time, too. Fortunately, I feel that there is a recent increase in awareness

and recognition of the many benefits of research. The offering of this inaugural ARP is itself proof.

This program has been an amazing experience for me. I joined a vibrant cohort full of energy, talent, and intelligence. My peers demonstrated impressive educational achievements, professional distinctions, and competence in everyday skills and communication abilities. Right from the start, I could see leaders emerging among my classmates who will provide guidance to the Humber research community in the coming years. Several of them are already in leadership roles, such as program coordinators and project leaders.

As far as the leadership of ORI goes, I am indebted for this concise way of packaging a wealth of useful materials everyone needs these days to succeed in research. They provided answers to many questions I had, which had been bothering me for years, and I had no time to ask. It may sound funny, but in a way, I feel I went through another Teaching Excellence Program (TEP) 22 years later—we called it New Faculty Orientation back then. I am discovering that there is a wealth of new information and new skills one needs. ARP provided me with the specific skills to do research—from learning how to apply for grants to writing for an academic journal to approaching research assistants and building communities.

These seven intensive weeks were a unique experience not only because of the many exciting activities but also because we built a community. Indeed, the bonds we built as a class in these short weeks will last a long time. We are a tight group of people, full of contagious enthusiasm, and we will make everyone at Humber feel more at ease with research, champion it and espouse it as an integral part of Humber life. Yes, we have built a community. The months of July and August will feel empty in comparison, but as all Humber faculty are, I am looking forward to the September revival!

Participant 8: Susan MacGregor



Hand palm marks in colour.

The experience of studying with individuals from diverse personal and professional backgrounds and from across all areas of the institution has been like a breath of fresh air.

Through the learning of applied research fundamentals and delving into my values and the values of the group, I have discovered much about myself. These realizations have prompted an examination of where I would like my teaching and research to grow in the coming years. I am inspired by my peers who have managed to carve time outside of their full-time jobs to publish articles and do original research. I hope to be able to accomplish this in the next phase of my career as well.

Course facilitators through the SEDA 1 certificate have done much to demystify some of the challenges that have made it difficult for me to engage in research in the past. Doug Thomson's simple whiteboard method of showing project achievement is something that will work for me as a visual person to ensure that tasks get accomplished. Hopefully, this will open more emotional and intellectual 'space' for me to engage in more research and writing in the coming academic year. Anju Kakkar's enthusiasm and optimism have inspired me to send her a piece of my research for consideration for JIPE.

The presentations of my peers at the end of SEDA 1 were so exciting to watch as they were the culmination of a few weeks of rumination and discussions. The ideas were great, and the processes were organized and thought out, but it was the spark in the eyes of my peers that was so rewarding to see. Our group is vastly different in age, ethnicity, experience and

fields of study, but the experience has been very supportive and engaging. I think we have all grown and learned from each other through the experience.

The experience has been positive, but there have also been some revelations that I have found disheartening. Learning that not all my peers have institutional support in their desire to become researchers and that some are dealing with active resistance has left me feeling frustrated and annoyed. As well, learning that others have had their ideas co-opted by colleagues and/or superiors does put a damper on attempting to engage in my own research at Humber.

The SEDA 2 certificate has been an enriching experience to date. Our peer group has reached a state of maturity where we are comfortable with each other, and the group has established its own set of norms. We know who will need a plug (as their computer battery does not hold a charge) and are sure to leave a spot for them near a plug and who will want/need to get a coffee first thing. We went for a walk in the Humber Arboretum and were able to vamp for the camera and poke fun at each other more like a 'family' than a group of work colleagues. We solidified this relationship when learning about 'community' from Sharon McIntyre as we expressed a desire for a lasting physical reminder of our time as a community in the form of a plaque.

What I have noticed as a result of the ARP is that I am approaching opportunities at Humber in a new way. In watching 'Showcase' presentations, I was thinking about ways to gather data and learn and/or be able to prove things. For example, the keynote speaker spoke a great deal about AI and ChatGPT. In past years, I would have found this interesting, but this year, I am thinking of running an experiment in my Fall class whereby I have the students complete their major assignment in a typical way and then, after submission, have them attempt to do the same assignment using ChatGPT. I am interested in seeing the differences in the final product. I think this would be interesting SoTL research as it is, but it could also lead to research on how to teach students to understand ways to prompt AI tools correctly in order to elicit quality output. I am excited to try this out in the Fall.

Participant 9: Fatima Momin



Roller coaster.

When I was told I was enrolled in the Applied Research Program (ARP), I was excited. The prospect of learning new tools and acquiring knowledge in research was thrilling. Since I am so passionate about research, the thought of learning new skills and tools in research was incredibly exciting. Initially, the lack of structure for tasks and deliverables felt uncomfortable and challenging. However, this ambiguity ultimately allowed me to tap into my creative thinking skills and taught me to handle uncertain situations where outcomes are not always predetermined. I also learned that this autonomy has sparked my confidence.

Learning tools like 4MAT, Human-Centred Mindset, Tableau and the Agile project board were incredible. Gaining knowledge in 21st-century skills, values we practice, Indigenous research methods, storytelling techniques, building online communities, gamification, and visiting the Idea Lab proved invaluable for both professional and personal development. I also discovered that connecting emotions to the learning process can transform it into lifelong learning. What made this course particularly interesting was that every session was activity-based and highly engaging, ensuring that everyone was fully involved.

Beyond the learning experience, I was struck by the positive group dynamics. The group quickly became comfortable with each other, and the level of trust that developed was remarkable. Despite their seniority and extensive experience, all the group members were humble and encouraging. The stories and personal experiences shared by the group members were also memorable, each offering valuable lessons. The time we spent together as a cohort is a lifetime

memory that has created a special bond among us, forged through the discussions we had, the laughter we shared, and the emotions we experienced together. This journey has been transformative, enhancing my skills and broadening my perspective in different ways.

Taking part in the research course has been like riding a roller coaster, an exhilarating journey filled with ups and downs of emotions. Just as a roller coaster begins with anticipation, I started the course eager to delve into new topics and methodologies. Despite occasional moments of uncertainty and the rapid pace, the overall experience has been thrilling and immensely rewarding. This roller coaster ride of learning has not only expanded my knowledge but also ignited a deeper passion for research, leaving me eager for the next adventure.

Participant 10: Meshanda Ellison



A path winding through the green. Photo credit: Saachi Kaur Bedi.

“Don’t be sad because it’s ending; smile because it happened.” –Dr. Seuss

Starting off my reflection with a quote from Dr. Seuss feels apt as I have a deep appreciation for quotes—it’s just who I am: a quote enthusiast!

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to my wonderful peers in the inaugural Applied Research Program. Being part of this journey with this cohort and meeting such inspiring individuals has been truly remarkable. Each one of you has made this experience exceptional, and I will miss our daily interactions. Let me borrow and tweak a few lines from Halestorm’s lyrics in ‘Here’s to Us’ to capture the essence of our time together:

Here’s to us, here’s to [research and building community]

All the times that we [laughed and supported each other]

Here’s to [me], [here’s to us]

‘Cause the last [7 weeks] have [flown by too fast]

Wish[ing] everybody well, here’s to us, here’s to us,
[ARP Originals!]

Reflecting on the program itself, I must admit that I felt intimidated initially, especially because I don’t have a Master’s or PhD degree. I had doubts about keeping up. Although I’m relatively new to research, having worked on my thesis a few years ago and having researched mature learners’ experiences in undergraduate programs, all my fears vanished on the first day.

I knew this experience would be unforgettable, so I decided to document my journey through a scrapbook journaling approach. Being visually oriented, I believe pictures can convey a multitude of words, helping me reflect on important topics, presentations, and tools for future reference. Throughout the program, I’ve thoroughly enjoyed various topics and activities. From learning about 4MAT and autoethnography to exploring narrative storytelling, each session has been insightful and practical. I’ve already started incorporating these tools into my work, such as using the storyboard example for student experience mapping and multidimensional journals to not only engage but also get a better understanding of our transfer students’ journey.

Another topic that resonated with me was the discussion on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) in research. As someone who works through an EDIB lens, I found the session valuable in broadening my perspective on incorporating these values into research practices.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the vast resources available, including funding opportunities like the Seed and Cultivate Research & Innovation funds through the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) and the many other ways in which Humber’s Office of Research & Innovation (ORI) can support the research journey. This experience has been truly rewarding, and the facilitators from the ORI team have been exceptional. I will genuinely miss this program and

highly recommend it to aspiring researchers.

Leaving this program, I feel more confident in my research skills and equipped with tools to enhance my event planning and student engagement strategies. I know that the friendships and connections we've formed will endure beyond this program, continuing to support and inspire us in our future endeavours. As we move forward, I encourage all of us to carry the lessons we've learned and the memories we've created into our next chapters. Let's remain curious, stay compassionate, and continue to challenge ourselves and each other.

To my peers: thank you for your camaraderie, your insights, and your unwavering support. To the facilitators: your guidance and enthusiasm have been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for the wisdom you've shared. In closing, let's remember that this ending is not really an end but rather a new beginning. The skills, knowledge, and relationships we've cultivated here are the foundation for the incredible journeys that lie ahead.

So, here's to us—the ARP Originals—may we go forth and make a meaningful impact on our Humber community and beyond. And may we always find reasons to smile because it happened. My heart is full, and as we part ways, tears of gratitude and nostalgia fill my eyes.

Conclusion

In concluding our autoethnography of reflections on applied research practices, we have come to appreciate the intricate relationship between theory and practice. This journey of introspection and analysis has not only deepened our understanding but also sparked a sense of inspiration and motivation. We have learned that applied research is not just about following a set methodology but about embracing the complexities and nuances of real-world contexts, a lesson that we believe will resonate with our fellow researchers and academics. This journey has underscored the significance of collaboration and dialogue within research communities, particularly the enriching environment that diversity brings. Engaging with diverse perspectives and sharing insights have enriched our approach and broadened our appreciation for the multifaceted nature of knowledge production.

As we conclude this autoethnography, we realize that applied research is as much about the journey as it is about

the destination. It is a continuous learning experience that demands humility, adaptability, and a commitment to contributing meaningfully to academia and society. We believe that this emphasis on continuous learning will challenge and engage our fellow researchers and academics, inspiring them to keep pushing the boundaries of their knowledge and understanding. Ultimately, this collection of reflections serves as a testament to the iterative nature of research and the transformative power of critical self-reflection. It is a reminder that each study, no matter how small, has the potential to contribute to a larger understanding and bring about positive change in the world.

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