

## 「スロー・プロフェッサーを目指して：大学における スピード文化への挑戦」

### The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy

Berg, M. & Seeber, B. K. (2016). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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The topic of the book is all too familiar with those of us in the academe for some time, whether tenured or non-tenured. In *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, Mary Berg and Barbara Seeber, both professors in the humanities, let us eavesdrop on their serious “conversations” over the shared concerns about the well-being of university professors in the academe increasingly taken over by a corporate model of governing and efficiency-driven organizations, that could have otherwise contributed to much happier and productive academic life. Three common areas of the academe, i.e., teaching, research, and collegiality, are addressed in separate chapters where the authors attempt to apply the *Slow Food Movement* to make professors to feel better and be equipped with alternative views and skills necessary to survive in the increasingly stultifying environment.

Back in 1986, the Slow Food Movement began as a benign protest, in the backdrop of the first McDonald’s Golden Arches in Rome, Italy, against the devastating

rise of fast food industries in the globalizing context. The movement proliferated mostly throughout Europe and North America via non-profit organizations, networks, campaigns, projects, and initiatives in the 1990s. The slow food philosophy was to recover the older, traditional way of doing things that emphasize quality over quantity while reconnecting ends, mind and body. However, when applied to the field of higher education, it is not simply challenging the nature of capitalistic, inorganic culture of the academe. In “The Slow Professor Manifesto,” Berg and Seeber are clear in the role of individual university professors in the corporate university, “We envisage Slow Professors acting purposefully, cultivating emotional and intellectual resilience. By taking the time for reflection and dialogue, the Slow Professor takes back the intellectual life of the university” (Preface, p. xviii). Similar to the beginning of the Slow Food Movement, Berg and Seeber imply the menace stemming the corporate culture of speed in the academe, cautioning

against the neoliberal, capitalistic trend for faster and efficient outputs for faculty members.

Nonetheless, while the above “Manifesto” addresses the need to return to what the intellectual life of university professors is supposed to represent, it focuses mostly on traditional approaches (in subsequent chapters) to promoting faculty well-being with the work-life balance, reduced teaching, more time for thinking and reflection, and more collegial interactions in the academe, but does not address systemic issues on how to change the “culture of speed.” In addition, the “Manifesto” is not backed up with strong evidence in the empirical literature although the authors claim that the corporate university has been driven excessively by “evidence-based” findings. It can be argued, however, that both narratives and testimonials by professors are hardly convincing in their approaches to providing suggestions for dealing with the corporate culture. It is also interesting to note that their book is necessarily and carefully made short because university professors would be too busy to read more than 100 pages other than the research literature in their own fields. By this, it implies that they want their readers (those in the academe) to continue in their hurried life.

In addition, as most of the readers for the current *Educational Studies* reside in Asia, we need to ask, “To what extent are the suggestions offered in the Slow Professor Manifesto relevant and valid in the East Asian context?” As in Europe and the United States, many of the higher education institutions in Asia have gone rabidly through “academic reforms” mainly due to globalization and societal mobility under the influence of neoliberalism and capitalism. These new trends include teaching courses in interdisciplinary fields such that the courses are internationally competitive and accessible via internet technology, learning new skills in pedagogy, classroom management, governance and administration, among other things (Sasao & Hatta, 2016). Hence, faculty well-being has been seriously compromised, with the

rise of mental health concerns including job burnout and frustration. As such, many of the messages found in *The Slow Professor* seem relevant, thereby offering promises and a sense of hope if some faculty members have been exposed to the slow philosophy already and have been practicing in the academe. Nonetheless, in traditionally non-English speaking institutions of higher education, these new trends in East Asia put faculty members under duress in performing their daily routines such as teaching and supervising students in English, and doing global collaborative research, thereby resulting in unfair and inadequate academic outputs for parties involved. Hence, an old-fashioned but vicious cycle of “publish or perish” sets in especially for younger faculty members in the academe.

For more healthy teaching practices, Berg and Seeber propose that our teaching should not focus on evidence-based learning outcomes, abhorring to enforce the unmeasurable into the measurable. Instead, our teaching should be based on joy. In a way, their philosophy is similar to that of social-emotional learning (SEL) (Durlack, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2016) but the latter has a strong emphasis on using evidence-based practice, thus gaining its widespread trend in education across the United States, Europe, and some parts of East Asia. Their proposed approach based on the Slow Professor Manifesto may not be relevant for some academic fields because individuals define a sense of joy differently.

Also, in terms of their proposal on research practice, “slowing down is an ethical choice” (p. 59). Berg and Seeber argue that the slow philosophy must induce a real change in the corporate fast culture of research conceptualization, implementation, and production, but instead that we need to take time to contemplate, connect, and produce in a spirit of community life in the academe. This is an admirable notion and suggestion, but again it does seem to vary depending on academic fields.

Condoning that Berg and Seeber are both professors

in the tradition of humanities, I would give them the benefits of the doubt as far as their warm suggestions for making it a joy to teach and do research in Chapter 4 on collegiality and community by developing a tighter sense of community in the academe. As a community psychologist, I appreciate the message of the concluding chapter since good teaching and research come only through continued conversations with other colleagues including these authors when a book project like *The Slow Professor* was completed. They further argue that “[t]alking with others made clear to us that many of us are searching for meaningful exchange about what it feels like to be an academic in the corporate university, and it drove home the fact that the corporate university actively militates against us having these exchanges” (p. 85).

Although Berg and Seeber seem to argue for the Slow Professor Manifesto to be applied at the level of individual faculty members, not necessarily at the systemic or organizational level, but I would think that faculty well-being in the corporate university could benefit as well by applying the Slow Principle in academe governance, and learning and teaching practice for students and faculty at multiple levels of socially-embedded contexts in the academe.

As a conclusion, I recommend this short book despite some of my not-so-positive comments above because of the authors’ important re-focus and suggestion for the often-ignored phenomenon of faculty stress and well-being, especially in Asia where academic work is still valued and very much part and parcel of the young mind in the ever globalizing and challenging world. After all, the faculty job is fun, but not necessarily so always (cf. Schwarzbach, 2019).

## References

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