

Foreword - Getting Started in Physics Education Research: Research Traditions within PER

This issue of “Getting Started in PER” is a rather unique collection of papers, and so some special words of introduction and context are warranted. This issue had its start with a conversation between the three of us at an AAPT meeting a couple of years ago. Amy had been reflecting upon the processes she had gone through as she transitioned from being a graduate student in one research group to a faculty member in another. That transition encouraged her to think about research questions, research methodologies, the breadth of PER in general, and her workspace within it in a broader sense. While the details of her story are, of course, specific to her growth as a researcher, many themes resonated with Charles and Kathy, both in reflecting on their own careers, and in recalling conversations with friends and colleagues in the field. It can be difficult to see beyond the specifics of one’s early research, and many of us could not have possibly predicted the ways in which future opportunities and interests reshaped the ways we think about PER and contribute to it.

To choose the perspectives for this issue, we asked the PER community, through postings on common listservs, to suggest both people whose stories they wanted to read and particular research traditions that they wanted represented in the volume. We are very grateful to the large response we received from the community and the way it shaped the product. We used this input to issue invitations to researchers with a variety of backgrounds, experience, and research foci. In these invitations, we explained to the individuals why the community wanted to hear from them and also encouraged them to “share their story.” Most of these people agreed to send us manuscripts, which then went through the peer review process.

Given the nature of this endeavor, these papers are very different from the typical PER publication – a fact that many authors and reviewers commented on during the process. We would like to thank the authors and the reviewers for venturing outside of their comfort zones to make this product possible. The resulting issue contains five diverse papers, in which we see both glimpses into the “earlier days” of PER and challenges to us for PER’s future. All give insight to the ways in which a researcher’s views can change with experience. It is this insight – those moments when we hope readers will think, “Oh, I wish I had realized *that* a lot sooner in my career!” - that we think makes this group of papers especially appropriate for this collection.

On a personal note, Charles and Kathy would like to thank Amy for inspiring this issue and for the many hours she put in as guest editor. It is not an overstatement at all to say that this would have not happened without her.

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