



The Shared Mic is inspired, recorded, and produced on Treaty 6 Territory. Treaty 6 Territory is the traditional territory of the Plains Cree, Woodland Cree, Beaver Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Metis, Nakota Sioux and many others whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries. We are just beginning to understand the significance of the land and want to ensure we honour the people and place. Today, this land is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Eric: Hi, welcome to The Shared Mic! I'm Eric.

Salima: And I'm Salima! Welcome to another episode.

Eric: Today we have two guests who are currently working at the University of Alberta: Jennifer and Maryanne. Jennifer is an Assistant Professor with the Faculty of Education. Maryanne is the Associate Dean of Undergrad Programs and Services in the Faculty of Education.

Salima: Jennifer and Maryanne will be talking about their experiences during their academic careers.

Jennifer: What made you decide to go into academia?

Maryanne: Jennifer, that's a really interesting question. So, I can always remember wanting to be a teacher from very, very early years and playing school and being the teacher in those situations. So, when I finished my B-Ed, I went back to teach and then came back into the University to complete my masters.

It was during my masters that I was offered a TA position. I just loved that. Loved teaching the older students and interacting with colleagues, and I was involved in a few research projects at that time. So, after my masters, I did a little more teaching and then I went back to finish my PhD.

Then after my PhD, I was offered a sessional position and I taught session only and researched in that position. Following that, for a few years I was offered a full time faculty position. So I think it came probably somewhat naturally from teaching in junior high teaching and senior high, and then moving on to teach at the university. So, yeah. How about you? What made you decide to go into academia?



Jennifer: For me, it was a really gradual progression. I would say when I was younger, I had no real thoughts of going into academia. What I wanted to do was travel. And so out of my undergraduate degree, I became an ESL teacher overseas. I did that for a few years but I really only had an undergraduate arts degree in English and political science, which doesn't really qualify you to be an English teacher as a second language.

And I had had a vague idea that I might go to law school one day when I decided to get serious. But then I was teaching a class in Prague actually and it was a great class, and I just had this sort of epiphany and I thought, "you know what? You don't have to be a lawyer. You could just keep doing this. You love this."

Then my next thought was, "well, if I'm going to do this as a career, I should probably learn how." And so I came back to Alberta and I took a master's degree in teaching English as a second language.

Even then I hadn't planned and I did some teaching in Edmonton, and I went overseas again and taught overseas. While I was in my master's degree, I had a professor who I had a position with as a research assistant and I loved working on projects with her.

And I continued to work on projects with her after I graduated. And I realized that along with teaching, I really loved research. And so at some point I thought, "you know, teaching is great, but I think it would be really a good challenge to do a PhD and maybe try to go into academia." So, it was sort of a long progression for me.

Maryanne: And I guess just to follow up on that, have you always lived in--you were saying, you know, that you've done traveling in Prague, but for the rest of the time, have you been in Edmonton?--How did Edmonton contribute to your choice as an academic?

Jennifer: I was born and raised as a young child just outside of Red Deer and then my family moved around Alberta quite a lot. So I lived in Chestermere, which is on the East side of Calgary. I lived in Cochrane for a year. I did high school in Fort McMurray and then really I came to Edmonton to do my undergraduate degree. But as is the case with people from Fort McMurray, a lot of my friends from there actually ended up in Edmonton.

I ended up living--I lived in Japan for a couple of years, in South Korea for a couple of years, in Prague. I did my PhD in Montreal, but always when I came back, I would come back to Edmonton. And so even though I wasn't really raised in Edmonton, it feels like my hometown now. And so when I was doing my PhD--actually my big dream was that I would end up getting to get a job at U of A--when I finished my PhD.



Jennifer (cont'd): It was incredibly lucky that that happened because it's pretty rare we get to choose (as academics) where we're going to work in terms of universities. I'm in applied linguist and jobs in applied linguistics come up pretty rarely. You ended up going where you have to go. I was very fortunate that a job opened up right when I was graduating and I got to come back to Edmonton.

Maryanne: Wow. That's a great story, Jennifer. And one with a happy ending. I love it, I love it, I love it! So talk to me a little bit about your research. What are you--what projects are you involved in right now and what is your program of research?

Jennifer: Well my main focus is pronunciation, second language pronunciation. So I'm interested in what makes a person easy or difficult to understand when they're speaking in a second language. Specifically, I usually look at people learning English because that's what I taught. So I think I first got interested in it because it was the thing I knew the least about when I was a teacher.

We would do silly little pronunciation exercises when I was a teacher in Japan and I instinctively knew that they probably weren't doing much good but I really didn't know how to make them better. And the professor I worked with in my master's degree was (pause) I came to know a really world famous pronunciation researcher, so I ended up following in her footsteps.

I really like to try to connect what's happening in research in pronunciation to teachers and try to bridge that gap. Right now I'm starting a project working with a colleague of mine looking at a type of training that you can do on the computer. It's called *High-Variability Phonetic Training*. Really it's giving a person a lot of examples of different sounds by different voices to help improve perception of speed of vowels and consonants that then translates into better comprehensibility and pronunciation.

I guess for me, that my big focus is that people often equate having an accent with being difficult to understand. And we know that that's not the case in research and that there's actually only a partial correlation. And so looking at research to help make people easier to understand--but without the idea that you're somehow going to get rid of an accent that's desirable or even possible for an adult learner--that's what I work on. So Marianne, could you tell me about your research and what you're interested in in education?

Maryanne: Jen, my research is an evaluation. My program of research is evaluation and I concentrate on sexual health education and, you know, looking at the gap between intentions and actions and I absolutely loved it.



Maryanne (cont'd): And I've been very fortunate...I've heard you talking about traveling and I took a position in Australia for a while, and in that position I was head of the sexology department there and continued on researching. So it's been a very exciting adventure. And especially now with COVID-19, I'm seeing a lot of similarities between the spread of this virus and the spread of HIV and looking at people and their preventative actions and how that's playing out. And I know there will be implications for sexual behavior coming out of this pandemic as well.

So I'm very interested in that whole area. Then being in the faculty of education--also looking specifically at what's happening in schools--in terms of sexual health education and how we can do a better job of making that more relevant and more meaningful for students and for their parents.

So yeah, that's my area of research and I love the research part because I think that my area of research is very applied. And so the findings and results that I do learn can be easily implemented. It's not the research that sits on the shelf in a book. So, sounds like your research as well!

Jennifer: One of the things I'm really passionate about having been a teacher and then a researcher is trying to generate findings that can be used practically in classrooms. And I know in applied linguistics, even though we say it's applied often a lot of the research isn't really that applicable to classroom settings. Your research, it really made me think back to my sex education classes in junior high and high school. And so...is that something that your research would influence? The type, the way that type of education is happening?

Maryanne: Yes, yes. And so some of my findings and results were used in the latest curriculum revision that's just happening now in the schools and that's being put on hold. Also yes, for sure--what can be done in schools, you know?

And I'm sure you also do this, Jen, when you're working with the children. They're also, you know, working with the parents and relieving any anxiety that they might have around this area--the sensitivity about it. But it is very exciting to see that when education is provided and followed up on that, there are amazing results in terms of benefits, the sexual health of young people and children.

Jennifer: It's so interesting. I can remember my sex education classes really, really well. I think everyone can cause it's a pretty...it's a pretty...I don't know what the word is. It's just a part of your education



Maryanne: So we've talked about the fun things, the rewarding aspects. When you think about the challenges Jen, and at your point in your career, what are the challenges now and what--have you thought about the challenges going forward?

Jennifer: Hmm, it's a really good question! I think with academia, one thing that can be interesting is you kind of--you go from being a "graduate student" to kind of being dropped into "suddenly you're a professor" and it's a big shift and the way people talk to you changes.

There's a little bit of a trial by fire. You know, being a professor isn't a job where you have sort of a boss that gives you tasks and you do those tasks. You have your teaching assignment, but really it's sort of a "create your own job" and "create your own projects." And that's I think both a really positive thing but it could also be a little bit anxiety-inducing and wondering, "well, how much is enough?"

You always feel like you could be doing more than you're doing. So, kind of figuring out what for me, figuring out exactly what it is that I do as a professor and exactly what my job is. Because so much of it is self-generated and self-created. I think that's been a challenge as sort of a new professor, but I'd like to bounce that question back to you because you probably have some interesting insights because you've been a new professor and now you're in administration as well. So I'd love to hear your comments on that and what you find challenging?

Maryanne: Well, it's interesting because your comments really resonate with me Jen and just even today you know, thinking back over my career. One of the challenges that you've identified and fits with me very well is because our positions are flexible and, you know, we're so privileged to have the opportunities to chart our own direction other than, you know, some things that are put upon us by, you know, the job that we have in terms of teaching and research.

But one of the biggest challenges as I look back over my career has been the number of opportunities and then being able to capsulize those opportunities into the time that I have allotted and not to overextend myself because I can get involved in so many things.

And as you know, being a teacher, we can get involved with the profession. We can involve parents and it just never ends. So what you're saying is important in terms of, you know, plotting out those opportunities. But that's the part that I just find challenging.

Maybe I'm a little bit more wise now, Jen, and picking it up--picking and choosing



Jennifer: Yeah. It can be very hard when you know when any opportunity that comes your way you think, “well, I can't say no to that. That's such a great opportunity. I have to do everything!”

Maryanne: Right.

Jennifer: I'm curious too about your role now that you have a Dean role...how that has been for you and how that changes your perspective?

Maryanne: So again, I've been very honoured and very, very privileged. I've been involved in administration now close to thirty years. One of the most important aspects of that is the people that I work with and work alongside.

And it definitely does change, or has changed my perspective from being a professor moving into administration. I think the main learning for me was when I was a professor, it was largely more about myself and forwarding my research--looking at different methods of teaching different delivery methods. So, I managed the online teaching, you know, earlier in my career just to try it out.

Now in an admin role, my position and my passion now is facilitating other people to meet their goals. So you know, right now I'm only an Associate Dean Jen, I'm not a Dean. So, right now facilitating students. We have 3000 undergraduate students and we place about 2000 students in schools for their student teaching. So my role--and I'm passionate about this--is to help those students to facilitate their success in those schools. So when they leave us with their B-Ed, they will be well-positioned to be teachers in the schools in Alberta and around the world.

Jennifer: That's great. I imagine given your role, you've found the last few months, probably quite busy with student practicums to organize around COVID-19.

Maryanne: Yes. It's very interesting. So I've heard, you know, some of my friends saying, “oh, you know, I'm so bored because I'm working remotely etc.” In my role, COVID-19 has added on--I would say doubled, maybe close to triple the amount of different work I can become involved in and helping progress. You know, student teachers in their movement towards a beginning teacher. How about you? Have you had any impacts?

Jennifer: Well for me the impacts, you know, teaching went online really quickly. And so I'm just finishing up a spring session course that went totally on Zoom and it worked out really well and it ended up being quite fun. But for me, I have to admit, I've had a few times thinking as all of these memos come through about COVID-19 and what the university is doing, I thought, “oh, I feel quite lucky right now that I'm not the one at the top having to figure all of this out and make all of these decisions.



Jennifer (cont'd): How about you? Do you have any travel plans coming up or anything in this atmosphere?

Maryanne: Well I have a few conferences, and they've been postponed until next year. It's interesting...I guess you've traveled a lot and worked in a lot of different places too, Jen. Just the perception or the opinion of academics and the respect and other countries...it's interesting. Did you find any blueprints in your places that you worked?

Jennifer: Well, I wasn't a professor when I was teaching abroad. When my first teaching job was in Japan and I was 22 years old, I did it straight out of my undergrad with the Jet Program--for some people will know it's a pretty popular program. Normally I would have been "Foot-San" as a teacher there. But I think because they were trying to create this friendly atmosphere around me, I was called "Jennifer-San". When I taught at a university in Korea, it was the same thing, but it was "She", so I was "Jennifer-Sshi". I never went as "Foote-Sshi" or "Foote-San" in Prague. I taught business people. And so I was just "Jennifer".

Maryanne: Oh, that's fascinating, very fascinating. And especially in your area you know, pronunciation and things like that. I'm also trying to learn Cree.

Jennifer: Oh, I took it in high school. Now I don't remember very much, but I studied it as well.

Maryanne: Oh. So just you know, these different sounds and the pronunciation...I think as I get older, I'm more inhibited to try and practice this. Like, I'll practice it at home and say all of these words to myself but, you know, if you were my Korean instructor, I would be very hesitant to just verbalize some of these things. So how do you get people to relax when they're learning a different language?

Jennifer: Well, I think it can really depend on the group. Some groups are very comfortable already and very used to using English orally. I've had really varied English teaching experiences. So I used to teach a course at NorQuest college where I taught students who had limited literacy in their first language. And so they were learning literacy in English, but also literacy for the first, you know, many of them spoke or could only read and write in a limited way in their first language. And those students I often found orally were more comfortable.

They were using their English a lot too because they had moved to Canada and were settled. Compared to when you're learning it as a foreign language and you're learning it as a subject--it's a little bit different and often people are shyer. But trying to not harp on too many mistakes is one thing you need to provide correction.

Jennifer (cont'd): But I know for myself, this is more not so much me as an instructor but me as a learner. When I was learning French in Montreal, I had an instructor who would always say, “relax, feel free to make mistakes.” But if you made a mistake she would come down on you so hard, and she'd say things like, “we covered this last week!” Here I was doing a PhD in applied linguistics and I was scared of my French teacher!

Maryanne: As you know, the schools even in Edmonton now are populated with children coming from all over the world, all different parts. And the statistics are evidence of how many children we have in those areas that do not have not only English but even--as you're saying their first language--they may have had an interrupted learning along that and so they don't really have a language. So your work is very important. You mentioned that you do like--and one of your passions is--working with teachers. Do you have any plans currently or in the future to provide some kind of in-service for teachers in that area?

Jennifer: Now that I'm moving into the faculty of education, it would be an interesting area to look at a little bit more and language development in children. There are definitely a lot of challenges for children who come, especially children who come and often have a lot to deal with right? A new culture, often an interrupted education. For some children who are coming as refugees, you know, there's trauma to deal with. Sometimes I just can't even imagine how much those children and their parents and their families are trying to deal with in terms of integrating and they need a lot of support.

Maryanne: I don't know if you've had any experience with this, but there's another asset of Edmonton I know we have...I have a friend that works at the Mennonite Centre. So for those people that are new immigrants into our city you know, there are all kinds of resources that they can access in terms of financial and literacy, et cetera.

Jennifer:

Well, I'm, I've worked with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre. When I was younger I did. I worked on a project with them, but it was actually not related to language so much. It was about racism in the workplace. That was a long time ago. I know there are a lot of really good organizations. Catholic social services as well does a lot for newcomers but I haven't done a lot of work with those organizations except indirectly. I've been on boards and what-not with members of those organizations but they do amazing work. And yeah, that's something I should think about doing. I'm suddenly feeling guilty. I should be doing volunteer work for the Edmonton Mennonite Centre! (Chuckles)



Maryanne: This is another opportunity for you Jen! Remember we were talking about all the opportunities presenting themselves? Can you talk about your past and what has given you support to carry on your journey as an academic?

Jennifer: I've had a lot of support. I think one thing that helps me enormously was having very supportive supervisors when I was a graduate student who helped me, really were invested in me, and helped me that made a big difference. I saw in my PhD in particular, there's a lot of variety and super how students are supervised and how hands on supervisors are. It can make a big difference for students. How about you, I'd like to bounce it back to you?

Maryanne: It's interesting to hear you say that, you know, because you are the younger professor in between the two of us and that those things are still important and it makes me feel really good that they are. You know, especially in this, COVID-19 where we can't necessarily meet face-to-face all the time to give this support and to bounce ideas off. Yeah...that's, what's kept me going. And mentors! I think along with colleagues, I would maybe put those people into two different groups. So I've just had fantastic mentors.

Jennifer: One thing I love about teaching in the university is how many incredibly interesting students we have pass through our classrooms, and students are definitely one of the greatest joys I think in being a professor.

Maryanne: Yes.

Eric: Maryanne had talked about her work with HIV, and that really struck a chord with me having lived through the AIDS crisis in the eighties and the nineties and the similarities between COVID and those early days of AIDS. We didn't know the cause, we didn't know how it was spread but public education was so important and taking proactive steps of looking after yourself. Which meant looking after other people. Which is the same situation we're in now. We now know more about COVID, but it's still the emphasis of "look after yourself" because that's going to look after other people.

Salima: And I think it's interesting that there's this narrative COVID that it's something we've never been through before. But I also think that we can learn from our past experiences and I think that's a really important role for research. And I loved when they talked about applied research and working with and within communities to bring awareness to things we know and the knowledge. And creating knowledge from our history in order to help us navigate uncharted territories. But there are things that we know from the past that can help us move forward. And that's a really nice space for research to be working in



Eric: The Shared Mic is an initiative of Age Friendly Edmonton, which is a project between The City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

Salima: We want to remind our listeners that if you're a senior or you love a senior and you need some information, please call the Senior's Information Phone Line 211 in Edmonton to get connected with organizations and services, please subscribe and tell your friends that they can find us wherever they listen to podcasts! Apple, Google, or Spotify!

Eric: And if you're generous, give us five stars and leave us a comment.

Salima: Of course, stay tuned for our next episode!