Chapter 6: Researcher positionality, power and doctoral research

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Introduction

Acknowledging the everyday challenges of being a full-time teacher, practitioner or indeed anyone carrying out a part-time professional doctorate in education (EdD), this chapter will increase your understanding of your own researcher positionality and the role it plays in mediating the outcomes of your doctoral research. Little is known about the professional tensions teachers, practitioners and doctoral students in general encounter, in relation to their positionality, when carrying out doctoral research particularly within the institutions where they work. By 'researcher positionality' we refer to a researcher's motives, presuppositions and personal history that lead towards, and subsequently influence, a particular inquiry (Caelli et al., 2003). With its focus on researcher positionality this chapter draws attention not just to some of the positionality tensions and dilemmas you may encounter on your doctoral journey, but also to the importance of teacher researchers (and all practitioner researchers) and their role in research knowledge production in general.

We start this chapter by describing elements of our own researcher positionalities we thought relevant when constructing and writing this chapter. This section is then followed by a brief discussion of some of the literature on power, positionality and the importance of teachers as researchers. We go onto provide a small-case study written by Michelle about her own researcher positionality and its relationship to her own doctorate. In the final stages of the chapter we look at the importance of interrogating artificial binaries as a doctoral researcher and the troubled history that practitioner research has had in terms of the way it has, historically, been positioned within academia.

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Acknowledge, understand and critically reflect on the ways in which your methodology, research questions, choices of literature and all elements of the research process are influenced by your researcher positionality;
- Understand how power relations in the research process can ferment the structural and agentic concerns you may have as a doctoral researcher;
- Reflect on how greater awareness of your researcher positionality can increase your critical engagement and evaluation of our work.

> *Reflective question:*
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> *How do your personal and professional experiences influence your research interests and perspectives? In considering this question reflect on your own background, education, cultural experiences and professional journey. Consider how these elements influence your doctoral study, the research questions you are creating and the methodologies you choose.*

Our Positionality as authors of this chapter

To write a chapter about positionality while not acknowledging our own would be contradictory and disingenuous. By way of introducing this concept to you, what follows are just some of our biographical details that we consider significant when considering and critically discussing our choice of theme for this chapter.

Gerry:

Clutching my impostor syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978) close to my heart, I co-write this chapter as a researcher, author and London-born former schoolteacher who studied for my own first degree in social sciences at a polytechnic at the tender age of 30, having left school at 16. During that time, I was a musician, shop assistant, barman, cleaner, van driver, and many other things to tedious to include in this paragraph. I spent two years backpacking to many of the destinations my future students would come from, although I was not to know this during my time travelling. Teaching in schools and colleges in London's East End, my students, from predominantly Asian, northern African and African Caribbean backgrounds would be classified by many as working class. If I had ever asked them, my students would almost certainly have described me as 'white', male and middle class. Yet, as is the case with most labels, such terms do little in the way of providing an adequate description of the intricacies of both biography and identity. Throughout my university career, my choice of research topic constantly reflects, in part, those intricacies. As a (mainly) qualitative researcher, positioning has also occurred through my disciplinary socialisation (Ray, 1999) via a Masters and PhD in the sociology of education, both of which focused on teacher identity, values and professional development. This socialisation emphasised not only philosophical and methodological underpinnings of a variety of research approaches, but also a critically theoretical understanding of education systems.

Michelle:

I contribute to this article as a white, middle-class female who holds multiple and intertwined identities as an educator. My current job title as senior lecturer in education belies a professional life characterised by a kind of 'betwixt and between' liminality (Turner, 1969) and my various identities as a teacher educator, my emic-etic status (Pike, 1967) as a doctoral teacher-researcher and as executive board member on a national

subject association (The Media Education Association). I currently train teachers and run a PGCE in Further Education whilst completing a doctorate in education focussed on the curriculum reform of A Level Media Studies. However, the majority of my twenty-three-year career has been spent as a teacher of Media Studies in inner city sixth form colleges in Leicester and west London. Most of my students at these colleges came from ethnically diverse and low socio-economic status backgrounds, very different to my own school days, which were latterly spent as a 'scholarship girl' at an independent girls' school in the northeast of England. Since moving to work in higher education, I have often found myself repeating the adage 'once a teacher, always a teacher' which perhaps is my way of expressing the discomfort and feelings of imposter syndrome that accompany such a transition from the classroom to academia. As these biographical 'moving parts' coalesce, it presents an opportunity to critically reflect on the role positionality plays as a rich qualitative research tool.

Reflective question:

"EMIC" and "ETIC" are concepts derived from the linguistic terms "phonemic" and "phonetic". Take a moment to consider how both concepts might be useful to you when critically reflecting about the impact your own positionality has on your doctoral research. Initially associated with anthropology, an EMIC approach to research is about understanding cultures from the inside, using the perspectives of the people within those cultures, while the ETIC approach is about examining cultures from an external, more objective standpoint, seeking to find commonalities and differences between different cultures. How engaging and relevant are these terms when considering carrying out research within an institution you are familiar with and the extent to which you can interrogate that sense of familiarity when making assumptions about what you see, hear and understand during your data collection and its analysis?

Power and positionality

The notion that the process of generating knowledge through fieldwork is inevitably affected by the social location of the researcher in question is not new. Geographers, anthropologists and all manner of researchers within the social sciences have drawn attention to the powerful role a researcher's positionality can play in all stages of the research process (Rose, 1997; Sundberg, 2003; Wee Teo, 2014). Drawing attention to both the depth and breadth of literature on the contested nature of power goes beyond the remit of this chapter. The many faces of power and the extent to which it can be conceived as solid or fluid, visible or invisible are just some of its many historically disputed characteristics (see Arendt & McCarthy, 1995; Boulding, 1989; Lukes, 1974; Millet, 1970). Best (2003), for example, argues that while the researcher 'holds power within the field, the issue of position is a fluid construct shaped and reshaped through

data collection' (in Pope & Patterson, 2019, p. 81). Drawing on Foucault (1981), Ball (2013) conceives power as a 'shifting and changing interactive network of social relations among and between individuals, groups, institutions and structures that are political, economic and personal' (Ball, 2013, pp. 29–30). In research addressing representation, positionality and power in feminist research, Hoskins (2015) adopts Ball's conceptualisation highlighting the complex and two-way nature of power relations in the research process in which the flow of power changes before, during and after completion of the process (p. 397). It is this dynamic and fluid conceptualisation of power that informs many of the ideas in this chapter and highlights both the structural and agentic concerns that you, as a researcher, can reflect on when carrying out your own doctoral research.

Positionality, like power, is a concept that is highly contested. Social attributes of class, gender, sexuality, race, caste, etc. are commonly cited elements that 'mark a researcher's relational position in society' (Zhao, 2017, p. 185). These elements are said to be situated in an 'intersectional space where class, race, gender and ethnicity interplay in the construction of stance, identity, knowledge, relationships, values, dispositions and actions' (Wee Teo, 2014, p. 382). As Brisbois and Almeida (2017) note:

> The importance of accounting for the researcher's embodied social location is by now acknowledged as an important component of rigorous qualitative methodologies, and data is understood to be co-constructed through particular research encounters (p. 15).

However, it is not just at the individual level that you can witness different positionality plays in progress. Disciplines themselves can also be subject to positioning at the institutional, national and global levels within a history that has been dominated, in the main, by the prioritisation of 'hard' [sic] scientific and technical rationality over the 'softer' social sciences, humanities and, of course, education. The relatively recent reduction in the number of arts and humanities subjects in the English national curriculum (DfE, 2014) is just one of many national evidence markers of this hierarchy. Acknowledging this hierarchy is important because researcher positioning can also occur through disciplinary socialisation (Ray, 1999). The student disciplinary experience, you have had at school, college, and university can influence not only the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of a variety of research approaches you may be considering, but also, in the case of education, the extent to which a critically informed theoretical understanding of education systems is deemed possible and/or desirable. This point is significant when considering the relative lack of research funds targeting the field of education and the impact this can have on the student experience in general.

Researcher positionality is also, itself, often positioned within an 'insider–outsider' dichotomy that can, in some cases, be somewhat deterministic while presenting a

simplified account of fieldwork dynamics, a point highlighted by Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009):

> Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. It seems paradoxical, then, that we would endorse binary alternatives that unduly narrow the range of understanding and experience. (p. 60)

Reflective question:

Describing a researcher as being either an 'insider' or an 'outsider' is common practice but just how useful is this bifurcation in the first place? Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) synthesis of 181 studies on boundary crossing spanning healthcare, technology, science and teaching points to four mechanisms of learning (identification, coordination, reflection and transformation) as people move from and between different professional contexts. These mechanisms serve to both problematise and interrogate the usefulness of insider–outsider dichotomies while also shedding light on their contextual specificities. Take a moment to think about when you might have considered yourself an 'insider' and see to what extent, based on what you have read so far, you can problematize that description of yourself.

Finally, if the identity of the researcher is significant to discussions regarding researcher positioning, so too is the effect of fieldwork, particularly where, in some cases, one might be privy to sensitive and at times emotionally charged dialogue. As a writer this can, for example, present issues about how one represents these experiences (Lather, 1991).

[Designers – this is the start of the case study section]
Real Life Case Study: Nearing the end of my doctoral journey by Michelle Thomason

Embarking on a doctorate in education, I, like many others, grapple with a dual identity as a practitioner and researcher. However, the term "dual identity" falls short in capturing the intricate and often 'messy' interplay between these roles. As I near the end of my doctoral journey, I perceive my dual identity of teacher and researcher as bookends on a metamorphic continuum on which I oscillate, sometimes uncomfortably, and often wildly. However difficult or unpredictable this might be it, nevertheless, defines my positionality and underpins my research. I draw, in this section of the book chapter, on some of the writing from my doctoral thesis in the hope that this may help you write about your own researcher positionality in your thesis.

Professional 'Noticing'

My research journey began as a teacher, amidst the radical curriculum reforms of A' Level Media Studies under the UK Conservative government in 2014. Engaging with an online community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) of media teachers of which I was also a member, I observed shared discontent with the new curriculum's stipulations. These online interactions became the impetus for my research and, framed by a "discourse of derision" against Media Studies (Barker, 1997, Buckingham and Sefton Green 1994, McDougall 2005, Laughey, 2011, Buckingham, 2017), my 'noticing' or 'professional vision' (Konig et al, 2022) propelled my central thesis in which I argue the curriculum reform of Media Studies is not compatible with how the subject is epistemologically constructed, and that this position is also shared by other media teachers and actors invested in media education.

Autoethnographic starting points

Whilst my research is not autoethnographic, it is not possible to completely extricate how the biographic tapestry of my background, biases, values, perspectives, and so forth, impact on the research design decisions I make. Therefore, awareness of positionality - and how it might modulate according to context - is absolutely crucial to the integrity of the research design as well as understanding how it may intentionally or unintentionally impact how I approach and interrogate my data.

My research takes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and interpretive research like this 'begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher' (Denzin, 1986 p. 12). It is therefore important to make explicit how the world is disclosed to me as a researcher and the inherent subjectivities and biases that contains, particularly as there is very little in qualitative research that is value-free (Carr, 2000, p71). There is well documented methodological validity for embracing researcher bias in academic work and I have leveraged them in my research as what I have termed 'autoethnographic starting points' to explore the complexities, heterogeneities and contradictions of the research object and what this discloses, rather than the search for any kind of positivistic outcome, incommutable 'truth' or vindication of a particular ideological position. Awareness of my positionality is, thus, central to how I (rather oxymoronically)

objectively attempt to observe the subjectivities of the research object - in all its variegation.

A Teacher's 'Subject Story'

Positionality is inextricably linked to the researcher's own personal experiences and an important starting point is to examine how this has impacted the research journey. Brooks (2016, p.116) states that 'a teacher's subject story can play a key part in professional identity, bringing coherence to professional practice' and thus, a closer examination of this was key to understanding my own positionality and how it might in turn orient my research. Moreover, acknowledging my own identity and background was an important step in establishing the 'trustworthiness' of my research (Basit, 2013).

Perhaps because Media Studies has been a much-maligned subject, that it belongs to a subversive academic tradition or that, in some institutions, it does not carry the same value as other more traditional subjects, is an example of disciplinary positioning that we mentioned earlier in this chapter. This positioning brands the subject with a very particular identity. This branding appears to inspire many of those who teach it with a strong set of values, beliefs and loyalty to the subject. As I go on to outline further, Media Studies' democratic appeal resonated with me because it challenged elitist norms in education and this gives some context and rationale for my epistemic stance and methodological choices in the research.

My 'Subject Story'

Having completed a PGCE in English and Communications, my teaching career began in 2000 at a large sixth form college in Leicester. A few years later, I transitioned to a similarly diverse, non-selective sixth form in inner London, set up as the country's first sixth form school by a Labour government. In both colleges, Media Studies was a popular option, buoyed by a curriculum balancing practical and theoretical components.

My own school education, in part, was as a 'scholarship girl' in an all-girls Church school. Traditional subjects comprised the curriculum, and 'new' subjects like Media Studies were neither available nor approved of. The eschewing of these elitist ideas most

certainly had a bearing on why I later decided to pursue a career as a media teacher, even if I was not completely conscious of this at the time.

Over time I became more aware of and drawn to the democratic power of a subject appealing to young people. Through its contemporary and relevant nature, I recognized the subject' potential to validate students' experiences, particularly those from non-traditional and/or disadvantaged backgrounds. A' Level Media Studies offered autonomy in text selection, responsiveness to current events, a substantial practical component, and rewarded group collaboration and creativity. However, governmental criticisms of the subject along with its politicised pursuit of rigour in the curriculum generated anxiety and discontent among media teachers, including myself. But it also spotlighted a research opportunity – a chance to interrogate the situation from a research perspective and to find out 'what is going on here' (Agar, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Wolcott, 1990).

The above is just a small snapshot of biographical and contextual detail. It provides some idea of my positionality and how this explains the genealogy of the central thesis of my research, but it also gives an indication of the subjectivities that underpin my research design decisions.

The Researcher as Insider/Outsider

My dual status as a teacher-researcher provides the ethnographic sensibilities of the 'insider' and, as such, a central aim of my research is to construct a densely textured thick description (Ryle, 1949; Geertz, 1973) of the research object.   In other words, 'to understand what is happening, what it means, and its significance to the social group from an emic (native, insider) perspective rather than from a [purely] *etic* (external, outsider) perspective' (Grenfell, 2012, p. 9). MacNaughton et al (2010, p.4) posit that where research seeks to describe or understand 'lived experiences', approaches that encourage complexity and diversity in the research data should be preferential. Thus, to explore the tonalities of these 'webs of significance' (Geertz, 1973) an approach is required that is ethnographic and interpretive in nature and one that also optimises the privileges that my *emic* status offers alongside my position as a researcher.

Whilst this dual role has its advantages, its affordances are not always comfortable or straightforward (Hamdan, 2009). Grappling to maintain a balance of both authenticity and objectivity between my dichotomous roles of passive observer/active participant on the online communities of practice I was researching, I had to make strategic decisions about which role to assume and when, as well as whether to disclose my biases to participants in order to foster richer data collection. This view is reinforced by Holmes (2020) who suggests that being aware of how you are perceived by your participants aids researcher responsiveness. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasise the importance of researchers being reflexive throughout their research.

As I draw this case study and section of the chapter to a close, this type of iterative reflexivity, I believe, is key to considering positionality because it creates a 'golden thread' for researchers to regularly attend to their intuition and subjectivities in the research journey. In turn, this allows the researcher to remain close to the object of research and embrace or mitigate for biases.

[Designers this is the end of the case study section]

> **Reflective question:**
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> *Positionality, for Wee Teo (2014), is a latent force that only becomes apparent to self and others when an outward action is expressed to show the political stance of an individual (p. 384). Can you think of any moments before and during your doctoral journey where the values of another person/s or institution/s have influenced an aspect of the development of your study? To what extent can or should your methodology take into consideration these sorts of micro-political influences?*

The importance of interrogating artificial binaries as a doctoral researcher

It is hoped that this chapter can help you foster an awareness of the significance of researcher positionality as a phenomenon that, if brought to the surface, can help develop your levels of critical reflection and reflexivity during the research process, including the writing up of the thesis. Earlier in the chapter, we mentioned Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) four mechanisms of learning (identification, coordination, reflection and transformation) as people move from and between different professional contexts. For those of you carrying out research for your doctorates, this learning encompasses 'new

understandings, identity development, change of practices and institutional development' (p. 142), albeit in varying degrees. The research you are carrying out for your professional doctorates in education spans academic and practitioner boundaries, making many artificial binaries (e.g. practitioner and academic knowledge; theory and practice; 'insider'/'outsider') redundant. If, for example, you are carrying out your research in an institution in which you are employed or strongly associated with, you can find your research being positioned by five sets of values:

1. those of your participants;
2. your own professional values;
3. the values of institutional gatekeepers (e.g. university ethics committees and school head teachers);
4. your emerging values as a doctoral researcher;
5. those of your doctoral supervisor/s.

As you try-on-for-size new emerging values born from the doctoral experience, this polyvalorisation can inform and enrich your doctoral experience but it is also a process that can create 'dilemmas' (Berlak & Berlak, 1983) if and when some of those values clash or become mutually incongruent. An example of the ways in which values can, sometimes unexpectedly, clash and influence the doctoral trajectory can be seen with Rania, a participant in published research I carried out about doctoral students (Czerniawski, 2023). Rania, from Tunisia, was a History teacher working in a private school in London. She had completed her data collection for her doctoral study on professional socialisation with a group of teachers in England and Tunisia and during the interview acknowledged some of the problems she experienced accessing her sample:

> The difficulties I anticipated were in fact opposite to what I expected. Teachers in the school where I work [in England] including our research lead and my supervisor at university were really helpful and I quickly found and interviewed teachers in England. Back home [Tunisia] was a different story … I think they [school leaders] were sceptical about my research and as a young female I felt I lacked authority in their eyes. I got there but it was so very hard to be taken seriously, as a researcher [Rania—History Teacher]

Rather than a straightforward bifurcation between insider and outsider, Rania's situation can be seen in terms of a positionality that possesses a shifting locus (Wee Teo, 2014).

Her various gatekeepers (e.g. head teachers, research lead, heads of department) in both countries had the power to grant her access to her potential research sample. However, during her interview, she talked about how she felt her 'age, religion and gender' mediated, in different ways and with varying degrees of ease, that potential access to her sample. Earlier in this chapter we were critical of the deterministic 'insider/outsider' bifurcation. The problematic nature of this distinction for students like Rania collecting empirical data in more than one country is apparent in the quote above.

Spaces of betweeness

Instead of an 'insider/outsider' bifurcation, in this chapter we prefer to draw on 'spaces of betweenness' (Nast, 1994) to describe a researcher's in-between position with regard to the 'manifold possible permutations of identity categories' (Zhao, 2017, p. 186) that many doctoral students may encounter when carrying out their research. Such a distinction captures the degrees of ambiguity, fluidity and uncertainty that many doctoral students acknowledge as ingredients making up their own researcher positionalities and emerging identities as researchers (Czerniawski 2023). Evidence of this identity work (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; McAlpine et al., 2009) draws attention to the levels of agency practitioner-researchers experience when carrying out research in institutions in which they work. These layers are often associated with the complexity of the decisions involved in their doctoral research including, in some cases, the choice of focus of their doctoral studies. A teacher, for example, that might be carrying out their doctorate in a school where they work may find themselves caught between conflicting values of what kind of study they would like to do, what would be most useful to them professionally and what their school believed would be in the institution's best interests. For Will, a Head of Department in a secondary school, these factors were significant in decisions he had to take in relation to his doctorate. While his school encouraged teachers to carry out research, Will's head teacher was 'uncomfortable' with his topic (Fundamental British Values):

> He [the head teacher] could pull the plug on it [the research] at any time, which
> was something the ethics committee got me to build in when I was seeking
> approval … I did feel at that time there was a specific result they were looking for,

to the point where [name of head teacher] really wanted my research to go in a particular direction [Will—Humanities Head of Department]

The significance of certain key individuals (e.g., head teachers, university ethics committee members, doctoral supervisors) consisted in the ways in which they had the capacity to be reality definers (Bryan, 2004). In other words, some individuals who are involved in the doctoral trajectory of the student have greater or lesser power to define what these teachers can and cannot research, and, more importantly how they should go about it. In Will's case, his positionality was situated within the relational boundaries of his values, those of his head teacher and those of his university's ethics committee. The ramifications of this cocktail of definers meant that Will left his school. He did, however, carry on with his research once employed in a different school.

> *Reflective question:*
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> *How does your identity and positionality impact your relationships with participants, gate keepers and 'reality definers' within your research context? Examine aspects of your identity (e.g., your race, gender, socioeconomic status and educational background) and how that might affect your interactions with others in terms of power dynamics, trust and communication.*

Practitioner Research – a troubled history

Practitioner research, itself, has and still is positioned by the 'disenfranchisement' of teachers within traditional educational research communities (Elliott, 1988, p. 157). This inequitable relationship was one identified by Rudduck (1987) claiming that:

> There is an urgent need to analyse the structures that govern the production and distribution of research knowledge and the right to engage in research acts. Teacher research is, at one level, a means of countering the hegemony of academic research which teachers are often distanced by. (Rudduck, 1987, p. 5, cited in Hammersley, 1993, p. 434)

And yet the championing of teachers as researchers has a significant tradition internationally and with many powerful voices. 'Classroom inquiry', 'action research', 'close-to-practice research' and 'teacher research' are just some of the terms that have been used, over the last 70 years, to describe, in different ways, school-based research by teachers (Hammersley, 1993; Rudduck, 1987; Wyse et al., 2018). Early advocates of this

type of research activity included Corey (1949) in the United States, described by Hammersley as 'one of its most influential advocates' (Hammersley, 1993, p. 425), and Stenhouse (1975) in the UK who perceived practitioner research as an invaluable mechanism to improve teaching and learning. The growth of school academy chains (in England) has been accompanied by a renewed interest in school-based practitioner research, accelerated in 2016 by the growth of 'Research Schools' set up in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Institute for Effective Education and backed by the Department for Education (DfE). The policy intention has been for such schools to be 'recognized as leaders in bridging between education research and everyday classroom practice' (EEF, 2017). This intention and its subsequent mediation, along with the emergence of new research-related job roles in schools (e.g. research leads and research advocates) and the rise of grassroots teacher-led organisations, e.g. researchED, also raises important questions around the purpose of educational research and by whom, why, how and for whom it is carried out. Nevertheless, these developments, in the main, are to be welcomed. However, the extent to which full-time teachers can develop a researcherly 'habit of mind' (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2016) while carrying out their part-time doctorates will in part, depend on their employment context. While many schools in the UK are increasingly becoming research-active, finding space and time to research can be a huge ask when many teachers understandably view their primary role as being to teach pupils. Layder (1994) writes that 'resources generate power which underpins a person's ability to effect change in his or her social circumstances' (p. 138). Authoritative resources refer to non-material factors, i.e., positions of authority and power which empower one set of human beings over another (Layder, 1994). Researcher positionality is, for many researchers carrying out research in institutions in which they work, often caught between structural and agentic tensions associated with these resources.

Reflective question:

How do you navigate potential conflicts of interest between your role as a practitioner and a researcher? This question addresses the ethical considerations and potential conflicts of interest that may arise when the researcher's responsibilities and priorities as an educator intersect with their research objectives. It is important to consider to what extent you can (or should) maintain objectivity and integrity in both roles.

The introduction in England of government Postgraduate Doctoral Loans in 2018 has added momentum to the growth in popularity of professional doctorates in general and in education specifically. Yet the creation of 'research leads', mentioned earlier, in some schools in England in recent years has also been accompanied by debates over the extent to which all teachers in schools can and should be involved in research and what is meant by 'research-informed' teaching in the first place (Bennett, 2016; McAleavy, 2016).

Research leads in schools may well ask themselves to what extent they are leading engagement with—or engagement in—research.

These debates and the emerging spaces in which they occur exemplify a form of macro-positioning by challenging the validity of current UK university-research auditing mechanisms such as the Research Excellence Framework (the 'REF'), which (at the time of writing) does not embrace research activity in schools but does, in varying degrees, acknowledge professional doctorates in that framework. They also challenge more conservative conceptions of research capability and capacity that have traditionally embodied more 'scientific'/positivist ideals. Prior to embarking on an EdD many teachers in schools do not necessarily have Master's-level qualifications and they often have little or no research experience, which is one of the many reasons they choose an EdD over a PhD ('Stage 1' providing the academic capital needed before embarking on the thesis stage). Acknowledging the value practitioner-based research has in professional learning, Murray (2011) has called for the 're-framing of the place of research in induction and professional development in teacher education' (p. 22). For policy-orientated logical coherence, this reframing must take place if 'school-led', research-informed teaching remains the government's objective. This does, however, pose a wicked policy problem (Roberts, 2000) for any government whose research-auditing mechanisms only address research outputs from universities.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Summary of the chapter

- This chapter draws attention to some of the tensions and dilemmas you may encounter on your doctoral journey in relation to your own emerging researcher positionality.
- For doctoral students in education, awareness of their researcher positionality and its influence on the research process increasingly forms an important part of defending the thesis.
- Dissonance and discord must not necessarily be viewed negatively. Rather, each can be a powerful tool for nurturing professional autonomy, learning, transformation and continuing critical reflective practice.

This chapter offers complex hope to all doctoral students, many of whom worry profusely about the extent to which they can contribute new knowledge to the field through original doctoral research. Acknowledging, understanding and critically reflecting on the ways in which our methodologies, research questions, choices of literature and all elements of the research process are influenced by our researcher positionality can increase our critical engagement and evaluation of our work. Wisely used, it can also provide the doctoral thesis with a hallmark of uniqueness.

Further Reading:

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