

Power, positionality and practitioner research: Schoolteachers' experiences of professional doctorates in education

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Abstract

The growth, internationally, in professional doctorates over the last 25 years has been well documented, as are the forms, fields and disciplines that such doctorates embrace. Yet relatively little is known about the professional tensions teachers encounter, in relation to their positionality, when carrying out doctoral research in the schools where they work. This paper draws attention, not only to the contribution the Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) makes to research as a whole, but also to the significance of teachers as invaluable members of the research community. Findings will be presented from interviews with 30 senior teachers from schools in England who are carrying out practitioner research as part of their doctoral studies. The paper draws attention to how power relations in the research process ferment the structural and agentic concerns of the participants in this study when discussing their researcher positionality. The scholarly significance of this study is its contribution to knowledge of how schools are increasingly becoming both sites of research and research-rich environments. With its focus on researcher positionality the paper draws attention not just to the tensions and dilemmas these participants encounter on their doctoral journey, but also to the importance of teacher researchers and their role in research knowledge production.

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KEYWORDS

close-to-practice research, practitioner research, professional doctorates, researcher positionality

Key insights**What is the main issue that the paper addresses?**

The main issue this article addresses is knowledge of how schools are increasingly becoming sites of research and the importance of teachers and their role in research knowledge production.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

The main insights are: (a) how power relations in the research process can ferment structural and agentic concerns of doctoral researchers; (b) 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; (c) how greater awareness of our researcher positionality can increase our critical engagement and evaluation of our work.

INTRODUCTION

It is the starting point of this paper that teachers' engagement in educational research contributes not only to their professional development, but to the body of knowledge of the profession and to teaching and learning in general (Loughran, 2014; Willemsse & Boei, 2017). Yet that body of knowledge is more powerful and more authoritative when infused with a critically reflexive awareness of the role that the researcher's positionality has played in its creation. However, relatively little is known about the professional tensions teachers encounter, in relation to their positionality, when carrying out doctoral research in the schools where they work. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of these tensions, for if practitioner research has, in the past, had a troubled history in terms of its status within broader research communities, so too has the professional doctorate within its wider cadre of doctoral cousins (Burnard et al., 2018; Creaton, 2021; Lunt, 2018). Acknowledging these dynamics, and the everyday challenges of being a full-time teacher engaged in a part-time professional doctorate (EdD), this paper aims to increase our understanding of researcher positionality and the role it plays in mediating the outcomes of practitioner enquiry. The paper draws attention not only to the contribution the EdD makes to research as a whole, but also to the significance of teachers as invaluable members of the research community. Findings will be presented from interviews with 30 senior teachers from schools in England who are carrying out practitioner research as part of their doctoral studies. The paper starts with a brief history of professional doctorates before critically discussing literature on power, positionality and the importance of teachers as researchers. After a brief description of the theoretical framework and methodology the findings of this study will be presented, discussed and concluded.

THE GROWTH OF PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

The growth, internationally, in professional doctorates over the last 25 years has been well documented, as are the forms, fields and disciplines that such doctorates embrace (Creaton, 2021; Hawkes & Yerrabati, 2018; Poultney, 2017; Pratt et al., 2014). Often perceived as the proverbial newcomer, Bourner et al. (2000) note in their genealogy of doctorates that early professional doctorates in law, medicine and theology emerged in Paris in the twelfth century. This long history is in stark contrast to the PhD that started from humble origins at the Humboldt University in Berlin in the first part of the nineteenth century (Malloch, 2010). Hawkes and Yerrabati (2018) report that, in recent years, there has been considerable growth in the number of universities in England, and especially the post-1992 institutions, that offer professional doctoral programmes. Across the UK, evidence of this growth exists in several studies (see Bourner et al., 2000; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016), showing a rise in the number of professional doctoral courses from 109 in 1998 to 320 in 2015 (Robinson 2018). The majority of professional doctorates within the UK today are studied part-time, a point emphasised two decades ago by the UK Council for Graduate Education pointing out that the Professional Doctorate in Education (from here onwards referred to as the EdD):

has developed to bring a demonstrably high level of research enquiry to bear within a practical context. This route is particularly relevant for experienced education professionals and is almost invariably undertaken on a part-time basis.
(UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE), 2002, p. 19)

Factors said to influence the emergence of alternative doctoral pathways, such as those under the 'professional doctorate' banner, include the growth of the knowledge economy; the marketisation of education; the rapidly changing role of higher education and its internationalisation; and developments in technology (Kot & Hendell, 2012; Zusman, 2013). Professional doctorates range from the clinical (e.g. those studied for in clinical psychology) to the more research-focused award (e.g. professional doctorates in social work [DSW] and education [EdD]). These doctorates are situated within what Scott et al. (2004) call the 'twilight zone', a place somewhere between the university and workplace often reflecting dissonance between these two cultures of learning (Scott et al., 2004, p. 3). While the structure of professional doctorates varies from university to university and country to country, a two-stage process can characterise these particular doctoral research degrees, with the first stage made up of a taught modular programme and the second concluding with the submission of a research thesis followed by an oral viva. The EdD thesis tends to be slightly smaller in word count (typically, in the UK, somewhere between 40k and 60k) than its PhD counterpart but large enough to encompass the requirements of a doctoral research thesis, i.e. it must be theorised, a substantial independent enquiry contributing new knowledge to the field and assessed for its originality and significance by external examiners (Czerniawski, Pratt & Vigurs, 2017; Jones, 2018; QAA, 2020).

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 article.

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 ferments the findings from this study and highlights both the structural and agentic concerns of the participants in this study when discussing their researcher positionality.

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 we 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 can influence not only the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of a variety of research approaches, 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.

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)

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.

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). Caelli et al. (2003) argue that the positioning of a researcher refers to the researcher's motives, presuppositions and personal history that lead towards and subsequently influence a particular inquiry (Caelli et al., 2003). In light of the discussions so far, it is this conceptualisation of positionality that has been adopted in this study to explore the many complexities unearthed during the discussions I had with my participants. But it is also the definition I choose to deploy when considering my own researcher positionality and its role in this study, a point I will return to in the discussion section of this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In writing this article I return, in part, to the critical realism that was so important to me when embarking on my own doctorate 20 years ago (Archer, 2010; Bhaskar, 1979). In that thesis (Czerniawski, 2007, 2011), carried out as a full-time teacher, I explored the development of teachers' identities in their early careers, emphasising their individual agency but one forged within, often overly deterministic accounts of, globalisation (e.g. Chappell, 1998; Ritzer, 1993). Acknowledging the paradoxical relationship between a focus on positionality and an analytical framework that, in part, draws on critical realist approaches (e.g. Bhaskar's (1979) argument that agents can transform social structures and mediate their effects by agentic action), this study recognises the existence of a social reality, with social structures and currents which have an existence over and above the existence of individual actors. But the study also recognises and champions the significance of teacher agency in the formation of those structures (Layder, 1994). Theoretically framed in this way, this study sheds light on the variety of ways a teacher's researcher positionality is constructed and mediated through the situatedness of becoming a researcher. Such framing acknowledges the importance of teacher research knowledge production, its ability to problematise the efficacy of those structures and its capacity to enrich our understanding of teacher professionalism.

METHODOLOGY

To write about positionality while not acknowledging my own would be contradictory and disingenuous. Clutching my impostor syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978) close to my heart, I write this article as a London-born Professor of Education and 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. Teaching in schools and colleges in London's East End, my students, from predominantly Asian and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, would be classified by many as working class. My appearance would, if I had ever asked them, be almost certainly classified by my students as 'white', male and middle class. Yet, as is the case with most labels, these terms do little in the way of providing an adequate description of someone's biography and identity. I author this article as someone who runs doctorates (EdDs and PhDs) in education and in social work at my university and as someone who sits on various committees belonging to a national learned society (BERA). These are just some of my biographical details that I consider significant when considering and critically discussing my choice of theme for this article and its accompanying research design, analysis and conclusions.

The study has adopted a purposive sampling strategy (Alexander & Winne, 2006) involving 30 teachers who volunteered to take part in the research after an initial social media call via Twitter. These participants were all engaged in doctoral research and, in the main, were in the final stages of their EdD theses. The method of data collection took the form of guided/semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996) carried out by telephone. Informed by the grounded theory tradition associated with Glaser and Strauss (1967), I have used its more recent interpretations (Charmaz, 2006), combining an iterative deductive and inductive thematic analysis while drawing on the theoretical framework described above. Initial open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) forced me, for example, to make analytical decisions about the data (e.g. balancing the epistemic agency of participants with their identification of structures that mediate that agency). Selective/focused coding highlighted more frequently appearing initial codes (e.g. 'value dissonance', 'professional knowledge interrogation' and 'research gate keeping') to sort and conceptualise the data sets (Charmaz, 2006). The dilemma in deciding what data to include was more than balanced by the dilemma of deciding what *not* to include. This latter positionality dilemma, on the part of this researcher, has been termed the 'agony of omission' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 262). The decisions I have therefore made concerning which data to use and which to leave out have been based upon the key themes that have emerged from progressive focusing (Glaser, 1992) and to which I now turn to.

FINDINGS

For many doctoral researchers, the early phases of the doctorate may be associated with feelings of excitement, insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety (Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Morris & Cudworth, 2019). Using metaphors to describe their early experiences as doctoral students, some participants in this study spoke of a 'shock to the system', 'driving into a brick wall at 100 mph' and 'wading in treacle'. In some cases, this led participants to question not just their own roles as teachers but the very foundations of their professional knowledge:

I'm currently at the stage where everything I thought I knew, I don't! I'm in the unravelling stage, which I'm told is perfectly normal [laughing]. I'm apparently never going to feel confident again ever again!

(Rita—Geography Head of Department)

The interrogation of professional knowledge is an essential element in the doctoral process. However, acknowledging my own positionality as both author of this paper and an experienced doctoral supervisor, it is easy to underestimate the dissonances and tensions that teacher-researchers face when juggling between the values they are encouraged to take up within the schools where they work and those they encounter in the readings and doctoral sessions they encounter as a student. Nazia is a deputy head teacher in a primary school in east London exploring the assessment strategies of mathematics specialists in primary schools. In this excerpt she talks about her feelings of insecurity and coping mechanisms during her meetings with her doctoral supervisors:

I'm proud of my work in primary schools, however when you come into a university you feel like small fish in a big pond with individuals who are professors and doctors who do research, you feel intimidated. It takes quite a long time to build a profile of where your ideas lie, and where you see yourself. Sometimes you build an artificial you as a researcher going through the processes for the projects you want to be doing.

(Nazia—Deputy Head Teacher)

Ibarra (2003) argues that the support and collegiality that can be provided by new mentors, role models and professional groups add to the likelihood of wellbeing and success within careers. Yet that sense of wellbeing can be hampered, in the short term, for senior teachers like Nazia, by movement and flux between the workplace and university, between being a senior teaching professional and neophyte researcher. Nazia's 'artificial you' exemplifies identity work, enacted and defended, when her knowledge, values and sense of self are subjected to unfamiliar levels of scrutiny or criticism as part of the doctoral apprenticeship.

In exploring their positionality, participants often highlighted tensions they experienced between theory and practice as part of the professional doctoral trajectory. For Catherine, a Modern Foreign Languages Head of Department, these tensions were born out of a sense of frustration with a perceived deficit in the curriculum content of Initial Teacher Education:

I felt frustrated at the time [of her teacher training] that I was getting lots of classroom 'tips' but I wasn't getting any of the background or the theory on second language acquisition and therefore that my practice as a teacher wasn't evidence-based in the slightest. It was just what my mentor or other observers were telling me to do. When I asked questions like 'why is this happening like this?' or 'why are the kids learning like this?', nobody was able to answer, and I think they thought I was weird asking this.

(Catherine—Secondary Modern Foreign Languages Head of Department)

In Catherine's case, those questions led to her enrolling onto her EdD, in part driven by the anti-intellectualism (Gibbons, 2019; Orchard & Winch, 2015) she associated with training to become a teacher. The longevity of affective ties that can be built up with institutional prevailing attitudes, values and colleagues over a prolonged period of time can lead some to experience occupational inertia, complacency and an inability to see how the job can be done differently (Czerniawski et al., 2019). As experienced and often long-serving senior teachers, embarking on an EdD addressed, for many participants, a 'need for change', 'a fresh challenge' and an 'opportunity to finally understand the reasons I do what I do'. However, participants often drew attention to the 'ambivalence', 'bemusement' and 'indifference' expressed by colleagues they worked with if, and when, the topic of their doctoral research came up in conversation. Echoing the plaint of anti-intellectualism mentioned above, Secondary Maths teacher Sarah, for example, spoke with some degree of frustration, of the values she encountered with colleagues in her school:

'we don't see the point', 'we're really busy'—this is the ambient noise that I hear all the time. When teachers say 'you don't understand us—we are in schools and we're the martyrs', well actually I do understand it because that's where I spend the best part of my career (Sarah—Secondary Maths Teacher)

However, Sarah also talked enthusiastically about her own professional development gained on her doctorate:

I presented at an international conference and off the back of that will be doing another this year, I've written a book chapter as well ... Every time someone asks about my thesis now I say I'm really proud, which is a big step for me to say that, which is due to my having crossed the boundary into being a practitioner but also a researcher.

(Sarah—Secondary Maths Teacher and Assistant Head)

The ubiquitous bifurcation of the term 'insider/outsider' used by researchers when acknowledging the power dynamics in the field (Brisbois & Almeida, 2017; Zhao, 2017) becomes immediately problematic when applied to comparative researchers. At the time of her interview, 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.

For some participants, the boundaries between professional practice and doctoral research became a source of tension with colleagues at work. While some participants, for example, talked about the 'indifference' their colleagues exhibited towards their research, for others, like Mohammed, collegial curiosity generated ethical dilemmas in relation to exactly how much information they should share:

One of my colleagues constantly wants to know what I'm finding out, I've anonymised some of the data and shared with her the stuff to do with motivation, but she wants to know the names and the ones in her class and what they are saying. I told her I couldn't tell her and I could see she was pissed off.

(Mohammed—Secondary Science Teacher)

Tensions could be further exacerbated if the doctorate was being partially or wholly funded by the school where the teacher worked, as Elspeth, a primary school deputy head teacher, reveals:

Some of the results didn't reflect positively on the institution, so what to do with that was a dilemma. It didn't sit with my experiences of the institution and the work I thought it was doing. So grappling with how to report and feedback, turning it into something constructive that the organisation could use to self-reflect and improve, is something I've been struggling with.

(Elspeth, Primary School Deputy Head Teacher)

School leadership was one of many factors influencing practitioner researcher positionality in this study. Yet the literature also increasingly focuses on the extent to which university research committees influence what research can and cannot be done and how far that influence is beneficial to the field (Coleman & Bouësseau, 2008; Sheehan et al., 2018). For Will, a Head of Department in a secondary school, both 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)

For some of the participants in this study, 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 particular cocktail of definers meant that Will left his school. He did, however, carry on with his research once employed in a different school.

DISCUSSION

In an article of this length, and in a small-scale exploratory study of this nature, the author has had to make some oversimplifications. The data presented are not intended to represent the perspectives of *all* teachers who have embarked on professional doctorates in education, and the findings are not generalisable to contexts beyond these cases. However, this qualitative small-scale study does serve useful and illuminative purposes that accommodate some level of generalisation while recognising the specificity of the context and setting in which these teachers are located.

It is hoped that this paper can foster an awareness of the significance of researcher positionality as a phenomenon that, if brought to the surface, can help the performance of both doctoral students and their supervisors when it comes to critical reflection and reflexivity during the research process, including its writing up. In my own case as author of this paper, my choice of research topic reflects, in part, my own personal and professional biography which has taken me into the teaching profession, teacher education and a research career in east London. Positioning 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. As indicated above, these biographical details have influenced not only my conceptualisation of this study but also the ways in which I have carried out and analysed the data. Earlier in the paper, I 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 many participants in this study, this learning encompasses 'new understandings, identity development, change of practices and institutional development' (p. 142), albeit in varying degrees. For practitioner researchers, doctoral work spans academic and practitioner boundaries, making many artificial binaries (e.g. practitioner and academic knowledge; theory and practice; insider/outsider) redundant. In such spaces, teachers carrying out doctoral research in their own schools can find themselves positioning and being positioned by five sets of

values: those of their participants; their own practitioner values; the values of institutional gatekeepers (e.g. university ethics committees and school head teachers); their emerging values as doctoral researchers; and those of their doctoral supervisors. As they try-on-for-size new emerging values born from the doctoral experience, this polyvalorisation can inform and enrich the 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.

Some of these dilemmas have emerged in the data presented in this paper. A case in point is Rania and the difficulties she experienced with accessing her sample for comparative research in two different countries. Earlier in this paper I was 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 this paper. Instead of an 'insider/outsider' bifurcation, I 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 participants in this study acknowledged as ingredients making up their own researcher positionalities and emerging identities as researchers. Evidence of this identity work (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; McAlpine et al., 2009) draws attention to the levels of agency these participants had, in actively navigating and negotiating many of the tensions and dilemmas they experienced. These were 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. Participants like Will, for example, found 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. 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). Will's decision to leave the school at which he began carrying out his research is an agentic exemplification of the enactment of that political stance.

In the introduction to this paper, I referred to the troubled history that practitioner research has had with 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 of the participants in this study, caught between structural and agentic tensions associated with these resources. 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 challenge the validity of current UK university-research auditing mechanisms such as the Research Excellence Framework, which 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. For this reframing to take place, I hope that policy-makers, subject and research associations, teachers and teacher educators in school, colleges and universities can draw on the 10 principles detailed in the BERA-RSA (2014) inquiry. In doing so it is also hoped that what is produced is a healthy education research community that, after Whitty et al. (2016), is one that is a 'broad church, encompassing activity that responds directly to external priorities, but also curiosity- or discipline led inquiry' (p. 1).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Engaging in research contributes not just to the professional development of teachers but to the teaching profession's body of knowledge and teaching and learning in general

(Willemse & Boei, 2017). The scholarly significance of this study is its contribution to knowledge of how schools are increasingly becoming both sites of research and research-rich environments. With its focus on researcher positionality the paper draws attention, not just to the tensions and dilemmas these participants encounter on their doctoral journey, but to the importance of teacher researchers and their role in research knowledge production. 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. 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. By understanding, more fully, some of the tensions and dilemmas encountered by teachers when carrying out doctoral research, it is hoped that both school-leadership teams and university postgraduate support mechanisms can be better constructed to provide more meaningful professional induction and more sustained, valued, authentic and nuanced professional learning opportunities for these valued members of the research community.

This article gives complex hope to 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.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from Gerry Czerniawski upon reasonable request.

ETHIC STATEMENT

This research was given University of East London ethics approval—number 1920-0090.

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