

# My EdD Journey

*OU graduates' stories*

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To June Ayres, our programme administrator, who behind the scenes has supported the OU's EdD programme, students and staff, so effectively for 15 years, with unfailing cheerfulness and patience.

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## Introduction

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DR MAGGIE PREEDY AND DR INMA ÁLVAREZ

The Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme at The Open University (OU) in the United Kingdom commenced in 1997, with the first cohort graduating in 2000/1. This inspiring collection of EdD graduates' reflections is published to mark the OU's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of our EdD programme and, most importantly, to celebrate the achievements of these graduates themselves.

Contributors to our collection tell the story of their experiences of the EdD, and how it has shaped their lives subsequently, both professionally and personally. The accounts range across the history of the EdD, from two students of the first cohort to graduate in 2000/1 to those who completed the award more recently, and are arranged in chronological order.

A major theme linking the stories is encapsulated in the title of our collection – the metaphor of a journey – our graduates portray the EdD experience as a long-term and often demanding journey, rather than a short-term event. As they vividly describe, working part-time towards a doctorate, often with the demands of a family and a full-time job, is not easy. Like a long and arduous journey, doctoral study demands qualities of commitment, motivation and sheer hard work, as well as the encouragement and support of tutor supervisors and families.

Contributors describe various reasons for wishing to undertake the EdD. For many, there was a real sense of intrinsic motivation to undertake the EdD – an enjoyment of learning for its own sake, rather than merely the extrinsic drivers of career development and ambition, though, of course, these were also important. A number of our graduates describe the wish to challenge themselves, to push themselves to explore the limits of what they are capable of – as Helen suggests in comparing her EdD journey to exploring the Kalahari desert, with a similar exhilarating sense of achievement and pride in achieving both these goals.

For some too, the EdD formed part of a lifelong learning journey, stemming from a wish to make up for lost time, returning to have a second chance at education, having failed to fulfil their potential in secondary school. For these people, the EdD formed the culmination of a part-time adult learning endeavour spread over many years, involving A levels, a first Bachelor's degree and Masters, the latter two awards often also undertaken with the OU.

Our graduates' topic choices for EdD study reflect a concern to explore practical issues in their own workplaces, as befits a professional qualification. So, these accounts describe research on real concerns and problems such as how to develop effective Continuous Professional Development, relations with Ofsted, issues of mentoring, teaching styles and student motivation, or teaching non-traditional learners. This educational research also demonstrates a commitment to making a difference, not just in the thinking and practice of our graduates, but also impacting on colleagues and organisational improvement, in putting forward some practical and feasible ways of addressing the issues explored.

Contributors portray the EdD as a richly rewarding and satisfying experience – enabling them to 'spread their wings', as Esther puts it, and achieve more than they ever thought they could. Building the skills and competence, as well as the confidence, for doctoral level research and writing is a gradual process – the journey takes place incrementally, bit by bit – the route to the end point is often not clearly signposted but emerges gradually as the journey proceeds.

In looking at the outcomes and impact of the EdD, for some contributors the award has paved the way to considerable career promotion and success, including professorships and extensive academic research and publications. Other outcomes described by our contributors include research and writing skills, and more intangibly opening their minds to new ways of thinking. One wrote her memoirs.

However, perhaps the most striking impact for many was the sense of personal development and achievement, and the associated confidence this brings. As one of the contributors to our video stories put it: *'I have the confidence to take centre stage in discussions where necessary, but I also have the confidence to stay silent too – I don't have to prove myself in that respect.'*

So, while the title 'doctor' is clearly an important achievement, which brings professional kudos and opens the door to further success, it's by no means the only major outcome. Developing a new identity as a doctoral researcher is equally important. As described by a number of our contributors, a deep sense of self-actualisation and personal fulfilment is maybe the most significant and lasting legacy of achieving the doctorate.

Thus, these narratives share the highs and lows of the doctoral journey and the rich range of personal and professional outcomes that followed. They also include useful insights and signposts for others aspiring to follow the same path – ideas about how to get started, how to juggle too many tasks during the EdD process, how to keep going through tough times, as well as some of the interesting and unexpected things that happen after completing the EdD.

Conveying a powerful message of determination and achievement, we hope these reflections will be inspirational and motivating both for our current EdD researchers and for those who may be thinking of taking up doctoral study. This collection is accompanied by a partner set of posters and cartoons as well as a set of video reflections on the EdD journey – both of these are also available on the Professional Doctorate hub on the OpenLearn website: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/postgraduate-studies/edd-graduate-stories>

## Chapter 1. Twenty-two years of making a difference

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DR WINIFRED M. BURKE, GRADUATED 2001

### **The first cohort of the EdD at the OU**

I started my Doctorate in Education at the Open University in 1997 when the new programme first began, so in 2001 I was one of the first 12 students to graduate. My thesis was entitled 'Journeying Beyond Models and Typologies, Towards a Better Understanding of Formative Assessment for Learning'.

#### **Education Doctorates Create History**

Will Swann, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Language Studies told those present at the London Royal Festival Hall 'This is a celebration of many accumulated years of achievement for the students here, who have reached a major milestone in developing the power to change the profession.'

Among those receiving the awards was Somerset Schools inspector Winifred Burke whose research into peer and pupil self-assessment and teacher feedback suggested the current focus on assessing children's writing according to the requirements of SATs is driving creativity out of the window. She said: 'Depending on the various forms of assessment, so depend the outcomes. There is so much more a child is expressing that they aren't getting credit for'.

OU student journal, *Sesame*, Issue 204, August/September 2001



*Group graduation photo, 9 June 2001*

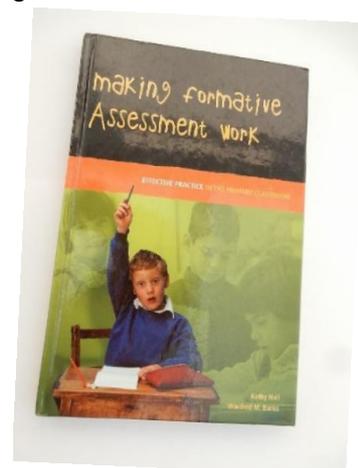
The OU team recognised my thesis as a model of clarity and sought permission to put it on their website for other EdD students to access.

### **Disseminating my research**

My first conference presentation of my research was at BERA Cardiff (Sept 2000) and was entitled 'Journeying Beyond Models and Typologies; a constructivist view of Classroom Assessment'.

One of the inspection providers I worked for asked me to contribute to a continuous professional development session on assessment for learning for lay inspectors. I was also invited to take part in a London conference (2000) entitled 'Putting Assessment at the Heart of Learning.' Professor Paul Black the main speaker led a workshop on the use of questions to promote learning and I felt the full benefit of this strategy as he quizzed me about my understanding of the concept under discussion.

Professor Kathy Hall, my supervisor, encouraged me to co-author a book with her, saying 'without your research no publisher would even consider our proposal'. In 2003 our book *Making formative Assessment work: Effective Practice in the Primary Classroom* was published by the Open University Press. This publication has had an impact on many different countries' educational organisations.



### **Contributing to OU course material**

I moved next from being an OU student to being part of a team producing a new course for teaching assistants, E111 *Supporting Learning in primary schools*. My contribution was about how the work of an exemplary practitioner in the real world could be disseminated more widely. It was entitled 'Teamwork, teaching assistants and technology'. In 2007 I received, along with the rest of the team, an Open University Teaching Award for this course. Having appreciated, as a consumer, the quality of OU courses, I now had an insight into the rigour that went into their production.

## Publications and contributions to practice

Another impact from my EdD research was the publication of a chapter in *Curriculum Briefing*, a publication intended for teachers and senior managers. My chapter 'Road-testing your AfL practice: finetuning for success' cautioned senior managers of the dangers of rolling out the government initiative 'Assessment for Learning', which was based on experimental settings, without recognising the need to embed theory in real classrooms.

My most lasting impact, however, began in 2006 when I became a school governor of a 7-11 junior school. At that time, teachers had been too confined by the Literacy Strategy, as well as the emphasis on teaching to the test. Creative writing had suffered as a result. The newly appointed head teacher and I agreed to undertake action research in the school. This was kindly sponsored by the United Kingdom Learning Association (UKLA). For three years (2007-10) we presented papers at UKLA conferences. Findings showed that children did indeed have more to offer than they were given credit for in SATs. A case study was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Literacy* (Burke, 2011) entitled 'Log jammed by standard assessment tests: how feedback can help writers'.

The editorial introduction to this issue of the journal commented: "Challenging the narrowness and numeric nature of a test-driven curriculum and pedagogy, she [Winifred] offers a more complex reading of the needs and capabilities of two high achieving writers in the primary phase [...]. She draws on the seminal work of Perrenoud [...] to foreground qualitative interpretations as a way of gaining the learner's attention and setting in motion the writer's metacognitive processes."

## And finally...

In conclusion I offer the following statement written by the headteacher I continue to work with:

*"Winifred has been involved with South Petherton Junior School in the role as a Governor; she has also worked closely alongside me personally in her role as Chair. Within the early years of my Headship, she updated me regularly on current educational issues; she spent time reading the TES and bringing in pertinent articles. This helped my workload considerably [...]. Her artistic talent has been evident throughout all her input and many children have benefitted from working with her. I am extremely grateful for her support."*

I recognise that in developing a doctorate as a professional alternative to the PhD, the OU has fulfilled its aim to enable those who take part to develop skills in educational research in order to contribute to educational knowledge. I hope that this account has provided an insight into how one EdD graduate has tried to fulfil that aim.

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## Chapter 2. Second time around

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PROFESSOR ANNE JORDAN, GRADUATED 2001

### **Believing in my research idea**

My experience of becoming a student on the OU's EdD programme showed me, after a previous false start with another institution, how straightforward the writing and submission of a doctoral dissertation could be.

### **Leading in academia**

The EdD was for me the beginning of two decades of intense academic and creative activity. This included the co-authoring of several books and book chapters. One of these books, *Approaches to Learning*, is still an educational best-seller in many countries around the world.

The award also led to the conferring of two professorships – one an Honorary Professorship of the Tula Pedagogical University in Russia and the other in the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), an Irish higher education institution. At the WIT I was Head of the Educational Development Centre, and the designer and course coordinator of WIT's Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

I have acted as a consultant to many Irish and European higher education institutions, managed a number of EU projects, and delivered workshops on pedagogy and creativity in Europe, Russia and China. I retired from my post in the WIT in 2010, and remain an Emeritus professor there. I am still heavily involved in pedagogical projects – in running courses in the liberal arts for adults in southern Ireland and in organising an annual series of public lectures.

Little of this activity would have been possible without this OU programme and doctoral award.

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## Chapter 3. Mentor, not tormentor: The pivotal role of effective mentoring

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DR TONY LIVERSIDGE, GRADUATED 2002

### **My EdD research**

For several years, one of my research interests had been in the field of mentoring. This interest first arose when I started working at Edge Hill University and realised that effective mentoring was pivotal in ensuring that students' placements in school were successful.

To improve my understanding and practice, I undertook and passed an OU master's module on mentoring, which eventually led to my doctoral study, culminating in a successful thesis in 2002 entitled 'Perceptions of Effective Mentoring'. The research entailed exploring the perceptions of PGCE science students and practising science teachers in relation to effective mentors, mentees and mentoring practice.

### **Leading mentor training and development**

The findings of this research and my role at that time as BSc Secondary QTS Programme Leader enabled me to take a strategic Faculty of Education lead on secondary mentor training. I disseminated my ideas and practices to both HEI colleagues and professional mentor and subject mentor teachers in schools, through my delivery of mentor training INSET, with associated mentoring materials.

These materials were designed to help colleagues develop their mentoring knowledge and skills. This initial input and subsequent learning about the role and practice of the school-based mentor was further supported by tutor visits to schools, using the materials that I had authored. Specifically, I led the science team in producing mentor training, development and enhancement INSET.

### **Continuing impact of my EdD research**

To my satisfaction, aspects that I uncovered in my doctoral research about effective mentors (including 'toxic' ones), effective mentoring programmes and effective mentees can still be discerned in secondary practice and mentoring documentation at Edge Hill University. For instance, an understanding of the hidden time costs of mentoring and the notion of mentoring departments, where the mentoring is done by several people, each contributing their expertise. I received very positive feedback about the training, documentation and associated support for practice.

## Consistency and retention of mentors

Also, on reflection I recognised that consistency and retention of mentors was as important as developing mentoring skill. Thus, I worked closely with partnership placement colleagues to shape practice in relation to successful approaches to schools, via development of personal relationships with professional and curriculum mentors. This helped to ensure their annual willingness to take Edge Hill secondary trainees (particularly BSc Secondary ones). It is fair to say that over the years this has had a mostly positive effect, with more schools taking pairs of students (particularly in their first school-based experiences) than previously.

## Coordinating research

In my next position as Faculty Research Development Coordinator I was able to continue my work on mentoring and influence practice in relation to doctoral supervision. To undertake the role of supervisor more effectively, I took and passed the university's Post Graduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision in 2009.

My learning and assessment writing on this course and my previous research work on mentoring, stimulated my thinking about the importance of the wider 'personal' support (by a consistent team or group) for anyone doing research, that was beyond the input of content, methodology and analysis from the 'traditional' single mentor/supervisor. This very much echoed the ideas of Eley and Murray (2009), who recognise the strength of a supervisory team model, bearing in mind the range of different tasks to be performed by supervisors, including providing pastoral care.

I was able to share this work with research managers and supervisors through the University supervisors' network, and its dissemination helped to change wider practice across the University. A requirement was introduced that supervision teams should consist of a least two, but preferably three supervisors. There was an associated recognition of the importance of the careful and skilful mentoring of PhD researchers, if they are to successfully complete their doctoral studies.

## Learning and teaching fellow role

In addition, from 2009 to 2012 as a University Learning and Teaching Fellow, I was able to pursue further work on the mentoring of doctoral students. I looked at case studies of successful and unsuccessful supervision, prompted by the earlier work of Delamont et al. (2004), who recount several examples relating to the different facets of supervision. I shared this work via the University Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) and its professional development series, as well as at a University CLT Annual Conference and a BERA Conference. My work drew attention to key supervision qualities drawn from good mentoring practice, such as approachability, supportiveness and collegiality.

## **Effective research degree supervision**

I believe that this work has contributed to the thinking about, and development of, effective research degree supervision across the University, particularly of part-time students and it continues to frame my approach and my influence on the supervisory teams that I have led as Director of Studies and the ones where I have been part of a team. In addition, and most recently, this work has also been acknowledged in one of the case studies for my successful award of Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

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## Chapter 4. Student drop-out at a FE college in a disadvantaged area

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DR JOHN C J PALMER, GRADUATED 2004

### **The research topic**

My thesis focussed on the reasons for, and the potential managerial solutions to, the problem of student drop-out on full-time Humanities programmes at a further education (FE) college in a disadvantaged area. The research evaluated:

- the assumptions which lay behind the Government's view that drop-out was caused primarily by college-based factors, such as teaching quality and levels of student support, and
- the appropriateness of the consequent policy response of using funding mechanisms and the inspection process to penalise colleges which experienced higher than average rates of drop-out.

### **My research methods and findings**

I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, by means of a comprehensive induction survey with the whole of the target population, focus groups with staff and students and biographical interviews with students who appeared to be most at risk of dropping out.

The research found that the majority of leavers did not complete their studies due to factors beyond the direct control of the college, such as starting a job, family/personal reasons, illness and financial problems. Nevertheless, in response to the minority of cases where early leaving was caused by college-based factors, potential managerial solutions were identified and explored.

The research concluded that the attempt to reduce a complex problem to a single cause was counterproductive and could undermine other policy priorities such as widening participation. It suggested that policy makers needed to adopt a more sophisticated analytical model if student retention was to be improved.

### **The impact of my study**

#### Methodological

The use of biographical interviews was an innovative approach to understanding the reasons for student withdrawal. The research design included a longitudinal process of conducting up to six interviews with each student, in a purposive sample of candidates who had a high risk of withdrawal. This allowed the interviewer to build sufficient rapport to enable each respondent to explore and analyse the often complex combination of factors behind the decision to stay or leave.

This process of supporting the students in constructing their own narratives about the turning points which shaped their decisions produced very rich insights that informed improvements to the college's retention strategies. It was also notable that each of the early leavers opted to return for a final interview to complete their story after withdrawing from the college, a positive and helpful response which was rarely evident when more traditional methods of data collection had been used to explore student drop-out.

### Organisational

Preliminary findings from the research, I believe, contributed significantly to inspection grades received by the college. In October 1999 the Humanities School was the only area of the college to receive an improved Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection grade. This was at a time when the organisation was recovering from a major crisis that had led the FEFC to dismiss the Principal, Senior Management Team and the Governors after finding serious financial irregularities in the college's franchised vocational provision. Similarly, in March 2001 the submission of data from my research to a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Review of the HE provision in the college helped the institution to achieve an unusually high score (21 out of 24) for an institution that delivered predominately FE provision.

### Personal

The completion of the doctoral thesis and subsequent award of the qualification contributed directly to the recovery of my career following my redundancy from the college in which the research was situated. This sudden and unforeseen event, following almost 20 years' service, occurred in the aftermath of the crisis induced by the serious financial mismanagement of the college by its senior leaders, and led to a situation where I was unemployed for almost two years.

During this time, I completed my doctoral thesis, and it was only after I had presented it that I was effectively released from the stigma of having worked at a 'failing college' and gained a new employment identity as a successful doctoral candidate. Within weeks of completion I was appointed to a part-time Associate Lecturer post on the Open University's MA in Educational Leadership and Management programme, and to a full-time post in the Educational Advisory Team at a Local Authority.

In the latter role, which was funded initially by the National Remodelling Team (NRT), and then subsequently by the Training and Development Agency (TDA), I was able to develop a new career in which I trained and supported head teachers and other school leaders during the implementation of the Labour Government's programme of Workforce Reform and the introduction of the Extended Schools Programme. I continued in this role for more than seven years until the TDA was abolished by the incoming Conservative Government, and I then took early retirement.

### Contributing to the discipline

It is unrealistic to expect the work of a lone researcher to prompt a change in the national policy position on the real causes of student drop-out, and there is no evidence that my thesis achieved that change. Nevertheless, by drawing on material from an early version of my literature review, I was able to publish an article in a peer-reviewed journal (Palmer 2001) that continues to contribute to the discipline and has attracted the attention of a number of other researchers in this field. To date (March 2020), my article has been cited on 11 occasions, and I am happy to observe the work of others in developing some of the points I raised in my doctoral thesis.

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<http://oro.open.ac.uk/49323/>

## Chapter 5. Exploring Interviews

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DR FRANCIS SPENSER MURPHY, GRADUATED 2005

### Starting doctoral study

Following the completion of an MSc in Training in 1996, I became aware of the lack of research into the quality of engineering courses. I could see a gap in the spectrum of research and, with this in mind, I decided to try and fill the gap by continuing with doctorate studies. I examined some potential doctorate programmes both PhD and EdD, which were offered in the UK and Ireland. The Open University EdD was favoured because it started with a module on research methods (E835). A module concerning the line of study, which in my case was education management (E838), followed this up. These two modules enabled me to refine the research methods necessary, before moving to the main work and the production of a research thesis.

#### My EdD thesis

The title of the thesis became 'Quality Management: an *essential attributes* approach. A case study towards a sustainable model of course effectiveness evaluation'. This work resulted in a model of course effectiveness evaluation, which could be applied to any course. Whilst engaged on the thesis, I submitted a paper to an international journal and this was published (Murphy, 2005a) with the same title as my thesis mentioned above.

One of the data collection techniques that I used during my EdD research was interviewing. A few years after the publication, I was contacted by the previous journal editor and asked to write a chapter for a book. The chapter highlighted interviewing as a data collection technique and was published (Murphy, 2010) as 'An "essential attributes" approach to curriculum reform'.

### Examiner for postgraduate research students

In 2005, I had been employed for many years as a lecturer at a local Institute of Technology. I was involved in many of the degree programmes across several of the departments at the Institute. As a consequence of obtaining the EdD, I was asked to undertake the role of internal examiner for postgraduate research programmes (MSc and PhD). This meant at times ensuring that the research thesis met the appropriate standard after the research supervisor and external examiner had agreed the result. Other times, it meant involvement in the viva voce interview panel along with the external examiner and contributing to the assessment of the PhD candidate.

### Later roles

I retired as a lecturer in 2011. Following retirement, I supported the lecturers who took over my duties to ensure a smooth transition. I also became involved in course programmatic reviews that took place in 2012. These reviews audited courses to ensure appropriate standards.

Retirement also provided an opportunity to attend international conferences and visit a number of UK educational establishment functions.

Since 2015 I have been involved in voluntary work for two institutions, both of which are constituent institutions of a UK professional body. This work involves interviewing candidates who apply for chartered membership of the institutions. The interview panel assesses whether the candidates have achieved certain competences.

#### Different approaches to interviewing

The interview panel examines the application form and the professional review report of the candidate. The candidate is then interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each of the competences are given a score. Based on the score, a recommendation is made to the UK professional body to approve the election of the candidate to chartered membership, or not. For the two institutions for which I was an interviewer, each had a different scoring system.

Each institution provided training for the interviewers, although this differed in emphasis. The first institution, with which I undertook training, emphasised that interviewers should encourage the candidate to do most of the talking. The second institution, from which I received training, did not discuss how the talking of the candidate should be influenced. Instead the training concentrated on a more complex scoring system, which gave scores for sub-competences in each competence category. Interviewing by this second institution was sometimes aggressive with some incisive questioning. This seemed to go against the training outcomes suggested by the first Institution.

I used interviews as a data gathering technique for my EdD research. At that time, I found that being a good listener and taking good field notes, with the subsequent respondent validation, produced high quality information. I think therefore that the first institution interview methods were better.

One of the constituent institutions of the professional body has recently provided interviewer training online. It was convenient therefore to type in the following question during the online session: 'Does the professional body audit the interview assessment methods of this constituent institution, to ensure that there is a similar standard for chartered membership across all constituent institutions of the professional body?' The answers provided indicated that this auditing takes place, and that it is satisfactory.

#### Offering solutions?

This leaves me to find an alternative forum for my opinions of the interview process, where I could offer solutions. One solution could be that a representative from the UK professional body should attend as an observer at every interview. The representative would not normally take part in the interview process, but could intervene if there was a problem with questioning of the candidate. Another solution could involve training a member of the constituent institution to act as a chairperson for each interview panel. The chairperson could then intervene when necessary.

My views could be conveyed to the UK professional body via their online consultations, which take place occasionally. However, my objectives for this project now include further research to consolidate my findings, as well as determining a more effective method of communicating the findings to the relevant professional bodies and institutions.

For the future, a possible second project in which I may become involved relates to mentoring. In July 2019 a UK University of which I am an alumni community member contacted me. The University was seeking professionals who are interested in mentoring students. There is an alumni-networking event at the University to take this further.

## Conclusion

The current world situation may necessitate that interviews be conducted using online/video link technology. This may solve the problem of uneven interview standards, as it will be easier to record the process thus making interview assessment auditing more effective.

As a member of several professional bodies, there is a requirement that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is maintained. A record of CPD activities must be kept to ensure that I can continue with the voluntary work. Some of the professional engineering institutions provide very good online CPD. However, it will be important to expand my CPD to include events from my various former University alumni.

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## Chapter 6. Directed routes or chosen pathways?

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DR JOHN RIDLEY, GRADUATED 2010

### Headteacher researcher

My interest in educational research began in 1994 with an MA in Primary Education at the University of York. This part-time course was based on practitioner research and allowed me to look at my own practice within the context of the small, rural primary school where I was headteacher. Following my MA, and alongside my headship, I became an Associate Lecturer with the Open University, teaching masters' modules, and continued my research interests.

In 2002 I focused my research on teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and, with the support and sponsorship of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), I began my EdD with the Open University. Part of my sponsorship agreement involved the completion and publication of my research associate's report: *Teachers' continuing professional development within two clusters of small rural primary schools* (NCSL Report, 2011).

### Doctoral Research

My doctoral research study was entitled 'Directed routes or chosen pathways? Teachers' views of CPD within a group of rural primary schools'. This was a unique opportunity to take a view of teachers' CPD within the rapidly changing period following the Education Reform Act (ERA, 1988), and offered an insight into trends and practices.

Underlying my research was the notion that the direction of teachers' CPD was no longer teacher-led but driven by the urgency to train teachers to deliver the raft of new initiatives that followed the ERA, e.g. the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. My research draws on my personal position, as a long serving headteacher of a rural primary school, and it was carried out with the co-operation of colleagues in two local clusters.

### Research findings

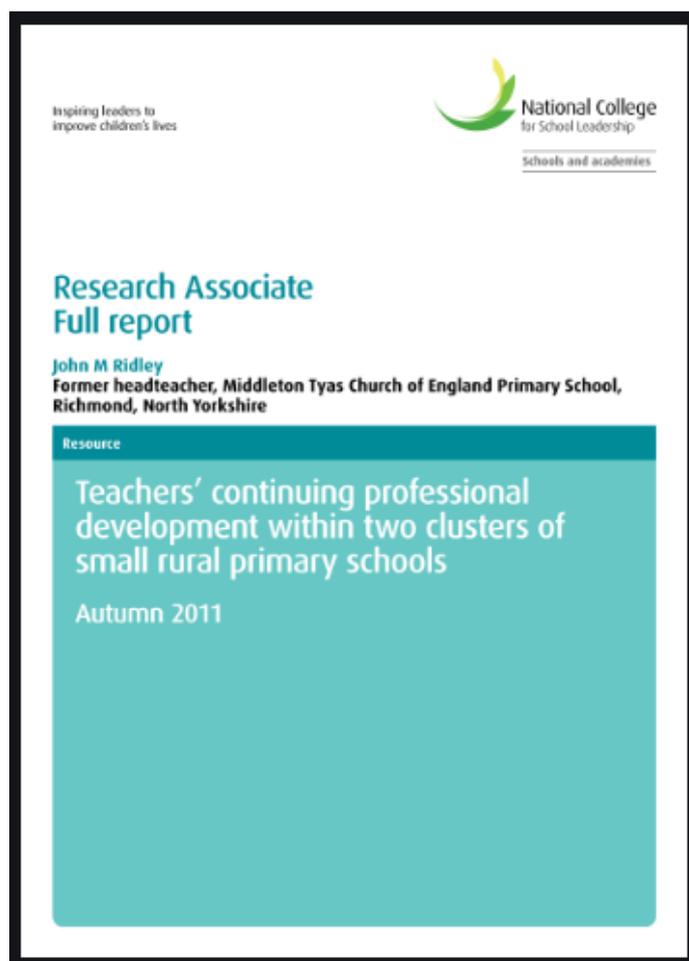
The data analysis showed that, across both clusters, teachers' CPD was driven by national government initiatives and, in some cases, the national initiatives became the schools' priorities, leaving little opportunity for an individual school-based approach to CPD. Across the clusters, there was an established relationship between the School Development Plan (SDP), performance management and CPD.

The one-year performance management cycle appeared to dictate the length of the CPD cycle. This promoted short term development, reducing opportunities for longer courses, such as advanced diplomas and higher degrees. The constraints of the cycle, along with the emphasis on the deficit model of CPD (i.e. centrally-imposed and top-down), is viewed by respondents as contributing to the general de-professionalisation of teachers as it decreases their professional autonomy.

My work added to the body of research on teachers' CPD through the availability of my doctoral thesis on the internet and, more widely, through my research associate's report, published by the NCSL (2011), and made available to schools.

## Research Associate's Report

My research associate's report, like my doctoral thesis, examines teachers' CPD within two clusters of rural primary schools in the north of England. However, the report focuses on the *methods of delivering CPD*, challenging the imposed deficit model, so widely used for the speedy delivery of government initiatives.



The report supports a more positive and developmental view of CPD, identifying the benefits of a growth model which has a tailored approach to CPD and an emphasis on the development needs of individual schools and teachers. The report was made available to all schools in the UK and its findings were intended to challenge existing practice and fuel debate.

## Summary of findings

In the two clusters of schools studied in my research (my EdD and the NCSL research associate's report), the following findings stood out:

- CPD priorities tended to be linked more to national initiatives and the SDP than to individual personal professional development needs.
- Decisions on CPD priorities tended to be taken in association with the headteacher (often acting as CPD co-ordinator) in accordance with SDP needs. Generally, there was no specific individual entitlement to CPD funding.
- Teachers expressed a preference for tailored in-school provision, delivered by colleagues, in which the school functioned as a community of practice and a professional learning community, rather than a perceived one-size-fits-all, centrally-imposed, deficit model of CDP.
- Funding for long CPD courses, such as higher degrees, was severely limited, yet satisfaction levels in this area of professional education were higher than for professional training and professional support. This was particularly the case for longer serving teachers.

## Conclusion

I gained my EdD one year after my early retirement from teaching, and my doctorate, combined with my long-term experience as a teacher and headteacher and more recently as a doctoral student, helped me to gain employment with the Open University. I was pleased to return to work as an Associate Lecturer in 2010. The academic rigour of the EdD process has many benefits for teaching in higher education e.g. writing research proposals, literature reviews and carrying out research.

Personally, achieving an EdD towards the end of my career as a primary teacher and headteacher allowed me to take an informed view of the many changes and developments in education over nearly 40 years in teaching. My research was carried out in the spirit of practitioner research and reinforces the belief that research carried out within schools, by teaching staff, is as valid and meaningful as that of the university department.

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## Chapter 7. Getting ahead

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DR YVONNE WATTS, GRADUATED 2012

### **My education**

I left school in the late 1970s with disappointing exam results. I was quite a gregarious teenager and initially focused on my pony and then my social life - as opposed to hard work or studying! After a couple of lack-lustre jobs, which were all that was possible with my meagre O' Levels, I joined the police force. This was a career that I loved and taught me, amongst other things, self-discipline, tenacity and determination. After leaving to have my first baby (before the days of part-time policing), I decided to undertake an Open University degree, to fulfil my childhood ambition of becoming a primary school teacher. With a little more maturity and life experience, I took to study with relish.

Having graduated with First Class Honours in 1996, and three wonderful children later, I became a teacher, after passing a previous version of the OU's PGCE. Studying had become my passion and, alongside teaching full-time, I continued with the MEd. After seven years in the classroom, I became a primary headteacher – a job that I loved. Once established in this demanding role, I decided to pursue a doctorate and eventually graduated in 2012, after 17 years of OU study.

### **My EdD study**

My EdD research title was 'Ofsted 2005 – A New Relationship with Primary Headteachers?'

As a new headteacher, I had the responsibility for completing the school's self-evaluation document (SEF) in preparation for Ofsted inspection. Writing a SEF was one of the most significant initiatives introduced in the inspection framework which resulted from the Education Act (2005). The SEF was a weighty document which fundamentally changed educational leadership and filled most headteachers with dread.

Schools were required essentially to judge themselves in various areas, including leadership and management, teaching, learning and pupils' behaviour. The SEF then informed inspection in Ofsted's 'New Relationship' with schools. Over time, the inspection framework has evolved, but there remains an expectation that school leaders will themselves be judged as to how they evaluate their school. Knowing how this considerable shift impacted on my role, I decided to research the implications of the new inspection process for other primary headteachers.

Having investigated various aspects of school effectiveness and the inherent accountability within the role, I designed a questionnaire to gauge the views of other heads, and to identify any trends evident in their responses. Questionnaires were sent to all headteachers whose schools were inspected in the same month that my own school underwent inspection. In total, 749 heads were surveyed from all areas of England, with schools ranging from only 7 pupils on

roll to more than 1000. The questionnaire was followed by face-to-face interviews with a small sample of the original respondents.

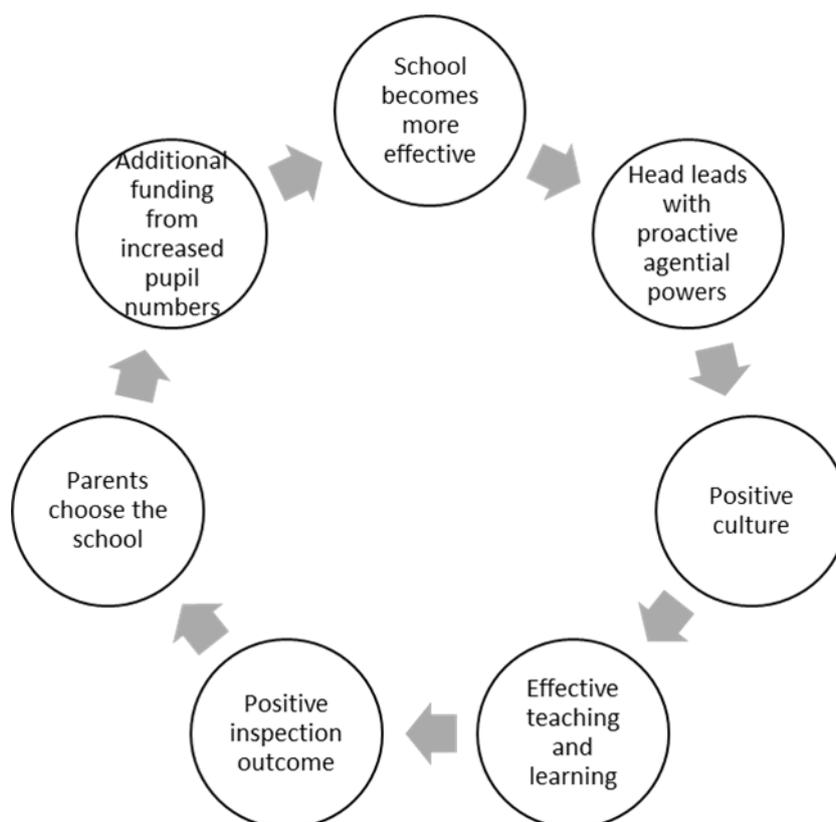
## My research findings

### Internal and external expectations

My research found that Ofsted's New Relationship with Schools resulted in considerable implications for schools, and particularly their headteachers. One conflict the research found was balancing the demands of the internal expectations from pupils, parents and staff, with the external pressures from Ofsted.

### The impact of the headteacher

An important finding was that the attitudes and agency (Woods et al, 2004) shown by headteachers could affect how they approached the inspection process, and ultimately how effective a school was deemed to be. The identification of a virtuous circle was intrinsic to this. Simplistically, a proactive, optimistic head will engender a positive culture, which leads to effective teaching and learning, helping to inform inspection. The circle continues, as a positive inspection will encourage parents to choose the school, leading to buoyant pupil numbers, so funding increases which should ultimately further improve effectiveness.



*A virtuous circle of school effectiveness*

## **The Panoptic Effect**

The metaphor of the Panopticon (Perryman, 2009) was instrumental to my understanding of the self-evaluation expectations of inspection. Here, a school preparing for inspection could be likened to an 18<sup>th</sup> Century prison (Bentham, 1787), where the prisoners were never sure if they were being watched, so learnt to behave as if they were under constant observation. From my research, I concluded that it is the constant anticipation of inspection that helps schools to improve rather than the visit itself. It may seem a draconian comparison, but resonated with my experience, and is a theory that I share with other headteachers.

## **Impact of the EdD on my professional life**

### Headship

My research certainly impacted on my own practice, with the approach that I took to headship in three different schools being upbeat and encouraging, always striving to achieve that virtuous circle which was borne out with successful inspections being achieved. As part of my wider role, I mentored a considerable number of new headteachers, and always discussed my research with them, which I believe helped to shape their own leadership qualities.

### Inspection

Since undertaking my research, I trained as an Ofsted inspector myself, and was a team member on many inspections, alongside headship. The insights I had gained from the EdD certainly helped to inform my practice, and I am proud that I adopted a balanced and pragmatic approach to the inspection role. However, I preferred advising and supporting schools so I changed direction.

### School Advisory Role

I set up my own school improvement consultancy after taking early retirement from headship and now enjoy a variety of different roles. These include working for an education charity leading school-to-school peer reviews across the country, which support school leaders to achieve greater effectiveness. In addition, I am the school improvement partner for a small academy chain and other individual schools. I visit regularly and advise on strategic planning and their own evaluations.

### OU Associate Lecturer

In 2018, I became an Associate Lecturer for the Open University, an incredible role. I now tutor on E209 and support aspirant teachers to extend their subject knowledge of the primary curriculum. I have also recently started tutoring for EE811, a Masters' level educational leadership course. Personally and professionally, it is a privilege to have developed my own virtuous circle – and now support my students to achieve their own dreams of contributing to the world of education.

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## Chapter 8. My OU journey and new career

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DR VAL CRITTEN, GRADUATED 2014

### **How I started OU study**

Prior to undertaking the EdD programme I was a teacher in a special school for children with physical and associated intellectual and communication disabilities. I started studying for an MEd with the Open University as some of the children in my class with cerebral palsy had extreme difficulties with learning to read. Although this helped a great deal in understanding the children's difficulties, I decided to further my study by starting an EdD.

#### My EdD research

During my doctorate, with the help and guidance of my supervisors, I was able to discover that the children I taught had specific cognitive difficulties which delayed or prevented their literacy development. I was able to disseminate my findings at the school in which I was teaching and in another special school which had joined in my research. I led workshops with teaching and support staff at the schools to find teaching approaches to help the children, which could be understood and utilised by all the staff.

### **After the EdD: research, publications and teaching**

After graduating, I joined the Open University as an affiliated researcher, and was able to work with my first supervisor (now mentor) on the publishing of the findings from my thesis, and to engage in further research both with my mentor and with one of my student colleagues who completed her PhD at the same time. With a colleague and my mentor, I have recently engaged in new research regarding the promotion of computational thinking skills in pre-school children. I have also helped with writing articles for the OU website.

To date, I have had seven articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals, of which three are concerning children or young people with cerebral palsy, and there is the intention to write further articles. Three other articles (with my OU student colleague) are concerned with the expression and communication of personalised stories by young people or people living with dementia, who have communication difficulties, through the medium of an iPad app called *Our Story*, which was developed by the Open University. One article with my EdD student has just been published; and two small articles on computational thinking in pre-school children were published in January in an education magazine. I have a chapter regarding the employment of a young man with cerebral palsy due to be published this summer.

I co-supervised an EdD student who has completed his doctorate, and I am currently co-supervising a doctoral researcher. I also review for two journals. I recently gave a presentation at a conference regarding specific cognitive difficulties which may delay educational development in children with cerebral palsy.

## Summing up

I could never have foreseen completing a doctorate in my sixties, retiring from teaching and starting a new career in academia! It has brought a huge change to my life and, with the support of my mentor and other colleagues (and most importantly, my husband!), I hope to continue with my new career for some years to come.

## Reference

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## Chapter 9. An EdD rooted in my own experience

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DR MEGAN ATTWOOD, GRADUATED 2016

### **My research study**

I completed a Doctorate in Education (EdD) with The Open University in 2016, whilst working full time as a lecturer, teaching and supporting students studying on the Foundation Degree in Children, Young People and their Services and the BA (Hons) in Education at Furness College.

My research focused on widening participation within higher education and the assumptions, often explicit, made by the government about a particular under-represented group, working-class students. A recurring theme in widening-participation policy is that working-class students have low aspirations, are less likely to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and lack the academic skill and support structure to enable them to study. I explored the stories a group of women studying on the foundation degree told me about their experiences of education. My research suggested that these experiences have implications for practice, as attitudes towards education are shaped by factors which filter down from policy, such as access and curriculum design.

The women's stories were powerful, signalling clearly that no matter what policy makers say, social class is a huge element in widening participation. My study explored the nature of access to higher education for working-class women. It was a study rooted in my own experience.

### **EdD insights on my role**

Completing the EdD provided insight and strengthened the commitment I have to social justice within higher education. In my role as programme leader I get to know well the students studying on the foundation degree. The women share their experiences of the emotional, physical and organisational effort it takes to be a higher education student, the barriers they face and the anxieties they have.

The majority of women highlight a combination of location and finance as a reason for studying at a local further education college rather than travelling to a university. Being taught and supported by a lecturer with an EdD goes some way to increase the credibility of the course and the view that studying higher education in further education does not have to be a second-best experience.

### **Developing my practice**

The knowledge and understanding I have gained from completing an EdD has also enabled me to develop my own practice. Taking a more transformative approach to learning, teaching and assessment supports the view that higher education should value the learning context and experience each student brings to it, and appreciate the broader contribution that these elements can bring to society. This approach provides opportunities for the students to make

choices and to take more responsibility for their own learning, and hence general levels of self-esteem increase. During class discussion, assignments and workplace visits it then became evident that students were supporting and using elements of a transformative approach to learning within their own roles in the schools where they worked.

## **Transferable teaching strategies**

The strategies I have implemented and developed within the foundation degree are transferable. This has enabled me to work with and support a range of groups and individuals to improve practice. Following a session sharing my pedagogy with the foundation degree partnership I was invited to speak at the Learning and Teaching Conference at the university. Highlighted as an example of good practice, I shared my strategies to improve retention and achievement within the foundation degree by adopting a transformative approach to learning, teaching and assessment.

The strategies I have implemented and developed within the foundation degree are also transferable to courses within further education, which led me to deliver staff training and one-to-one coaching sessions. These strategies are also applicable to secondary education, which led me to work with a local school to develop their teaching and learning approaches.

## **Communication skills**

Studying for my EdD enabled me to specialise in a particular area of education and to develop my writing and communication skills. This gave me the confidence to present at the QAA Annual Conference. This experience then led on to other opportunities such as presenting at the QAA North West Regional Networking Event. I was one of the contributing authors of the QAA Quality Code for the Higher Education Advice and Guidance document (Work-based Learning) and wrote an article for an international journal for teachers and trainers.

## **In conclusion**

Studying with The Open University was a fantastic experience and I am so glad that I made the decision to study for an EdD, as daunting as it seemed at the time. It was often very difficult to work full time and juggle life whilst studying. Caring about the subject I chose to research and receiving the excellent support I did from The Open University and my wonderful supervisors meant that I never gave up. Gaining an EdD did not secure a pay rise, nor enable me to progress within the organisation where I work, yet the impact of the research I conducted within one small college - with one cohort of students - has been wide. It has helped me reach local, regional, national and international audiences, shaped both my own and others educational thinking and impacted on my personal and professional practice. That is something I am very proud of.

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## Chapter 10. More than just a 'Dr' title: Reflections on studying for an EdD

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DR HELEN BRITTON, GRADUATED 2016

### Questions for reflection

My thesis was entitled, 'Investigating partnership working in voluntary and community organisations delivering learning and skills'. It was completed in 2016. Reflecting on my Doctorate in Education journey, I asked myself two questions:

- How has studying for an EdD made me feel about myself?
- How has doing an EdD impacted on me professionally?

### EdD impact on how I feel about myself

It is strange to think how the twists and turns of living a life mean that one day you realise that, unless you take that leap into the unknown, you won't realise your dreams. Many of the things we may wish to achieve in life can be difficult to find a route to starting, maintaining or even finishing. I would place studying for a doctorate in that category. I am fortunate to have been able to pursue many of my dreams over the years and to possess a personality that has enabled me to push myself, and others, forward in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds.

### Challenges: the EdD and the Kalahari

Completing a doctorate has been, unquestionably, one of my top ten personal achievements and ranks alongside exploring and camping in the Kalahari Desert. What both have in common is that they pushed me to the point of exhaustion and despair; they took me to a point of almost giving up; they provided moments of exhilaration and insight into the world within and the world outside one's self. As different as both experiences were, they both challenged me to 'step up my game'; to learn new skills and to learn how to survive in their respective worlds.

One of my reflections, precipitated from this very personal journey, is that of the mental challenge that underpins studying for a doctorate and the physical challenges that being in hostile, uncomfortable and challenging environments can precipitate. Sometimes, you really do need to push yourself outside a 'comfort zone' in order to develop your potential.

I certainly wouldn't recommend the Kalahari Desert to everyone as necessarily the best way to gain a deeper insight into yourself, but what it did highlight, for me, is that reading about it in a book is not the same as living that experience. That is also true of taking a step up the learning ladder and a doctorate is a big step. Only by doing one (and yes, I did consider for one mad moment of signing up for a second doctorate), did I realise the commitment required to investigate complexity.

## **Finding my voice**

I realised the importance of 'finding my voice'. Studying for the EdD helped me to find another voice – my academic voice - and the confidence to be able to express my thoughts. It made me realise how important it is to have the opportunity to be part of a community that seeks to discover and to present those insights to a wider audience.

## **The learning journey and the support of others**

Something that both extreme activities of perseverance have taught me is that achievements are rarely a single event or achieved without the support of others. Part of the learning journey is identifying when to ask for help and to recognise that what you thought you knew may need to be revisited. Re-writing for clarity is one thing but re-writing in order to gain deeper insight is altogether another.

During my doctorate I always had a couple of inspirational mantras on Post-It notes in front of me. One was, "writing is an expression of self" and "writing needs thinking". Only post-EdD can I really say that I understand, from the inside, exactly what that means and in turn how that feels.

## **EdD impact on my professional life**

The EdD has made me feel more confident to challenge myself to engage in areas of academic interest, and it has provided me with the opportunity to do so. Being an educationalist and entrepreneur, it has enabled me to combine two of my biggest passions by facilitating opportunities to engage others in activities of personal and professional development.

On completing my EdD, I looked for academic opportunities that would enable me to continue my interest in partnership-working and academic writing whilst still managing my other professional and personal commitments. In May 2018, as a member of the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN), I did a presentation entitled, 'Innovation and social challenges: re-thinking and re-framing the narrative' at York University's Conference, 'Developing innovative approaches to tackling complex social problems and challenges'. Talking at this event, and the feedback I received afterwards from delegates, made me feel that I still had something worth saying post-EdD.

### Visiting fellow role and activities

In 2018 I was asked to become a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL) at The Open University Business School. This role has enabled me to make a practical contribution towards the development of the Centre's work in terms of the expansion and marketing of CVSL's portfolio of courses. I have worked collaboratively on a Facilitator Pack of resources to augment CVSL's leadership courses which is available for organisations to download.

In July 2019, I facilitated a workshop at CVSL's July 2019 Conference, 'Putting leadership and collaboration into practice in a changing voluntary sector.' This resulted in working with intermediary organisations whose role it is to support voluntary community groups. Collectively, these particular organisations represent in excess of 20,000 individual charity, social enterprise and community groups.

In October 2019, this led to me being asked to do a presentation, on behalf of CVSL, to a group of voluntary sector CEO's in Northamptonshire entitled, 'Thinking and Doing: Creativity, Innovation and Leadership and back again.' This has helped precipitate further engagement

with intermediary organisations; interested in adding structure and content to leadership development training for the sector.

A little later than I had hoped, I have returned to my thesis in order to develop my theoretical framework and model. I am currently developing this into another piece of extended writing – an academic book.

## **In conclusion**

In short, my EdD has provided the thick layer of icing on the top of a rich set of lived experiences. I didn't just gain a degree, I gained much more than this short piece can express.

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## Chapter 11. Teaching strategies and student motivation in EFL

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DR MIRANDA JANE WALKER, GRADUATED 2016

### **My research study**

The influence and benefits of my EdD research on my personal and professional life have been greater than I expected when I first began, and at the same time, different in nature.

My research was on the influence of teaching strategies and behaviours in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom on student motivation and anxiety. It falls within the area of second language acquisition, specifically EFL and psycholinguistics.

As a modern language teacher, by giving students a voice, I have gained important insight into what students themselves believe concerning teaching strategies and behaviours. I have further discovered that there is, in some cases, an enormous gap between common teacher perceptions regarding teaching strategies and students' actual feelings. Moreover, I learned that there are cultural differences between the Cypriot setting and many other cultural settings in the literature.

### **Teaching to meet student needs**

A key outcome of my research was that I realised the importance of truly making an effort to discover my students' individual needs. As a result, at the beginning of the school year, I ask my students to make jottings on the teaching strategies and teacher behaviours they find motivating, and which aspects of the language classroom make them anxious. I also consult them on the ways that I can help them to overcome this. I then make a conscious effort to adapt my teaching to their needs. This practice lays the foundations for a positive classroom climate formed on trust and approachability. Students seem to appreciate this simple act of consideration.

### **International research study contribution**

I have shared my knowledge and research not only with my colleagues across Limassol, in a series of professional development seminars, but I also used my research as the basis for an Erasmus+ KA2 student project.

In the Erasmus+ sponsored project, students in five European countries (Cyprus, Finland, Spain, Italy and Lithuania) consulted their peers in the EFL classroom setting, as well as in the science classroom environment, on the teaching strategies and behaviours which influence their motivation and anxiety.

Via a series of webinars, I taught the students in all five countries the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analyses that they were to use. The students showed

enhanced enthusiasm to put their newly learned skills to use after I had explained that these skills are appropriate even for doctorate level research. The students then conducted their research, following a common methodology, and reported back on their findings.

Our research population, for each aspect of the project, was approximately 1,000 students. We were able to draw generalised conclusions of the influence of teaching strategies and behaviours on student motivation and anxiety for each subject area, as well as in general, which the students found exciting. On a personal level, I feel proud and satisfied that my research has given students in another four countries a voice and facilitated colleagues in these settings in evaluating their own practices.

We disseminated the findings at the end of the project in the form of a regional professional development conference in Cyprus, to over 100 science and language teachers, which was broadcast simultaneously in the other four countries' schools. Feedback from my international colleagues has been positive. Some reported having noted a significant difference in student engagement in the class. Others reported slight improvements in test results.

## **Publications**

I have published two articles related to teaching strategies which influence student anxiety. The first was an evaluation of the psychometric properties of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety scale (FLCAS) for my cultural setting, namely Cyprus (Panayides & Walker, 2013). The aim was to determine the extent to which the scale was an appropriate instrument for my research setting. I found that even the very best instruments are not necessarily appropriate for all cultural settings. Having determined the aspects of the scale which were relevant and other items which should be included, I designed a revised inventory and evaluated it (Walker & Panayides, 2014).

Since completing my EdD, I have been planning to prepare a few articles based on my research findings and my Erasmus+ project. However, my enjoyment for conducting research has led to me spend more time on investigating various aspects of the school environment rather than on writing up!

## **In conclusion**

In sum, I strongly believe that the OU EdD programme is well-worthwhile. The support and organisation are second to none. I was blessed with superb supervisors to whom I am very grateful, and made great friends along the way.

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## Chapter 12. Spreading my wings

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DR ESTHER WAITHERA KIEBERGER, GRADUATED 2018

### **Introduction**

The motivation to do a doctorate in Education was a result of the challenges that I had encountered in my work as a trainer in a vocational college in Austria. I worked with adult learners who were long term unemployed people in a government retraining skills programme. This group of learners had numerous difficulties that ranged from economic, social, educational and psychological matters. On the other hand, were the trainers who did not have the skills to deal with these challenges because they had no background in teaching adults, although they had high qualifications in other areas. So, my research was about improving skills for these trainers working with unemployed adult learners.

The research enabled me to gain a deeper insight into the real challenges experienced by this group of disadvantaged people. What emerged is that there were issues of learning difficulties, psychological disorders, different levels of motivation, and lack of adequate skills among trainers to deal with the complex needs of these learners.

The research findings show that the trainers play a big role in the success of retraining skills for the labour market, but they need to be prepared well through continuing professional development activities, so that they can improve teaching quality and ensure better learner outcomes. The suggestion is that these improvements should be supported through institutional management, trainer networking systems, and change of government policies. The thesis puts forward practical strategies that can be applied to the classes for unemployed adults, to improve learning and teaching.

### **Impact on my career**

My first job after completing the EdD was as an educational studies expert with the Austrian education inspectorate, working with middle schools providing for students with special educational needs. My role was to visit different schools and provide advice on levels of teaching quality, and support in developing improvement plans for teacher professional development. There was a need to enable teachers to get adequate feedback on their performance in a one to one setting, and to suggest concepts and activities that could enhance teaching and learning quality. The intention was to improve on the CPD for these teachers and to enhance their skills to support special needs learners.

My EdD research was relevant to my work with middle schools because it was at this stage of schooling that many children dropped-out of schools for a variety of reasons. A link between school drop-out and later adult unemployment had been established in my research data, which showed that some of my research group of unemployed adults had experienced challenges that were related to prior learning difficulties in school that had not been addressed or dealt with.

So in my work for the inspectorate, I worked with young teachers of English in inclusive/integration classes with learners who had learning difficulties or learned differently, for example children with autism, ADHS, bipolar and other challenges. Most of the teachers in these classes did not have any training in special education.

### Teacher training

Through the schools' leadership teams, I was able to invite experts to train the teachers in effective teaching and support for children with special needs, and to show the teachers, where necessary, how to get additional support and assistance. Teachers were helped to develop skills in supported communication for learners who remained silent because of the serious challenges they had experienced. Teachers were also encouraged to create conducive learning environments, so as to foster confidence in the learners, and to learn skills of emotional tolerance without losing control, or feeling overburdened, drawing on what Goleman refers to as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

The next area that I focused on was related to competence-orientated coaching and reflection, to enable the teachers to evaluate their teaching and how they could best continue improving their practice, based on the feedback that I gave. It was evident that, because of the many different learning styles in the classrooms, the teachers were overwhelmed, and in many cases, they experienced conflicts in various forms. Therefore, I saw the need for these teachers to be provided with courses and seminars on conflict management, to enable them to react and respond to challenging situations more effectively.

With the support of the inspectorate, the schools took part in shared CPD activities, to support development in various areas, including readiness to implement changes, improving teaching and learning standards, allocation of budgets for courses, negotiating for expert support, and adding value to education. The schools worked to ensure that inclusive decision-making processes were promoted, as well as more transparent systems, and interventions where classroom difficulties were experienced.

The inspectorate also included support for the school leadership and management teams, in terms of commitment to better education, support for sharing knowledge, and creative means for solving problems. This was intended to encourage a learning organisation approach, as described by Stoll et al. (2012). The initiatives introduced also influenced policy-making decisions in the institutions, and an increase in the budget for learning resources to support teachers. By the end of 2019 there was much more active participation in decision making by teachers, improved teachers' self-esteem, and focused planning based on national policy guidelines,

I drew on my experience of EdD research to write a handbook for teachers that summarizes some aspects of my research study and provides teachers with some case examples of challenges and how to deal with them. Entitled *Improving professional skills for trainers working with unemployed adult learners in Austria* (2019), the handbook is available in bookshops in Germany and Austria.

The EdD provided the basis for the career developments outlined above, by helping me to develop my research skills and put them into practice in my work, and more broadly by building my professional competence and confidence.

### Personal development and writing

The EdD journey also increased my personal self-confidence and my writing skills. I published a number of books and articles. After completing the EdD, I went on to write my memoirs, *Let the bird fly, my daughter* (2019). I felt that I had matters in my childhood that I needed to deal with,

especially my schooling that influenced some of the themes for example, 'who are good teachers?

After that I wrote a book based on observations and short conversations, *The ways of the African diaspora in Austria* (2019) (Vol 1), depicting the kind of challenges that migrants experience, in terms of education, social, economic, and cultural dilemmas. My next book, *Scattering survivors* (2019), was based on interviews that look at leadership and conflicts in Kenya during the elections of 1992. The book captures the previously untold experiences of people who were affected by issues of political instability, social and ethnical difference.

This was followed by *Challenges of the African Diaspora in Austria* (2019) (Vol 2), which highlights issues for immigrants, such as legal status dilemmas, substance abuse, learning difficulties, and problems of integration. *Business Ventures of the African Diaspora* (2020) (Vol 3) has just been published. It portrays cases of commercial failure and success of a hardworking, and tenacious group of immigrants, who are examples of game changers and change inspirers for the African Continent.

I also wrote a number of papers for the University of Vienna, on the experiences and challenges of a black woman researcher in Austria, and an analysis of the Kenyan presidential elections in 2007.

In 2019 I also became involved in two projects in Kenya. One of these was a support team working on curriculum change for the Kenyan education system. The other project supports children in Kenya with mental challenges in primary schools. So far I am collecting good second hand functioning laptops, keyboard pianos, and other musical instruments, to enable the children to develop their potential, and to promote their love for learning.

## Conclusion

Finally, a major insight that I have carried forward from my EdD journey is that it is important to recognise the limitations and challenges in trying to encourage teachers to continue learning, but it is also equally important to acknowledge that most people strive to learn, develop and improve, no matter what the challenges are. This short account shows how the EdD has helped me to learn, develop and spread my wings.

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