

Supporting researching professionals: EdD students' perceptions of their development needs

Article

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Supporting Researching Professionals: EdD students' perceptions of their development needs

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Abstract

A Doctorate in Education (EdD) is an established alternative to a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD). However, frameworks in use to support doctoral study in the UK are focused mainly at PhD students and their associated needs and do not address the specific requirements of students who are often working full time and undertaking research into their professional context. To fill this gap, the purpose of this paper is to report on a Researching Practitioner Development Framework (RPDF) which has been developed to meet the specific professional development needs of EdD students. We describe the theory which underpins the overarching structure of the RPDF and report on a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with nine EdD students, which informed its content. Future research is planned to evaluate the implementation of the RPDF alongside existing EdD programme resources, and its role in supporting the professional development and research impact of EdD students.

Keywords

Doctorate in Education (EdD); professional doctorate; doctoral education; researching practitioner; professional development framework.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on a study which aimed to explore students' perceptions of their development needs while undertaking a Doctorate in Education (EdD). An EdD is an established alternative to the Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) in many countries and gives educators (e.g. school teachers, nurse educators, police trainers) an opportunity to carry out research that is relevant to and informed by their experience as practitioners. The route is almost always undertaken through part time study, with students conducting research into some aspect of their professional practice while continuing to work (Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006).

Over the last few years, the number of students undertaking EdDs in the UK has grown (Floyd and Arthur 2012), and the need for the skills developed through an EdD

programme has been widely recognised. For example, in a recent report into the role of research in teacher education, the British Educational Research Association emphasises the need for knowledge, practical experience and research literacy, which it views as jointly contributing to the teacher as a professional. It sees ‘teachers’ research and enquiry skills and predispositions’ as helping to renew ‘teachers’ professional identity and practice’ (BERA 2014, 12). The report concludes that a culture needs to be encouraged where ‘engagement *in* and *with* research becomes an everyday part of teachers’ professional identity and practice’ (ibid 21, original emphasis). While the report refers specifically to teachers, the sentiment is pertinent across all areas where research can inform practice. But how can we best support students who decide to undertake an EdD, especially as it offers a different educational experience to the traditional PhD and often has a very different student intake?

In developing the EdD, the aim was to put professional practice and critical reflection at the centre of the experience, with the culture of academia less so: the EdD was distinguished from the PhD by being described as ‘knowledge in context’ (Maxwell and Shanahan 1997, 142) whereas a PhD focuses more on making a contribution to knowledge alone. A notable distinction between the two different modes of study is that the pre-service PhD leads to *professional researchers* while the in-service professional doctorate leads to *researching professionals* (Bourner, Bowden and Laing 2001; Butcher and Sieminski 2006). Therefore, the professional or practitioner doctorate is founded on ‘processes of thoughtful action, leading to advances in practice, rather than processes of research leading to advances in knowledge’ (Lester 2004, 765). The focus on ‘thoughtful action’ makes reference to the way in which EdD research straddles the university and the workplace (Taylor 2007, 156); it brings critical thinking into the workplace and offers an opportunity for the status quo to be challenged (see Maxwell and Shanahan 1997). This process was described by Butcher and Sieminski (2009, 45) as ‘professionals as insider-researchers investigating their own practice’. Similarly, Beutel et al. (2010, 67) refer to the undertaking of ‘scholarly research into professional practices’, while the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* comments that ‘Professional doctorates aim to develop an individual’s professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge’ (QAA 2014, 30). Thus, professional doctorates include an emphasis on

‘research which is expected to lead to personal and professional development and is grounded in practice’ (Burgess & Wellington 2010, 163).

While the differences between the two modes of doctoral study can be easily distinguished, there appears to be very little development support for EdD students that is tailored specifically to their unique learning situations. For example, The Open University where the current research was conducted provides the VITAE researcher development framework (www.vitae.ac.uk/effectiveresearcher) for all doctoral students. However, as already argued, EdD students’ professional development needs are not the same as those of PhD students (see Salter 2013; Costley and Lester 2012; Burgess, Weller & Wellington 2011) and the professional development needs of EdD students cannot be met in full through their engagement with materials designed primarily for PhD students who are likely to pursue academic careers. For example, whilst some parts of the VITAE resources are applicable to EdD students, the framework does not cover the concept of working as a researching practitioner. What kind of developmental support do EdD students really need? And how does it differ from more traditional frameworks targeted at PhD students? It is these key questions that this article hopes to address.

While there appears to be very little tailored support for EdD students, there is even less research into what this support might look like, with any previous work in this area focusing either on PhD study (e.g. Deem and Brehony 2000; McAlpine, Paulson, Gonsalves and Jazvac-Martek 2012) or looking at more generic aspects of EdD study without a key focus on development needs. For example, in their mixed methods research, Butcher and Sieminski (2006) identified four professional impacts from completing an EdD:

1. Professionalisation – reflection on practice leading to enhanced confidence in applying knowledge and skills in practice;
2. Professional change and impact on colleagues – for example, revising teaching plans and policies;
3. Impact on the wider professional/academic community – ‘joining the club’, disseminating findings;
4. Impact on professional self-esteem and credibility, which underpins the other three impacts.

Their research, however, focussed on the professional impact of studying for an EdD but not on how students develop the relevant skills. From their research across three countries into the emergence of professional doctorates, Wildy, Peden and Chan (2015, 772) concluded that a generational shift in thinking would be needed before the value of a professional doctorate was fully understood. They found that professional doctorate students were ‘likely to be mature-aged, mid-career professionals who are keen to progress in their workplace’ and that they could be ‘characterized as time-poor and experience-rich’, which they concluded would both impact upon their progress as EdD students and have pedagogical implications. However, they did not explore how the development of those students could be facilitated. This suggests that further research into the development needs of such students would add value. The research presented here provides an original and important contribution to our knowledge of how best to support students who are undertaking professional doctorates. By drawing on learning theories, as described below, the paper also makes a significant contribution to our theoretical understanding of how EdD students learn as they progress through their research journey. The research question addressed in this paper is as follows:

- What are EdD students’ perceptions and experiences of their development needs in a UK university?

This article is organised into six sections. Following this introduction, we explore the theoretical framework which has underpinned the research and data analysis. Next we describe our methodological choices. Then, we present our findings and propose a new empirically derived framework for practitioner researcher development. Finally, we conclude with some implications and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

Illeris (2002, 2009) was concerned that traditional learning theories did not reflect the complexity of how individuals learn in times of significant change. Having explored the learning theories of over thirty renowned writers, he concluded that human learning involved the integration and interaction of three dimensions of learning – cognitive, emotional and social. He describes the internal learning process as involving the *integration* of the cognitive and emotional dimensions, while external learning involves the *interaction* of these two dimensions with the social context of learning. Illeris (2009) argued that all learning involved, to some extent, all three

dimensions and that these were inextricably linked in what he described as the ‘tension field of learning’ (ibid, 11). Kegan (2009) instead chose the words cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal to describe the three dimensions. Illeris (2009) argued that at a time when change is significant, learning has to embrace the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of learning as much as the traditional cognitive aspect.

Other researchers exploring changes in the learning environment chose instead to use metaphors to describe the different facets of learning. Sfard (1998) distinguished between ‘learning as acquisition’ (relating to acquiring, storing and using knowledge) and ‘learning as participation’ (learning from interaction and relationships). Wenger (1998) meanwhile introduced the idea of ‘learning as becoming’, which he related to the intrapersonal concept of identity. More recently Boud and Hager (2012) identified limitations in the previously dominant metaphor of ‘learning as acquisition’ in the professional development field and stressed the importance of both ‘learning as participation’ and learning as becoming’. In an attempt to bring together these strands of work to inform a better understanding of all the areas of learning that need to be considered during professional development, Lindsay (2014) mapped the three dimensions of learning identified by Illeris against the metaphors of learning described by Sfard (1998), Wenger (1998) and Boud and Hager (2011) (Figure 1).

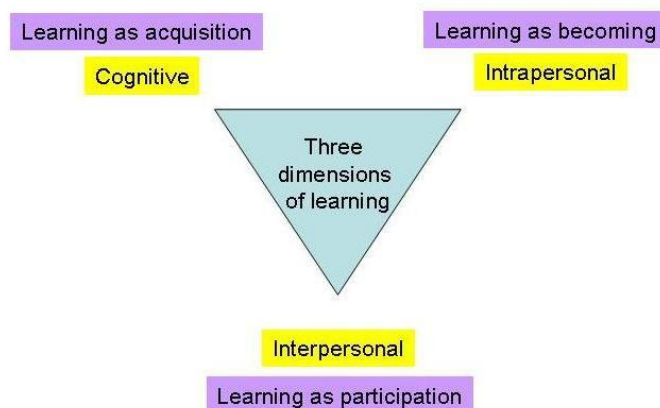


Figure 1. The three dimensions of learning and their associated metaphors (adapted from Lindsay 2014)

Lindsay recognised that while every learning activity will to some extent draw on all three dimensions, some learning activities will particularly resonate with one or other

of the dimensions. On the other hand, if learning activities are focused on only one dimension of learning, the learning will not be as complete as it could be if it encompassed the cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions (2014; 2016).

Whilst other research has explored the learning of doctoral students, none has focussed solely on the development needs of EdD students. In their research into professional doctorates at Middlesex University, Doncaster and Thorne (2000, 393) identified three sets of high level capabilities which doctoral candidates were expected to demonstrate. The first group included 'habitual reflection' and 'self-directed and self-managed learning'; the second group included 'high-level cognitive capabilities'; and the third group 'the ability to formulate solutions in dialogue with stakeholders'. These three aspects map across directly to the intrapersonal, cognitive and interpersonal dimensions mentioned above. However that research then focussed on developing the reflective and planning skills which were seen by Doncaster and Thorne as prerequisites for the development of the required capabilities.

Meanwhile two of the dimensions were mentioned by Wisker et al. (2010, 5). In their final report into Doctoral Learning Journeys they explored the threshold crossing or 'learning leaps' of both PhD and professional doctoral students. In doing so they concluded (ibid, 6) that 'doctoral conceptual crossing includes ontological shifts' where 'security of self is challenged and researcher identities affected' and 'epistemological shifts' where 'knowledge is problematised and deepened'. Again these two aspects resonate with the emotional and cognitive dimensions which make up the internal aspect of learning Illeris describes above. However this significant programme of research focussed on exploring student learning journeys from the perspective of threshold crossings, the light bulb moments, rather than exploring all the learning experiences of a doctoral student.

Finally, although Smith et al. (2011) explored student perceptions it was their perceptions of the professional doctorate itself and not of their development needs. And, while Buss, Zambo, Zambo and Williams (2014) explored the development of researching professionals, this was in the context of two signature pedagogies used by their university, cycles of action research and leader scholar communities.

The three dimensions of learning set out in figure one have therefore been reinforced by other research with doctoral students (Doncaster and Thorne 2000; Wisker et al. 2010). The dimensions also have the potential to form an innovative analytical framework which could be used to support EdD students' development as researching practitioners. We therefore interviewed EdD students and graduates at The Open University about their experiences and drew upon their responses to develop a framework which could then be used by future EdD students. This process is reported below.

3. Methodology

In order to address our research question, we wanted to capture EdD students' understandings of their professional development needs as researching practitioners. This approach would ensure that the new framework reflected their needs and would be useful for them. As with other recent research into the tensions and challenges of EdD studies (e.g. Burgess et al. 2011), we were keen to capture the student voice. Thus, we adopted the interpretive paradigm in line with social constructivism. This approach views experiences as being socially constructed and perceived differently by individuals depending on a range of cultural, historical and situational factors (Punch 2014).

Participants

Our aim was to ensure that data was drawn from as wide a cross-section of EdD students and graduates as possible. A recruitment email was sent to around 25 past and present EdD students who collectively represented a range of professions and their associated workplaces, research topics, stage of EdD study and countries of residence, as well as location and gender. From the respondents, nine were then asked to take part in the study on the basis that they represented as broad a range of the above characteristics as possible. None of the participants were supervised by the authors. Four were EdD students and five were EdD graduates. Five were female and four were male. Five were based in the UK, two in mainland Europe and two outside Europe. They included teachers, school heads and deputy heads and individuals working in teacher education. Research interests ranged from music education to language education to special needs education.

Ethical Considerations

Approval for the research was obtained from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Each participant was given a detailed information sheet and signed a consent form before their interview. In order to protect their anonymity, pseudonyms were allocated and used from the start of the project and each participant was given the opportunity to drop out at any time. The interviews were conducted by the first author who anonymised the data and agreed transcripts with the participants through respondent validation. That author had no involvement in the studies or the progression or otherwise of the students who participated.

THE EdD PROGRAMME at The Open University

A pre-requisite requirement for registration is that students hold a Masters degree in education or a related discipline. Also, applicants must submit a suitable research proposal that is reviewed by a potential supervisor and co-supervisor. The EdD programme at The Open University does not require students to study any modules/courses; once they are registered on the programme, students start their own research immediately. Year 1 focuses on the literature review and an initial small-scale study and students move on to their main study in years 2 and 3. There are residential/day schools each year which contain sessions on research training, thesis writing, and face to face tutorials. In addition, students in year 1 can participate in online fora; each is led by an academic and focuses on a key aspect of the research process (e.g. research ethics, literature reviews and research methodology). Students are not formally required to submit their research to a journal or present at conferences during their studies but they do present their work to fellow students and supervisors at the residential/day schools.

Across the three years, students' progress is evaluated by means of progress reports which are evaluated by their supervisors. Students in year 1 also produce an end-of-year report of approx. 12-15000 words which is double-marked and considered by an exam board; at this stage a student either progresses to year 2 or is advised that they need to resubmit their report the following year. The last three reports in year 3 are drafts of the 50,000 word thesis, which is examined in a viva voce. Students are entitled to twelve hours' supervision a year from each of their supervisors who provide support and feedback before and after progress reports. With the exception of

the face-to-face supervision at residential/day schools, most supervision is delivered at a distance by telephone or Skype etc.

Semi-structured interviews

An interview schedule was drawn up and piloted. Participants took part in a semi-structured Skype interview lasting 40-60 minutes which was conducted by the first author. Three main areas were explored that reflected the cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of learning (Table 1).

| Dimensions of learning | Area of EdD professional development | Example interview questions |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Cognitive | Information that needed to be learned as an individual researcher | What were your learning experiences relating to residential schools, collecting data, etc.? What has engaging with your supervisor been like for you? |
| Intrapersonal | How new identities, attitudes and mindsets were developing during the research process | What is the biggest difference studying to be an EdD has made to you as a person? How big a role has reflection played in your EdD studies? |
| Interpersonal | Activities relating to sharing research ideas and findings | What have you done to try to spread the word about your research? Is there anything connected with developing and promoting your research that you wish you had done differently? |

Table 1: The structure of the interview schedule with example questions

In addition to the questions outlined in Table 1, interviewees were asked specifically if they had experiences or advice they would like to share to help current EdD students. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, agreed with the interviewee and anonymised.

Analysis of the interviews

A thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun and Clarke 2006) by the first and second authors. They engaged in an iterative process which involved firstly immersion by reading and re-reading, then discussion and agreement of provisional codes, then

individual coding. The first author adopted a deductive approach that was informed by the three dimensions of learning (Figure 1): evidence of learning activities across the three dimensions of learning was sought in the data. The second author adopted an inductive approach and developed codes based only on the content of the interviewees' utterances. This dual approach to coding has been described previously by Hamm and Faircloth (2005) in a similar attempt to ensure reliability. This process of provisional coding resulted in the generation of over 150 codes between the two researchers, which were then compared and merged into a final single list of 42 codes that represented the combined result of both the inductive and deductive coding. All the transcripts were then subject to a second round of coding where each author independently applied codes from the agreed list and actively checked that they were exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Braun and Clarke 2006). The two authors discussed the output together until complete agreement was reached. The codes were then grouped into three themes and both researchers agreed that these were broadly representative of the three dimensions of learning and their associated metaphors. Each theme was then divided into subthemes and each subtheme was labelled to represent the areas of professional development identified as important by the participants during their EdD studies (Table 2).

| Themes (learning dimensions and metaphors) | Sub-themes |
|--|---|
| Working as a researcher (cognitive dimension; learning as acquisition) | Developing research and study skills Blending theory and practice Building supportive relationships |
| Developing ways of thinking (intrapersonal dimension; learning as becoming) | Reflecting on theory and practice Building your resilience Developing your identity |
| Moving on with your research (interpersonal dimension, learning as participation) | Engaging with new opportunities Disseminating your research Making a difference |

Table 2: Three themes with their associated learning dimensions and metaphors, and their sub-themes

4. Findings: EdD students' perceptions of their development needs

Next, we discuss each theme and subtheme in detail in order to illustrate the students' perceptions of their development needs. We include exemplar quotes from interviewees, which have been selected on the basis that they are representative of the views that emerged under each of the subthemes.

Theme 1. Working as a researcher

1.1 Developing research and study skills

The students talked about their current experiences while the graduates reflected on what they had done, or wished they had done, as they had developed their research and study skills. Interviewees recognised not only that they must not cherry pick the literature but that they also needed to know when to stop reading and move on. They emphasised the importance of using search tools and setting up online alerts and how to take advantage of tools such as Google scholar. Their advice was that students needed to find an effective way of collecting references that worked for them. They emphasised the importance of getting any ethical approval needed from any bodies in good time. They referred to the challenges they had faced as students in taking ownership of their research, in developing their critical skills, and in moving on in their approach from anecdote to reflected critique.

But certainly during the course of the EdD I had to look at [the literature review] from a new direction so to speak and actually realise that 'OK I have read it, I mustn't take everything as gospel, I must consider where it has come from, what kind of research has been carried out in order for the author to come to the conclusions they have. Do I actually go with this? Do I agree with it or do I not? What is missing? Can I grab that and do something new and exciting? Have they already done what I have done? Does that mean I drop it or does that mean I should try and take the aspects that could be useful to me?'

[EdD student, Year 3]

Mention was made of the value of research methods books, of the need to be aware of the reliability of data, of developing thematic analysis skills and of the benefits and pitfalls of transcribing. Interviewees shared their experiences in developing an academic style of writing. Most talked of their difficulties in structuring arguments and reports, in learning how to reference and how to use quotes, in meeting the word count and in learning how to change their style of writing.

I have just written a chapter on my research methodology and I was told to rewrite it because it wasn't critical and I didn't really understand what that was until one of my supervisors sent me a sample of somebody else's work and it all made sense, and I could see what I was expected to do ... because I am a practitioner and not an academic, I don't necessarily understand what it is to write an academic piece of research.

[EdD student, Year 2]

All the interviewees emphasised the importance of organisational skills, time management and managing the workload; and of the need to set realistic goals and to keep focussed.

The way I approached my EdD was I tried to be professional in my studies because I was professional at work ... for me it was somehow easy to function if I kept up my professionalism as much as I could. So for me it was just a job; I had been hired by The Open University and I had a line manager and I had to deliver.

[EdD graduate]

1.2 Blending theory and practice

The Open University EdD assessment criteria require students to make a contribution to both educational theory and practice. The interviewees were asked about their experiences in trying to blend theory and practice. Interviewees mentioned how they were now adding a research rigour to any projects they undertook and described how they now found themselves adopting an evidence-based approach at work, particularly if anyone at work mentioned 'research'.

I must be a real pain, but the Head has said 'research shows this' and I say 'where is the research? Is it in a local newspaper? What research is it?' And they must get fed up with me really but, at the end of the day, what research? There is research for everything, how good is it?

[EdD student, Year 1]

Feedback from work colleagues and participants had given students new ideas for their research. One student's presentation to colleagues at school helped shape the

questionnaire she was designing; another realised she needed to tailor an academic strategy to meet her students' needs; and yet another found the feedback from workshops held with staff had been invaluable in helping her explore the future implications of her research.

There was also recognition that sharing research findings helped get buy-in from others. One student mentioned how it helped his colleagues see where his research might fill a gap and add value. Another found herself with the opportunity to implement what she was finding out and realised she was in a position to influence things more at work. She saw her research as a way to try to invite change. Overall students had found that as they undertook their research it added a new understanding of what was happening in practice.

1.3 Building supportive relationships

Interviewees were asked about the relationships that were important to them to support their work as a researcher. The importance of developing relationships with supervisors that worked for each individual was emphasised. One was pleased that his supervisor recognised that he was an independent worker but knew other students preferred far more interaction. While students valued the face-to-face contact and planned online sessions, informal contact was also seen as invaluable. Supervisors were described as 'mentors' and 'sounding boards'. One student saw the relationship as that of apprentice and skilled expert.

I really was an apprentice where [my supervisor] kind of took me under his wing and we went forward and that worked out well even though I was surprised because it is in an online setting ... and yes, it really made me the academic that I am today, absolutely.

[EdD graduate]

For some, support from other students had been important. They had stayed in contact throughout with students they met at the initial face-to-face residential weekend. Meanwhile others talked about how they had managed their colleagues' and their managers' expectations about their research. Some colleagues had been apprehensive; others were not interested. One student now realised he should have sought input from

colleagues at an earlier stage. Another described how her head teacher had been invaluable in helping her find a way to collect data.

Theme 2. Developing ways of thinking

2.1 Reflecting on theory and practice

Participants were asked about the role of reflection and how this may have changed during their studies. They described how in the past they had resolved issues without reflection, whereas they now thought more before moving to action. One student, referring specifically to Donald Schön's (1983) work, said he now 'reflected in action'. Others described how the whole research process had made them reflect on everything and talked about how they felt they were in a permanent state of reflection. Reflection was seen as helping both practice and research and the interaction between the two. Students commented that the more they reflected the more theory and practice came together and that the research-based approach had helped them to contextualise previous work experience.

I find myself reflecting far more on what I do rather than thinking 'oh that lesson felt like it went well, that is OK, we are fine, off we go'. I ask my students far more how they feel about what is going on [whereas] before I would have been a little bit nervous about doing it. I realised that at the end of the day they are, in essence, my clients and if it is not working for them they are not going to get results. I found it has been much better for me having done what they actually believed was good for them.

[EdD student, Year 3]

Students described how they had learnt to accept and reflect on the feedback they received from their supervisors. They recognised that being reflective had helped them move forward and also helped them face up to and discuss their concerns about whether they would be able to meet the EdD requirements. Students also reflected on future challenges they might be facing. This could be about how to research colleagues' practice and manage their reactions or they could be considering possible future research opportunities. More generally there was reflection on the iterative and reflexive nature of their research.

2.2 Building your resilience

Students and graduates discussed the cognitive strategies they had used to cope with the ups and downs they encountered during the conduct of their research and shared the advice they would give to future students to help them succeed. They talked about their passion for their areas of research. To stand the best chance of success they felt they needed to believe in what they were doing.

The reason I started the doctorate, and continued with it through thick and thin, was because the subject was very personal to me and I was highly motivated to complete it.

[EdD graduate]

Interviewees emphasised the importance of trying to get the best fit between their research topic and what they were doing in practice, in order that the aspects complemented each other. Another theme emerged around working out what suited each of them personally, regardless of what others might prefer. Interviewees were open to criticism, realising supervisor criticism was not personal. Indeed some built their resilience by embracing criticism. Some had realised there was far more flexibility in the programme than they had thought. Others emphasised how important it had been to challenge initial assumptions, to face their own ignorances and to be open to disproving their own ideas.

Go through with your eyes open. Learn as much as you can and be prepared to lose any preconceptions. I accept that it is a journey of understanding; it is a journey of knowing which is unpredictable but certainly a journey which is very useful and makes a big difference.

[EdD student, Year 2]

Nearly all talked about times when they had encountered difficulties. For some it was about feelings of doubt and not feeling they were good enough. For others it was an ongoing sense of guilt that there was always more that needed to be done. For some it was the impact the EdD study was having on the rest of their life. Some students had felt the need for emotional support along the way.

2.3 Developing your identity

Interviewees were asked how they had developed their thinking about themselves as researchers and whether they felt they had changed as a person in some way during their studies. In response they described how their confidence had increased, both during their EdD studies and as a result of graduating. Alongside this there was mention by several of an increasing sense of humility. Interviewees described how they had developed as researchers, about how they now realised the value of evidence-based argument to bring about change and of the need to embrace the greyness inherent in the nature of knowledge. Interviewees had found their increasing critical thinking skills relevant in all environments. Generally they had become more open to discussion and more confident about asking questions. They now thought more objectively and more forensically.

I almost feel like [doing my EdD studies] has made me more mature. In other ways I am much more aware of my surroundings and my present position now, my present relationship with everybody especially at school than I was. I don't have that chip on my shoulder anymore. ... What an academic approach seems to have done is put my experience into context and it is this understanding of context that I have discovered has changed my perception of myself I guess.

[EdD student, Year 2]

The respondents talked about how the EdD had changed their lives. Some wanted to continue to do research in their current roles. Some had used the EdD qualification to move on to a new job. For others the EdD had given them a stronger voice and the confidence to say yes to new projects.

Theme 3. Moving on with your research

3.1 Engaging with new opportunities

Interviewees were asked what they had done to try to spread the word about their research and share any findings. In response they stressed how important it was to talk about their research to as many different audiences as possible, and to start doing so early in their studies. It had helped them check they were making sense and that they were using the right language for each audience.

Talking with others really helps you to understand something that you won't read in a research article... especially if you are a practitioner, a teacher, you learn from your colleagues but it is not written down anywhere.

[EdD graduate]

Students and graduates described ways in which they had built their networks, for example by signing up to mailing lists, attending events at other universities or contacting leading researchers in their field. One interviewee had made sure she met the best of the best in her research area. Meanwhile others recognised that their research community was the school or sector where they worked. While a few of the interviewees described how they had benefitted from using social media, others recognised its potential but did not know how to make use of it or were concerned about the lack of confidentiality.

I think that whole notion of using social media makes a great deal of sense ... and certainly it is something that could well be developed ... it is something else which is more open, positive, upbeat but informative.

[EdD student, Year 3]

Some wanted to apply their research skills to other areas while others had plans to write more freely or on different topics after graduating.

3.2 Disseminating your research

The interviewees were asked what they had done to disseminate their research, both during and after their EdD studies. Some had run workshops at the schools where they worked. Others sought opportunities to publish articles and attend and present at conferences. Overall they emphasised how important it was to start disseminating research findings as soon as possible.

Just don't wait until you have finished your research to start publishing, start publishing as soon as you can get anybody to accept it.

[EdD graduate]

Some respondents gave examples of how they had shared, or planned to share, their research findings with wider audiences. However, others were unclear how to go about doing this, even though they could see it was important to do so. In general

interviewees were clear about the benefits of going to conferences, presenting papers, listening to others and meeting key people in their field. Nevertheless, they recognised that presenting at a conference could be a challenging experience if subject matter experts were present.

In looking at post-thesis publishing, the need to break a thesis down into several articles was emphasised as was the importance of choosing appropriate journals. The interviewees had been relieved to discover that having papers rejected was something that happened to everyone. It was suggested that for maximum impact students should publish their research through non-academic as well as academic channels.

3.3 Making a difference

As interviewees described what the phrase ‘researching practitioner’ meant to them it became apparent that the concept embodied not only the whole process of a professional doctorate but also the evolving and then continuing relationship between research and practice. On being asked about how they hoped their research might make a difference in their own research setting and more widely, students and graduates mentioned how their EdD studies had led to new opportunities at work. One described how she was using an action research approach at school; another how her research had provided her with challenging opportunities that she would not otherwise have experienced. For one student the change was that since she had given a presentation on her research findings colleagues now viewed her in a new light. One student’s ultimate aim was to make his school a research community.

Some mentioned how others now sought them out as mentors or asked for help with their research; that people now listened to them and came to them for advice. Others talked about ways that their research had helped change practice, policy and the lives of others.

[My school is] working with [a Research School] and we are actually designing a way of looking at the impact of holistic education. ... We are trying to develop a tool that we can use in schools as a way of looking at the impact of the education in the broadest kind of sense.

[EdD graduate]

Several talked about their plans for further research. For some this would be in the school where they worked; for others it was in a new role working for a university. Several of the graduates were working with other academics in a variety of ways, including commissioning researchers to help with a project at a school. One graduate valued the freedom she now had to choose how to make a difference.

I have got an awful lot in return [for my EdD]; I have got freedom now, I have got independence, I can choose what I want to do and people listen to me because they think she must know what she is talking about.

[EdD graduate]

5. Summary of findings

Each section above describes the learning activities coded to one of the nine subthemes. However learning activities are multifaceted and inevitably some of the interviewees' responses could have been included in more than one of the subthemes. For example, comments about running a workshop at school could have been described as 'blending learning and practice', as 'engaging with new opportunities' or as 'disseminating your research'. For reasons of clarity, a decision was made to include each code in only one sub-theme so that there would be as little confusion and overlap as possible when EdD students subsequently engage with the framework. However as the analysis was undertaken the integrative nature of the framework became increasingly apparent. Whilst the links within each of the three main themes had been apparent, there were also links across the main themes. Blending theory and practice was closely aligned to reflecting on theory and practice. In order to disseminate your research you needed supportive relationships. You needed resilience if you wished to engage with new opportunities. This meant it was possible to represent the three themes and nine sub-themes in the formation shown at Figure 2, with the outer ring of the framework representing the three themes identified during the data analysis and the three subthemes associated with each theme represented by the nine inner segments.



Figure 2: The Researching Practitioner Development Framework

6. Discussion

This paper offers a Researching Practitioner Development Framework (RPDF) to support the development of EdD students at The Open University. The overarching structure of the framework is underpinned by previous work by Illeris (2002, 2009) and resonates with other research with doctoral students (Doncaster and Thorne 2000, Wisker et al. 2010). Its content has been empirically derived from our analysis of interviews carried out with EdD students and graduates. As such, the framework offers an insider perspective on the personal experience of doing an EdD and the ways in which EdD students conceptualise their development needs as researching practitioners.

The interview responses provide clear examples of how students could develop their learning as researching practitioners. Even in the relatively traditional elements relating to ‘working as a researcher’, most interviewees talked about the challenges associated with developing a research mindset and developing an academic writing style and shared thoughts on how this could be achieved. In the intrapersonal area of development, ‘developing ways of thinking’, interviewees shared how they felt they

had changed during their research and how others might expect to do so. The frequent reference to reflection, how it eventually became a habit, and the realisation of the need to be open and flexible throughout the EdD process were two examples of how the thinking of students had developed. Finally the responses in the ‘moving on with your research’ section emphasised the importance of making an early start, in whatever way was possible, in sharing research findings. Talking about research to whoever would listen, building networks and using social media were just some of the practical suggestions in this area.

There were also comments that related specifically to the development needs of EdD students. The part-time nature of such programmes can lead to a sense of isolation; of not feeling an integral part of a research community. It was only when one student was shown an example of somebody else’s work that they realised what was meant by critical writing. Several students expressed feelings of doubt and that they were not good enough, without realising that others felt the same. The ‘time-poor and experience-rich’ descriptor of EdD students mentioned by Wildy et al. (2015) leads to other differences from PhD students. Students with significant experience in other fields have had to ‘unlearn’ some of the behaviours that have made them successful: ‘I am a practitioner and not an academic, I don’t necessarily understand what it means to write an academic piece of research’. Being ‘professionals as insider-researchers investigating their own practice’ (Butcher and Sieminski 2009, 45) is not an easy place to be and again sets EdD students apart from the traditional context of PhD students.

The framework has the potential to address several of the concerns articulated in the Introduction section above. One area for development that is identified in the RPDF is ‘blending theory and practice’, an essential element that Butcher and Sieminski (2009) found ranked below academic skills and understanding in the factors motivating EdD students and graduates. The RPDF makes these skills explicit. The framework should also help students identify that they need to develop academic confidence and enter the discourse of academia, the two specific learning needs identified for EdD students by Butcher and Sieminski (2006). The RPDF makes specific reference to ‘developing your identity’; an idea which resonates with the desire of BERA (2014) that research becomes a part of professional identity. Overall

the framework supports individuals in identifying the need to develop a research mindset that will enable them to make the ongoing contribution to professional knowledge that QAA (2014) identifies as one of the aims of a professional doctorate.

When the three main areas of the framework are mapped against the four areas of professional impact that could emerge from completing an EdD (Butcher and Sieminski 2006), it becomes clear that EdD students' engagement with the RPDF should enhance all the four identified aspects of professional impact. For example, the development of new ways of thinking will not only benefit students in terms of attaining their EdDs, but should also have an impact on their standing as professional, researching practitioners in their fields. Burgess and Wellington (2010) identified professional development, personal development and impact as three areas critical to the progress of professional doctorate students. The RPDF has identified three equivalent areas of development. Finally, with just nine elements of learning, the framework is accessible for predominantly part-time EdD students seeking to maintain a work-study-life balance (Wildy et al. 2015).

Whilst EdD students and PhD students share some development needs (e.g. the need to think critically), EdD students are distinct in that their development takes place within the University *and* the workplace (Taylor 2007, 156) with the overarching aim of enhancing their professional practice (QAA 2014, 30). Unlike the resources designed for PhD students which focus on supporting the development of *professional researchers* the RPDF focuses specifically on supporting the development of *researching professionals* (Bourner, Bowden and Laing 2001; Butcher and Sieminski 2006). All three areas of development in the framework identify the ways in which EdD students need to develop as researching practitioners *in* their workplace and apply their new skills *to* their workplace so that they are able to engage in 'processes of thoughtful action, leading to advances in practice' (Lester 2004, 765) and make contributions to professional knowledge (QAA 2014, 30). The RPDF therefore addresses the specific development needs of EdD students that are not considered in resources designed for PhD students.

The framework has been developed from EdD students' understanding of their professional development needs at one particular University. However, while some of

the specific comments may be context-dependent, the three areas of learning; Working as a Researcher, Developing Ways of Thinking and Moving on with Your Research will apply to all EdD students, and potentially to all those studying for professional doctorates. Any University offering a professional doctorate programme could review to what extent the nine elements of the framework are covered by the teaching and learning activities they have in place. They could also add their own content to the framework by seeking input from their doctoral students and graduates as to what they see as their professional development needs as researching practitioners and share those insights with current students. At the Case Study University an online resource has been introduced which enables students to interact with the framework, read guidance from previous students, consider their own development needs and draw up personal development plans.

7. Conclusion

This paper has explored EdD students' perceptions and experiences of their development needs and has used this new understanding to develop a Researching Practitioner Development Framework. Future research is planned to evaluate the implementation of the RPDF in terms of how it is used by EdD students and how well they feel it supports their professional development and research impact in their workplace. It is hoped that the framework will provide an important supplementary resource which will support the professional development and research impact of EdD students as they strive to become *researching professionals*.

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