

## **T12.2 Raglan Friday 7 December 10.30-11.00**

### ***Becoming a Researching Professional: EdD students' perceptions and experiences of using the Researching Professional Development Framework (0285)***

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#### **Introduction**

In a recently published paper, we argued that while the Doctorate in Education (EdD) had been around for some time and is increasingly popular, supporting frameworks had tended to be based on traditional PhD routes of study, with the unique development needs of part time students often being ignored (reference removed for peer review): EdD students are normally working full time while undertaking their doctoral research on a part-time basis (normally at a distance) and often researching their own professional practice or context. To address this lack of tailored support for EdD students, we proposed a new framework - the Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF). The RPDF has been developed over the last three years as an online resource for EdD students at the Case Study University and had been empirically derived from an analysis of interviews carried out with EdD students and graduates which explored their specific development needs. The framework is not a formal teaching resource; instead it offers EdD students an opportunity to reflect on key areas of their professional development as they progress through their studies. They do this by drawing upon the descriptions of experiences provided by other EdD students and graduates, and use their reflections on these to generate their own researching professional development plan for the forthcoming year. The RPDF, we argued, was a more suitable tool to support the development of such students as they move from being

professionals to becoming *researching* professionals (reference removed for peer review). However, we acknowledged that there was a need for the framework to be tested empirically.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to report on this research: a longitudinal study which explored the perceptions and experiences of part-time doctoral students using an online supplementary resource, the RPDF, as they progressed through the first year of their EdD programme at a research-led English University. Specifically, we aim to address the following research questions:

- What are part-time doctoral students' perceptions and experiences of using an online supplementary resource, the Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF)?
- How does using the RPDF help them to reflect on their identities as they shift from seeing themselves as professionals to becoming *researching professionals*.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretically, our work draws on theories of social identity ([Simon 2004](#), [Burke and Stets 2009](#), [Lawler 2014](#), [Jenkins 2014](#)) which suggest that people have multiple identities which are heavily influenced by social interaction. More specifically, we draw on the notion of academic identity-trajectory proposed by McAlpine et al. (see, for example, [McAlpine 2012](#), [McAlpine and Lucas 2011](#), [McAlpine et al. 2012](#)). Academic identity-trajectory links students' personal and professional experiences to help form biographical views of academic identity formation, maintenance and change:

“individually distinct past experiences and emotions influence present intentions,

emotions and engagement in doctoral work as well as future imagined possibilities...” ([McAlpine et al. 2012, 511](#)). Parallel research has explored the possible identities that doctoral researchers have to develop and integrate, for example teacher, practitioner and researcher ([Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene 2015](#)) and learner, leader and action researcher ([Zambo, Buss, and Zambo 2015](#)). This thinking links to adjacent work in organisation studies exploring career trajectories. For example, Chen ([1998](#)) argues that a person’s career is determined by a wide range of influences over time and cannot be viewed as separate from a person’s life experiences. As with career trajectories, academic identity-trajectory cannot be studied in isolation without considering key personal and social influences over a person’s lifetime.

These interrelationships are also integral to help us understand the transition that EdD students go through while studying for their doctorate: how they move from being a *working* professional to becoming a *researching* professional as they progress through their doctoral research journey while continuing to work full time. Their distance learning context contrasts with the ‘daily interactions’ experienced by full-time PhD students as they develop their academic identities ([Alexander, Harris-Huermann, and McAlpine 2014, 163](#)).

This current research offers an original contribution to the literature by extending previous understandings of doctoral work through looking at the impact of a planned intervention in a distance learning professional doctorate environment, and by exploring the nexus of interrelationships students need to build in this context. It is hoped that applying the above mentioned theoretical framework, and using a longitudinal research approach, will give rise to a more nuanced understanding of how EdD students understand their developing academic identities and how they might use the RPDF on

their journey to become *researching professionals*.

## **Methods**

To address our research questions, the study was undertaken from an interpretive perspective, in line with social constructivism. Within this paradigm, we used a two-stage, longitudinal research design. In stage one, questionnaires were completed by EdD students (n=6) and their supervisors (n=12) and in stage two, participants were interviewed at three key stages of their EdD year (beginning, middle and end).

## **Findings**

The part-time doctoral students' perceptions and experiences of using the supplementary RPDF resource were overwhelmingly positive. They particularly valued the early introduction to the wider aspects of development and found the comments from former students both helpful and reassuring. The concepts of developing their identity and developing their wider research networks would not have occurred to the majority of them without the framework. As well as giving students the structure and comfort of a plan the framework also prompted them to reflect on how their identities might be changing now and what might be their imagined possible futures. A further development at the Case Study University could be to introduce alongside the RPDF an orientation session as described by Koole and Stark (2016) where students could discuss at an early stage how friends, family and co-workers might react to the learner's new academic world. Meanwhile the Case Study University now describes its doctoral students as doctoral researchers. This immediately enhanced how the researchers viewed themselves and has helped emphasise that they are on a journey from being *working professionals* to becoming *researching professionals*.

## References

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