

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Reconnaissance as a pre-requisite to (re)thinking and (re)imagining educational research

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**Abstract:** The period of the pandemic in Higher Education from 2020 to 2021 has necessitated some (re)thinking and (re)imagining in our approach to education research. More specifically, it has provided the opportunity for some new and emerging methodological positions to be tried and evaluated by PGR students. This paper will therefore present and discuss some early research into the concept and method of Reconnaissance as an informal approach to research which is arguably of particular value *in extremis*. Furthermore, the discussion of Reconnaissance will draw on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and his notion of Rhythmanalysis as a means of exploring the area by undertaking an informal Reconnaissance exercise on the use by PGRs of Reconnaissance itself as concept and method. The exploration of Reconnaissance in this paper has raised an important line of enquiry for further work; the role and nature of informality in research. For example, is informality merely a stage in the research process or something inherent to research itself? Perhaps in this sense Reconnaissance emerges in this paper as something closer to a political disposition than a fully-fledged approach.

**Paper:** The period of the pandemic in Higher Education from 2020 to 2021 has necessitated deep (re)thinking and (re)imagining in our approach to education research. But it has also provided the opportunity for some new and emerging methodological positions to be tried and evaluated by PGR students. This paper will present and discuss some early research into the concept and method of Reconnaissance as an informal approach to research which is arguably of particular value *in extremis*. Reconnaissance work at its basic operational level and in its most immediate and accessible form can be conceptualised as an exercise in 'fact-finding' (Ivankova, 2014) or 'information gathering' (Walsh & Moss, 2010) undertaken at an early stage. This approach is designated particularly relevant in crisis situations, such as a global pandemic, but it is also imperative to chart and record what exists as an early and elementary task in research. Further, it can be considered a meaningful aid and prerequisite to the later and more complex stage of formal data-collection and analysis.

In order to develop the concept of Reconnaissance it may be of value to think it through using a Rhythmanalysis stance, drawing on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre. The requirement to return and reflect is a central repetitive aspect of Rhythmanalysis. Applied to the context of Reconnaissance in research, each iteration of the rhythm is in some important, if subtle, way different from the last as research experience, knowledge and learning accumulate. Indeed, this relationship between repetition and difference central to the analysis of Lefebvre is arguably at the heart of what it means

to reconnoitre in educational research. On occasion, however, the rhythm of Reconnaissance can be noticeably subdued and understated; a certain murmuring in the research process. The murmuring, continuous and contiguous, is an involuntary reconnaissance narrative of questions, observations and reflections, the epistemic fragments and traces from which meaning begins to form.

In a deceptively simple metaphor in Chapter 3 of *Rhythmanalysis* Lefebvre describes at some length looking out of his apartment window in Paris and the delight of being able to stand on his own balcony whilst perusing everyday life in the street below. With this act of Reconnaissance Lefebvre begins to engage with the Parisian rhythms that surround him. Therefore at its most elementary and visceral level *Rhythmanalysis* involves attention to both listening and observation *in situ*; first to one's own body in the everyday and then increasingly to its ever widening spatial and temporal context.

This is exemplified in our reconnaissance on Reconnaissance of PGR students, given the duality of their roles in research and as professionals working on the 'front line' during the pandemic response in healthcare and education settings. A conspectus of these PGRs indicates how the concept of curiosity in research relates to the act of reconnoitre. This curiosity is signified not only in the view of Reconnaissance as a 'curious' approach, but one which also elucidates new (im)possibilities and potentials, provoking deep thinking. Lefebvre (2014) might conceptualise the conspectus of these PGRs as murmuring, but it could be argued that their inherent loitering and stumbling has been amplified by an attempt to traverse a new, unfamiliar and possibly inhospitable terrain. That these researchers also operate within the shifting and often brutal economy of research credibility provokes further consideration of their experiences of these epistemic rhythms *simultaneously* inside and outside of it.

The exploration of Reconnaissance in this paper raises a number of lines of enquiry for further work. First, the role of informality in research or perhaps the research of informality. For example, is informality merely a stage in the research process or something inherent to research itself? Perhaps in this sense Reconnaissance could be said to be more of a disposition than a methodology. A form of low key and in petto research allowing us to ask what is in the heart of the researcher?

However, on a different register, it could be argued that the exploration of Reconnaissance as a concept and method can make a distinct contribution if only in a small way towards an emerging Lefebvrian pedagogy. For example, how do we listen to murmuring within the research process and what may it tell us that we do not know already? Is murmuring part of the unreported truths within the research? Indeed, what happens to your research when you use Reconnaissance? It will certainly be interesting to record the response and reception of the research methodology community in education to the concept and method of Reconnaissance.

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