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BERA Bites 11

Developing your early career researcher profile & skillset

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EDITORS

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ABOUT BERA

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the home of educational research in the United Kingdom. We are a membership association committed to advancing knowledge of education by sustaining a strong and high-quality educational research community.

Together with our members, BERA is working to:

- advance research quality
- build research capacity
- foster research engagement.

Since its inception in 1974, BERA has expanded into an internationally renowned association with both UK- and non-UK-based members. It strives to be inclusive of the diversity of educational research and scholarship, and welcomes members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. It also encourages the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

Aspiring to be the home of all educational researchers in the UK, BERA provides opportunities for everyone active in this discipline to contribute through its portfolio of distinguished publications, its world-class conference and other events, and its active peer community organised around 35 special interest groups.

We also recognise excellence in educational research through our range of awards. In addition to our member-focused activity, we aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best-quality evidence produced by educational research.

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ABOUT THE BERA BLOG

The BERA Blog was established to provide research-informed content on key educational issues in an accessible manner. Its aim is to produce and promote articles that attract policymakers, parents, teachers, educational leaders, members of school communities, politicians and anyone who is interested in education today. It also welcomes the submission of research-informed articles from across this community.

The blog is edited by a small team comprising academic representatives chosen by BERA's Academic Publications Committee and the BERA office. All content is approved for publication by one or more of this team. However, the views of the authors are their own, and the views expressed on the blog (and in this collection) are not the official views of BERA.

The blog is currently curated by the editorial team of Jennifer Agbaire, Gerry Czerniawski, Naomi Flynn, Alison Fox, Elizabeth Rushton, Barbara Skinner and Kathryn Spicksley.

See bera.ac.uk/blog

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ABOUT BERA BITES

The BERA Bites series presents selected articles from the BERA Blog on key topics in education, presented in an easily printable and digestible format to serve as teaching and learning resources for students and professionals in education.

Each collection features an introduction by editors with expertise in the field, and each article includes questions for discussion, composed by the authors, prompting readers to further explore the ideas and arguments put forward in the original articles.

See bera.ac.uk/bera-bites

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

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DEVELOPING YOUR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER PROFILE & SKILLSET

Editorial



LUCY ROBINSON & JOANNA RANKIN
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

As you go through the early part of your research journey, developing your researcher profile and skillset is essential. Whether you are primarily a practitioner or a researcher, getting the most from the varied opportunities available helps to enhance your professional development. It is important to keep the future in mind, even if you are not yet certain what path to follow in your career. Therefore, both developing a range of skills and actively thinking ahead (even if only occasionally!) can be of great benefit. This applies equally whether you are doctoral student, practitioner researcher, postdoc or if you identify in any way as an early career researcher (ECR).

In this BERA Bites collection, we have put together 13 blog posts covering a range of themes related to developing your researcher profile and skillset. These move from reflecting on your positionality, through attending and presenting at your first conference, to planning the next steps in an academic career. In doing so, we hope that this collection offers something for all in our community.

One set of skills that is essential to your researcher profile involves thinking and writing about how we relate to the work we are doing and our positionality. In a piece exploring her self-reflexivity and the importance of intersectionality in her research, **Janet Ramdeo** shares her own approach to addressing difficult questions about these themes. Also on positionality, a piece by **Jessie Shepherd, Emma Noble and John Parkin** examines curated advice from multiple academics. This covers how to approach, record and revisit your positionality throughout the research process.

Skill development can seem like a challenge too far on top of the demands of your main project or job description. Don't forget, though, that attending conferences and symposia consolidates multiple skills and can be as intensive as you like. **Aisling Walters** shares some top tips from her first in-person conference presentation experience, while **Lucy Robinson** explains how her presentation was prepared and supported for an online conference, capturing the benefits of virtual professional gatherings.

One of the more nerve-wracking features of presenting in public is the likelihood of receiving feedback. Yet, actively seeking constructive feedback from peers and more experienced researchers can clarify your thoughts, help you to make the best decisions going forward and celebrate your achievements so far. **Sylvia Ikomi** describes how she made the most of an opportunity for feedback at a symposium held during a key point in her fieldwork.

Alison Fox's blog post asks questions about the power of conference-adjacent social media with regard to research dissemination. She provokes thought about how best to harness such potential, while underlining the research gap around social media sharing in academic contexts.

Naturally, conferences are not the only way of building, joining or maintaining a supportive academic community. **Nour El Houda Benlakhdar** explains why building such networks is so important and suggests some ways in which to create communities that work for you.

Moving on to planning for your future, **Gerry Czerniawski** lists 20 top tips for ECRs to keep in mind as they develop their (gulp!) three different ‘careers’ (Laudel & Gläser, 2008). These three skill categories are each addressed in Gerry’s blog post, ensuring you attend to the full range of relevant professional development.

Anna Mariguddi, Cherry Zin Oo and Kathryn Spicksley share their experiences as BERA Career Development Fellows, including what they enjoyed, how it benefited them and what they planned to do next to build on their fellowships. Kathryn, for example, went on to be a key member of the editorial team of the BERA Blog.

When deciding on your next career move, it is important to consider the attributes you may need to draw on. **Sophie Atherton and Janina Suppers** write about the role of resilience and adaptability in career transitions, sharing comments made in an online meeting during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Up to this point, we have focused on what ECRs can do to improve their own situation, work and prospects. There will undoubtedly be some readers, though, wondering how they, as more experienced researchers, can best support those earlier in their careers. Across a two-part blog post, **Sin-Wang Chong** presents a set of suggestions regarding the support and development of ECRs in journal publishing, for those who may be in a position to effect such changes. Indeed, getting started as a peer reviewer is a fantastic opportunity to develop an understanding of academic writing and the publication process.

Finally, the world of academia can appear rather intimidating and uninviting to those in practice settings who are starting to engage in research, or even to doctoral students and ECRs. What do we need to know when considering this type of career in the long term? **Dominic Wyse** gives a balanced view of the benefits and drawbacks of opting to stay in academia, talking us through the ‘good, bad and ugly’ of an academic career.

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A NOTE FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

While you read these blog posts, you might also think about your own contexts or research. Perhaps you would like to contribute a post to the BERA Blog, or perhaps when you are next at a conference or professional development event you might come across someone who you could encourage to write for us (see bera.ac.uk/submission-policy for details on how to submit). Please consider interesting methodological aspects, issues and approaches that would be worth reporting more widely, as well as the content of studies. As the BERA Blog team and our colleagues develop these resources we welcome feedback that can help us improve their quality and accessibility.



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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPING YOUR POSITIONALITY

‘Who are you?’ Moving from reflexivity to self-reflexivity in educational research with marginalised groups



JANET RAMDEO
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

In this blog post, I consider my critical engagement with my positionality beyond reflexivity to self-reflexivity.¹ When conducting my literature search for my thesis, I noticed that self-reflexivity receives less attention when researchers choose to articulate their positionality in relation to their participants. My own research illuminates stories of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) experienced by Black female teachers within English schools, but being a non-race-matched researcher (Vass, 2017) my positionality became a critical discussion in my thesis and viva. Although being racially and ethnically different from my research participants, I share some cultural commonality with participants who identify as African-Caribbean heritage, being from an Indo-Caribbean background myself. However, I faced a methodological and ethical challenge when a potential participant asked me, ‘Why are *you* researching *us*?’ In other words, I do not look like these women, my lived experiences are

different, so why am I conducting a study on their lives? This is an extremely pertinent question in the context of my research. I was forced to reflect on my positionality, not just in terms of power relations as part of the ethics process, but also in terms of my own racial, ethnic, cultural and social position. This reflection went beyond a recognition and acknowledgement of my difference as a ‘shopping list of characteristics’ (Folkes, 2022, p. 1) or identities. Being asked, ‘Why are *you* researching *us*?’ illuminated my need to critically examine me, as the researcher. This raised questions for me: ‘Who exactly should be carrying out this research?’, ‘Who is best placed to convey the voices of Black female teachers?’, and ‘Is the best placed person really me?’

Pagis (2009) notes that self-reflexivity is a conscious activity of turning the mirror towards oneself, and as a researcher ‘simultaneously being the observing subject and the observed object, a process that includes self-knowledge and self-monitoring’ (p. 266). Researcher self-knowledge and self-monitoring therefore became part of the research

¹ Original blog post, published 24 March 2023: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/who-are-you-moving-from-reflexivity-to-self-reflexivity-in-educational-research-with-marginalised-groups>

discourse as I analysed my own racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered and social intersectional identities in relation to the researched group. Turning the mirror on myself thus played a central role in me researching Black female teachers' lives so that I could be explicitly cognisant of where and how knowledge is constructed, the nature and importance of representation, how these women related to me as a non-matching racialised woman, and power relations which exist between researcher and researched. I am aware that my participants are the knowledge constructors and owners; they are sharing their lives and experiences. Therefore, I repositioned myself from being central to knowledge production to being a conduit of these women's voices by presenting their stories as individual intersectional experiences rather than analysing different Black women's lives as if they are a uniform group. My repositioning ensured that their intersectional experiences were heard and not homogenised.

'I was forced to reflect on my positionality, not just in terms of power relations as part of the ethics process, but also in terms of my own racial, ethnic, cultural and social position.'

Self-reflexivity also minimises the processes of essentialism in feminist research, which is 'the belief that there are properties essential to women and which all women share' (Stone, 2004, p. 135). In studies which centralise 'race', researchers should aim to resist homogenisation and prevent the erasure of nuanced differences of intersectional social categories. Harris (1990) states, 'in an essentialist world, black women's experience will always be forcibly fragmented before being subjected to analysis, as those who are "only interested in race" and those who are "only interested in gender" take their separate slices of our lives' (pp. 588–589). I found the idea of 'taking a slice' of anyone's life for my own professional gain deeply troubling and a position I wished to mitigate. It made me consider, what exactly was I bringing to these women's lives? Understanding my role as a conduit ensured that I did not 'speak for' my participants, potentially oppressing the Black female teachers' voices and falling into the trap of essentialising their lives. Rather, I centralised their individual stories and nuanced experiences and provided a platform for

these women to 'speak for themselves'.

My doctoral examiners probed my self-reflexivity, asking multiple times, 'Who are you?' in relation to my research and research participants during my doctoral viva. It was uncomfortable, and so it should be. Despite the dissonance, I will be consistently asking myself this question as I continue to conduct educational research which involves marginalised groups.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does self-reflexivity do in creating a positionality statement that reflexivity alone cannot?
2. How would 'turning the mirror' on ourselves as researchers help to redress the power dynamic that exists between the researcher and the researched?
3. There is currently a counter-argument claiming that there is no place for positionality in research. Why is this problematic in research conducted with human participants and specifically with marginalised groups?

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPING YOUR POSITIONALITY

Positionality & reflexivity for early career researchers & postgraduate researchers



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As researchers, we have an ethical responsibility to recognise the potential impact our background and beliefs have on the decisions we make when conducting research.¹ As early career researchers (ECRs) and postgraduate researchers (PGRs), we feel that reflexivity and awareness of positionality in our research are vital to research integrity. In this blog post, we consider the importance of reflexivity and positionality in research and aim to provide some useful advice for ECRs.

Reflexivity can be defined as the ongoing examination of how the researcher's identity potentially impacts research design, methods, analysis, ontology and epistemology (Basit, 2013). The goal of reflexivity is to improve the quality and validity of the research while

¹ Original blog post, published 7 November 2022: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/positionality-and-reflexivity-for-early-career-researchers-and-postgraduate-researchers>

recognising the limitations of the knowledge produced. Employing reflexivity throughout the research process involves the researcher being aware of how their perspective and identity might influence all aspects of the process and assessing the impact on the research (Hamdan, 2009). Being reflexive allows a researcher to build awareness of ethical issues and issues related to knowledge creation (Berger, 2013).

'Reflexivity is essential for understanding and navigating potential unintentional bias we hold that may impact our research (Braun & Clarke, 2013).'

It is impossible though to fully separate researcher influence and perspective from research design, approach, and data collection. Reflexivity is essential for understanding and navigating potential unintentional bias we hold that may impact our research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). All researchers are people with their own backgrounds, perspectives and values; this means that whether intentional or unintentional, we all have reactions that will influence the decisions we make when we conduct research (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

Due to the individual identities of researchers, we need to acknowledge our identities (for example, age, background, ethnicity, and so on) and biases at every stage of investigation, during design, when gathering and analysing data, and during the dissemination of our findings (Basit, 2013). As Mosselson (2010) contends, being reflexive will not only enhance the integrity of the study but will also improve the research data generation process, analysis, and interpretation of the data. Spending time reflecting allows our positionality to become explicit and gives a greater understanding for the context and ‘trustworthiness’ of our research (Finlay & Gough, 2008). The risk of a lack of reflexivity is that we fail to acknowledge the role we play in the process, obscuring potential bias. Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight that for researchers who have a particular aspect of our background or identity that is relevant to the topic, being reflexive is vital.

TIPS ON POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

1. It is essential to identify your positionality before starting the research (during your planning) and in an ongoing way when conducting research (Holmes, 2020).
2. Consider using a reflexivity journal to help you capture and reflect on what arises while analysing your results (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
3. Positionality is not static and can change during your project, so engage in ongoing reflection on your relationship to your research, context and participants (Holmes, 2020).
4. Writing a positionality statement:
 - Make sure you devote sufficient time to writing a positionality statement (Holmes, 2020).
 - An effective positionality statement will consider your personal and theoretical beliefs, as well as your identity (for example, age, background, ethnicity, and so on).

- Braun & Clarke (2013) encourage PGRs to weave their positionality and reflexivity throughout their thesis chapters, rather than having one positionality statement at the beginning.
5. Think about how your participants will perceive you, as this could affect their behaviour and responses (Holmes, 2020).

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How have your identity and background affected (or how will they affect) your research?
2. What are some tools, techniques and strategies you might use that will help you to be more reflexive in your research?
3. What are some of the challenges you have faced when aiming to incorporate reflexivity into your research?



Photographs by Joné Reed

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES OF CONFERENCES & SYMPOSIA

Views from a conference



AISLING WALTERS
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MY FIRST CONFERENCE...

Recently I spent several days at the UK Literacy Association (UKLA) conference at the University of Exeter.¹ This was my first ever conference and I thought that it might be useful to share some thoughts on presenting and attending. Spoiler alert: *it was wonderful.*

As someone relatively new to academia, the idea of a conference was daunting. I asked several colleagues for advice. The variance in the tips I received shows that people enjoy conferences differently. I will share these insights, but feel free to pick and mix.

First, do your research. Read email communications and the conference programme carefully. From these I deduced that Exeter University was at the top of a hill. I also found out that there was a gala dinner. 'Gala dinner anxiety' resulted in an enormous suitcase. Suitcase + hill = putting the local taxi company in my phone!

¹ Original blog post, published 26 July 2023: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/views-from-a-conference>

When you are reading the conference programme, make a note of the sessions that you really want to see. Bear in mind that this is a bit like a festival – you can't see everyone! If you can't fit in all the presenters that you are hoping to see, try and seek them out when you're there. If you're able to, why not drop them an email and arrange to have a coffee together during the conference?

'Bear in mind that a conference is a bit like a festival – you can't see everyone!'

On the topic of coffee, UKLA arranged the timetable well. We were encouraged to explore the campus and told where we could find a quiet spot. So much intense interaction can be exhausting (I was still talking shop on the train home), and I appreciated the option of time out.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS...

Add your contact details to the end of your presentation. If you're on Twitter², add your Twitter handle too. Take pictures of the slides that you like in other presentations and if you have pictures of the presenter too, ask them if they are happy for you to share them. Some people like to ask for selfies.

If you have fancy fonts in your presentation, make sure that you embed them in the file (tutorial here³) on your USB stick so that your work looks as you intended on the big screen. You can take advantage of a coffee break to go to your room early and get set up. Don't forget to take a drink.

Having a timer for your presentation helps; that way you stay on track and protect the time for your questions. The chair will signal if you are running out of time, so keep an eye on them. Phrase any questions to others in a supportive and curious way.

If you are presenting, it is a good idea to make sure that you've anticipated what people might ask you about in the questions section, especially if these touch on potential limitations or awkward aspects of your research. I think of these as 'roundabout questions'. Before my first driving test I remember saying, *I'll be fine if there are no roundabouts*. Reader: there were roundabouts. If there is something that you perceive as a limitation, present it as an area for further development. No one is there to pull you down.

I already mentioned my enormous suitcase. This was unnecessary. Wear what you feel confident and comfortable in.

Yes, there will be intimidating names present. At one point I was talking to at least five different people from my reference list. Again, they were lovely.

Perhaps the most important piece of advice about attending your first conference is this: you deserve to be there.

Recently, Reshma Saujani spoke about imposter syndrome by linking it to 'bicycle face'.⁴ 'Bicycle face' refers to a condition that nineteenth-century doctors associated with women who wanted to ride a bicycle. Bicycling women⁵ had bulging eyes, clenched jaws and suffered with weariness. Solution: don't ride a bike, don't step outside the box that is assigned

to you. Saujani suggests that, like 'bicycle face', 'imposter syndrome' makes people feel that they are the problem as opposed to the system. So, push past that discomfort. Get on your bicycle and head to a conference!

Conference newbies, it is completely understandable to feel nervous about stepping into a new space because it is unfamiliar. It is not because you do not belong. Everyone at UKLA wanted to talk about literacy, about reading, about writing. They were my people. In going to a conference, you are going to be among allies. You will be welcomed and valued because you are bringing new funds of knowledge to the community. You have metaphorically (and literally in Exeter!) travelled up a hill to get there. Enjoy the view from the top. You deserve it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you experienced the dreaded 'imposter syndrome' as an ECR? If so, how have you managed this? As a community, how might we share strategies to combat imposter syndrome?
2. How do we induct 'newbies' into the world of academia? What are the challenges of starting out as a researcher?
3. What does your educational journey look like? What have you learned along the way and how might these experiences support others?

² Now known as X.

³ <https://www.howtogeek.com/660274/how-to-embed-fonts-in-powerpoint/>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vFnM8JhkNc>

⁵ <https://www.vox.com/2014/7/8/5880931/the-19th-century-health-scare-that-told-women-to-worry-about-bicycle>



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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES OF CONFERENCES & SYMPOSIA

Presenting at an e-festival: Experiences of an early career researcher



LUCY ROBINSON
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In this blog post, I share my experiences of presenting at the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) e-Festival.¹ After outlining the initial application, the run-up to the event and the delivery of my webinar on the day, I conclude with my recommendation for encouraging other early career researchers to embrace online opportunities like these, alongside other more traditional formats, as part of their researcher development.

The NCRM's e-festival took place between 7 and 9 November 2023. The event was the 10th edition of the NCRM's biannual Research Methods Festival, the last two editions of which have been run completely online. The e-festival² was designed to be a 'celebration of research methods with an interdisciplinary focus'

1 Original blog post, published 8 March 2024: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/presenting-at-an-e-festival-experiences-of-an-early-career-researcher>

2 <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/RMeF2023/>

and the three-day programme was packed with over a hundred sessions in a variety of formats. Early in 2023, I sent off my application to present at the e-festival, encouraged by my growing interest in research methods and having attended excellent training courses hosted by the NCRM. Fast forward a few months and my application was accepted! I would be running a 50-minute webinar titled 'The research ethics tree: engaging children with research ethics using an interactive tool'.

As the date for the e-festival approached, I was kept well informed by the organiser. With the e-festival platform, Whova, up and running by October, I was able to create my 'speaker profile' including my affiliation and research interests as well as social account links to LinkedIn and X (formerly known as Twitter). I also made use of the other features on the platform including sharing articles and recommending conferences. As a speaker, I had the ability to set a

poll for my event, which gave me an indication of the levels of pre-existing knowledge of my audience members. Collectively, these features were a real strength of the e-festival format as they allowed me to create a researcher profile, network with like-minded researchers and fine-tune my presentation – all before the event!

So, when the day of my webinar dawned, I felt well placed and prepared. I was familiar with the Whova platform and MS Teams (an absolute must when relying on technology) and I had the emergency technology support number saved to my mobile phone. The event organiser had also offered rehearsal slots to check the technology worked, answer any questions and allay any worries the presenters had. While I remained a little nervous about the possibility of dreaded technology issues, my webinar thankfully ran smoothly. The e-festival attracted lots of interest, with over 1,000 tickets sold (at £10 each, making it far more affordable and accessible compared to traditional conferences) to attendees from across the globe. In my own event, I had 70 attendees, including fellow students, more experienced academics and those working in policy and practice – all with a shared interest in ethical research with children.

As part of my webinar, I had devised an interactive activity, inviting the attendees to reflect on how they do, or could, support children's understanding of ethical research in their own practice. It was great to see and interact with audience members willing to get involved and share their responses. As I had choice over my timings, I left a good chunk of time for questions and discussions, handled by the Whova platform. This generated discussion and interaction, something which I previously foresaw as a main disadvantage of online events.

'My experience allowed me to share an important feature of my doctoral research with a far larger and more diverse audience than I would have had at a more traditional academic conference.'

Given my experience, I would certainly recommend that other early career researchers look for opportunities to present at e-festivals or other online events. My experience allowed me to share an important feature of my doctoral research with a far

larger and more diverse audience than I would have had at a more traditional academic conference. Also, being online removed the necessity for expensive and time-consuming travel, thus increasing accessibility for presenters and attendees alike. Although giving a presentation from the comfort of my desk chair while talking into a camera felt strange, I would recommend online opportunities like these, alongside other more traditional formats, to build your researcher profile, practise your presenting skills and disseminate your research.

The NCRM's Research Methods e-Festival is a biannual event and will return in 2025. To stay informed, look out for updates on their website³ or follow the e-festival hashtag on X – #RMef2023.

³ <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/training/RMeF2023/>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you experienced any barriers to presenting at in-person conferences?
2. How might online tools support or enhance the delivery of an online presentation?
3. What other online opportunities have you come across that could support your researcher development?

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES OF CONFERENCES & SYMPOSIA

BERA ECR Network symposium: A personal reflection on constructive feedback



SYLVIA IKOMI
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

In October 2019 I travelled to the US to explore the benefits of oracy-centred teaching strategies and expeditionary learning for the development of the speaking, listening, reading and writing skills of children who have had an adverse childhood experience (particularly children in care).¹ As I was due to expand this research into a MPhil/PhD in October 2020 I wanted to get feedback from other doctoral students and academics on what I could do to improve my research approach and strategy, and what areas I could amplify or reduce as research focus points.

I was quite nervous when I arrived at the symposium. I was putting my hope on having a late afternoon presentation slot but discovered that my presentation would be the third one. We had 15–20 minutes to present our research or proposed research followed by 10 minutes of questions from the audience.

¹ Original blog post, published 30 July 2020: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/bera-ecr-network-symposium-a-personal-reflection-on-constructive-feedback>

I started my presentation by outlining the wider context of my research topic. I referenced the situation in England in 2020 in which only 6–7 per cent of young people in care enter university and 82.5 per cent of children in care did not pass their maths and English GCSEs according to the government's latest statistics (DfE, 2019a). I also went into some detail about the concept of adverse childhood experiences. Adverse childhood experiences comprise of several experiences including psychological, physical and sexual abuse and household dysfunction ranging from parental substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and incarceration (Felitti et al., 1998). Further data from the Department for Education (DfE, 2019b) show that 63 per cent of looked-after children in England were in care due to experiencing child abuse or neglect, 14 per cent were in care due to family dysfunction, 8 per cent were in care as their family was going through a temporary crisis that diminished the parental capacity to adequately meet some of the children's needs, 7 per cent were in care due to absent parenting, 3 per cent of them were in care due to their parent's

illness or disability, 3 per cent were there due to their own disability, and 1 per cent were in care due to low income or socially unacceptable behaviour. These situations primarily come under the umbrella of adverse childhood experiences.

I outlined my mixed-methods research methodology which comprised of a focus group with key members of the US Legal Centre for Foster Care and Education, an interview with one of the founders of EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) who developed the expeditionary learning model that is used across the US, interviews with teachers at one of EL Education's schools that is renowned for its work with children who have had an adverse childhood experience, and action-based research with students at the school (Ikomi, 2020). I presented the key findings of my research, with specific attention on the focus group's identification of schools' underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis of the special education needs of children in care and a lack of trauma-informed teacher training that present particular challenges for children and young people in care.

'I presented the key findings of my research, with specific attention on the focus group's identification of schools' underdiagnosis and misdiagnosis of the special education needs of children in care and a lack of trauma-informed teacher training that present particular challenges for children and young people in care.'

The audience feedback was rich and constructive, as members shared their own anecdotes as educators who have worked with children and young people who have had an adverse childhood experience and have been in care. Potential ways of enhancing the MPhil/PhD follow-up research were recommended – such as considering a participatory approach to the research design that includes the ideas of children and young people in care. This feedback enabled me to consider key factors and perspectives that I would not otherwise have considered.

Taking part in the symposium gave me clarity on the significance of my US-based research, helped me to worry less about my weaker areas and provided me with key aspects to incorporate into my research methods to make it richer. It substantially enhanced my own post-research reflection. I can say without any hesitation that my time at the symposium was time well spent, and I would highly recommend it to other early career researchers.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has presenting your work to other postgraduate students helped you to refine your methodology?
2. If you teach postgraduate research students, would you recommend that they use opportunities to present their work to their peers and to get feedback from them?
3. If so, why?



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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: DISSEMINATING RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Reflecting on the conference season: Where did your presentations end up as a result of social media dissemination?



ALISON FOX
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

As you reflect on the BERA Conference, have you thought about where images of and reflections about your presentations ended up as a result of social media dissemination? Who heard about them, who shared them and, furthermore, were they of value and did they influence thinking or changes in practice?

There is a growing but fragmented literature looking at the activity and significance of the use of social media at academic and professional conferences (Desai et al., 2012; Misori & Levi, 2014; Nomura et al., 2012). The flow of knowledge and connectivity that broadens the space and time of conferences is an area ripe for methodological exploration in relation to education and educational professional conferences, but we need to

identify which questions are worth asking and which research designs are therefore appropriate to examine data generated by and related to such social media use.

The main tool for social networking in use at conferences, and under study, is the microblogging tool Twitter.² The majority of studies map the resultant social network activity using social network analysis (see, for example, Neill et al., 2014) to look at the scale and structure of activity within and beyond the conference in space and time. These sometimes look to identify the most prolific Twitter activists (see, for example, Misori & Levi, 2014).

There is little evidence of studies related to educational research conferences specifically, in contrast to the burgeoning interest associated with their medical research conference equivalents (Fox & Bird, 2017)

1 Original blog post, published 26 October 2018: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/reflecting-on-the-conference-season-where-did-your-presentations-end-up-as-a-result-of-social-media-dissemination>

2 Now known as X.

since 2011 (Desai et al., 2012; Roland et al., 2015). Such research about social media use is set within a wider social and professional schism between those who embrace and those who avoid social media – a schism evidenced by school teachers (Owen et al., 2016) as much as with medics (Nomura et al., 2012). Professional online behaviour and attention to accuracy of information were particular concerns evidenced in studies in medical settings (Fox & Bird, 2017). In 2018 the national Association of the Study of Medical Education (ASME) discussed the benefits and challenges of using social media to enhance conferences in their tweet chat #MedEdForum. Perhaps such a debate can be hosted, and even linked to discussions within ASME, at the 2019 BERA Conference?³

As researchers we need to critically explore appropriate methods with which to address questions around the learning associated with social media use.

Researchers are beginning to ask questions, such as, ‘Does the use of a Twitter-enabled backchannel enhance the conference experience, collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge?’, and, ‘How is microblogging used within academic conferences, and can one articulate the benefits it may bring to a discipline?’ (Ross et al., 2011). Such questions require more than an analysis of network structure and processes: few studies focus on the content of the tweets and their influence on those who both post and read. As researchers we need to critically explore appropriate methods with which to address questions around the learning associated with social media use. These should involve qualitative data-mining, taking into account the ethical challenges of engagement with social media users and data (the public availability of which is contested). To understand the value of social media use, we need to examine users’ attitudes towards, perceptions of the significance of, and reports of the influence of such activity on their thinking and practice. ‘Netnographic’ methods, which involve researchers in participant observation within networks, might be of value in relation to Twitter, learning from studies conducted of online forums (see, for example, Aaen, 2015; Tremayne, 2018).

³ <https://www.bera.ac.uk/conference/bera-conference-2019>

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which factors affect whether you would be interested in engaging with a social media post linked to an event?
2. Which factors do you think affect whether someone is likely to repost, including deciding who to repost to, hence increasing the reach of the original content?
3. Think of effective uses of social media you have become aware of at conferences (or other professional events) and reflect on why they added to the event.



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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: SUPPORTING ACADEMIC WRITING

Being a member of an academic community: A key factor in enhancing doctoral students' academic writing



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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

The challenges of writing a scientific article are widely discussed and acknowledged in research literature, including novice authors' challenges (see for example Hyland, 2016; Lin & Morrison, 2021).¹ In my PhD project, I explored the challenges of Algerian doctoral students who attempted to get published. Instead of focusing on students' linguistic needs only, I was particularly interested in exploring all possibly existing types of needs they might have when writing their articles.

While many studies suggest that being part of one's academic community is an important factor which contributes to the construction and development of the early career researcher's (ECR) academic identity, it can be seen that some doctoral students begin not only to move away from socialising with others outside their doctoral circle but also disconnect from their academic communities, whether intentionally or not.

'Some doctoral students begin not only to move away from socialising with others outside their doctoral circle but also disconnect from their academic communities, whether intentionally or not.'

Scholars speak of joining one's 'discourse community(-ies)' which Swales (1990) defines as 'groups that have goals and purposes, and use communication to achieve their goals' (as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 398), and 'communities of practice' that Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p. 1) perceive to be 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'. Both concepts highlight the significance of being part of an

¹ Original blog post, published 31 August 2022: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/being-a-member-of-an-academic-community-a-key-factor-in-enhancing-doctoral-students-academic-writing>

academic community and the benefits it could bring to the researcher including the cultivation of a supportive and collegial atmosphere.

The literature on academic writing addresses a number of ways in which doctoral students can get involved in the community of their choice. Murray (2013, p. 179), for example, refers to writing retreats that ‘create a more positive, cooperative, environment for writing’. As such, the act of writing is essentially considered a social practice encouraging authors to engage more with their texts and one another when writing their articles. Murray adds that a writing retreat can take place online or in-person and can be initiated by experienced or novice authors.

Another support avenue that doctoral students can explore is blogging. Blogging mostly takes place in an online environment. Guerin et al. (2015, p. 219) highlight how blogging can help doctoral students develop their writing through ‘the process of preparing weekly posts [that] can teach the authors a great deal about writing, not only through the feedback received from other editors or draft blogs, but also through observing other editors’ writing processes’. In her *Teaching Matters* blog post on the benefits of blogging for doctoral students, Shinton (2017) explains that blogging can provide doctoral students with the chance to build new connections with people sharing the same interests and is a way of increasing their engagement in both academic and friendly, informal conversations.

On a personal note, the invitation to write this blog post, which I received after communicating my research at the BERA ECR Network Symposium in May 2022,² was an opportunity for me to pause and reflect on many aspects of my doctoral journey and the decisions and choices I had made. In addition, writing this blog post offered me the possibility of cultivating meaningful connections with BERA members and non-members including the editorial team, ECR peers, and readers, and has helped me in creating my researcher profile.

Support to develop new authors’ scientific writing capabilities can come from different sources and occur in different forms. Supervisors, in particular, possess the capacity to positively influence their supervisees by convincing them of the importance of becoming active members of their wider community. They can also nurture their abilities to develop transferable skills that supervisees can use in their attempts to connect with others as they both work on fostering an effective supervisor–doctoral student relationship.

² <https://www.bera.ac.uk/event/bera-ecr-network-symposium-series-2022-framing-research-theories-concepts-and-reflexivity-in-educational-research-may>

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can academic institutions help doctoral students to overcome the challenge of socialising with others during their research journey?
2. Apart from writing retreats and blogging, what other activities could doctoral students engage in to improve their academic writing?
3. Would it be beneficial for doctoral students to engage in academic communities outside their field of research?

Early Career Researchers – 20 tips for career development



GERRY CZERNIAWSKI
UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

It's not easy being an early career researcher! Establishing your professional identity, developing your independence as a researcher, teaching, competing for grants, coping with increasing levels of administration and – oh yes – developing your 'output' – that dreadful word so often used to describe the writing born of your research. A word that denies the creative and emotional endeavour that writing entails.

Laudel and Gläser (2008) argue that as early career researchers (ECRs) you are not just developing one but three careers simultaneously: your *cognitive career* (i.e., the development of your research trail); your *community career* (i.e., your contribution to your wider academic communities); and your *organisational career* (i.e., the performance expectations of your employer organisation). I hope that the following tips help move you to make the transition from early career researcher to experienced senior colleague, as you develop these three careers:

1. Approach senior colleagues and directors of research throughout your university. Tell them who you are and what your research is about. Many will be unaware of exactly what work we do in education or the potential linkages with their own disciplines so this could open many doors.

1 Original blog post, published 16 October 2017: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/early-career-researchers-20-tips-for-career-development>

2. Write a blog for one of the more established blogging sites (for example, the BERA Blog). It is an opportunity to publicise arguments, themes from research and/or published work you are engaged with. Remember, blogs are increasingly being recognised as evidence of your impact.
3. Ensure you keep your university staff webpage up to date. Don't underestimate the extent to which lobbying groups, journalists, publishers, policymakers and others look at these.
4. Offer to review articles for journals as part of a longer-term strategy to target that publication for a future article.
5. Offer to review abstracts for academic conferences. This is a brilliant way to get to grips with the work and current thinking within your own research area.
6. Schmooze grant managers/university research funding officers in your university! Get them to know your first name. When a last minute grant comes in, with luck, they'll immediately think of you!
7. Get accepted at a conference at least once a year and ensure that you present a whole paper (rather than just PowerPoint slides) then use the critical feedback to turn it into a journal article.
8. Aim to have one article under review while writing the next.

9. Have a trusted critical friend (not an academic!) read all your abstracts, introductions and conclusions. If they cannot understand those vital sections, then it's not their deficiency in understanding that's the issue – it's the clarity of your writing!
10. Widen your methodological expertise – it is too easy to stay within our own epistemological comfort zone – widening your expertise will open doors to the sorts of research collaborations you need to develop your careers.
11. Aim to have two mentors – one within and one outside your institution – both will offer invaluable expertise while widening your professional arena.
12. Access the dedicated support available in your own university that specifically targets ECRs – it is there – but institutions are not necessarily effective in signposting it.
13. At larger conferences, talk to the people behind the publishers' stands. They're usually the senior commissioning editors or senior publishers and are there to talk about your emerging research ideas with a view to future publication.
14. Try to write and publish with your mentor or other colleagues within your 'academic tribe' – generally speaking, more authors means more citations!
15. Seek out and contact ECR forums in other universities. They will be keen to hear from you – and in many cases will invite you to present your work – or even put on shared events at your or their institutions.
16. With a colleague or two, put in a proposal for a special edition of a journal. It's fun and can raise your game in terms of developing professional expertise, networks and publishing craftsmanship.
17. Exploit your doctoral thesis to the maximum in publications, in terms of contributions to theory, practice, existing findings, methodology and policy.
18. Join any special interest group/network within your professional community (often related to annual conferences). BERA, for example, has over 30 such networks to choose from.
19. Answer emails at the end of the day rather than the beginning! That way you might just get to lunchtime having achieved some of the tasks on your to-do list.
20. Finally, write the sorts of publications you want to write, rather than those you feel you *ought*

to write. I still enjoy writing for A level sociology students. And I get as much pleasure writing those sorts of publications as I do for the REF, TEF or any other auditing requirement that we academics often feel pressured into writing for. All writing is good – it helps us think, create, develop, review and enhance our ideas.

These tips draw on my own experience, from the advice and guidance of experienced colleagues and published research on ECRs and were part of my keynote lecture at the BERA Annual Conference in September 2017 in Brighton, UK. You can hear it from the horse's mouth via the following video link: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/beraconference-2018/conference-2017-videos>

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What professional networks exist (for example, subject associations, trade unions, university networks, learned societies and research associations) that could support your career development?
2. To what extent could you benefit from methodological development in order to increase your opportunities to join other research teams within and beyond your immediate discipline area of expertise?
3. Do you have a research mentor within your own institution? If so, to what extent could you add a second research mentor from another institution to broaden your professional capital acquisition?

THINKING AHEAD: CAREER DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

The BERA ECR Career Development Fellowship: 2021 fellows share their stories



ANNA MARIGUDDI¹, CHERRY ZIN OO² & KATHRYN SPICKSLEY³

¹EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY, ²YANGON UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION & ³UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

The BERA Career Development Fellowship is a flexible package of benefits intended to support early career researchers (ECRs) in the first three years following the completion of their doctoral thesis.¹ The fellowship is aimed at ECRs who are precariously employed (that is, on zero hours or temporary contracts), and it provides opportunities to support their development as scholars during what can sometimes be the challenging transition from PhD student to academic researcher. In this blog, the three researchers awarded the fellowship in 2021 share their stories of how the fellowship has supported them.

DR ANNA MARIGUDDI – LECTURER, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY, UK

I wrote my application for the BERA ECR Career Development Fellowship as if writing a ‘career wish list’. Post PhD, I was juggling the childcare of two young children while trying to find my footing as an ECR in academia. I experienced a simultaneous feeling of shock and gratitude upon receiving the award, but also a strong sense of responsibility to make the best possible use of this experience. The time had come to finally address the imposter aspect of my identity.

Seven months into the award, I have attended and delivered individual presentations at two international music education conferences (European Association for Music in Schools [EAS] and International Society

¹ Original blog post, published 16 September 2022: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-bera-ecr-career-development-fellowship-2021-fellows-share-their-stories>

for Music Education [ISME]), I have professional membership of education organisations, including BERA, EAS and ISME, and I have participated in a qualitative diary methods training course. Perhaps most importantly, I have been able to learn from and engage with other colleagues working at the forefront of the discipline area, including my incredibly supportive BERA research mentor. The juggling remains but with an increased sense of direction, wider support network, and achievement. I wish to thank BERA for the experiences and opportunities this award has facilitated which would have otherwise been inaccessible, and I look forward to continuing with this fellowship into the next academic year.

**DR CHERRY ZIN OO – LECTURER,
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY, YANGON UNIVERSITY OF
EDUCATION, MYANMAR**

I received my PhD degree from the School of Education at the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney) in 2020. As an academic staff member from a university where there are limited scholarly resources, I felt extremely fortunate to get a BERA ECR Career Development Fellowship. I have spent the fellowship funds on training courses, symposia, writing retreats, and resources connected to my studies about assessment, teacher education and research methodology. The first benefit of this grant for my career development is that I could expand my knowledge related to research writing, and advanced methodology and analysis. As I have a mixed-methods research methodology background, I could learn advanced data analysis in both quantitative and qualitative research. For instance, with the help of this grant, I could learn and use Mplus for doing complex analysis. Regarding research writing courses, I have joined useful courses, especially for ECRs including ‘Advanced research funding and writing grant applications’. In addition, I have got community support for my writing by joining writing retreats. As part of this fellowship, I have an excellent mentor who has provided insightful advice and constructive feedback on my publications and career, and I have got a lot of value from this mentor–mentee relationship.

**DR KATHRYN SPICKSLEY – RESEARCH
FELLOW, INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY
OF WOLVERHAMPTON, UK**

I was so excited when I got the email saying that I had been awarded the fellowship; as the first grant I had won, it felt like I was finally starting to work out how to ‘sell’ my future academic projects and ideas to others, and that gave me a lot of confidence. Since winning this grant, I’ve also won the BERA Doctoral Thesis

Prize and a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, and the process of applying for the BERA ECR Career Development Fellowship helped me immensely when writing these subsequent applications.

I’m primarily a qualitative researcher, but during my PhD – which focused on early career teacher identity – I became interested in corpus-assisted discourse analysis. As this research method involves an element of statistics, I felt I needed to improve my skills in this area, so I used the BERA fellowship to fund two statistics courses – one introductory course, and one specifically focused on statistics in corpus linguistics. The skills I have gained are already having an impact on the quality of my research and on my confidence in using this method. A further benefit of the fellowship has been the mentoring I have received; my mentor has provided excellent support and tailored advice, and I was pleased to meet them in person at the BERA Conference, which the fellowship also supported me to attend.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent do the expression and enactment of certain values and ideologies within your context or institution shape the research culture and lead to the support of (or pose obstacles to) ECR career development?
2. How can we, as ECRs, balance academic responsibilities and mental wellbeing?
3. Who would be your ideal academic mentor? We suggest contacting them. We have found a number of generous academics who have been keen to share the secrets of their success with ECRs!

Practical research considerations for PGRs & ECRs: Adaptability, resilience & career transitions



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On 7 June 2022 postgraduates (PGRs) and early career researchers (ECRs) with an interest in youth studies met for a virtual event, facilitated by the youth study groups of three UK organisations: BERA, the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Political Studies Association (PSA).¹ During a time of ‘intersecting crises’ (see Moore et al., 2021), we decided to focus on adaptability and resilience as useful concepts to deal with these challenges.

Adaptability can be defined as the ‘capacity to adaptively regulate cognition, emotion, and behaviour in response to new, changing, and/or challenging conditions and circumstances’ (Martin, 2012, p. 90), while resilience can be defined as the ‘process of achieving positive outcome despite challenge and constraint’ (Yin & Mu, 2022, p. 2). Although resilience is a contested concept in the literature (see for example Yin & Mu, 2022) and should not be used to deflect attention away from structural inequalities, the speakers in this event often found themselves having to develop resilience to complete their projects. The two-hour session was split into two parts, summarised as follows, which included breakout room sessions where participants could reflect on what they have learned from the short presentations and roundtable discussions.

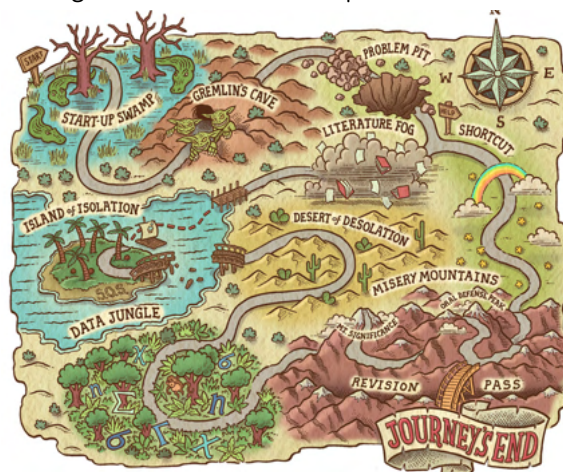
RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

Dr Parinita Shetty, who researches intersectionality, critical literacy and public pedagogy in fan podcasts,² shared her reflections on the concept of resilience.

1 Original blog post, published 2 February 2023: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/practical-research-considerations-for-pgrs-and-ecrs-adaptability-resilience-and-career-transitions>

2 <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/31642/1/Shetty%2C%20P.%20Marginally%20Fannish%20-%20Fan%20Podcasts%20as%20Sites%20of%20Public%20Pedagogy%20and%20Intersectional%20Education%20-%20PhD%20Thesis.pdf>

Parinita highlighted the importance of managing researcher workload, which dramatically increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. She then discussed the importance of connecting with fellow PGRs and ECRs to avoid isolation, scheduling time for enjoyable activities and being kind to oneself when plans do not work out.



Dr Janina Suppers, who researches young people’s emerging citizenship activities, reflected on her experiences of collecting data during her PhD research at a secondary school during a pandemic lockdown. Janina experienced changing and challenging situations which she illustrated by sharing a map (produced by Mario Zucca). She outlined some of the challenges she faced during data collection and ways to harness adaptability to address them, including creative recruitment strategies, a range of online tools, and providing different consent options. Janina’s takeaway tips were to sometimes ‘let go’ of an idea to embrace new ones and to appreciate new opportunities arising from challenging situations.

CAREER TRANSITIONS

Resilience and adaptability are also needed when it comes to planning our careers, so the second half of

the event involved a discussion between four youth researchers, from across career stages and with academic and non-academic experience.

Dr Sophie Atherton highlighted competing opportunities PGRs may have to juggle and argued that this can be daunting and risks burnout. She explained that during her PhD, she has learned to reflect, be selective, and say ‘no’ so that she can say ‘yes’ to what she really wants and needs. Sophie’s selection (highlighted in dark blue in figure 1) changes periodically to balance extra work, while prioritising her PhD, and (most importantly), her wellbeing.

Figure 1: Balancing opportunities to avoid burnout

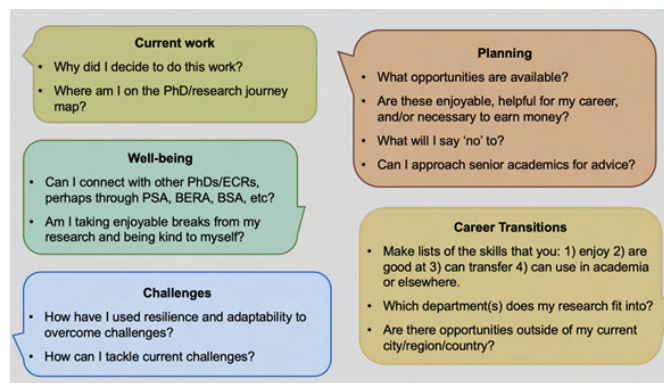


Dr Christine Huebner reflected on the academic and non-academic roles that are available to youth researchers and reminded us that asking ourselves why we take on certain responsibilities can help us focus on the inspirations behind our decisions. Dr Nora Siklodi prompted the audience to engage in self-reflection by identifying our strengths, recognising the interdisciplinary nature of our work, and our potential to stretch and re-create disciplinary boundaries. In line with youth studies’ focus on transitions (Woodman et al., 2020), Professor Tracy Shildrick reflected on how careers are constantly in transition and although it is not without its challenges, academia can be a fruitful and rewarding path to experience such transitions. Tracy encouraged PGRs and ECRs to submit their research to academic journals and seek advice from senior academics.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Academia can seem like a challenging landscape, but networking and talking openly about these challenges can benefit our research and mental wellbeing. Figure 2 summarises some of the provocations that attendees discussed, which we invite you to reflect on.

Figure 2: Practical research considerations for postgraduates



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are your thoughts on resilience as a concept? How do you experience and enact resilience in your current work?
2. How has this blog post helped you to reflect on which opportunities to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to in your current work?
3. How has this blog post made you think about adaptability as a concept? How is adaptability relevant to your work?

THINKING AHEAD: CAREER DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

Supporting doctoral students & early career researchers in journal peer review in educational research: Issues & suggestions (Part 1)



SIN-WANG CHONG
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Journal peer review is a familiar topic for doctoral students and early career researchers in educational research.¹ With the prevalence of the ‘publish-or-perish’ culture in academia, researchers’ performance is gauged largely on the quality of publications they produce. An indicator of this ‘quality’ is whether the outputs are published in international, peer-reviewed journals. In the discipline of education, publications in journals indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) (that is, journals with an ‘impact factor’) are highly valued by universities. Journals indexed in SSCI usually employ a rigorous peer-review mechanism to ensure that published research is original and methodologically sound. To most, peer review is a process of checking the quality of manuscripts, implying a hierarchical relationship between peer reviewers and authors. Peer reviewers are often viewed as experts in the area, giving authoritative feedback to authors, who are expected to take up most, if not all, of the suggestions.

¹ Original blog post, published 27 July 2022: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/supporting-doctoral-students-and-early-career-researchers-in-journal-peer-review-in-educational-research-issues-and-suggestions-part-1>

PROBLEMATISING THE CURRENT STATE OF PEER REVIEW IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNALS

The conception that peer reviewers are gatekeepers of academic journals and experts raises several problems, including limiting participation of doctoral students and early career researchers in the process. First, since peer reviewers are positioned as ‘experts’, journals prefer to invite experienced and senior researchers who have a well-established track record of publications in a particular substantive area or that use a specific methodology. Doctoral students and early career researchers are often an ‘afterthought’; indeed, junior researchers are sometimes invited to review because the original peer reviewer becomes unavailable or, in some cases, they are recommended by the original peer reviewer, who is their supervisor.

The peer reviewer as gatekeeper paradigm ensures that participants in the review process are insiders, who are acculturated to and aware of the norms and practices of academic publishing. Nevertheless, doctoral students and early career researchers rarely have the chance to get hold of such tacit knowledge because journal peer review is usually not included as part of the doctoral training programme

offered by universities. It is surprising to see a lot of university-based initiatives supporting academic writing (such as writing retreats) but not preparing doctoral students and early career researchers to navigate the journal peer review process as authors and reviewers. In Chong (2021), I observed that most peer-review training resources are provided by international publishers, but they mainly focus narrowly on knowledge building (for instance, What are the stages of peer review?); as a result, there is inadequate coverage of skills-based and community-based approaches to peer-review training. In other words, rarely are doctoral students and early career researchers offered opportunities to practise what they know, including reviewing actual manuscripts and receiving feedback on the feedback they provide to the authors. In a collaborative autoethnography that I co-authored with Shannon Mason, both of us felt unsupported and unprepared when we were invited to review. We were unsure both of what we should and should not comment on, and of the expectations from the journal (Chong & Mason, 2021); we were also perplexed about the format and structure of a peer-review report (Mason & Chong, 2022). Likewise, doctoral students and early career researchers who receive feedback from reviewers for the first time may be confused by conflicting comments by different reviewers and the conventions of responding to reviewers' comments.

'The conception that peer reviewers are gatekeepers of academic journals and experts raises several problems, including limiting participation of doctoral students and early career researchers in the process.'

Conceptualising peer reviewers as experts restricts the number of researchers that are 'qualified' to be invited. As a journal editor myself, like many others, I find it increasingly difficult to find suitable peer reviewers, especially during the pandemic. It is not uncommon to send out a dozen invitations before receiving a positive response. It is a 'lose-lose' situation: when we continue to reinforce the mindset that only experienced and senior researchers can be journal peer reviewers, it impedes and delays the whole process of peer review because seasoned researchers can only review so much, given their other professional commitments. At the same time, it is a loss to doctoral

students and early career researchers because they are rarely given the opportunity to build their confidence in review.

CONCLUSION

Although the peer-reviewing model may be 'tried-and-tested' to serve its gatekeeping function, it is not conducive to preparing young researchers to be active contributors and actors in the journal peer-review process. Much can be done – if we think creatively and from the perspective of the next generation of educational researchers – to make our journal peer-review process more inclusive: one that provides a chance for novice researchers to learn, participate and shine.

I discuss some suggestions for greater inclusivity in Part 2 of this blog post.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What concerns do early career researchers have when navigating journal peer review?
2. How can supervisors and senior academics encourage early career researchers to participate in journal peer review?
3. How can publishers and universities encourage early career researchers to contribute to journal peer review?

These questions are for parts 1 and 2 of this blog post.

THINKING AHEAD: CAREER DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

Supporting doctoral students and early career researchers in journal peer review in educational research: Issues and suggestions (Part 2)



SIN-WANG CHONG
UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

In Part 1 of this two-part blog post, I surveyed the landscape of journal peer review in educational research and underscored the importance of involving junior researchers.¹ Am I suggesting that everyone can be a journal peer reviewer? No, people need training. Am I devaluing the contributions of expert reviewers? No, what I am suggesting is a reallocation or expansion of their expertise to train the next generation of peer reviewers. We, as an academic community, need to provide opportunities to doctoral students and early career researchers to grow and blossom as journal peer reviewers. In my experience, serving as peer reviewers is the best way for junior researchers to gain hands-on experience and an insider's perspective to peer review.

CREATING PEDAGOGIC MOMENTS IN JOURNAL PEER REVIEW: SOME SUGGESTIONS

First, doctoral students and early career researchers could be invited to sit on journal editorial boards. I know some journals offer 'internships' to junior researchers, providing them with the opportunity to review for the journal. *Language Teaching* published by

¹ Original blog post, published 3 August 2022: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/supporting-doctoral-students-and-early-career-researchers-in-journal-peer-review-in-educational-research-issues-and-suggestions-part-2>

Cambridge University Press, for example, has an annual essay writing competition opened to doctoral students and early career researchers. The winner is offered a place on the editorial board of the journal for a year, providing them with hands-on experience of peer reviewing.

A second suggestion is to have doctoral students and early career researchers serve as a regular peer reviewer (not an ad hoc reviewer), sometimes called the College of Reviewers. These novice peer reviewers receive regular invitations from the same journal, helping them get acquainted with the standards of the journal, and the practice and culture of peer review of the journal. It is not enough to simply invite doctoral students and early career researchers to review; journal editors and experienced reviewers need to provide mentorship opportunities. For example, some journals, such as *Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education*², adopt a collaborative peer-review model, where a group of reviewers, comprising the new and experienced, meet to discuss a manuscript. Elsewhere, I have proposed the creation of an additional position on the journal editorial board that focuses on mentoring new peer reviewers for the journal (Chong, 2021). This experienced researcher would co-review with new peer

² <https://asrhe.org/index.php/asrhe>

reviewers, providing guidance and support throughout the process of writing up an evaluation report. For instance, one of the BERA journals, *Review of Education*,³ has an editor who has assumed the position of the ‘Support for Early Career Researcher Lead’ to provide mentorship and support to early career researchers.

‘It is not enough to simply invite doctoral students and early career researchers to review; journal editors and experienced reviewers need to provide mentorship opportunities.’

A third initiative would be to create a repository of doctoral students and early career researchers with a range of expertise in educational research topics and methodologies who are willing to serve as journal peer reviewers. Additional information such as their research backgrounds, reviewing experiences and sample publications will also be uploaded to the repository. Training will be provided to the peer reviewers who register on the repository, and if they complete the training, this will also be indicated on the system. The repository will be shared with editors of educational research journals who will indicate whether they would be willing to invite a certain number of doctoral students and early career researchers on the repository to review for their journals every year. I have recently created such a repository⁴ with more than 120 early career researchers in educational research signed up. I also propose to create badges (an idea similar to the open science badges⁵ awarded to journals) for these journals who participate in this initiative to show on their websites that they are actively supporting and including doctoral students and early career researchers in their peer-review process.

I am hoping to begin the consultation and planning phase of this idea later this year, when opinions from journal editors, publishers and early career researchers will be sought. In preparation for this initiative, several events are being planned. These include a summer school on journal peer review focusing on responding to and providing feedback, and peer-review retreats for participants to discuss in small groups about how to respond to peer-review feedback they receive or to provide feedback on a manuscript that they are invited to review.

3 <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/hub/journal/20496613/editorialboard.html>

4 <https://forms.gle/BFWjzPnZozeidnfm6>

5 <https://www.cos.io/initiatives/badges>

CONCLUSION

It is of paramount importance that we consider the developmental benefits of peer review for doctoral students and early career researchers in educational research. It is not my intention to downplay the value of ‘expertise’ and ‘experience’; rather, the intent of this blog is to invite us to ponder what ‘peer’ means in ‘peer review’, and how we can create space and opportunities for junior researchers to make our journal peer-review model sustainable and inclusive.

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Chong, S. W. (2021). Improving peer-review by developing reviewers’ feedback literacy. *Learned Publishing*, 34(3), 461–467. <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1378>

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These questions are for parts 1 and 2 of this blog post.

Who wants to be an academic?



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THE GOOD...

Academic staff are driven by the thrill of creating new knowledge.¹ New knowledge also stimulates the passion that academics bring to teaching their students. When these two things happen together the job satisfaction is unrivalled.

Interest in a new research idea requires creativity. This idea then needs the right funder. Doing the research project, which is nearly always a collaborative team effort, is followed by the joy of sharing the outcomes – for example, the excitement of getting a peer-reviewed paper or book published. Sometimes there is international interest in the research which takes you to new countries. And perhaps the media call can catapult the academic to prime time TV.

The creativity of teaching is bound up with the excitement of helping students to learn: as individuals, in small groups, large groups, even massive (MOOC) groups. The particularly long apprenticeship of a doctorate can result in professional relationships, between academic supervisor and student, that last many years after the doctorate has been awarded.

For some academics, enterprise and engagement work also sparks their creativity including through commercial start-ups and other spin-offs. Traditionally, then, the job of an academic has been a very varied one. It is a profession that allows the flexibility and personal agency to determine at least some of the work based on interests, although research evidence on the structures and processes of the work of academics in UK education departments is known to be scarce (Boyle et al., 2021).

...THE BAD...

The variety of the work of an academic includes refereeing papers and book proposals; being an editor of a journal; organising seminars and conferences; giving

talks at conferences; helping research organisations like BERA do their work; and talking to journalists about news articles they are writing, and about programmes on broadcast media that they are pitching. Too often this work has to be done on top of research, teaching and administration: effectively overtime *done for free* (see for example Koens et al., 2018). The nature of academic contracts enables this situation, which is a risk to work–life balance (Matthews, 2016). I doubt that much ‘free’ work is done in the private sector.

The qualifications required to become a lecturer in a university require full-time study of three years on an undergraduate degree, one year master’s degree, three-to-four years’ doctoral study then X years of postdoctoral research or the equivalent in a profession such as school teaching. As a result, academics are extremely well qualified, and work in what is known in employment analyses as ‘a knowledge intensive service’. On average, public sector workers in knowledge intensive services, including university academics, are paid much less than their counterparts in the private sector. To be precise, they are paid 17 per cent less than other higher-skilled private sector employees (ONS, 2020).

And these figures can’t account for one-off bonuses for individual employees in the private sector, or the range of ‘informal’ incentives such as being part of the lavish entertaining of clients or company meetings, or the quick promotions and bonuses that come as a result of simply meeting numerical targets. In universities, most promotions require not only the meeting of performance targets but also a lengthy written case across multiple documents that are peer-reviewed by multiple committees in the annual applications process – all to gain the extra £2,000 per annum that may be on offer. In general, given that there is a clear link between pay and productivity (Britton & Propper, 2016), it is reasonable to assume that incentives are an important consideration for any job, including for academic staff. My experience suggests that incentives

¹ Original blog post, published 1 December 2021: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/who-wants-to-be-an-academic>

of most kinds for academic staff have been reduced or are now non-existent. For example, the £500 contribution to the cost of attending an academic conference (which is part of the requirements of the job) for which one can apply to one's institution annually has, I suspect, not increased much over the years.

...AND THE UGLY

The prized flexibility in the job of an academic has seen many changes, including the introduction of performance management structures initiated by the UK government such as:

- the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
- the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).

Teacher educators in universities face the 'double whammy' of performance management through the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections, in addition to repeated government attempts to control their academic freedom to construct relevant curricula (BERA, 2021).

UK academics have risen to the challenges of productivity and quality – the REF, for example – by competing and winning on the global stage. However, whereas in the private sector financial bonuses may quickly follow increased productivity, this is not the case for university academics. Even the astonishing work done during the global pandemic remains totally unrewarded.

Apart from the satisfaction of the job, the reason for any job is to earn a good living. Academic pay has lost its value by a minimum of 10.5 per cent since 2009 (a higher estimate puts this figure at 16.4 per cent), and the problems of poor wages are particularly acute for colleagues who are in the early stages of their career (UCU, 2021). To be clear, that is effectively **a pay cut year-on-year for 12 years**. The post-doc academic will generally be on fixed-term contracts before they even get a chance to apply for a first lectureship, but will face many of the same expectations of full-time academic staff. And pensions for academic staff, which have always been seen by people outside academia as a major incentive of the job, are facing very serious problems.

In view of the changing nature of conditions for academic staff it is no surprise to me that for the second time (pre-pandemic and now) the University and College Union has received a mandate from academics (and other higher education professionals) for industrial action. It is absolutely vital that those responsible take decisive action to reverse the years of decline in working conditions for academics. This needs

to be supported loudly and clearly by government for all the reasons outlined in this blog. Equity and equality, pay, incentives, conditions of service and flexibility all need to be addressed, not least to ensure that the creativity that powers our society is safeguarded.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are university academic staff paid appropriately in relation to the qualifications they are required to have and the productivity that they have continued to demonstrate?
2. Is academic freedom alive and well in university education departments?
3. Is an academic career in universities as attractive as it was 10 years ago?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sophie Atherton is a research fellow in the Centre for Biomedicine, Self and Society in the Usher Institute at the University of Edinburgh. She is currently working on an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project entitled 'Viral Memories: From HIV to Covid-19 and Beyond' which explores gay men's experiences of Covid-19 and their memories of HIV in the UK. In 2023 she obtained a PhD in Sociology from the University of Manchester. Her PhD investigated the experiences of transgender secondary school students in the UK. Her interests include the sociology of gender and sexuality, the sociology of education, youth studies and qualitative methods.

Nour El Houda Benlakhdar has a PhD in educational linguistics from the University of Northampton, UK. Her project was fully funded by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education. In her thesis, Nour investigated the challenges and needs of Algerian doctoral students in the sciences when writing scientific articles. Her areas of interest include English for Academic Purposes (EAP) needs analysis, writing for publication, genre analysis and qualitative inquiry.

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Alison Fox is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University in the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport, an Associate Head of School (Research and Knowledge Exchange), chair of the University's Human Research Ethics Committee and Senior Fellow of the

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Sylvia Ikomi has an MA in education. She is a recipient of an Economic and Social Research Council Stuart Hall PhD studentship. She is an early career researcher, higher education lecturer, teacher and the author of the autumn 2023 BERA *Research Intelligence* magazine article 'Black girls: Adulthood & care in school'. Her PhD research is on the adulthood of Black girls in local authority care. Sylvia delivers continuous professional development training for teachers and social workers that is aimed at supporting them in working more effectively with children in local authority care and improving the children's life outcomes.

Anna Mariguddi is a Senior Lecturer in Education (specialising in music education) at Edge Hill University. Research interests include: music education, linking theory with practice, co-researching and qualitative research. Prior to working in higher education, Anna taught music in a secondary school.

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John Parkin is an Academic Employability Consultant at Anglia Ruskin University where he works with academics and external partners to embed employability into courses. John Parkin was also a Senior Lecturer Practitioner in Education and a Course Leader of the BA Primary Education Studies course. Before becoming an

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Janet Ramdeo (PFHEA) is an experienced teacher educator, having worked in a variety of academic and programme leadership roles in universities across London and Cambridge. She has primarily worked in international teacher education and initial teacher training (ITT). Her current role at the University of Surrey involves supporting curriculum development across the university from an inclusive education perspective and the implementation of the Race Equality Charter Action Plan. Janet's research focusses on how Black female teachers create their professional identities in spaces which rarely represent them, illuminating their experiences through intersectional and Black feminist lenses. She continues to research the lived experiences of racially minoritised groups in educational settings.

Joanna Rankin is a third-year doctoral student at the University of Oxford's Department of Education. Her research, in collaboration with Portsmouth EMAS, focuses on the support given by Bilingual Learning Assistants to multilingual pupils learning in English schools. It uses mixed methods to investigate the nature and impact of Assistants' support and is funded by an ESRC Grand Union DTP studentship. Before her doctorate, Joanna taught at international schools in China, Brazil and Italy, as well as at schools in the UK.

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Kathryn Spicksley is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on teacher professional identity, with a specific interest in its relationship to teacher recruitment and retention. Prior to studying for her PhD, Kathryn worked as an early years teacher in state primary schools across England.

Janina Suppers is a lecturer at Te Kura Toi Tangata School of Education at the University of Waikato. Her research focuses on making young people's voices heard at their schools and in their local communities, citizenship education, rural communities and co-production research with young people. Janina has experience in conducting qualitative, mixed methods and participatory research and has previously worked as a citizenship teacher in Germany and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Aisling Walters works as a teacher educator and researcher at Nottingham Trent University. She is an early career researcher and has just completed her MA in Education. The focus of Aisling's research is the writer identity of trainee English teachers and the formative experiences that shape these.

Dominic Wyse has made a leading contribution to research on curriculum and pedagogy, including national curricula, for more than 25 years. He has led multiple research projects and has published many books and research papers. Dominic's main research is on effective teaching of reading and writing. His book *The Balancing Act: An Evidence-Based Approach to Teaching Phonics, Reading and Writing* (co-authored with Charlotte Hacking, Routledge), and their research paper, advanced 'The Double Helix of Reading and Writing', a new theory and model for teaching. Dominic was president of BERA from 2019 to 2022. He has made a significant contribution to research on education as an academic discipline in universities, including the vital place of teacher education and 'close-to-practice research'. As president, then vice-president, he led the BERA 'Education: The State of the Discipline' initiative, which consisted of five research projects undertaken by different teams of researchers.

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