

# Balancing insider-outsider positioning in near-to-practice research

Presented at Harnessing Creativity in Changing Times: Risk, resilience and professional learning. IPDA Annual International Conference, 29–30 November 2019, Birmingham

Professor (Jas) Jaswinder K Dhillon  
University of Worcester, UK

# Researcher positionality

Central premise of the argument in this paper:

- Positionality is **not a neutral aspect** of research methodology or method
- It is a fundamental feature of research design
- It needs to be considered, justified and defended at all stages of the research process

# Complexity in near-to-practice research

Ontological and epistemological complexities - truth, knowledge, best/good practice, improving practice... critique/challenge existing practice

- Professional, inter-professional and disciplinary boundaries
- Complex practice-based settings
- Role and identity as a researcher – ‘researcher self’

# Traditional binaries and dualities

Insider/outsider

Subjectivity/objectivity

Validity/reliability

Qualitative/quantitative data

# Need for more nuanced conceptions

Researchers undertaking near-to-practice research need to navigate complex boundaries :

- need for creativity, reflexivity and **ethical sensitivity** in boundary crossing
- and **nuanced conceptualisation** of the 'researcher self'

# The 'researcher self'

- able to navigate and balance multiple positionalities
- 'multiple selves' (Coffey 1999)
- 'transition from outsider to insider' (Dhillon 2006)
- 'blurred boundaries of insider/outsider' (Perryman 2011)
- 'insider/outsider continua' (Obasi 2014)
- 'insider-outsider-inbetweener' (Milligan 2016)
- 'ethics of engagement and insider-outsider perspectives' (Dhillon and Thomas 2018)

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities and change during research process

- 'transition from outsider to insider' (Dhillon 2006) *'Joining-up': a study of partnership in post-16 learning*

Methodology - interpretive paradigm , case study

Methods - observations, interviews and document analysis

Role of researcher – outsider at beginning of study and became more like a member of the partnership by end of fieldwork

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Dhillon and Thomas (2018) *Ethics of engagement and insider-outsider perspectives: issues and dilemmas in cross-cultural interpretation*
- Methodology - interpretative, co-researching
- Methods - interviews, co-interviewing, co-interpreting
- Role of researchers - balance between cultural insider and cultural outsider

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Hooker (2016) *The life stories of teachers in post compulsory education: a narrative exploration of teacher identity*.
- Methodology - narrative enquiry
- Methods - repeated interviews using visual prompts
- Role of researcher - balance between insider and outsider

# The 'researcher self'

- examples of empirical research relating to multiple positionalities
- Smith (2018) *Doing the portfolio' – pre-registration training for biomedical scientists and developing the capable practitioner*
- Methodology - constructivist grounded theory
- Methods - **stage 1**: analysis of professional documents to inform questionnaires, **stage 2** : focus groups, interviews
- Role of researcher - balance between insider and outsider

# References

- Coffey, A., 1999. *The ethnographic self*. London: Sage
- Dhillon, J.K., 2006. 'Joining-up': a study of partnership in post-16 learning. PhD thesis. University of Warwick.
- Dhillon, J.K. and Thomas, N., 2018. Ethics of engagement and insider-outsider perspectives: issues and dilemmas in cross-cultural interpretation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*. DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2018.1533939.
- Hooker, B. A., 2016. *The life stories of teachers in post compulsory education: a narrative exploration of teacher identity*. EdD thesis. University of Wolverhampton.
- Milligan, L., 2016. Insider-outsider-inbetween? Researcher positioning, participative methods and cross-cultural educational research. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 46 (2): 235–250.
- Obasi, C., 2014. Negotiating the insider/outsider continua: A black female hearing perspective on research with deaf women and black women. *Qualitative Research* 14 (1): 61–78.
- Perryman, J., 2011. The return of the native: The blurred boundaries of insider/outsider research in an English secondary school. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 24 (7): 857–874.
- Smith, S., 2018. *Doing the portfolio' – pre-registration training for biomedical scientists and developing the capable practitioner*. EdD thesis . University of Wolverhampton.

# Thank you for listening

## Questions ?



Professor Jaswinder K Dhillon  
School of Education  
BB101, St John's Campus  
Henwick Grove  
Worcester  
WR2 6AJ

[j.dhillon@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.dhillon@worc.ac.uk)