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A participative research for learning methodology on education doctoral training programmes

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Introduction and background to the study

This paper outlines a methodology we have developed as part of a wider research interest in the engagement of educational practitioners (teachers in Higher Education, schools and colleges mainly) in doctoral level study. This methodology both enables research on an agreed topic - in this case 'What brought us to undertake doctoral studies' - and 'hands-on' learning about research methodology. Regarding the wider research interest the general question we wanted to address was 'Why do some educational practitioners engage in doctoral studies, knowing that currently the majority do not? ' Part of the means of answering such a question is, for example, to look at structural aspects of the education field in England (and other countries), the formation of teachers and expectations regarding the academic levels of practitioners, conditions influencing the importance of having higher level qualifications for teachers, and many other contextual factors. Another direction for such research is to pose the question at the phenomenological levels of individuals and groups and how they understand and explain their own trajectories. This latter approach provided the substantive topic for the research project reported here.

In this article we give a brief account of the first year of the project as a means of drawing attention to the pedagogical possibilities of this kind of research project within researcher development programmes. It is not our intention here to report on findings, though we do at times refer to some of these where relevant to the aim of the article. The aim here is to show how doing such research within doctoral programmes can enable learning that is not easily acquired through exposition, reading, simulation, or other common means of training. In keeping with this aim, we have devoted some space to a narrative of the project meetings, which we hope will provide a more concrete evocation of the opportunities for methodological learning than might be achieved through a more analytical register. This narrative is supported by a discussion of habitus, the organising theoretical construct in the project, its uses in some other research, and its potential in developing researcher reflexivity.

Before giving our account, we must briefly outline the context in which this project has taken place. The participants, other than ourselves, the two principal investigators (both already having PhDs), were all doctoral students on our professional doctorate programme for the Doctorate in Education (EdD). The doctoral students were all experienced professionals working in a range of contexts and subject areas, sharing a common interest in researching education and training practice. The subject areas of their pedagogical practice included nursing, Further Education, youth work, business studies, autism, hospitality and air safety. Of the eight doctoral students, six had recently begun the doctoral programme when the project started and two were in the 'thesis phase' of the programme which begins at least two years following registration, after successful completion of a 'taught phase' comprising four assessed modules. The research project we report was offered to the doctoral students as an additional activity which could enhance their understandings of research

methodology, an activity which was entirely optional and not connected to any formal assessment on the EdD programme. The doctoral students met three times a semester at weekends for their 'taught phase' programme, so, for convenience, project meetings were held at the end of the daily sessions on those weekends, the other participants attending when able.

It should be stressed here that we, the two principal investigators, though responsible for the project proposal, obtaining ethical approval, agenda setting and data storage, were also full participants in the project, as outlined below. Thus, while we have presented here a partially objectivised account, we have retained some of the more subjectivist or autoethnographical flavour of our own experiences in the project. We do not want to present this article as an account of what was 'done' to some research participants: the effort throughout was to blur boundaries between researcher and participant, 'flipping' roles frequently in order to explore the possibilities for reflexivity through role taking and to gauge the levels of participation that might be achieved. Mindful of Bourdieu's advice on reducing symbolic violence – "It is the investigator who starts the game and sets up the rules..." (1999: 609) – we tried to ensure that all matters regarding the project were open to full discussion and consensual decision-making. The doctoral students were not simply dealt with as respondents and therefore the learning about methodology that took place was extended to a much wider range of methodological concerns than might have been the case if we had asked 'them' to reflect on being interviewed or to produce reflective accounts for 'us' to analyse. As the fifth dyad in the project, we too had to deal directly with the issues of selectivity, presentation of self, confidentiality, trust and disclosure that all the other participants had.

Our wider interest has been strongly influenced by Bourdieu's approach to the relational analysis of field, capitals and habitus. This particular research project involves working with a small group of doctoral students to try to develop a collaborative methodology for exploring habitus. Here, we are exploring ways in which people engaged in their own education doctoral study can participate in researching their own and other participants' trajectories with a view to developing their research capabilities through the practical activity of understanding how each others' dispositions towards academic study have been formed. As such, the study contains elements of life history and autoethnographic approaches, informed by the theoretical tools offered by Bourdieu for understanding agency within the dynamics of a field. In this project, the key theoretical tool is the concept of habitus, rather than forms of capital and the structure of the field, supporting the phenomenological focus. In this respect, there was a strong convergence between our general research interest, the interests of a number of the participants who were either using or considering using Bourdieu's work in the theoretical framing of their doctoral research projects, and the usefulness of Bourdieu's work a s a means of encouraging reflexivity in research. The project experience thus offers itself as a resource for learning about methodology in education research in several ways:

- participation in the research project (outlined below) is both active and passive (each participant has both researcher and respondent roles) and thus acts as a resource for experiential learning about methodological issues
- the process of negotiating the phasing and direction of the project engages all in planning decisions
- the use of a theoretical framework and the problems of operationalising theoretical constructs are also matters for shared discussion and decision-making

Project methodology

The current study consists of five pairs or dyads: 3 dyads of doctoral students who have not started their thesis stage[1]; 1 dyad in the thesis stage; 1 dyad with doctorates. Within each dyad individuals wrote narrative, autobiographical accounts of their educational trajectories (phase one) which served as the stimulus for dyadic interviews (phase two) in which they discussed and explored what they had written with their partners. The interviews were recorded and these, along with all narratives, analyses and notes of meetings held on a secure online discussion board. A third planned stage was for individuals to write life history-type accounts of their partners' educational careers. However, the collaborative nature of the process meant that the approach was subject to change and currently participants have agreed to revisit and modify their phase one accounts as a result of the interviews and of discussions in meetings. They also decided recently that they now want to reorient their attention away from a life history angle on their trajectory towards doctoral study to focus on why they have managed to continue (having seen a number of their peers – though none of the research participants - drop out of the programme). Recently we, as two of the participants and the principal investigators (as required by our university for approval of such projects), were asked to write an initial analytical paper following discussions with participants and this article has been developed as a result of that. However, it is envisaged that all participants should have the opportunity to contribute to and develop the analysis as the research progresses. As the research is ongoing, this paper dwells mostly upon methodological aspects, although there is some reporting of empirical work to illustrate points.

The project experience as a resource for methodological learning

Participants were invited using an initial, one-page outline of the proposed research entitled 'Research Project: what influences decisions to undergo doctoral study?' that was posted on the virtual learning environment (VLE) in February 2010. This outline included a brief discussion of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and its relevance for helping us develop a reflexive awareness of research as a practice. The dyadic approach was also explained and its potential for achieving the 'double back' that Bourdieu thought so necessary in order to "objectify more completely one's objective and subjective relation to the object [of study]" (1990: 1). Our proposed methodology was presented as an attempt to work through some of the issues raised by Bourdieu in a practical way by linking strategies that are more closely associated with phenomenological thinking such as narrative, analytic autoethnography and life history approaches with Bourdieu's discussions of habitus (1990, 2001). Nine people came forward in response to this call and we met to discuss the proposal in more detail. Following this discussion, a detailed proposal was drawn up and submitted to the Faculty Ethics Committee for approval. Potential participants were thus involved in design issues from the outset and they were circulated with all initial documents and the final proposal for comment.

[1] 8 of the participants are members of our EdD programme, a doctorate in education with a professional practice focus. This programme has a cohort phase of two years in which cohort members meet regularly as a group and undergo research 'training'. At the end of two years, if they have successfully completed the four modules of the cohort phase, they transfer to the thesis stage, on successful submission of their research proposal. From then on they work in the same mode as 'traditional' PhD students, largely independently, with one or two supervisors to support them.

Following approval of the proposal (April 2010) a first meeting was arranged for May 2010, the main purposes of which were to agree the phasing of the project and its initial tasks, agree the dyads and to agree protocols for data sharing and storage. Agreement on the dyads was relatively straightforward in that some pairings had already been decided by those interested in participating and others were made on the basis of ease of contact, or prior acquaintance. One person was left without a partner initially but this problem was solved by the decision of another to withdraw. We discussed the proposed first phase and the pros and cons of interviewing our partners after writing our first autobiographical accounts. The thinking was that having written an autobiographical account we would be sensitised to some extent to our own understandings of key events, influences and developments in our own lives. This would mean that each of us would have 'surfaced' some of our 'dispositional factors', making them more amenable to conscious scrutiny and to their existence as possible personal 'agenda items' influencing our approach to the interviews. This is a complex issue that was discussed at some length at the time and has subsequently been identified as an area for further exploration, especially around questions of presentation of self (Goffman 1959) and the relation between performance of one's 'personal front' and sincerity or 'truthfulness' in accounts of the self. As for interviewing we decided to leave it to individuals to decide just how they should conduct their interviews, partly to avoid too much 'clutter' in the early stages of the project and partly because individuals would be receiving or had already received specific training in interviewing during their programmes. Besides we did not put up guidance on interviewing because we did not want to prescribe approaches, assuming that dyads would develop their own styles by 'negotiation-through -interaction', or by explicitly agreeing how they would conduct their interviews. Although this could be seen as a dangerous assumption, given the group (all experienced educational practitioners) and the already established rapport between individuals in their dyads, we did not think it likely that there would be any serious communication breakdowns. What happened in the interviews and the forms they took could then be discussed at subsequent meetings, or subjected to analysis. Indeed, it was striking when conducting a third party analysis of some of the interviews to see how the direction and flow of interviews revealed as much about interviewers' assumptions, values and priorities as they did about the interviewees. This was highlighted particularly where interviewers asked follow-up questions that carried certain assumptions about the way their partner must have experienced a particular event.

We agreed that the overall methodological approach was open and emergent and we intended to keep decisions on methodology (re)negotiable throughout the project. However, regarding security of data there was firmer direction from the principal investigators: all documents and audiofiles would be lodged with the principal investigators and these would be held in a secure area of the VLE only accessible by project participants. At this stage, it was clear that the question of the role of participants as both researchers and researched needed revisiting, as did the role of the principal investigators as 'meta-analysts' in addition to their other two roles. The feeling of the group was that once we had some material ('data') these questions would become more concrete. The discussions in this first meeting illustrate a number of issues in developing a participative research project, issues that were directly experienced by participants. Not the least of these are issues of trust and informed consent. Here, it would seem, the focus of the trust issues was both formal (data storage and security) and also something far less tangible: the question of trust in undertaking an open-ended and uncertain project. As for the latter, the fact that most of the participants had known each other and the PIs for no less than 7 months through the doctoral training programme (and a few

had known us and each other for much longer) helped. In addition, those who had agreed to participate were clearly interested in the approach and could see potential benefits for their own development, including their understanding of Bourdieuan concepts. The fact that all the participants were experienced educational professionals we think was an asset here in that we could assume that people would feel relatively confident of their capacity to deal with open-ended and contingent situations. Clearly, using such an approach with less professionally experienced doctoral students might require a different degree of flexibility in certain matters, dependent upon the profile of the group. The flexibility exercised here in the directing of the project was governed by a concern to maximise the methodological learning potential within the group, whilst enabling the project's continuation. The agreed actions for this first meeting were that each individual would write an initial autobiographical account of how they had come to do doctoral studies, length, format, historical 'reach' being entirely up to them. Following this, dyads would arrange to interview each other before the next meeting of the project group and record interviews on digital audio files. This might mean learning some new skills and possibly making a purchase, which was viewed as worthwhile for subsequent work other than this project. Some reading from Bourdieu (Chapter 3 on habitus from *The Logic of Practice* entitled 'Structures, Habitus, Practices') was also distributed, later to be supplemented by a range of materials explaining key concepts in Bourdieu, put together by one of the doctoral students with a special interest in Bourdieu.

The next meeting, in June 2010, was an impromptu meeting asked for by those of the project group (6 out of the ten) who were present at the EdD weekend. Here, those who had already written their first autobiographical accounts discussed their consciousness of self-revelation when writing these accounts. The question of sharing data outside of the dyad was raised and it was agreed to reserve the right until after the interviews and participants had seen what had come out from this phase of the research. A question was also raised regarding what had been omitted from the autobiographical accounts because of our awareness of disclosure. One response to this was the suggestion that a second phase could enable us to revisit both interviews and autobiographies and fill in the 'gaps'. Another suggestion was that participants could identify themes, for example, educational experience, family and so on, but it was pointed out that this would mean we would not get to see 'raw' data other than those within our dyads. These questions and suggestions illustrate a number of the concerns that participants had about self-disclosure and trust, but they were also linked to methodological issues here regarding what inscriptions should be the focus of analysis: coded segments', audiofiles, transcripts, thematised commentaries? This was a theme which continued throughout the doctoral training sessions that were running while this project continued and led to debates about whether the audiofile or the transcript should be the main focus of analysis, and the extent to which researchers remove themselves from the 'raw' data and work with refined segments such as codes, often using qualitative analysis software. The practical question of who analyses what (and whom) was approaching the heart of some of the deep methodological questions in qualitative research. Again, participants in the project were able to think through these issues whilst engaged in a concrete research activity, rather than to encounter these questions as abstract, theoretical scenarios.

As for following the agreed procedure, it was clear already that not only had people written very different accounts of different lengths and with different 'starting points', but it was also clear that some dyads had exchanged autobiographical accounts before interviewing, giving us an immediate illustration of the messy realities of research and the tendency for people, in practice, to go their

own ways and ignore agreed procedures: a good example of learning that cannot be had from textbooks on 'doing' research that idealise processes.

From this point on, perhaps because of the pervasive issue of trust and disclosure, the meeting became more intimate. The PI present gave a personal example of how he had come to discover by chance that identity has a strong fictional component in relation to his understanding of his own life history. If at least part of our identity is based on delusion or ignorance, to what extent might this research process enable us to get rid of such 'blank spots'? If there are always elements of delusion and ignorance in our self-identities what is this work for and how does it relate to issues of truth and truthfulness? One participant discussed the difference between siblings and how the younger or older child has different treatment, raising the question of personalities and family relations in this work. What were the individualistic aspects? How could these aspects be explained through the concept of habitus? With these questions in mind we can see the potential in such encounters to extend and develop everyone's theoretical understandings. Another participant talked about her struggle over her embodied sense of personal autonomy and the concepts (discourse, structures, agency, social constructionist ideas) being discussed on the EdD that were telling her she is not as free as she thinks. She went on to ask how did the dyads choose each other? In forming her dyad, two nurses who did not know the other had been a nurse had chosen each other: had they recognised a common habitus? There was extensive discussion of anonymity and disclosure. Someone had noticed that a number of us have Roman Catholic backgrounds: were we drawn to this project for its confessional aspects? At this point it was suggested that we should record subsequent meetings because these were also clearly a rich resource for thinking about our trajectories and also for methodological learning.

We will draw on notes from one more meeting to give the reader a concrete indication of what took place in the group meetings and to further illustrate the potential of the approach. The October 2010 meeting agreed to put up on the secure space in the VLE all autobiographical accounts and audio files of interviews and to write an extension to our autobiographies and/or a reflection on the process so far. Discussion ranged over many issues and the following questions were raised: Why were we prepared to get involved in the first place? What would be gained from reflecting on the range of motivations for involvement? Once you are involved in this project are you stuck? Despite all the agreement about withdrawal at any time, might we feel obliged to carry on because of a feeling of obligation to our partner? How important is it that people will withhold personal information? What is the nature of our accounts and interviews as 'true' or 'truthful' records? What do we do about discussions that start up again after the recorder is switched off? What about the openness of choice in the project, for example length and starting point of accounts ? Does this kind of thing matter? What do we mean by consistency and why do we want it? Here again we can see the potential for developing methodological thinking. A seemingly straightforward 'right to withdraw' was experienced in reality as counterbalanced by feelings of obligation or possibly even a subtle pressure to 'stay in'. The desire for each account to have the same starting point or to cover similar content areas can lead to a broader discussion of the underlying assumptions of participants about the need for consistency and the levels at which consistency might operate in a research project with several participants. The question of how to construe what is given or elicited in interviews is, of course, a common discussion point, but again the anchoring of this discussion in a concrete experience with which one is personally involved powerfully alters the learning when it is already and immediately pre-reflectively embodied as experience.

The project was organised theoretically around the question of how we might understand the doctoral journey in terms of changes to the habitus and experientially around a participative approach. The accounts above illustrate the generic methodological learning that was made possible through the actual practice of collaboration and the distribution of researcher roles. The next part of this paper explores the methodological learning that has been enabled through the testing of extant theoretical constructs. Whilst these two strands –experientially driven and theoretically driven – are not separate (the one feeding upon the other as essential aspects of the same context) it is convenient to tease the two strands apart for the sake of clarity in discussion. The next section, therefore, turns our attention to the development of the theoretical constructs informing the project.

Theoretic-methodological considerations

In *The Logic of Practice* (1990), the habitus is characterised as "a virtue made of necessity " (54); an "infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity " (54); "embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history" (56) and as a "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (57). This dialectical view of structured and structuring agency in which past experience is the basis of current action suggested an approach through which we could explore individual and collective histories, linking these to wider social trends and influences as well as more intimate spheres of influence such as family.

The habitus, intersubjectively shared, becomes the basis of a common-sense world where practices are harmonised through the objective conditions of existence which give rise to common dispositions. Individual habitus is seen as a "structural variant … expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory " (60). Bourdieu sees early experiences as having particular importance in the formation of the habitus, which then becomes a source of resistance to new information that might challenge already-accumulated knowledge structures. The concept of habitus allows for a qualified degree of agency that accepts the open endedness of action but recognises the constraints upon agency that come from structural determinants in the shape of different forms of capital that position agents within the field. Thus, "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us', a division as fundamental and as fundamentally recognised as that between the sacred and the profane." (1990: 64)

This explanation of the dynamic between structure and agency is compelling, but it poses many difficulties for operationalising the construct of habitus in educational research. Here we briefly review some other attempts to put the concept of habitus to work in social science research. We do this in order to provide a little more background on the way in which habitus is used in this study and to give some indication of the ways in which doctoral students can be brought to methodology through the work of others. Reay (2004) discusses other educational researchers' attempts to operationalise Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In discussing Bourdieu's assertion that the strength of the concept of habitus lies in its 'empirical relevance', she suggests that there is an '*indeterminacy about the concept that fits well with the complex messiness of the real world*' (p438). Part of the argument of Reay's paper concerns the way that Bourdieu viewed his own theorisations, that is in terms of wanting people to use them as he had done to look at empirical situations and as not so well defined that researchers are constantly trying to bend them in order to use them. So, in trying

to operationalise habitus we are, by his own definition, attempting to use the conceptualisations as he suggested they might be used – that is in order to 'drive' empirical work. Grenfell (1996) makes a similar point when he cites Bourdieu's exhortation to 'get our hands dirty' (p302). In relation to this practical emphasis Reay suggests that '*paradoxically the conceptual looseness of habitus also constitutes a potential strength. It makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption of the concept in empirical work.'* (Reay 1995 cited in Reay 2004 p441). Thus, it is in the 'nature' of Bourdieu's style of writing about theory (based as it is on empirical work, with his own empirical work at the centre), to allow the researcher space to build on his or her ideas, rather than foreclosing possibilities by too rigid a theoretical structure. Concepts such as habitus can be used to build new theoretical openings, based on (and arising from) the researcher's new empirical data. From the pedagogical angle, working with a conceptual tool such as habitus allows us to explore the relations between theoretical constructs and empirical work, but again our emphasis is not the abstract discussion of 'operationalising' constructs but on how operationalisation can be experienced in practice, by doing the research within the theoretical framing of the constructs.

Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder (2002) have used life history research in conjunction with a Bourdieuian analysis, though their use of Bourdieu's work is different to ours. Although their use of Bourdieu is central to their analysis, it does not seem to have been the 'driver' of the methodological approach to their study. In this regard, it is similar to Reay's use of habitus (see Reay 2004 p440) and that of others. Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder use the notion of habitus as a 'powerful tool' for the analysis of their informants' (Russian Jewish university students) concepts of the intelligentsia but their use of habitus is not the starting point for the methodological approach as it is in this study. Our study begins from a methodological starting point, the intention being to allow an exploration (and analysis of) habitus to be the focus which frames the central research questions and which 'points' to methods of research which might be appropriate. Thus, although there are some similarities between our study and that of Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder in that life history work was involved and habitus is used as central axis of analysis, our study differs in its operationalising of the *term* as a central focus.

Grenfell (1996) looks at the area of initial teacher education in relation to Bourdieu's work and provides an illustration of how research methodology might be derived from this. In seeking to develop a methodology to explore the relationship between field and habitus, Grenfell turns to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and suggests moving in three stages from analysis of the habitus to analysis of the field within fields (or in his case from case studies of students to analysing the discursive nature of training within the field). There are similarities here with our approach to operationalising these concepts, though we note that Grenfell has reversed the sequence advised by Bourdieu as set out in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 105) without drawing attention to this. We too have reversed the suggested sequence, but in our case, involving our students in a field mapping phase of research would have been impractical and probably would not have held the immediate appeal that the notion of habitus has.

Nash (1999) addresses attacks on the potential relevance and usefulness of Bourdieu's work to educational research, and in particular that made by Tooley and Darby (1998). He concludes by saying that reading Bourdieu is useful because it forces us to think, and that without "concepts – the tools of thought – we will not make much progress" (1999: 185). The role of theorising and theoretical constructs is clearly a key component of any research training programme, in which the

"oppositions of objectivism and subjectivism are transcended" (Nash 199: 185) and again this feature of the construct resonates well with other key issues on doctoral training programmes for education researchers, issues such as subjectivity and objectivity; agency and structure; and the role of subjectivity in generating 'objectivised' knowledge.

In order to improve on previous research on cultural capital in education Dumais (2002) proposes, amongst other things, to operationalise the concept of habitus alongside that of cultural capital, with gender placed within this theoretical framework. Dumais moves on to look at gender differences (which she considers are less often focussed on in discussions of habitus) suggesting that "one's habitus, determined by the available opportunity structure or field, shapes the type of class-based capital that men and women have, resulting in gendered forms of cultural capital….Moreover, one's habitus is also gendered as a result of the possibilities available to each group" (2002: 47). It remains to be seen how gender will emerge as a category in our study which includes four women and six men. It is likely that gender relations will figure highly in some accounts of earlier educational experience, as well as accounts of current concerns in professional practice. Clearly the use of gender as an organising construct presents similar challenges of reification through theory infiltrating and shaping our interpretations of social realities and as such would make an equally powerful starting point for a project designed to promote methodological learning.

Habitus is a compelling yet elusive concept. It provides an explanation of how we are both structured yet have agency through the operation of dispositions to act and schemes of perception and classification. Yet Bourdieu's explanation of the logic of practice relies heavily on the idea of the habitus being made up of pre-reflective, embodied dispositions:

"…systems of durable, transposable dispositions, **structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures**, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes **without presupposing a conscious aiming** at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor." (Bourdieu 1990: 53).

This then raises two problems in relation to our project of better understanding our own educational trajectories. The first of these is the extent to which the habitus can be recognised in oneself: can you research your own habitus or do you need others' perspectives? Bourdieu was at pains to distance himself from rational action theory (e.g. 2001: 79, 1990: 49) and, though he did not deny the capacity of actors for rational calculation, he emphasised time and again that the logic of practice is a fuzzy logic, where actors are predisposed to see certain courses of action as 'obvious' and others as impossible or simply unrecognisable. Therefore, the question remains as to what extent the participants are able to objectivise their own and each other's habituses, beyond that which is already understood through reflection on experience, to encompass the taken-for-granteds and misrecognitions that are the glue of social life and the engines of practice. Bourdieu emphasised that "in order to free our thinking of the implicit, it is not sufficient to perform the return of thought onto itself that is commonly associated with the idea of reflexivity" (2000: 9). That which is taken for granted is history (both individual and collective) and it is from the social history of educational institutions "and from the (forgotten or repressed) history of our singular relationship to these

institutions, that we can expect some real revelations about the objective and subjective structures (classifications, hierarchies, problematics, etc) that always, in spite of ourselves, orient our thought." (2000:9) Autobiographical and life historical approaches, it would thus seem, offer some opportunity for us to gain an objectivising perspective on our habituses.

The second question is how to account for changes in the habitus. What makes some people take a trajectory that, according to their childhood position in the space of social relations, is unlikely while others follow a life course that is more predictable? Bourdieu discusses the feelings of displacement and uneasiness felt by some agents where the space of positions and the space of dispositions are not closely aligned. This "dialectic of positions and dispositions" is to be found in "positions situated in zones of uncertainty in social space" (2000:157). Notwithstanding the general uncertainty of doctoral students undertaking a journey they have not seen to conclusion and are unlikely to undertake again, our initial analysis would suggest that the majority if not all of our participants have experienced or continue to experience a lack of homology between positions and dispositions and are thus well placed to explore the formation of their own habituses. Indeed, we would go further and suggest here that embarking on a new programme of learning of any sort offers an opportunity for people to ask themselves, 'How is it that I have come to this point? What is the nature of this new practice that I am learning? What have I brought with me that will help or hinder me in learning the new practice?' With education doctoral students, achieving a higher degree of self-understanding is obligatory, if they are to reach a better understanding of and control over the relationship between their personal dispositions (beliefs, assumptions, values, priorities) and their research practices.

Habitus is one of many possible theoretical tools for use in this process of self-understanding, one which brings with it a number of distinct uses. It is useful in developing understandings of practice and, when linked to other key concepts such as field and capitals, provides a means of getting a theoretical grasp on how we are engaged in both structuring, and being structured by, the education field of practice. It is also useful in that it provides, we think, a bridge between pyschological and social constructs of identity formation: as one participant exemplified earlier, we may hold a greater belief in our own agency than we should, and the process of re-examining that agency may help us to get a better grasp of and therefore a better potential control over what we might be pre-reflectively doing in our practices. Understanding our learning and our difficulties in achieving such reflexivity in terms of homology or lack of it between position and disposition links the personal/psychological with the interpersonal/sociological and provides us with a framing that is more powerful than seeing the doctoral journey as acquisition of personal skill or expertise. In our experience, the personal skill development and individual-psychological perspectives are often already embedded in our students' dispositions, and it is the sociological and social-theoretical perspectives that are less familiar, these latter being approached as abstract bodies of knowledge. Thus, a sociological construct such as habitus, inspired as Bourdieu acknowledges at least partly by Piaget's constructs of assimilation and accommodation (Bourdieu 2000), is a good bridging point for many. We would go so far as to suggest that the constructs of habitus and of position and disposition are particularly useful as tools for getting at the processes of transition and habituation in becoming a doctoral student, for example in helping students to get an analytical perspective on their 'resistances' to doctoral practices which are unsettling, such as the difficulty of problematising habitualised practices, or of dealing with rival ontological and epistemological positions that challenge taken-for-granted positions.

Empirical work – autobiographies and interviews

To sum up so far, this project has two key aspects. Firstly, the use of autobiographical and interview approaches allows participants to reflect deeply on and discuss their educational and life trajectories and this process is beneficial in helping each of us towards better self-understanding in relation to our research work, our presuppositions and our values, an essential element of research training in itself, though one which might be overlooked in more formal approaches to researcher development. Secondly, the process itself is clearly a form of practical and theoretical research training which has many benefits, not the least in providing a model of how theoretical tools can be operationalised for a specific research problem. The project also has another purpose: the exploration of commonalities and differences and the picking out of themes that appear to be shared across the narratives: an exploration of the developing researcher habitus. It is not the aim of this article to explore these in any detail. However, some reference to initial findings will help illuminate other ways in which the project has shown its potential as a pedagogical device.

Therefore we now outline some of the themes emerging from the first two phases of the project in order to highlight the potential benefits on a programme of researcher development. Questions around self and identity, if not originally central to the project, have come to prominence as the project has developed. The intensely personal and individual nature of the autobiographies and interviews was obvious as the data from the first two phases of the project were received: the participants had mostly worked at a high level of self-disclosure. Although some participants organised their narratives and commented in interviews using Bourdieuan concepts, most did not. Instead they presented themselves in terms of narratives with key motifs, such as the need to strive for excellence; the need to achieve; the desire to prove our capacities to ourselves and to others; the knowledge that others would be proud of us. This raises the question of the use of the organising theoretical constructs – in this case habitus – and their relation with the data being generated by individuals and dyads. Where the constructs are not used, does this inevitably place some participants in a more passive role as regards the analytical aspects of the research? By using ordinary language, are they excluding themselves from the objectivating, analytical levels of the research? Is the process of abstraction from ordinary commonsense understandings necessary for it to count as research? Or should different framings, for example those of identity, be encouraged as alternatives or replacements? Here, there is scope to exploit what has actually happened and to open discussion on the use of theoretical constructs and the danger of such constructs being reified and supplanting the 'reality' that one wants to speak about. This aspect of theorising was the subject of frequent comment by Bourdieu (for example, 1990: 11), who was acutely aware of the way in which theoretical constructs, though necessary for grasping practice simultaneously destroy it:

"logical models giving an account of the observed facts .... become false and dangerous as soon as they are treated as the real principles of practices, which amounts to simultaneously overestimating the logic of practices and losing sight of what constitutes their real principle."

An alternative approach is to supplement the theory of habitus with theories of self and identity to support, revise or extend the Bourdieuan framing of the research. Here, then, we have another benefit of the open-ended participatory approach: the data generated having a direct influence on further developments in the project, in this case in terms of theorising in the light of the intensely

personal and individualised nature of the narratives produced by participants. The approach of starting with one theoretical framing and then, in the light of emerging data, extending or modifying that frame is another benefit of this collaborative, emergent approach: participants can thus experience at first hand the ambiguous and uncertain ways in which research might progress in reality, something that is hard to grasp concretely when you are in an institutional environment that is pushing you to produceidealised, decisive-looking research designs for the purposes of getting through reviews and upgrades. This is not to suggest that participants did not dwell on experiences that are open to a Bourdieuan analysis. Certainly links are made to structuring conditions (especially social class) and structural changes in a field (for example the moving of Nurse Education into HE in the late 1990s) that are seen as significantly determining features of changes in the habitus. These structural influences are presented as contexts or significant events, often as prevailing influences to be fought against or as opportunities to be taken and as such they form background to the narratives and coherence to their 'plots'. They are not, however, presented by these participants through the Bourdieuan analytical lens.

Above all, the narratives in both the autobiographical sketches and the interviews are more immediately recognisable as narratives about identity. As such they display a coherence that one would expect in narrative forms, with stories of struggle, resilience, self-actualisation and with motifs and themes that are traced back to childhood or other important phases of formative experience. All the autobiographical pieces apart from one (which is written more as notes under subheadings or themes) show such narrative forms, most often with a chronological, life-story structure and with considerable emphasis on early experiences. And of course it is not difficult to approach such narratives from a Bourdieuan perspective.

In his extensive discussion of the habitus in *The Logic of* Practice (1990: 60-1), Bourdieu reflects on the importance of formative experiences:

“Early experiences have particular weight because the *habitus* tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information.”

In this passage, Bourdieu stresses the agent's built-in resistance to change, understood as “a non-conscious, unwilled avoidance” (60-1). Marcus and Nurius (1986) claim that in psychology virtually all empirical studies showing resistance of self-concept to change dwell on individuals’ resistance to/rejection of challenging feedback: “These studies have not explored what actually happens to the individual’s self-relevant thoughts, feelings and actions in the course of this resistance” (1986: 964) and Marcus and Nurius aim to do this through the concept of possible selves. Marcus and Nurius (1986) understand possible selves as derived from representations of the self in the past and including representations of the self in the future: "These possible selves are individualised or personalised, but they are also distinctly social" (1986: 954). This construct makes a useful bridge between psychological and sociological construals of identity: "the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular socio-cultural and historical context and from the models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences." (1986: 954) Thus possible selves reveal the "inventive and constructive nature of the self but they also reflect the extent to which the self is socially determined and

constrained"(1986: 955). The self-concept is viewed as a system of affective-cognitive structures or schemas about the self that lends structure and coherence to the individual's experiences. These self-schemas are constructed from an individual's past experiences and reflect enduring personal concerns : "in particular domains, these well-elaborated structures of the self shape the perceiver's expectations …. they determine which stimuli are selected for attention…" (1986: 957) Defining the working self concept as "a continually active, shifting array of self-knowledge", they also suggest that agency could be understood "in terms of the individual's ability to develop and maintain distinct possible selves" (1986: 962).

A similar linkage between psychological and sociological constructs is apparent in Bourdieu's work, for example *Pascalian Meditations,* where we can see the direct influence of Piagetian thinking on Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Here, Bourdieu seems to allow for individual variations, though he does not explain the source of individual differences in rigidity or flexibility of habitus and he appears to rule out the possibility of sudden changes in the habitus, of the kind of 'epiphanies' that educationalists are always drawn to as immanent possibilities in learning:

Dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state. They are characterised by a combination of constancy and variation which varies according to the individual and his degree of flexibility or rigidity. If (to borrow Piaget's distinction relating to intelligence), accommodation has the upper hand, then one finds rigid, self-enclosed, overintegrated habitus (as in old people); if adaptation predominates, habitus dissolves into the opportunism of *mens momentanea*, incapable of encountering the world and of having an integrated sense of self." (Bourdieu 2000: 161)

The notion of an 'overintegrated' habitus has particular resonance for this study, in that our wider research interest is to explore and explain why some educational practitioners decide to pursue doctorates, a course of action which cannot be seen as the norm for educationalists and thus presumably implying a habitus disposed towards adaptation. If the 'established order' of teacher formation in England is one in which higher level intellectualised study of education has been subject to undermining as impractical, irrelevant and indeed by many as the source of some of our problems in education (McCulloch et al 2000; McCulloch 2001; Stevenson et al 2007; Bottery and Wright 2000), this partially explains why undertaking doctoral study of education is rarely seen as a 'smart move' for educational practitioners. If an untheorised pragmatism is at the core of (English) teachers' values regarding their own pedagogical knowledge base (e.g. Moon 1998, Korthagen 2001), we can understand this in Bourdieuan terms as doxic submission:

"The social world is riddled with *calls to order* that function as such only for those who are predisposed to heeding them as they *awaken* deeply buried corporeal dispositions, outside the channels of consciousness and calculation. It is this doxic submission of the dominated to the structures of a social order of which their mental structures are the product…" (Bourdieu 2001: 54-5)

Yet most involved in the project have identified ourselves as coming from poor or working class backgrounds where doxic submission might be characterised by low aspirations or limited expectations of further or higher education, or at least limited cultural capital and 'know how' for our parents to have been able to support and advise us in our earlier educational choices. Given our current positions in the education field, these backgrounds suggest the habitus of participants is not

overintegrated but is more pliable and open to revision. Yet this does not explain how another participant, for instance, from a more privileged social background, should not feel at ease in the middle class milieu of her childhood and should still feel so strongly a sense of low integration of habitus or identity, despite repeated academic success at masters and doctoral level. For her, explanations were sought in a complex mix of structural influences (for example the decision to leave full-time work while her children were young and the subsequent lack of success in regaining full-time work) and early experience in which an underintegrated habitus/self-concept formed.

For several of us, then, a question of the balance between contingency/serendipity and capacity to deal with those contingencies arises. A clear example is the extent to which we were equipped with the 'right' capacities' - cultural capital for example - to exploit the opportunities that were 'offered' to us. For two of us, passing the 11+ exam[2] and being directed to the grammar school combines serendipity and deployment of cultural capital: passing the exam may have been a lottery 'win', but the new trajectory enabled by this selection for secondary school brings new possibilities. For these two, subsequent failure to get into Cambridge colleges at the interview stage were seen as a function of lack of appropriate cultural capital. Here, it is as though chance had opened up a course of events (grammar school education) that led to an area of the educational field (university, but most notably an Oxbridge college) that was mostly closed to people from working class backgrounds. But the accumulated capital was insufficient and their trajectories would have to take other twists and turns. In contrast, as one might expect, untheorised accounts typically place the narrator in an active, deliberative frame. Yet other accounts, though still recognisably from the independent viewpoint, present participants as less proactive in circumstances. Here we have an example of the ways in which a theoretical frame can be used try to explain trajectories in ways that are not focused on a common sense idea of an integrated self, following a clear narrative and with an emphasis on agency.

Methodological learning

The collaborative nature of the project offers opportunities for participants to learn much about methodology through practice. Meetings have indicated this strongly in that much discussion has covered ethical issues such as disclosure, confidentiality and trust. As 'third parties' in this early analysis, we have been struck by the way questions posed by interviewers can reveal more about the interviewer's construal of a situation than the interviewee's. This feature of the interviews suggests another iteration where we explore the extent to which we can learn about ourselves from the questions we ask others in this process. The blurring of distinctions between researchers and the researched, or rather the establishing of these as dual roles for all, is another source of learning on methodology. In one interview it is unclear who is leading the interview at times. Of course, the fact that we are all Education doctoral students and tutors is an advantage in that we can all see good instrumental reasons for participating, but the model developed does we think have potential for other subjects, where the 'learning about' the method and the 'doing of' that method can be brought together powerfully. Here the means of bringing those two elements together is compelling:

[2] The 11+ examination was used widely in England until the 1970s for selection at the age of 11 to a tripartite system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools

exploration of the potential of theoretical constructs in a project that is intrinsically interesting because of the promise of greater self-knowledge it offers.

It has been suggested that the context of the study - the EdD programme - must have an influence on this project. All the people in this project have come to their doctorates through non-traditional routes. They are all experienced educational practitioners and most have substantial work experience outside of education. We assume that it is not only the trajectory towards doctoral study that is important but also what happens when you are there on the doctoral programme. The programme is cohort based with three dyads drawn from the same cohort and one from the previous cohort. The sense of travelling together, at least for the two years of the 'taught' phase of the programme must enhance the feelings and expectations of group support and the trust that is necessary for such a project. The programme experience must also count: two participants remarked that it was the opening up of a theoretical landscape to explore in the taught phase of the programme that was a source of inspiration for them.

Concluding remarks

Although we started from a position of exploring the operationalization of habitus, in fact our journey of 'the use of theory in research' has led to a wider use of theoretical frameworks. This has helped to demonstrate, in practice, that to simply apply or operationalize one area of theory is unlikely to be flexible enough for what is uncovered during relatively open-ended research. The model of taking a theory or theorist and looking at everything found in research of relevance to the theory might be very restrictive on research aims and design. If researchers are methodologically confident enough, they can allow their theorisations to arise from different points: from the data itself outwards, as in Grounded Theory approaches; from a starting point as with habitus and Bourdieu in this study; using a more emergent approach in which theoretical anchor points can increase and range across discipline areas as well as different theorists within a discipline. It is these broader understandings of the role of theory in research which we see as a great strength of the 'methodological pedagogy' approach developed in the project. Without these understandings, it is hard for doctoral students to come to the more nuanced relations of theory to research practice and all too easy to make only superficial reference to substantive theory, or perhaps become completely bound to one area of theory, reifying it to the status of objective truth in the process.

Bearing the last point in mind as a sobering corrective, the narratives produced so far remind us that, although the responses of the *habitus* are not unaccompanied by strategic calculation, changed courses of action, such as the decision to undergo doctoral study may appear to have become obvious or necessary, given the individual's trajectory up to the point of that decision. Given the small number in the project, it is surprising how much commonality has been found, for example in social background and in school experiences. Similarities in age and the nature of the EdD may well be factors that help explain those commonalities of experience. We are reminded here of Bourdieu's explanation of the individual habitus as a "structural variant … expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory " (1990: 60).

The project topic is concerned with understanding our own habituses and raises the question of whether we are able to identify structural determinants of our individual choices in life, given that the regularities of the social world are those that "... tend to appear as necessary, even natural, since

they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended" (1990: 53-4). Habitus seems usually to be described by the 'other', who is seen as more able to take an objectivating stance, by virtue of the other's 'distance' from the subject of study. But in this project, we have five pairs of agents whose habituses are both the subject and the object of the study engaged in characterising their own and others' habituses. This arrangement, we think, helps us to practise reflexivity, defined as "the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 36). Such reflexivity demands scrutiny of the social conditions of production of the discourse the academic is operating within and this is an aspect we have yet to consider carefully. Bourdieu insists that thought about the social conditions of thought can offer the prospect of a "genuine *freedom* with respect to those conditions" (2000: 118) and it is possible that this collective attempt at objectification will help us to understand at a deeper and more personal level the importance of scrutinising our roles in research. As Bourdieu says, "one would be falling into a form of the scholastic illusion of the omnipotence of thought if one were to believe it possible to take an absolute point of view on one's own point of view" (2000: 119). On the other hand, "...reflective analysis of the tools of analysis is not an epistemological scruple but an indispensable pre-condition of scientific knowledge of the object" (2010: 87).

No doubt there are other concrete, practical ways in which doctoral students can learn about methodology through research experiences. Our project was able to exploit the powerful concept of habitus as a means of encouraging reflexivity in individuals in relation to their own life trajectories using a participative approach that allowed much incidental learning about methodological issues along the way. Running the project alongside their doctoral programmes meant that learning from this project could be adapted in their own doctoral research. Thus, an informal pedagogy ran alongside the more typical research training. Whether such an approach could actually replace some of the 'training' on conventional, assessed programmes such as our EdD is a difficult question we raise at this point but do not to attempt to answer, given the many different forms that education doctorates take. Clearly, informed consent and voluntary participation are difficult to maintain alongside obligatory assessments. However, the project as it has developed so far has convinced us of the power of introducing participatory research into doctoral programmes that has the following features:

- it attempts to practise the highest levels of participation and decision-making possible
- participants experience researcher and respondent roles
- decision-making about the project is shared as far as is possible within institutional constraints
- project leaders should be prepared to do what participants are asked to do
- in all of the above there is constant consideration of what is to be learnt about methodology from the experience

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