

## **The impact of a Professional Doctorate - My OU and EdD Journey**

### ***Getting there bit by bit* Dr Pauline Lyseight-Jones**

OK. I went to a Girls' Grammar School, which I enjoyed tremendously, but I didn't work particularly hard. I didn't understand what I was meant to be doing. I didn't understand education at all. But I came out at the end of it with five O-levels, and that was sufficient to start training as a teacher. But I stopped teaching very shortly after starting, to have my son.

I wanted to go back into teaching, and I didn't want to have stagnated I was very lucky to find that the OU had started around about that kind of time. I'm a 1978 student, an H student. And that was tremendous because it allowed me what seemed to be a miraculous opportunity to do home, do child, and to get back into education and to build on previous knowledge.

The OU has allowed me to do things step-by-step, bit-by-bit. Like a ladder you gradually find the thing that works and the course that you'd like to do, and courses that fit in with your work as well. And sometimes you like them, and they fit in with your work.

I was lucky, I suppose, that the OU came along at the right time. I did my honours degree and then thought to myself, why not see how far I can go, and surprised myself by being accepted on the MSc.

I then had quite a long pause while just getting on with career stuff, and thought to myself, I really, really need to see if I can get to the top of what seemed to be an unattainable academic tree.

So, I did try. I did try to go through another kind of university. I thought it would be a good idea to try and go to a campus university, a face-to-face university. And I applied. I got onto an EdD course in a jolly good university. But I really found that the quality of the materials, presentation, structure, were not a patch on my previous experience with the OU.

So, I breathed in, I breathed out, and found myself re-joining the OU to do my EdD. I started really working on it in 2012, because I'd taken up an appointment in Uganda working as a VSO volunteer on a UNICEF project. And that became the basis of my EdD thesis.

So, this is about the kinds of things I'd say to other people who wanted to do this. In terms of the EdD, I would say first of all just start.

It is a stunningly, lovely journey. It's a really well-structured piece of academic endeavour. And in my experience, even if you don't think you can see the end, ace supervisor's will help you to move through it. And I think that's really important. You don't have to see the end. You do have to start.

I think that you can make the EdD what you want it to be. I, first of all, was thinking of and looking at policy relationships between one country and another. That isn't what I did in the end. I did something which I think was considerably more practical, useful, valuable, and the OU and the EdD structure within it allowed for that kind of flexibility. So, you can build on what you want to do and what you need to do.

I would certainly want you to enjoy it. It's a really funny process as an adult, I think, just learning and understanding that you're learning. And you're allowed these kinds of ways into places that you maybe didn't expect to go into. So, enjoy the trip. It's such a freedom. Just enjoy every bit of it.

When I was first starting this, I spoke to my supervisor along the lines of, can I do this? Can I do this? And she said two really important things. One is she said, yes, of course you can. And the second one was she said, it will change you. And I sort of doubted the first one. I couldn't even understand the second one. But I think it undoubtedly changes you, and I would say be prepared for the change.

The last thing is to just remember that you will have to either forget about reading fiction, or for a bit, or for a long time because you really do have to have a look at, I suppose, what you need to rearrange to find space for this kind of learning.

But it might be best to just think that that's something you're putting on one side broadly, until this is over.

The OU allowed me to achieve something that, if I look back as a bewildered sixth-former, who did her final O-level by going off to evening classes, because I really didn't think I'd get my A-levels, and I was right. If I think back to that bewildered sixth-former, who really wondered what was going to happen next.

The OU allowed me to see that things were possible. I really, at that time, could never, ever have thought that I would have gone this far in terms of academic learning, and The OU allowed that to happen.

In terms of my professional capacity, I've been both lucky and not lucky. When I started off in education I didn't really know what I was getting into, and I think there were times when I certainly doubted whether this was the thing I wanted to do and whether I was capable of doing it.

Having worked through with the OU, and having done the EdD, it's certainly helped me with my confidence as an education professional. I don't need to argue all the time now. I don't need to be the loudest voice in a room. I can listen, and I can consider what's occurring, and why it's occurring.

I'm not suggesting that I suddenly have all the answers, but I am suggesting that I don't need to be in every discussion about answers. I think it's doing the work itself has allowed for a good amount of critical thinking and discrimination in where you best put your energies.

So, I think it's overall made me feel like a more confident and capable education professional. And I think a more capable and competent person, generally. It's been a very, very, very good experience.