

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

### ***My OU and EdD journey – A voyage of discovery* Dr Tim Maxwell**

Well, when I was a child, I went to many different primary schools and two secondary schools, and eventually, settled down on wanting to train as a teacher. So, during the '70s, I applied to Teacher Training College. It's St Lukes in Exeter, and I trained as a teacher and then started my career teaching in secondary schools in 1976.

It was in the mid-'80s, I suppose, and the school was going through a developmental process, where they were offering opportunities for studying to include special educational needs. And the opportunity presented itself for me to take that on and study the SEN Advanced Diploma in Special Needs.

It was a combination of professional and personal circumstances. I had time to develop to some interest, and the school was going through, as I say, a process of change.

Like a lot of people, when you start out with the Open University, because of its inherent nature, distant learning, and modular progress, it's difficult to know sometimes what your plan might be. So initially, it was to fulfil the advanced diploma in special needs.

And then I began to take more of an interest in the psychology modules.

And the Open University was really at the forefront of helping and supporting students who wanted to make that crossover from education to psychology. So, I was able to continue to study after the advanced diploma and take modules in the psychology undergrad course.

The very nature of the Open University is that it is distance learning and modular.

So, people can opt in and opt out, depending on their personal circumstances. And my circumstance at the time allowed me to develop quite a bit of time to studying, and it suited me to be a distance learning student. So that, it really suited my style as an individual, where I was able to rely upon my own self-regulation, motivation, and independence.

All commitment to professional study requires a certain amount of balance. You've got to balance your own personal life with what might be driving you and the motivational factors in your professional life. And I found that the OU really did allow me to be able to do that.

So, I felt quite a lot of under control of my studying, and I was able to, perhaps, aspire to something I hadn't done before. And that was to move on to postgraduate study, and then through to the doctorate.

So, for me, a key point is that, sometimes, we don't know where the journey is leading. And we must take every opportunity we can to grasp it, and then perhaps later on, reflect on where we've come from and where we're going to.

The self-fulfilment aspect is very important, because I think to study at, doctoral level, you've got to have a very high drive internally for achievement.

So it's about academic excellence and recognition in front of your peers, but for me, it is very important that I had this sense of fulfilment, which is more of an internal model than perhaps driven for to add to my academic progress or my professional development. That was an important part, but the self-fulfilment was perhaps more central.

And the last piece I suppose, is that the studying at a postgraduate level and at a doctoral level allows you to-- it can contribute towards the research in your field and make a significant contribution to the development of a particular area, and feel that you've really contributed to the academic world.

When I trained as a teacher in the '70s, I had a sense that you were trained and accomplished and complete and ready to go out and fulfil that role. And there was very little understanding, at the time, of any sense that learning took place over a lifetime.

The concept of lifelong learning and continual professional development really helped me take a grasp of things and have a sense that we must continue to learn throughout our years.

So, having had the opportunity to think about my relationship with the Open University. I tried to come up with a conceptual model, because I tend to think in terms of-- certainly, as a psychologist-- that there's very little that happens in a linear way. It's more of a circular causality where things interact and impact upon each other.

So, in my model, I've tried to say that an important aspect of learning would be certainly academic development, I want to achieve the standard that I've set myself, and I'll do that through study. But at the same time, there's an impingement on all of that, of a sense of

internal motivation and drive, which must come through a certain sense of self-satisfaction rather than being moderated or marked by external people, which often happens in all of our learning.

And the third strand was that I had a fantastic opportunity through to OU to study as a researcher at a doctoral level and feel that I was able to enhance both my professional skills as a psychologist, as well as contribute to the academic field in research in the area that I was working in, which was pupil perspectives and inclusion, and get a sense that that model was very complex.

So, you can't pick it out and take things separately. They have an impact upon each other. So that's what I tried to represent in the model that I've presented there.

So when I thought about my journey, I should make people aware that the contribution of peer support and support system, such as our family, and our friends, and our colleagues, and our tutors, of course, are all paramount to helping us achieve what we aim to aspire to.

And I was able to come across a quote, I think, by Desmond Tutu, who said that when we stand out in the crowd we are often held on the shoulders of others. So, for me, it's, it gave a bit of an opportunity to say thank you to my friends and family for the help and support they gave me during my academic years, as well as in my personal life, of course.