Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

academic, critical realism, thesis, read, knowledge, contradictions, realised, learning, thought, teacher, socio cultural, education, people, paradigm, teacher educators, world, professional, ideas, audience, bit

SPEAKERS

Kris Stutchbury, Fiona Aubrey-Smith

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 00:29
So Kris, can I ask you perhaps to start by just sharing with us your thesis title, and just a little bit of an overview, but what your thesis was about?

Kris Stutchbury 00:39
Okay, thank you. Well, my name is Khris stutchbury. I'm a senior lecturer in teacher education. And I've done a lot of work on international projects. And that's what stimulated my interest, my EdD. So the title is teacher educators as agents of change, a critical realist study of a group of teacher educators in a Kenyan University. And so my professional dilemma was that we've been involved in loads in educational development projects over a number of years, to co develop open educational resources for teachers and teacher educators to use. And yet, my observation was that my teacher, educator colleagues weren't really using them. They were telling people about them, they weren't actually using them, and they didn't see the ideas embedded in the OER didn't really seem to impinge on them. And I wanted to find out why. So that's what my project was about.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 01:33
Fascinating study, absolutely fascinating study. And can you talk us through a little bit about how the knowledge emerged through your thesis and where the knowledge came from, and how that affected sort of reflections on your research or identity?

Kris Stutchbury 01:52
I think that the, the, the thing, which helps me most actually, was the was my chosen paradigm, the critical realist paradigm, because the critical realist paradigm is asking for why questions, it's asking for its us, the idea is that you, you try and on earth, the underlying causal mechanisms as to some things happening on the surface, something that you can see, but it's trying to understand what it is that's going on underneath the surface, that that is causing that. And so I think that the, I can remember, the lightbulb moment, when I kind of really felt I had learned something that I knew something. And that was when I was undertaking the analysis. And I'd been going round and round in circles, I'd got everything. I've got text files, I'd got it all onto spreadsheets, I'd been trying how to code a, bla, bla, bla, bla, et cetera. And then, and then there was a sudden, lightbulb moment when I made the connection.

Within the, the framework has this view that knowledge about the real world is like, it's like a nice, like exploring an iceberg, where there's some stuff that you can see. And there's some stuff that is a bit obscured, because it's sort of roundabout the surface, and then there's some stuff that you can't see, which is underneath the surface. And it was when I applied that structure, to what I thought I was seeing that actually, I began to feel I was learning some sort of learn something. And that was the kind of lightbulb moment really, and in a way I had, I had already read worked out my underlying causal mechanism, the answer to my question, why is this stuff not being used? The short answer to the question is that well, it's about knowledge. It's not about learning, and that these teacher educators saw knowledge about teaching as like, knowledge about physics. So it's all in, in rules. So. So you teach the student teachers the rules, and then they go and apply the rules in their classroom and they become brilliant teachers. And of course, that doesn't teaching doesn't work like that. And I can remember thinking in the middle of my data collection, oh, that this, this person, hasn't. This this person, she was telling me something, and I suddenly thought, She's, she's imagining that the student teachers are learning about physics, and that there's all these rules. And they're not they're learning that and so I'd sort of, I sort of realised, but I think that's one of the challenges in a doctorate is that you learn there's you pick up low, you're learning stuff all the time. But it the key for me was having a framework to pin it on and once I suddenly saw or this image of a, like an iceberg. And it was like a picture coming into focus. And then I could suddenly start to see that, oh, yes, that's what I've learned that nobody would dispute. This is where and then there was a whole layer of contradictions. And that's all the stuff around the surface. And then there was this realisation around the nature of knowledge, and that that's what the fundamental problem was. And so it and I, so by the time I got to that stage, I probably knew all that stuff. But because I couldn't hang it together. And that's when I realised that that's why paradigms and conceptual frameworks are so important, because it enables the that you know, stuff, but you, you don't know how to position it or what it means, or the implications of it really, I suppose.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 05:54

Next together, you've painted a wonderfully visual picture that explains that beautifully. Can you can you talk us through a little bit about how your sort of professional lens on that space and your academic lens on that space, how those two kind of related together or how that challenged or supported what you were doing?

Kris Stutchbury 06:17

Well, I think I think I came into this. And that's, I think that's why the idea was a good thing. For me, I came to this as primarily as a practitioner. And so I can remember, when I studied my masters, I found that in hugely exciting because I suddenly realised, actually, I'm quite academic as well. And I love academia, and I love the I love the sort of x, going into more depth in the ideas, and then seeing how the ideas play out in practice. And that interface between the, what the theory says and what the practice is. But I do find that, that I think that is quite challenging, because because the real world is actually very, very complicated, but we talk about it in simple words. Whereas a lot of academia, we talk about it in very complicated words. And actually, it's a lot simpler than because you're looking at things in the abstract, it's actually a lot simpler, but we talk about it in, in very, in unnecessarily complicated ways, if you can put in long words, and so I think that I, I found that as I still find that as a as a conflict. And when I remember I when I first started my master's, straight from school, and one of the academics, so I got a bit of a reputation, because I would be sort of saying, Well, so what if explaining

all these kind of these theories of social science, whatever you add, we think, Well, so what what does that mean? What does that mean, in practice? And I got a bit of a reputation, I think, for being a bit difficult, but that I have found that a lot, I find that my, my professional persona is still the strongest. But although the the EdD probably helped me to become a bit more of an academic,

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 08:32
Did you find that the, as you were immersed in the research, and as you're drawing out these findings that you were talking about a moment ago? Did that affect how you viewed your professional knowledge or how you viewed your academic knowledge?

Kris Stutchbury 08:47
It made, I think it probably made me it cemented the relevance of the academic knowledge, actually, the fact that I was able to find a way to apply this, really, because if you go and look at literature on critical realism, it is really obscure, it's it's really difficult to follow. And I think, for me that the fact that I was at the I was beget, I was able to see the value of academic knowledge, as I began to understand how to apply the ideas to practice, then I valued the academic knowledge a lot, a lot better. And I think and that's the challenge for practitioners is. And I'm guilty of this, I'm sure I value the academic knowledge that has some sort of practical application or something that's, it's good. It's got to be a reason for it. It's got to help me understand the world better. Rather than just be interested in the world, for its own sake. It makes sense.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 09:51
Absolutely. I think you articulate that beautifully. And in terms of that kind of inner conflict about am I am I looking at the sort of my professional lens or my looking at this with my academic identity? Did you have a sense of any of any struggle or conflict between those two identities? Or did they? Were they all part of a single identity? Can you talk us through that space a little bit?

Kris Stutchbury 10:14
Well, the thing, I think the thing that that really challenged me was the fact that I've found myself in a faculty of interpretive lists. And to the core, everybody, everybody is sociocultural lists and everything and interpretivist every thing we go to, I mean, I've often said, as a faculty, we ought to have more discussions around the socio cultural paradigm, because everybody uses that expression, every talk you go to, on a research day, for example, will start off people say I'm working within a socio cultural paradigm, and, but we never interrogate what that actually means, and so on. And so the biggest challenge for me is that I was I, that wasn't that didn't satisfy me, because that enabled me to elicit people's perspective. So what and what people what people thought about the world, but I still think, well, so what, because the perspectives that I on earth does well, in teacher education is fraught with contradictions, and so's education, a lot of time, there's a policy over here. And there's people might agree with the policy, but they, they they the practice is different, because they can't see how to convert the theory into the practice. There's a lot of contradictions in teacher education well, and in, in schools and in education in general, because it's complicated. And so I could see that interpretivism was going to reveal these, these contradictions. And I'd spotted the contradiction for myself, they were these people I was working with were very enthusiastic about these open education resources, yet they didn't actually impinge on their professional life. And so. So critical realism enabled me to, to explain those

contradictions, and so on. But at the same time, there was a lot of volume, you're assuming there's a reality, and you can't assume there's a reality within social socio cultural framework. And I was thinking, well, actually, maybe I'm not associated culturally. So I went through a massive journey, actually, where I was, I felt as if the the academic, the academic knowledge was it somehow didn't fit. And that I was this, I was just a low level practitioner who didn't fit into academia. And when I discovered critical realism, and here was a sort of complex philosophy that actually explained how I thought about the world, actually, then I suddenly began to feel my academic persona, blossomed, and it grew. And actually, I think the, I mean, obviously, just getting your ideas a massive achievement. But to me, the biggest single thing I think I've achieved is I've explained critical realism to the world. It's much easier to follow my thesis than it is most of the stuff that I read, and that was because I found it so difficult. So I think that it was, that was the point when I realised that actually, I was an equal academic to my colleagues, I just had a slightly different view of the world. And it was a perfectly justified I could, I could, but getting to that point that there was a very painful bit in the middle where I just fell out on the limb. And I wasn't a proper academic. And I was too immersed in the practicalities. And I was trying to cling on to this paradigm that didn't satisfy me, and it didn't really explain how I thought about the world.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 14:13
That itself sounds a very familiar kind of emotional, psychological journey. Yeah, it is resonating from own experience. And I think there's something really helpful in there for anyone currently going through that Doctor, isn't it of finding yourself within the research within that big infection? And I just want to draw on a another kind of aspect of that just before we finish, and that is, as you were writing up and drawing the thesis findings together. Did you have a sense then of who the audience for the research was because I know some of the things you've just been talking about the audience. There's several different audiences that come into play and several different stages.

Kris Stutchbury 14:57
I think as you get near the end of it I think you do realise that the the the audience is really your examiner. Because Because actually, the stuff that I've written up subsequently, isn't what I thought I would write up. The first thing I wrote was the paper that I thought my thesis was about, which was the contribution to teacher education. And, and I wrote it up, and I found it quite difficult. And it was, it was a sort of a brief and brief version of my, my thesis, and the teaching and teacher education journal just sent it back and said, and when I reflected on it, I realised it, it didn't really make sense, it was just a condensed version of my thesis, because it was condensed, it didn't really make sense. So the stuff that I've read that made me realise that the audience really is your, your examiner's, because they, to be honest, for most people, they're the only people who will read it from cover to cover. But it doesn't mean to say it's not, it hasn't gotten much wider interest, because what happens is that you then draw on bits of it. And so so the paper that I've written from it is in a methodological journal, and it's about using critical realism. And then the second paper that I've written is a contribution around education, what I've learned about educational development as a whole rather than just about teacher education. And in both of those articles, I've used sections of my thesis, but none of them, they don't, none of them tell the story of the thesis, none of them. That's, that's not the so so the audience in the in the real world, is, you have to be a little bit more selective, I think about what if you want it in, it's about research methodology, then it's in a methodological journal. And the thing about your thesis is that it covers all of the covers the content, and the methodology, and so on. So the audience can never really be as that

broad. So it had to be. So I think, certainly for the second half of it soon as I started to get sort of proper chapters, I think I was just very focused on the fact that well, how does this sound to an examiner? Now, that's sounds because well, that sounds quite narrow, but it absolutely isn't. Because it's only by having, as you say, when you said, you give me the title of your thesis on my desk next to me, and that's nearly three years after I handed it in. So because I still draw on it in in different aspects of my work.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 17:52
And it's that it's interesting in what you're saying there, but the thesis is part of the research and the research audience has become a very, very broad range of different places for different purposes. It's quite a powerful message in that. And just to just to finish up with this, there's so many valuable things in what you've been talking through that will that will resonate and be so helpful. For students on the site, or researchers on the same similar similar kind of journey do you have any kind of top tips that you would suggest for anyone either thinking about embarking on a doctorate or who is currently on that journey?

Kris Stutchbury 18:31
I think the I think the first thing that I do think the biggest single thing is that the EdD gives the opportunity to do is to read, you need to read a lot as a us as academics, we need to, we need to read stuff. And when I was doing the day, I found myself sitting in production meetings, and maybe research meetings, I found myself drawing on papers that I'd read and referring to them and and people noticed this, and suddenly you sound a lot more authoritative. So I think that that was the biggest because as academics, that's what we're supposed to do. But if you're not actually studying yourself, it's quite difficult to carve out that time in the day to just think, Oh, I must just read this. Oh, yes, the the journal from the from the Bush has come in British education research journals just arrived. And if you sit down for a morning just to read it, that's work and that's work you should be doing, but it's often not work that we do do it. I know now, since I finished the EdD. I don't do nearly as much reading as I ought to do and I so the so my top tip to any students is first to read as much as you can and So as you start to read it and you get knowledge about the field, then you get more selective, you get more critical. And all the things that people keep banging on that you got to learn how to do will happen if you read a lot. So I think I think that would be my top tip. And little things like, always have the next thing to read with you, either on the phone or a Kindle or in a bag. So when you're waiting outside the swimming pool to pick your daughter up from swimming, you've got 20 minutes, you've got something to read, you're in a queue, you've got something to read. And that that was I don't take that advice enough, nearly enough myself, but I should do. But I just think that's the starting point. And, and the fact now I started working as a supervisor, the student that I've had, one student I've had has got into difficulties. And I think it's because he didn't read enough early on. I think that's really important. It's a pretty powerful tip, both academic and the way that you've made that very practical and very achievable. That I love that having it to hand to read in the queue. Yeah, every every snippet of time can be purposefully it can be really, really crucial thing is to know what you'd come in next. And the times I got into difficulty and felt I was wasting time on my EdD is when I reached the end of something I'd reached the end of a chapter and handed something in. And then I would think, Oh, I should be working on my idea should be or what should I be doing? So I think that that's the always knowing what you're going to do next, I think is really important.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 21:38
That definitely resonates. Thank you so much. I'm incredibly grateful to you.