

Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Mel Green, Fiona Aubrey-Smith

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 00:15

Good morning and thank you, Mel, for agreeing to talk with me about your postdoc and negotiated different ways of knowing. Can I start by asking you to introduce yourself your thesis and how it connects to your professional practice?

Mel Green 00:35

Hi, my name is Mel Green. I'm a year three EdD doctoral researcher. My thesis is exploring the relationship between professional identity of higher education practitioners and the intersections of their personal identity, and how this affects their online teaching. I'm looking to do an ethnographic exploration of this and it's based on my own experiences moving from face to face teaching into online education exclusively online education.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 01:21

Can you just say something a little bit more just about you - you're currently employed by the Open University, so about your role and so on.

Mel Green 01:33

I am an associate lecturer (AL) with the Open University and have been since 2017 and it's actually my experiences as an AL. When I first joined as an associate lecturer, I was teaching face to face so I was doing tutorials, and six tutorials a year. And if my second year they, I was told that I would be moving to be an exclusively online teacher. And I started to question how I could be the teacher that I have always been as a former primary school teacher, I was a primary school teacher for 13 years, and how I was going to remain the teacher that I wanted to be that I thought I was, if I wasn't going to have face to face contact with my students. So that's where this research was conceived.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 02:32

Thank you very much. So can I then start by asking you, what is the relationship between your research and your professional practice?

Mel Green 02:46

So initially, it was mainly to explore the relationship of being an online teacher. And, the idea of a kind of teacher identity. And it's expanded quite a lot, because of how I was required to look inward and think about all the things that made me that my identity, I started to think of, rather than initially I thought of my identity as being teacher or professional, and them as separate. And I started to see how those facets of who I am actually intertwine intermingle and cannot be separated from each other. So is expanded from me believing that there was one type of a professional identity. So when I go into my role as a as an AL, that I am just one person actually expanded to me understanding that I am still a mother, I'm still a black woman, and I'm still from a working class background when I am in my professional role. So it's me really trying to understand how they intermingle and how actually they affect my teaching choices, my pedagogical choices and who I like to present, as a teacher, as a practitioner.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 04:29

Okay, that's fascinating. Thank you very much. It's possibly an unfair question, because it's not written down but could you say something about how that knowledge or how that changed understanding has come about what has led to that change in your perception of identity.

Mel Green 04:54

So it is actually a book which I will end up talking about no end whether anyone will listen. I read a book by a fantastic woman, Bell Hooks, who wrote a wonderful book called Teaching to Transgress. And I read that at the end of my first year with a teacher, and it really made me view teaching as something that is, within the personal as well as professional identity, and that it should remain as such it there, this idea of having these two spheres of professional and personal is actually something that I don't necessarily agree with. But I've been taught over the years I've been trained to agree with, and I think, especially as an online practitioner, that separating those two, two spheres, can create a teacher that maybe isn't able to be as compassionate as engaging and as an effective as I believe they can be. So I think by being myself by being the Mel Green, who has children who have personal issues, that I can understand my students, personal issues, their life commitments, and include that within my teaching and making a pedagogy that sees my students and myself as human beings, rather than as people that I pass knowledge down to. So yeah, it was that, but that really, really changed my thinking. And actually, I hadn't, I don't think I had really considered my professional identity in such depth. Then after reading that book, and even this process of Yeah, of the birth two years, reading around professional identity, has really changed how I view how I want to teach and how I believe, and what I believe is effective teaching, engaging teaching.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 07:21

That's brilliant. Thank you very much. One, one of the things that people often think about when they think about the professional doctorate is the idea that research informs practice. And it's quite a neat, linear, straightforward relationship. But we're mindful that there are moments when actually research has a disruptive relationship with practice, it challenges practice, and it might even subvert practice. And I wonder how you have experienced that relationship between your academic knowledge and your professional knowledge. And so I think you talk about you somehow have personal knowledge embedded between those two. So I wonder if you can, you can talk about what those relationships have been like for you.

Mel Green 08:16

This the idea of subversion often can take a kind of negative sort of path, but actually, I found this, I agree with you completely that it has disrupted my practice. It has subverted my practice. But I think in a real positive way, I think it really developed who I am as a practitioner. So for example, I've really begun to engage with this idea of our practices, our pedagogy, needing to change leading to vastly change as well. So I've really gotten into researching anti racist assessment practices. And that's come from a place of realising that the way that I had been taught to teach where I've been taught to assess my students is not necessarily from a place that is objective neutral. And that has a history that maybe has been doing a disservice to our students, essentially. And I wouldn't have come to these conclusions without the journey that I've been through and with this doctorate, it's made me question and I suppose everything about my teaching practice, and while that is really disruptive, because you No, I've think many a year as much as I've been in, I've been in education as a field like since Oh, God, I don't even want to say, from a very, very, very long time. And I've very much been told how to teach and what the best way to teach it. And I've, I've taken that on, and I've, you know, just due to affinity, you know, become a teacher that I think everyone would agree is a good teacher. It's only now that I'm starting to question those practices, question that training. And I think that's a really positive thing, because rather than just be told, by, you know, training institutions by other people, what a good teacher is actually having this level of inquiry. And personal inquiry has made me a teacher that I believe in. And so I'm teaching in ways that I value and that I think I can see, are important to students, especially those types of students that we have at the Open University, who often how coming from all walks of life, and sometimes very difficult. Background. So yeah, I think while it has been disruptive, because it's taken me away from the status quo, I think that's a really positive thing. So yeah, it's kind of seeing it rather than being a negative experience that you're going to have moments of Discomfort of tension of conflict. But that that is all part of the process. And it's a good part of the process in the end.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 11:52

Yeah, that's that's neatly put. Thank you. It is challenging, it is unsettling. But that's, that's, that's a necessary and a helpful, ultimately a helpful part of the process. That's lovely. Thank you. I wonder if I can ask you then what advice you would offer somebody who is either poised right at the start of a professional doctorate and thinking, shall I should I? Or shouldn't I? Or maybe somebody who's midway through and not quite sure, of themselves, not quite sure, if they ground? I know you've just successfully started or you're about to start on the empirical phase of your doctorate in year three. So what advice would you offer anybody in either of those positions,

Mel Green 12:45

I think the best thing that I have done, and initially I stayed away from doing this is, is talk about it about my research with as many people who will listen, because there are so much that people, I mean, your supervisors, they're great, and they've obviously been assigned to you for good reason. And talking about your research with them is insightful, it's really important. However, talking about your research with your colleagues, with other researchers, has been just as insightful as I've managed, a lot of my colleagues have really given their guidance about how I could apply my research more successfully, and disseminate it and work with participants more successfully. And I think because they're in the role that I am going to be researching. Sometimes, when you're sort of separating yourself from your work,

in order to kind of think about it from a science more scientific, more research based lens, you can kind of lose sight of, of, of the professional lens. So by talking about it with my colleagues, I've been able to sort of see, okay, yeah, these are the kinds of questions I will I'll be able to ask or, actually, this week, part of my research to die wouldn't really, really work for my colleagues. So I'm gonna have to change that up. So talking to people really helps you to get a more holistic idea of, of your research and how you can actually undertake it, conduct it. So that's one of the first things and and, and also people external to your practice, and you're not even on your cohort by talking to other researchers about their own research and how they're conducting it. You get some great ideas, and you get access to literature that you wouldn't have normally found? So yeah, I am as someone who does talk a lot, I would say I would advise people just to Yeah, talk to as many people about your research as you can. And I think the second important thing that I've learned is that your confidence naturally comes. When I first started. Yeah, my first year, I really had the very low even though I'd been obviously successfully accepted onto the programme, I still thought, What am I doing here, they're going to realise at some point, they've made a mistake, and just had this huge, high levels of of imposter syndrome and that I didn't belong. And it just has naturally dissipated that feeling. And, and it's because after all that, talking that I mentioned, in my first sort of tip, you start to realise that, you know, it's going in, there's a level that your knowledge is shifting, you know, I'm using words like epistemological in conversations with people. And I actually know what they mean. And so it's after, you know, as I've just successfully passed my second year, and I'm now at a stage where I do feel confident as a researcher, that even this morning, I've been writing an application for a Praxis project as an associate lecturer, just to research, a really innovative tool for student engagement. And I wouldn't have done that without doing the EdD, it's given me the confidence to actually think I want to know more about this, and how this benefits students and actually think, well, I'm gonna research it. And I wouldn't have done that before. So the confidence does come and it is natural. And it's not something that you necessarily need to force. So I think rather than that being a tip, I think that's just a little bit of a supportive element. Because I yeah, I think a lot of students, a lot of doctoral researchers will start thinking, I don't know if this is right for me, and, and just to sort of, as we've talked about earlier, this to sit with that discomfort for a bit. Because there is an element of Yeah, you know, we don't know enough to be that person who gets a doctorate, but you've got these, this whole period to get there. So expecting yourself to be Dr level in the first year is not going to help you and allowing yourself to be a beginner or a newbie is really an important part of the journey. And then I would just say the quicker that you get yourself into an organised way of working the better for you. So even if that is yes, starting using vif reference management tools from the beginning, starting to create I'd know however you want to work but Excel documents where you keep all your, your quotes that you like when you read them just keeping a really organised way of working you may change it, but do that from the beginning and honestly it will serve you well because I think I spent the beginning of the of my doctorate thinking oh, I don't really like this way of working. Maybe I'll try it that way of working. And then and then you've just got post its here you've got references over there and it becomes quite overwhelming. So get yourself even if it's something that you do change this find a way of organising, you know, all the information that you get given early on.

Fiona Aubrey-Smith 19:14

That's absolutely fantastic and three very different but completely pertinent tips and bits of advice. So thank you for that.