NEGOTIATING TRUST: RESEARCHING THE PRACTICE OF SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGERS

Paul Armstrong¹, Colin Mills²
¹London University Institute of Education, London, UK, ²Manchester Institute of Education, Manchester, UK

Background to the topic:

Since 2002, successive governments have invested in national programmes to strengthen the potential of the school business manager (SBM) a member of the school workforce whose skills, knowledge and experience are well-placed to improve capacity and reduce the workload of headteachers in the operational, administrative and financial function of the school. Today there are thought to be approximately 13,000 SBMs across the country yet there remains a paucity of scholarly attention paid this section of the school workforce. This provided the impetus for the research discussed in this paper, a longitudinal case study that took an interpretivist perspective to explore the emergence and influence of the SBM in six schools across England.

Research questions/focus of the enquiry:

This contribution to the symposium focuses on a single yet central aspect of the research process, whether one is an insider or an outsider: the establishment, maintenance and nature of relations between researcher and participant, specifically the development and cultivation of trust. As the title indicates, the members of the school workforce with whom the research in question was conducted are important, heralding as they do from a somewhat marginalised group categorised as ‘school support staff’.

Research methods and/or mapping of the literature:

Semi-structured interviews conducted with participants at each case study site form the main strand of data collection. A range of tactics was employed during these interviews to foster and facilitate the level of participant engagement as a key means of engendering trust.

Analytical and/or theoretical framework:

The paper uses the recommendations for establishing trust set out by Christopher et al and the hierarchical model of trust developed by Bottery (2003) as organizing frameworks to interpret the means by which trust was cultivated and maintained.

Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge

The findings contribute to the theme of this symposium in that they provide the opportunity to look at the complexities beyond the ‘insider/outsider’ binary. Findings highlight the importance of repeated encounters between researcher and participant during the initial stages of the study in relation to the establishment of trust while the concept of ‘relational groundwork’, whereby the researcher takes the time to develop a thorough understanding and appreciation of those they are studying, is key to maintaining trusting relations between researcher and participant.
References: