THE IMPACT OF RAPID REFORM: WHAT CAN AN EMBEDDED RESEARCHER LEARN?

Ruth McGinity  
manchester institute of education, manchester, UK

Background: this contribution to the symposium charts the research relationship between a successful and innovative school in the North West of England and a University over a period of rapid educational reform. From the standpoint of a doctoral researcher who was embedded within the school (on a University/school-funded scholarship) throughout this period of reform, I reflect both on the lessons to be learned that may be of value to other researchers as well as drawing on my own reflexive accounts to go beyond the 'indier/outsider' binary and to frame an account of how both the school - and the researcher met - the challenges of change.

Research questions/focus of the enquiry: I frame my paper around the following questions:-

(i) can such research partnerships provide knowledge about policy reform, and how?

(ii) how do shifting policy cycles and trajectories affect such partnerships?

(iii) what are the implications for an embedded researcher 'in between' the school and the University?

Research methods and/or mapping of the literatures: I use data generated from interviews and observations of the work of a range of actors within the school: leaders; staff; pupils and parents. I analyse my own reflexive diaries to chart my own learning and development.

Analytical and/or theoretical framework: I employ the thinking tools of Bourdieu to explore the changing policy contexts as well as the school/University relationships. The concept of 'misrecognition' is particularly important in making sense of the ways that the school framed the challenges resulting from rapid reform processes. Such notions are also used to explore my own experience and learning, as are the notions of going 'beyond binaries' which my colleagues use in the symposium.

Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge: the particular contribution of this paper is its standpoint of an embedded researcher's conceptualisation of change - in both the researcher and the researched. I complement my colleagues' contributions within the symposium by considering the advantages - and the tensions - of researching 'from the inside'