

Pensive professionalism: The role of ‘required reflection’ on a professional doctorate

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Abstract

This short paper examines the origins and nature of the reflective writing that is presently required on one part-taught doctorate in education (EdD) programme. It explores the various ways in which EdD candidates have engaged with self-reflection, using a number of extracts from writing submitted for formal assessments (including of the doctoral thesis itself, the culmination of their doctoral journey). The specific ways in which individuals have been caused to interrogate their place within, and contributions to, their respective professional realms are examined, as is the question of how writing in reflective vein has contributed to the evolution of professional identity. In the context of reflective writing, particular attention is paid to the ways in which the specific matter of developing confidence with accessing and manipulating language is frequently cited by individuals. As appropriate, connections are made in the paper between the above dimensions of what I am terming *pensive professionalism* and the perspectives of certain writers. The article concludes by drawing attention to the ways in which those of us involved in delivering professional doctorates need to be aware of, and induct our candidates into, the benefits of pensive professionalism.

Keywords: reflective writing; professional identity; professional learning; metalearning; language

Introduction

The EdD has given greater insight into the wider changes in society that have occurred since the end of the nineteenth century and an understanding of how they have affected education and, in turn, our own professional lives. We feel able to step back, to theorise, to engage with reflexivity rather than letting it leave us baffled and frustrated (Andrews and Edwards, 2008: 7).

... professional learning continues both on and off the job: in action, in discussion and in periods of personal reflection. Most of it is unplanned, even personal reflection taking place more in unplanned moments – when driving to work, talking to a friend or having a bath – than in periods deliberately set aside for the purpose (Eraut, 1994: 75).

Notwithstanding the truths ingrained in the second of the two perspectives above, that of Eraut, I contend that there are indeed opportunities for ‘deliberately set aside’ moments that arise when focused reflection by professionals not only happens, but has to take place – when it is formally required.

In this article, I review the nature of certain elements of one part-taught doctorate in education (EdD), and will argue that the degree of importance attached by doctoral candidates

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to *required reflection* is of a very high order. I illustrate the precise ways in which individuals engage in such reflection, and present a case that it has great potential to enhance and deepen their insights into the nature of their professionalism, alongside extending their scholarly – and, often, their writing – skills. In the latter regard, I view the kind of reflective writing I describe and illustrate as an exercise that essentially promotes *engaged scholarship* (Boyer, 1990), and as such possesses an intellectual value at least the equal of the development of the research capacity that is of central concern to those of us involved in doctoral education. The very act of writing reflectively forms almost a dimension of the kind of conversations with self that can enhance metalearning. This is because of its capacity to focus attention on the *process* of learning that has been experienced by an individual, as well as on the content and/or the new skills that have comprised that learning. The conversations with self are of special value when they take place in the kind of discursive space actively promoted on cohort-based professional doctorates. Here there are also regular conversations with peers to learn from. However, a process to which Bruner (1990: 111) has given special emphasis is that of the linkage between *telling stories* and the construction and validation of self. As Dennison (2017: 253) summarizes Bruner’s perspective, ‘our identities are bound up in the stories we tell ourselves, the way we explain ourselves to ourselves’.

What arguably occurs in the above contexts appears to be a manifestation of Mezirow’s highly influential notion of transformative learning:

Transformative learning is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance (Mezirow, 1990: xiii).

There also typically occur, as Rodger (2014: 61–2) observes, parallel processes of examining, questioning and revising assumptions. All of this takes us well beyond the realms of the kind of reflection that has sometimes been termed mere ‘navel gazing’. Ultimately, the sort of *learning professional* envisaged by Guile and Lucas (1999) develops – an individual who has advanced beyond the confines that Schön’s *reflective practitioner* (1987) may perhaps be subconsciously held within.

Although writing in reflective vein is a formally required component of the EdD, it appears that the great majority of course participants do not view it as an imposition. On the contrary, in my experience the act of reflective writing has been actively embraced. Seeming to illustrate my point, someone recently prefaced their first piece of assessed work with the following quotation adapted from the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC): ‘Three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest’ (Samuel, 2017, FoP). (All extracts drawn from this segment of the programme are indicated by FoP, and their authors have been given pseudonyms.)

On first reading this, I was left in little doubt that here was being signalled an engagement on the writer’s part not only with the task of mastering the content of his chosen route to a doctorate, but also with the mode of learning it encompasses. (Subsequent conversations and email exchanges with the individual concerned have strongly confirmed my initial impression.) I will deal later with the fact that it ought not to be taken for granted that, initially, the value of focused reflection will inevitably and always be readily discerned by busy professionals. However, offering an explicit, persuasive rationale for this reflection is almost always going to be worthwhile.

The regulatory context

The stages at which, in the course of their doctoral journeys, candidates are required to construct reflective accounts of the ways in which their development as *researching professionals* (as opposed to academic researchers) has progressed are as follows:

- As a core component of the very first piece of assessed written work submitted for the EdD, a 5,000-word account of issues, changes or challenges within a candidate's own professional sphere. Evidence must be provided of engagement with the implications for 'own professional practice' of the understandings gleaned from the module that has been completed. In broad terms, participation on the course aims to 'enable participants to reflect upon their conceptions of professionalism and upon ways of enhancing their own professional practice' (Course information, 2016/17).

On occasion, the reflections stimulated even at this earliest stage of the programme can be very deep, as evidenced by Annie's observation that: 'Researching and writing this essay has been a cathartic, revealing, restorative and reformative, experience for me' (Annie, 2017, FoP).

- The culmination of the assignments produced for all three of the taught elements of the programme (the one mentioned above plus two covering research methods) is their inclusion in a portfolio, to be accompanied by a piece of reflective writing focusing on the ways in which, cumulatively, the candidate has developed over this – typically one-year – stage of their studies, and believes that they are now properly equipped to embark on the independent research stages of the EdD.

(Extracts drawn from this segment of the programme are indicated by P/F, with their authors again being given pseudonyms.)

- Finally, the submission of their bound doctoral thesis is a major event that has to include in its preparation the writing of a 2,000-word reflective statement as a preface to the thesis. The principal requirement of this additional piece of writing is that it details the ways in which an individual's learning on the programme as a whole, and in particular their research and writing for the thesis, has contributed to their development.

(Extracts drawn from this final segment of the programme are indicated by TS, with their authors' actual names being used.)

For the purposes of this article, I draw on all of the above three exercises, occasionally using long quotations from individuals' 'stories'. If I have given any particular prominence to the 'thesis statement' (TS), the decision to do so is based on two key considerations: first, the accounts benefit from the length of time during which candidates' self-perceptions, and reflections on professional issues, have been gestating; second, mindful as ever of potential ethical issues that can arise when citing what was, of course, student writing submitted for assessment, all of the 2,000-word statements from which I have extracted material are readily accessible in publicly available doctoral theses. It is also the case that in the course of my work in preparing candidates for their oral examination I have routinely used such extracts to illustrate the various ways in which successful candidates have confronted the challenge of writing the required statement; I have done so with permissions that, without exception, were given not only willingly but enthusiastically, evidencing the collegiality and supportiveness of our students.

One further matter that seems worth mentioning at this stage is that it will not be at all difficult to discern the prominence given in this paper to writing itself, and to the way in which

self-reflections – be they on identity, practice or anything else – obviously only see the light of day when articulated. The business of ‘finding a voice’ has been engagingly captured by Seidman: ‘At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language’ (2013: 8). A number of the extracts selected for inclusion here speak to the significance of being better able to access, and confidently manipulate, language – and of the part played by the EdD in strengthening these core academic skills. I will return later to the issue of language, and its potential to enhance the capacity for one variety of professional *power*.

Why ‘required reflection’?

A core member of the small group of the UCL Institute of Education’s (UCL IOE) senior staff who designed and oversaw the introduction of the EdD in the mid-1990s, Professor Andrew Brown, has much of interest to say regarding the collective thinking that underpinned the prominence given to reflection on the programme, and he is worth quoting at some length. In an important summary of early developments on the EdD he writes that:

the reflective statement was part of the assessment of the programme from the start. Ingrid Lunt, in particular, was keen that the examination of the thesis should reflect the professional orientation of the EdD (and the desired dialogue between academic discourse/research and professional practice/development). The reflective statement was an important part of this, enabling the author to reflect on (and make explicit) the relationship between the components of the programme and both the thesis (process and outcomes) and their academic and professional development. It also helped the examiners (and any other reader) see that the thesis (which is shorter than a PhD thesis) is the culmination of a sequence of work, which has acted both to lay the foundations for the thesis and to develop and enrich the academic/professional dialogue. Initially, the statement was a separate document, but it soon became clear that it was, in fact, a necessary part of the thesis – the reader needed this kind of reflective and analytic account to fully understand the thesis (as a product of a professional doctorate) (Brown, 2017, personal communication with author).

Going on to respond to another of the queries I had raised with him, as I delved into how we arrived at the present mode of organization of the requirements pertaining to required reflection on the EdD, he deals with the portfolio statement (the second item on my list above), making clear that this:

has a different provenance. In the early days of the degree we were under pressure by the University of London to examine all components of the programme ‘at doctoral level’. That meant that the ... expectation was that the very first essay should be of ‘doctoral standard’, rather than ([more] sensibly) reflecting the early stages of a research programme that would lead, in the end, with the presentation of the thesis, to a contribution to knowledge (for the EdD, both academic and professional knowledge). We decided to address this by viewing the four essays as contributing to a portfolio, that would be used (like the MPhil/PhD upgrade) as a transition point (this is done better in Australian doctorates through the idea of candidature – you are a student while you are working on the research, and then when it reaches a particular state of maturity, you apply, with supporting documents, to become a ‘doctoral candidate’) ... the compilation of the portfolio became a good opportunity for the participant to reflect on the relationship between the pieces (including the feedback they had received and their response to the feedback) and their professional and academic development. I think these two formal points of ‘required reflection’ work well in encouraging people to stand back at key stages to reflect on the process and how the academic and professional aspects of their work (and life) relate to and, hopefully, enhance each other. They make good, insightful and provocative (and heartening, sometimes inspiring) reading for those who teach and supervise on the programme, too, I think (ibid.).

With specific regard to the third and final piece of reflective writing with which candidates have to engage, Brown is emphatic that:

very few [of the thesis statements] are just going through the motions. In the vast majority of cases, in my experience, people have used the opportunity to *take stock* and think through how the components of the programme work together and how they have developed academically and professionally. Some of the statements have really reinforced my own belief in and enthusiasm for the programme. This is personally very important, in view of the fate of some professional doctorate programmes and some of the more negative writing about professional doctorates (ibid., emphasis added).

The question of identity formation

Contrary to a perspective that might envisage identity formation as being predominantly a feature of the early – even earliest – years of an individual's professional life, my contention is that in reality professional identity constantly evolves in the face of the ever-changing challenges with which we are presented. This evolution seems to be fundamentally buttressed by the ongoing reflection promoted by the major opportunity for professional learning that following a professional doctorate represents.

The notion of *learning to be*, as adopted by UNESCO (albeit in a very significantly different context of a proposed 'four pillars of learning' along with learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together) (UNESCO, n.d.), comes very much to the fore here: as professionals we are, in some regards at least, constantly needing to be a particular type of sentient being, depending on whatever challenge happens to have arisen. This kind of proposition is echoed in a number of reflective statements. For example:

As a valuable offshoot [of having undergone an intensive research training] ... the habit of reflection has helped me to keep my work in perspective and provided a tool to make the day-to-day challenges faced by all of us within education less overwhelming (Andrews, 2004, TS).

An especially interesting aspect of what is being said above is the implication that reflection not only deepens our *insights* into the nature of professional challenges (keeping them 'in perspective'), but also enhances the professional *resilience* essential to deal with them (making them 'less overwhelming'). I would argue strongly that the role of reflection is also absolutely central to becoming – and remaining – what Power (drawing in an extremely persuasive way on the sociological analyses of C.W. Mills) has so convincingly described as *imaginative* professionals. These are individuals who are readily able to position, and understand, themselves as actors who are neither 'oppressed' nor 'distressed' in their professional realm but are capable of deploying 'a perspective that encompasses both the[ir] immediate orbit and the transcending forces [such as globalization and postmodernism]' (Power, 2008: 153–4).

In her writing, Power makes the case that:

If professionals are to hold on to their sense of professionalism, they need creative and articulate responses to [the above changes] rather than feelings of hopelessness and/or defensive reaction. The more sophisticated their understandings, the greater the chance of developing such creative and articulate responses (ibid.: 157).

My own argument is that the way in which 'required reflection' is designed into the formal structure of a professional doctorate such as the EdD plays a crucial part in enhancing the *sophisticated understandings* that Power alludes to. These understandings allow for deep insights into the quotidian challenges thrown up in an individual's immediate professional milieu, by locating these alongside developments and trends in the hinterlands of policies, practices and

broader society. Incidentally, but importantly, because of its high value in causing new course members to begin to discern an interconnectivity between their own professional concerns and conundrums and these hinterlands, Power's work is strongly promoted during a particular EdD induction session as a source that, in a sense, serves to underline and reinforce the very ethos of the professional doctorate.

For Giddens (1991), in his 'runaway world', for individuals faced by such multiple challenges as alluded to above, the value of reflexivity was likely to be especially high. Their sense-making capacity – the ability to see their own life history and present narrative – within wider frames of reference is strengthened by engagement in the reflective 'project' (ibid.).

For Bauman (2004), too, writing of the world as being one of 'liquid modernity', self-identity faces constant challenges; it is in need of constant (re)'invention' (ibid.) and negotiation. I seem to see – hear about, read about – these processes at work for by far the greatest majority of our intakes on to the UCL IOE's professional doctorate. It is, therefore, unsurprising that so much of their reflective writing concerns their interpretation of the origins of the changes and challenges they have been confronting, and the ways in which the EdD has functioned to enhance their insights and strengthen their resilience in the face of these. The resulting *evolution* of their professional identity is writ large in so much of their reflective writing, in all three of the formal contexts I have described.

Positive influences on 'practical professionalism'

A theme that has emerged from reviewing the reflective statements is the way in which individuals have been brought to the realization that their practical professionalism has been significantly refined over the course of their studies: 'My doctoral studies have changed the way in which I work. As a project director I now employ a different style of leadership that distributes rather than delegates responsibilities' (Cook, 2013, TS).

The same doctoral candidate (who had very engagingly titled her reflective thesis statement 'Woman at work') also writes that: 'The reason I embarked on a professional doctorate was to support my work by deepening my understanding of methodology, by *sharpening my research skills* and by enabling me to re-evaluate my epistemological stance' (ibid., emphasis added).

Another recently successful candidate writes:

Along the way, I have had to learn to turn my professional policy-writing abilities towards an academic style, often failing in this respect, but learning to question those policy objectives with which I work in a professional capacity as a result. This is not to reject what I do but has made me a more engaged practitioner, understanding why I do, or have to do, certain actions in particular ways. It has made me reflect more on the consequences of actions and question the wider impact of what I do (Bohrer, 2014, TS).

The question of language and (professional) power

Specific issues surrounding confidence with language and writing, as alluded to by Bohrer, surface in many of the pieces of reflective writing from which extracts have been used here, and these were but a small representative sample of what is available. This is arguably simply a reflection of the way in which an expanding consciousness of what it means to be a public intellectual (that is, a professional capable of *professing*, in Barnett's (2008) terms) brings with it a heightened awareness of the sheer power of language.

Language is an area very frequently dwelt on in sections of the reflective statements; the contribution made by the EdD programme to the development of individuals' writing skills

specifically (and to their ability to decode the frequently challenging writing styles of published scholars) was vividly highlighted by Andrews and Edwards:

Too often ... *faux* professionals cover themselves in a cloak of jargon ... Research and the reflection it stimulates provide a bulwark against the semantic swamping of jargon, and the discursive learning that takes place on the EdD entails a more or less constant manipulation and interrogation of language (Andrews and Edwards, 2008: 6).

Here is an individual separating out the question of writing skills from a number of other positive dimensions of the EdD:

Reflecting on my time on the Doctoral (EdD) programme, I can honestly say it has been a challenging, stimulating and worthwhile journey. During this time I have made substantive progress in developing my thinking, analysis, reflection and understanding of both my professional practice and [the] research questions I wanted to pursue. ... I can see real progress and continuity between different elements of the EdD programme and they have been extremely valuable in *developing my academic writing* and professional voice (Boorman, 2011, TS, emphasis added).

Cook, cited earlier, draws special attention to ‘the additional bonus I anticipated that I would have the opportunity to decode particular “academic language”, and to demystify “academia” for myself’ (Cook, 2013, TS).

Because of the centrality of the *empowering* nature of being able to access academic texts confidently (and, more broadly, academic discourse) and of being able, ultimately, to produce these texts to a standard that will pass muster in the scholarly community that our course members frequently aspire to join, it is worth including here yet another extract touching on this particular theme:

Feedback on essays commented on a lack of confidence in my writing, however this changed ... A comment from a tutor about how they liked to see ‘which of our comments you reject’ was liberating for me. I realised I had to have more ownership over my writing. My confidence grew from that day on (Felicity, 2014, P/F).

The relationship between language *and* power, and the notion of language *as* power are of course twinned themes that have been very closely scrutinized over the years (see, for example, the seminal work of Lake and Rose and their collaborators (1990) and of Fairclough (2001)). It is therefore unfeasible to do more here than simply remark on, and illustrate, the ways in which they have come to the fore in the developing reflective capabilities of one group of undeniably pensive professionals.

Research, writing and reflection as disruptive processes

Many EdD candidates begin to see a far broader range of possibilities than those outlined above, even at the point when they are submitting the first piece of writing required on the programme. It is not at all difficult to gain a sense of the *disruptive* potential of the sheer hard intellectual work entailed in research, writing and reflection; collectively, these can lead to a realization of the nature of professional equilibrium, and of how this may be – positively – disturbed.

For example, reflecting on the process of producing the assignment is succinctly captured by one of the medical doctors who each year make up a distinctive contingent of our intake:

I used the reading and research to explore conflicting and troubling aspects of my professional life. I believe I thought deeply about my life as a medical professional ... which I had not even realized were subtly disturbing my equilibrium (Annie, 2017, FoP).

The notion invoked above of a *disturbance of equilibrium* is actually a recurrent theme in the reflective writing reviewed for this paper. Quite often the disturbance is attributed to the very act – a professional milestone – of beginning doctoral studies, and being caused to think about, talk with others about, and write about aspects of professional life and work. A key element of all this is almost inevitably going to be a process of focused reflection on, and articulation of, the nature of the specific problem or question that will be at the centre of individuals' planned independent research for their doctorate. In this sense, starting to take on the mantle of researching professional becomes – and many EdD participants do actually use the phrase – a *critical incident* (Cunningham, 2008: 161).

Another dimension of the work of writing their first piece of assessed work entails course participants responding constructively to feedback, and using the content of this feedback to enhance the quality of subsequent submissions. This not only assists individuals to more comfortably meet a set of assessment criteria, but also equips them to deal more confidently with one of the typical tasks arising in a very diverse range of (if not in all) professional realms: writing for a wide – and possibly, on occasion, an antagonistic – audience. As Cook, from whose work I quote several times, put it: 'I thank my assignment marker who suggested that I develop my critical stance' (Cook, 2013, TS).

Overarching all such statements as those above, I see the essential truth captured so well by Brown: 'Through the forms of engagement provided by professional doctorates, the academic community becomes professionally more able to bring its expertise to bear productively in and on practice' (Brown, 2014: 23).

And, to cite Cook (and, in part, to return to the issue of language) again:

My doctoral studies have unlocked doors I didn't know existed. Although I find the 'academic club' enticing and have begun a 'love affair' with a literature that previously seemed impenetrable, I remain a staunch advocate of plain and simple English because my work develops practical outcomes for others to use. The last sentence of my first assignment still encapsulates my mantra: 'the most important element of working as a collegiate professional is that *I can apply my old mentor's adage, "to do good as you go, lass"*' (Cook, 2013, TS, emphasis added).

Some concluding ... reflections!

Completing a doctorate as a part-time (adult) student is a real struggle.

(Brown, 2017, personal communication with author)

In line with Brown's observation, I would contend that individuals embarking on professional doctorates are, with hardly any exceptions, busy – possibly even beleaguered – practising professionals. Their professional realms will very typically feature the kind of 'craziness' that Barnett (2008) has pointed to. They are therefore almost certainly juggling the myriad workplace demands that daily present themselves, alongside the challenges of research and writing. If in Barnett's (2008: 190) age of *supercomplexity*, 'being a professional is fraught with difficulty', then it is, perhaps, likely to be the case that working towards a doctorate significantly adds to this difficulty.

In such circumstances, it is of paramount importance that our doctoral candidates can readily discern, and be convinced by, the rationale for our asking of them the completion of tasks that, superficially at any rate, might appear extraneous to the assessment core of their hoped-for award. *Required reflection* must be introduced in a persuasive, evidenced, way if it is to be engaged with at any level beyond that of mere compliance – or, as Andrew Brown has captured it, above, 'going through the motions'.

The character of Christopher Metcalfe in William Corlett's novel of public school life, *Now and Then*, reflects apropos his housemaster and maths master Mr Tollmun-Jones:

Mr Tollmun-Jones would despise anything I am associated with, because he can't stand me. I can't blame him; I'd loathe me if I had to try teaching me algebra – but I would start by telling me what the point of it is. He never has, and I'm not very enthusiastic about pointless subjects (Corlett, 1995: 89).

My own personal perspectives on the issues I have been exploring in this short paper derive not only from my concern with the question of *rationale* (as was so crucial to Christopher's engagement with the endeavour of learning algebra), but also from a strongly held belief that no matter how far an individual may have risen in their professional world, the challenges of engaging with the research, writing and advanced reflection that present themselves on a professional doctorate such as the EdD are quite frequently new and different ones to those they have previously encountered. A school head teacher, a college vice-principal, a senior medical practitioner or a manager of a university's professional services staff have all, of course, dealt with problems such as difficult discussions or confrontations with subordinates, or with parents or patients. They may well have had to write, to expected high standards, briefing papers to senior leadership teams, or to boards of governors. They will increasingly have been involved in writing lengthy, evidenced, applications for additional staffing resources, or for external funding for specific projects. And they will certainly already be high performers academically.

In connection with the last of these accomplishments (and bearing in mind that we see many newly enrolled doctoral candidates in their 30s, 40s or 60s) there may well be – to return to this point – a notable degree of under-confidence with academic, and reflective, writing. One of the recurrent syndromes I have encountered is the anxiety someone will be caused by the required engagement with what is essentially a highly distinctive writing *genre* – and this despite their many and varied professional accomplishments. In such circumstances, it behoves us not only to be *content experts*, but also to embrace the informal mentoring role that is so valuable when assisting and guiding someone making the kind of transition to producing work of doctoral standard that is essential for success on an EdD or comparable professional doctorate. One vitally important element of this process is, for me, making explicit the positive benefits of the *taking stock* that Brown invokes, and engineering through our programme design the space for our candidates to write in reflective vein on the scholarly challenges they have overcome on their doctoral journey, and on their *new* accomplishments, as doctoral candidates.

Ultimately, not only are we in the business of supporting and enhancing individuals' research skills and their scholarship but also, as Schön expressed it, that of *educating the reflective practitioner*. The very notion of reflective practice has over the years been subject to critique as a facet of intellectual and professional life. For example, Chapter 7 in Eraut (1994: 143), contains the assertively put contention that 'Schön proceeds mainly by example and metaphor rather than sustained argument. He also tends to stray away from his own definitions and evidence into making statements which are difficult to defend.' However, I maintain that it remains relatively secure in its continuing important status.

For individuals in such professional realms as medicine, nursing and social work, the habit of reflection, as required in the three assessment-specific contexts I have described, will have longer-term benefits than having contributed to making a success of their professional doctorate. One important example of this can be seen in the way in which, as part of their portfolio-based revalidation procedures, practitioners in these areas will need to record their reflections on how they have continued to learn from incidents in their everyday work. And, I would claim, this is but one example of the afterlife that acquiring an EdD can sustain.

The afterlife can be a lifelong one, as alluded to here:

I feel my commitment to the profession and to the people I work with is deeper now. This has been a *process of possibility* since it has encouraged me to take action, to transcend the technical deployment of knowledge into sensitive and sensible professional intellectual work (Barboni, 2013, TS, emphasis in original).

And regarding yet another benefit, it is, quite simply, that the *deployment* (to use Barboni's word) of reflexivity tends to become habituated – a core attribute of the truly pensive (and thereby, in all likelihood, undogmatic) professional self. As Andrews and Edwards (2008: 8) captured their commitment to the value of the reflective habit (it might even be plausible to refer to it as a reflective *reflex*): 'In reflecting on our doctoral studies, one of us said she hoped that the process of reflection would stay with her to continue to confer a sense of objectivity that made professional challenges less overwhelming.'

On this kind of possibility, that of acquiring an enhanced capacity for objectivity, I will leave the last word to Raymond, rounding off his first EdD assignment, which had explored issues of accountability, performativity and deprofessionalization in further and higher education:

To close, does the increase in accountability, the transfer of autonomy from practitioner to external supervisors, together with more regulation and control, constitute deprofessionalisation or does this actually make us more professional? On balance, I suspect the reality is a blend of both of these amid an infinite number of variables and blurred lines and rather than giving definite answers, exploring all of this has served to open up rather more questions. In light of that, for now, *I shall continue to think about it some more* (Raymond, 2017, FoP, emphasis added).

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