The following are examples of abstracts that have been authored by EdD students who have been awarded their Doctorate in recent years. It is very likely (and desirable) that your own ideas are different to those here. These examples will help you to get an idea of the scope of the EdD programme, the type and amount of work involved, and the standard of work expected.

Craig Avieson

Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school

This thesis explores the facilitation of pupil voice and how this might impact on school improvement in an English primary school. It is underpinned by theoretical frameworks that address children’s rights, voice, participation, power-relations and active citizenship. Two formal mechanisms of facilitating children’s voice are explored using an action research approach. Firstly, a pilot study explores the possibilities offered by a ‘children-as-researcher’s’ initiative (Kellett, 2005a). Findings from this inform the main study where the focus shifts to the potential of school councils. Two action-research cycles are used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of both pupil voice mechanisms. Following research skills training, six mixed-ability children (aged 9-10 years) were supported in conducting independent research into a range of child-initiated issues that they identified. Data were collected through participant observations, a reflective journal and the actuality of the children’s research. Areas of research explored by the children included: ‘Why do year 8’s receive more praise than year 5’s?’ ‘Do boys receive more pocket money than girls?’ ‘In what areas of school are you more likely to be bullied?’ The long-term sustainability of this initiative raises issues around time, resources and the inclusion of all children. Subsequently, cycles one and two focused on developing an effective school council system, which incorporated the principles of children-as-researchers and influenced school improvement. Data were generated through analysis of school council minutes, observations, field notes and interviews with children and staff. Four themes emerged: organisation of school council meetings, facilitating the views of all children, training for children, and support from senior staff. Each of these themes was explored in further depth and eight specific adjustments to the school council were subsequently implemented and evaluated through further interviews and analysis of school council documents. Final analysis suggests that gathering the views of all children, alongside specific training for school councillors are both pertinent issues which impact upon pupil voice and school improvement. The findings provide further evidence that school leaders have a significant influence in facilitating pupil voice and active citizenship. The study highlights the challenges of maintaining a dual role as researcher and practitioner. Findings suggest that national policy and inspection frameworks need to provide better support to headteachers for school council development in primary schools since this could lead to transformative pupil voice and school improvement.
New technologies have revolutionised the way people learn. In language learning, using a web-conferencing system is a relatively new development, and acquiring pronunciation skills in a virtual environment even more so. The central question of this exploratory study is whether learning pronunciation outside the classroom is a pedagogically sound experience. The focus is on learners: their emotions, with a particular focus on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), and the strategies they use to learn pronunciation on their own and with others in a new online environment. Macdonald et al. (1994) contended that second language (L2) pronunciation needed more research and over the years more studies have explored the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching (see Munro and Derwing, 2011 for a review of L2 pronunciation teaching). The present study also looks at L2 pronunciation but investigates the learning of it in a non-conventional setting.

The mixed-methods research approach in this study, grounded in a post-positivist paradigm, involved two quantitative instruments: a questionnaire and a recorded reading activity of a text; and two qualitative instruments: think-aloud verbal protocols (TAPs) and semi-structured interviews. Participants who were involved in every stage of the study were then the objects of case studies as these ‘can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis (Cohen et al, 2003, p181). The four different sources of data provided multiple perspectives on students' emotions and strategies when working on pronunciation in a virtual learning environment (VLE) or on their own, and these perspectives deepen our understanding on how distance learners can acquire good pronunciation skills outside of the classroom.
Valerie Critten

Literacy development in children with cerebral palsy

This thesis concerns the literacy development of 15 children with cerebral palsy (CP). The children were an opportunistic sample from two schools, and were initially selected on the basis that they had typical abilities in other school subjects.

A review of the literature pertaining to the development of literacy and related aspects of cognitive development in typically-developing children with CP informed the development of the research strategy. The children’s literacy, their general non-verbal and communication abilities, as well as a set of cognitive abilities that could be related to literacy impairments, were assessed.

The findings revealed that most, but not all, of the children with CP had literacy difficulties with low scores in reading and spelling, and all the children had problems with handwriting. Standardised assessments showed that while the children had good verbal abilities, they had very low scores on a non-verbal test.

The children with the most severe literacy difficulties also had the most problems with phonological processing. Almost all of the children had difficulties with visual and spatial perception; however the better readers had typical results in an assessment of visual sequential memory. Tests of working memory (WM) revealed a clear division between typical levels of performance on verbal recall measures, and very poor performance on the visual components of working memory tests. There were mixed results for the assessment of the central executive, but generally those children who were the more able in literacy had higher scores.

Correlations suggested that visual sequential memory; phonological segmentation; verbal recall; and aspects of the central executive of working memory were most closely associated with the children’s literacy abilities. Thus, findings indicate that children with CP have specific cognitive impairments, including a new suggestion that poor visual sequential memory abilities could delay the development of reading and spelling skills.
This study is about the influences underlying the inequalities in educational progress experienced by Pakistani-heritage pupils in the small city of 'Newminster'. The literature offers a wealth of explanations for the persistent inequalities in attainment among different minority-ethnic groups, from which the voices of the pupils themselves are almost entirely absent. In this study, young people offer their own, often competing, explanations of distinctive aspects within the GCSE attainment data, including their rapid progress over the previous decade and the small gap in attainment between those eligible for free school meals and their peers. The principal sources of data are extended discussions with groups of Pakistani-heritage young people supplemented by interviews with parents, and a formal survey conducted by the young people among their black and minority ethnic peers. In analysing the variety of data generated by this mixed approach, the study draws upon the analytical framework of Bourdieu, in particular, the concept of ‘habitus’. The study engages with the methodological dilemmas of a white researcher conducting research with a community to which she is an ‘invited outsider’, and the broader challenges of attempting ‘participatory’ research. The findings indicate that the Pakistani-heritage young people in the study have a strong sense of habitus that they contend has a positive influence on their educational progress. At the same time, they are actively engaged in habitus transformation. This process drives their educational aspirations but involves personal cost, dilemmas and encounters with barriers constructed by the wider education system. Their insights support a call for further consultation with marginalized young people over issues relating to their own educational progress.
Using Songs to Enhance Language Learning and Skills in the Cypriot Primary EFL Classroom

Although the role of songs in the primary EFL classroom has attracted the interest of a number of researchers (Newham 1995; McMullen and Saffran 2004; Millington 2011), given the frequency with which songs are being used in English language teaching classrooms, it might have been expected that Cyprus would wish to play a role in extending research findings and applying them to its own educational setting. Yet the lack of research with young learners is particularly acute in the Cypriot Primary School EFL context where pupils have been working for the last 15 years with very outdated textbooks. Evidence of the effectiveness of using songs to learn English has come mainly from studies in other countries mainly with older pupils in middle and high schools, (Adkins 1997; Millington 2011; Fonseca-Mora et al. 2011). My research, therefore, aims to address this gap by attempting to find out whether songs could play an important role in learning a foreign language with Cypriot learners of 9-12, an age range that has not so far been addressed in the literature. In my study, I examine the potential of songs as a valuable pedagogical tool to help young pupils learn English. More specifically, I investigate the role of songs (1) in arousing positive emotions in the primary language classroom and (2) in determining whether and to what extent positive emotions can help to reinforce the grammatical structures being taught and aid vocabulary acquisition.

Using an ethnographic case study framework, my study attempted, through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, to assess the effectiveness of working with songs in the EFL classroom. The findings of this research revealed that the majority of pupils taking part in the study following the normal EFL curriculum which involved two 40-minute EFL lessons a week, showed considerable improvement in language learning after the use of songs. This suggested that the framework of EFL competence in Cyprus might also benefit from the implementation of songs into the current English language curriculum.
Linda Fripps

Challenging Behaviour and Inclusion in a Secondary School: perceptions, policies and practices

It has been widely reported in research and by the media that pupils’ challenging behaviour causes concern amongst teachers, parents and politicians. Theories abound attributing indiscipline to factors related to the child, the family and, to a lesser degree, the school.

This study investigates the experiences and perceptions of pupils and staff regarding challenging behaviour and inclusion in a mainstream secondary school. The research seeks the views of pupils considered challenging by school authorities and also those of their teachers. It also elicits the opinions of pupils who are generally considered to be well-behaved and those of support staff, as their experience of behaviour in mainstream schools appears to be understudied within the existing literature.

The research took place at an all-ability Roman Catholic boys’ school in a selective London Borough. The school has adopted measures to address challenging behaviour, including the use of punitive spaces such as the detention room and an inclusion unit. Within these spaces discipline is exercised and the implicit aim is to produce ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1977, p.138).

The study incorporates methods designed to facilitate students’ involvement as participants and co-researchers. The research findings stress the importance of relationships with peers, parents and teachers in children’s behaviour. The notion of blame is also advanced. Each group blames others for indiscipline and generally absolves itself of responsibility for it. Children whose behaviour is seen as challenging are ‘othered’ by staff and students alike, who place limits on inclusion and advocate an exclusionary approach to addressing indiscipline.

In describing developments arising from the research, the study advocates listening to children and highlights the importance of collaborative working and consistency in developing and implementing whole school policy and inclusive practice relating to behaviour in school.
Daphne Loads

Surprising spaces: Artistry in university lecturers' professional development

In this qualitative study I investigated an aspect of my own practice as an academic developer. My research question was:

How do I understand and theorise what happens in art workshops that contribute to university lecturers' professional development?

Taking a self-study approach (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) in which theory is understood as generated by close and intense engagement with individual practice, I invited university lecturers to create, interpret and discuss collages in relation to what teaching meant to them. I interviewed the participants and the co-facilitator shortly after the workshops and again at the end of the study. Bringing together understandings from academic development, adult education and therapy, I claim that these workshops can be understood as restorative spaces where lecturers undertake and explore troubling experiences, leading to surprising insights and opening up the possibility for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Drawing on Eisner's (2003) concept of artistry, I introduce the notion of the apercu: the noticing of a surprising detail that troubles settled ways of thinking and feeling. I explore the relevance of stochastic processes that combine random and non-random elements. I suggest that physical engagement with art-making balances the disembodied nature of much academic work; dialogue with colleagues, including expression of feelings, develops intimacy and safety that are often absent from professional encounters; and metaphor work opens up fresh and surprising ways of making meaning. I recommend that academic development practitioners should consider integrating an element of artful practice into development programmes as a necessary counterpoint to those activities that are narrowly instrumental and concerned with performative values. In order to avoid inappropriate personalisation of structural issues and unthinking personalisation of the status quo, I argue that it is important that activities focusing on artistry should be complemented by strategies that draw on scholarship and address social and institutional change.
Daniel Portman

Walking a linguistic tightrope: learner development in writing job application letters

This thesis focuses on tracking the development of 17 tertiary English language learners (ELLs) studying how to write job application letters. The research took place within the context of a Business Writing in English module, in which pedagogy was informed by a Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to genre. While much genre-based research in educational settings examines pedagogic practices, Cheng (2006) urges genre researchers to focus on learner development. In this project, learner development in writing job application letters was of interest for two reasons: a) the letters were new to the learners, in the project’s national context and b) the letters required the complex task of both: demonstration of job suitability and maintenance of appropriate relations with presumed readers.

Within their coursework, the 17 learner-participants wrote three job application letters, in response to three job advertisements, at three points in time. For the 17 participants, demonstration of suitability of the job was examined. For three of these participants, a more detailed analysis was carried out, concerning their management of social relations with their presumed readers. Analysis for tracking development was informed by SFL and focussed on the lexicogrammatical and register strata, in relation to the generic staging of a job application letter. Participant interviews and feedback from Human Resources professionals supplemented the linguistic analyses.

From the findings, three main conclusions are drawn and presented with reference to Halliday’s (2004) language learning triad: a) ‘learning language’ – genre development can be seen through the participants’ appropriate expansion, organisation and variation of repertoire; b) ‘learning through language’ – genre development can be seen through the participants’ ‘resemiotisation’ (Iedema, 2003) of themselves as job applicants; c) ‘learning about language’ – genre development can be seen through participants’ demonstration of ‘practical’ and ‘discursive’ knowledge (Giddens, 1984). Based on insights from the research, policy and practice implications are offered. Finally, further research directions are suggested.
Elodie Vialleton

Investigating the use of naturally occurring spoken French in adult foreign language learning

This study explores the feasibility and desirability of introducing samples of naturally occurring spoken French to adult language learners at an early stage of the learning process to develop perception and listening skills.

The literature review examines the status of the spoken language, the notion of authenticity of materials, and the development of listening skills in the context of past and present language teaching methodologies, including recent ecological and data-driven approaches. Linguistic theories and descriptions of the spoken French language are also reviewed.

The research is based on an experimental study, set in the context of distance language learning at the Open University, and makes use of mixed methods. Students were asked to work with experimental teaching materials comprising self-study activities based on recorded samples of naturally occurring spoken French matching the topics and structures of the Open University beginners’ French module. A test was then administered to participants and their performance was compared to that of members of a control group. Their reaction to the experimental approach was gauged using semi-structured interviews. The data analysis demonstrates that the students were able to engage with the speech samples and related tasks, and with their specific linguistic features. It also reveals that students found the approach challenging but useful in developing listening skills.

Taking into account cognitive, affective and contextual dimensions, and bearing in mind the constraints inherent to the typically mixed context of adult language learning, the study concludes that naturally occurring spoken French and activities aimed at developing awareness of its features should be introduced as part of a mix of materials, striking a balance between ecological and reductionist approaches, offering students a chance to exercise choice between types of materials and providing tools they can reuse when exposed to naturally occurring spoken French autonomously.
Mark Wareing

Rhetoric and reality: the theoretical basis of work-based learning and the lived experience of the Foundation degree student

This hermeneutic phenomenological study has sought to uncover the lived experience of work-based learners and their workplace mentors. Eight workplace mentors (all registered nurses) and eleven former Foundation degree students agreed to be interviewed. The research sought to identify whether a mismatch exists between theories of work-based learning as described by educationalists and theorists; compared with how it is actually experienced by a group of work-based learners and their workplace mentors. The former students had all been healthcare assistants (HCAs) working in acute clinical settings and employed within a large NHS hospital. All had completed a two year Foundation degree in Health and Social Care (FdSc) course in preparation to become assistant practitioners (AP). The start of their studies was characterised by managing conflict, establishing an identity as a learner in their own right and making sense of the assistant practitioner role, whilst their concluding lived experience was characterised by becoming an assistant practitioner, receiving recognition from peers in addition to feeling the need to prove the validity of the AP role. Being a novice or apprentice was not the experience of former Foundation degree student participants. Four models of work-based learning were compared against the lived experiences of participants. While all four models capture the profoundly social nature of work-based learning, none of the models captured the challenge faced by Foundation degree student participants in making the transition from being a health care assistant and becoming a work-based learner, to becoming an assistant practitioner. This finding was particularly significant to the lived experience of all participants in this study as the assistant practitioner role was completely new to workplace mentors, their departments and the NHS hospital Trust in which the research was undertaken.