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Special Issue: Navigating unexpected terrain in postgraduate research:
Reflections from the field

On the doctoral journey: An introduction to articles in this issue

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As Pat Thomson notes, "No-one arrives at a doctorate as a blank slate. Everyone brings with them particular histories—life experiences and personal histories which are classed, raced, gendered, work experiences and sometimes long professional careers, as well as educational histories" (2022, para. 1). Along with personal, educational, and professional histories, individuals' current situations and circumstances continue side by side and are woven through doctoral study and research processes. The articles in this issue reveal something of these lives, their standpoint or positionality, as the authors present reflective narratives about their doctoral research, and challenges to be negotiated and reconciled along their doctoral journey.

The articles are presented in an order that simulates the research journey. We begin with two articles exploring theory, then encounter ethical considerations, the unexpected in evidence gathering and surprises in analysis. The final two articles bookend this issue, "Navigating Unexpected Terrain in Postgraduate Research: Reflections from the Field" by returning to reflect on and illustrate the bigger picture(s) of writing a doctoral thesis, and the socialisation of doctoral students. All these articles, in some way, involve personal and academic development achieved via the process of undertaking a doctorate.

The theoretical lens that doctoral researchers use in their project works well when it is a good match for their own world views, beliefs about knowledge and learning, and individual positionality. Hugh Kearns, in ThinkWell workshops (see https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/), suggests that beginning researchers select a theoretical jacket off the peg and try it on for size. This may imply that doctoral students can create a meal of theory and methods from going to the supermarket and selecting a cereal, a milk and any additions. However, a key part of Kearn's message is the importance of fit. For this reason, Thomas Everth's piece makes an important contribution in his article titled "On Snakes and Ladders: Ontological Detours into Quantum Physics from my PhD in Education". Everth expresses his passion for his topic – climate change education – and his excitement at having come across the theoretical lens that is a "good fit" and helps him make sense of his project. Readers will learn more about how Everth came to know the theoretical approach to his research and get a sense of the importance of a researcher's "place to stand" theoretically.

In his article "Contestations over Hijrat and Postcoloniality: Forming a Theoretical Framework for the Doctoral Journey", Hossein Hosseini uses the Islamic and Persian cultural metaphor of Hijrat to explore the challenges faced by international doctoral candidates from non-Western backgrounds during their doctoral programmes within Western academic institutions. Hosseini reflects on interviews with Iranian doctoral applicants (in Iran) and Iranian doctoral candidates (in New Zealand) and his theoretical

framework based on Hijrat and postcoloniality to "make sense" of participants' evidence in ways that can be understood by readers (and are acceptable to examiners) in a Western academic tradition. Recommendations about cultural congruence are drawn that will be of interest to doctoral supervisors and their supervisees in Western to non-Western cultural arrangements.

Ethics in research is more than a required approval stage. Ethics for researchers speaks to their approach and responsibilities in research design, conduct and decisions of representation and reporting research evidence. In her article, "Reflecting on an Unexpected Challenge in Obtaining Ethical Approval for Research with Adults with Learning Disabilities", Nicolina Newcombe dives into the complexity of negotiating two sources of information, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and her institution's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (HRR). The author describes the edgewalking strategy she used to resolve tensions in contested meanings of words in these documents and reveals something of the growth in self-awareness of personal subjectivities and positionality that is an important aspect for all qualitative researchers on their doctoral journey.

All of our authors conducted empirical research, which is not a given at the doctoral level although it is more common in education. When the doctoral researcher enters their field of study or attends the research site or sites, referred to as the "data gathering" stage, they find themselves enacting their approved plans and good intentions more independently and in more self-reliant ways than their work in earlier stages, especially when their field of study is in a country different from their country of study. In the next four articles, authors reflect on relationship building within data-gathering. These articles unpack challenges and resolutions in collecting data for doctoral research.

"'Being' with Research Participants: Experiences of Doing Narrative Research in Covid-Pandemic" by Devendra Adhikari describes the challenges of researching during the Covid-19 pandemic in a country without adequate health resourcing. The author skillfully weaves Eastern philosophy into the process and theory of research and recognises the lived experience of participants. Readers will be reminded of the power of shared experiences between researcher and participants in building trust and rapport for the benefit of enriching relationships and the project.

Eric Adjei Baah also reflects on researcher-participant relationships in his article "Navigating Participant Apprehension: A case of Investigating the Teaching of Literature in English (LiE) in Ghana". Baah provides insight to the challenges of collecting data across perceived hierarchies and describes strategies for humble relationship-building between researchers and participants. While this article is set in the cultural context of Ghana, the information about equalising power imbalances in research settings will be relevant to many person-to-person investigations.

"Overcoming Data Collection Challenges and Establishing Trustworthiness: The Need for Flexibility and Responsiveness in Research" by Devika Rathore discusses the challenges of access to participants and participant withdrawal, largely as a result of Covid-19. In Rathore's case participants were migrant Indian teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) contexts. Rathore advocates flexibility and responsiveness as essential research tools in anticipating, planning for, and meeting research challenges. She also makes recommendations for early career researchers based on her experience.

"Navigating (Mis)assumptions in Exploring Teachers' Knowledge and Practice of Multiliteracies Pedagogy" by Jia Rong Yap explores the data collection mediated relationship between researcher and participants. The author had preconceived notions of how participants would respond and learned to adapt her approach to navigate the realities of participant interactions. Review of transcripts revealed participants' issues with researcher use of vocabulary and clarity of interview questions. Of interest, this article reflexively articulates the impact of researcher assumptions on research design and a shift to "researching *with* teachers".

Then, the next three articles further unpack challenges and resolutions in collecting data for PhD research in the context of a global pandemic, particularly concerning the quick shift to online data gathering that many researchers (doctoral and other) have grappled with as a result of social distancing

measures and travel restrictions. These articles by Tachaiyaphum, Saeed, and Fenmachi, respectively, explore emerging and, at the time, necessary options for digital approaches to doctoral research.

Nutthida Tachaiyaphum explores the emotional dynamic of doctoral research in relation to disruptions caused by Covid-19 in her article "The Global Pandemic and a Shift in Research Methods: Applying Digital-Based Methods to Educational Research in Applied Linguistics". The author provides examples of how she dealt with the emotional rollercoaster of factors beyond her control affecting her doctorate, followed by the practical and ethical considerations she used to ultimately work to a positive result.

In her article, titled "Online Action Research in Maldives Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Unexpected Challenges", Sharuda Saeed describes changes to method from participatory action research (PAR) to e-action research (e-AR). Along with noting benefits to online research, Saeed outlines unexpected challenges, giving a holistic view of what it is like to conduct action research online.

Emela Achu Fenmachi, in her article titled "New Approaches to Data Collection with Research Participants: Distance Learning in Cameroon", explores adaptation to data collection in Covid-19 lockdown in a lower-middle-income country. The author used innovative approaches with affordable digital tools. While the project this article draws from was located in Cameroon, the learnings will also be of use to researchers working with participants in similar contexts and with similar barriers.

Research evidence can be analysed deductively, inductively or abductively, and there are many possibilities for approaches and models available in the literature (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006 or Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). Digital tools, such as NVivo, are said to assist and they do serve storing, collating, organising and retrieving functions, but they cannot do the analysis on behalf of the researcher (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The analysis process, from the beginning, involves articulating what is going on in the researcher's mind and decision-making, as well as their actions, which poses several challenges, even when everything goes according to plan.

Mairaj Jafri reflects on research analysis and chronicles the challenges of overcoming missing values in research data in her article "Addressing Issues of Missing Values in the Survey Research of High School Mathematics Teachers' Digital Competencies". Jafri uses creative tension to transform a risk of statistical bias from reduced sample sizes into motivation to develop new skills. Ultimately, this article forms a roadmap with potential for doctoral students and other researchers to use when faced with challenges in analysis.

"Contending with the Unforeseen 'Messiness' of the Qualitative Data Analysis Process" by Zahra Mohamed narrates a journey to confidence with qualitative data analysis methods. The author reveals her experiences recording, noticing, categorising and reflecting on data from primary teachers' use of digital technologies in classrooms in Maldivian schools. While initially messy and non-linear, iterative and progressive use of qualitative data analysis results in sensemaking that was congruent with the author's overall approach.

Topics of study and the types of research questions that doctoral students are interested in are influenced by their previous personal and professional experiences, identities, values and concerns. During doctoral study, life experiences continue to influence the shape, nature and experience of learning through research and supervision. Shifting from challenges experienced related to aspects of the research to challenges related to the researcher's journey, the final two articles in this issue explore aspects related to, respectively, personal health and socialisation as a doctoral researcher studying in a country other than home.

In "An Unexpected Journey: From Typing to Dictating a Thesis", Julie Hest shares her experience using voice recognition technology. After taking up dictation due to a health issue, Hest explains how the cognitive processes involved in typing and in dictation are different and as such enhanced her problem-solving capabilities and empathy with participants. Voice recognition technologies and accessories are reviewed in this article for the purposes of writing accuracy, clarity and speed. Readers of Martin Heidegger will be interested in Hest's reference to his concept of existing.

Atif Khalil's article, "Challenges in Doctoral Socialisation: A Researcher's Reflective Experience", reflects on the author's socialisation experiences and their impact on intellectual, emotional and cultural challenges he encountered studying in another country. This article is rich with insight into the experience of international students from non-Western backgrounds and will be of value to anyone working cross-culturally.

This special issue concludes with an Afterword. Dr Renée Gilgen was invited to make connections between what the authors in this issue were saying and her own experience as a Māori doctoral candidate. Her response "On the Unexpected Challenges of Doctoral Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand: An Indigenous Māori Perspective", is an example of how a reader might encounter and engage with the papers in this special issue, insofar as Gilgen's indigenous perspective illustrates how readers bring their culturally informed academic perspectives and knowledge to anything they read, including others' narratives.

This is not the first time that the *Waikato Journal of Education,* published by the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (waikato.ac.nz/wmier), have included articles where doctoral candidates have written of their study and research experiences. In Volume 25, 2020, (wje.org.nz/index.php/WJE/issue/view/50) five articles were published where the authors as international doctoral researchers drew on experiences of traveling "home" to gather research evidence.

In 2017 the journal published a special issue titled *Research Backstories: Reflexive Accounts from Postgraduate Scholars* edited by Donella J Cobb and Margaret Franken (wje.org.nz/index.php/WJE/issue/view/43). The articles in this issue were based on experiences of facilitation and participation in an academic writing group with the aim of scaffolding international postgraduate students into writing for publication. By exploring the backstories of each participating student's research experiences, five emerging writers of research were supported to foreground reflexivity in their articles.

We are pleased to contribute to the ongoing work of *Waikato Journal of Education* in growing knowledge and understanding of educational research and the experiences of researchers. We hope you find value in the articles in this special issue.

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