

6 Matilda Education Transcript Summary

04.21 Your background Matilda and your career, how did you come to be where you are now?

Matilda describes her career as messy. PhD in English literature followed by 10 years as a casual lecturer in a range of related courses. She looks back at it as being a relief teacher and was part of the early gig economy, although she didn't have words for it back then, and was not a good thing. She then trained as an English Language teacher, and worked for 7-8 years preparing students for IELTS and in Academic English and academic editing. She'd been a sub-editor on an academic journal in her first post-doc role, so did a free-lance editing too. In 2008 she got the job which led to her now career in doctoral education, but with lots of messy contracts along the way. Her mixed past has come together well in the required skill set for a researcher developer.

04.16 (Researching) Do you research as well Matilda?

Yes. Researcher Development was always an academic position, with 20% allocation for research. Her first research project as a researcher developer came about because when she was running supervisor workshops the students and the supervisors were all from other countries. She learnt then that education research is different to literature and cultural studies.

05.44 (5 Learnt) Tell me more about the differences of research in the two different areas.

She felt bitter about her earlier career experience and so resisted using what she had learned during that time. But a colleague persuaded her to use what she already knew about socio-cultural theory into the education space and now thinks it's a nice way to make sense of what you are looking at.

08.06 (5 Learnt) Have you got any examples Matilda?

Matilda gives specific theoretical examples that related to learning disciplinary norms and likens it to the distinctions between academic, professional and general staff role and the break-down of dichotomies. She felt she had a lot to learn about pedagogy.

She approaches new research projects, not with trying to impose a theory, rather as she starts to look, memories are triggered and she looks again at theory. She refer again to her lack of knowledge at the time of research methods and having to learn. It's useful for everybody to be able to read and understand statistics.

11.27 (5 Learnt) So, what else did you learn from doing that piece of qualitative research?

Because her contracts have left her ineligible for many research grants, she has done a lot of small projects. The research has led her understand the research landscape and how to do the researcher developer job, although others may learn from experience, or from colleagues.

13.25 (5 Learnt) There's more than that though isn't there?

Doing research on a topic encourages reflection and to pay attention to that area. She hadn't thought much about team supervision until she was doing a project. It's not just the empirical research, it reading that helps too. If she didn't research it would be easy to keep doing the same

teaching, over and over and may become less credible if you are not researching. She's written a paper on this. It also models behaviour to research students. You know what it is like to have to write when you don't feel like it, or the feeling when you get negative reviews; being scholarly. She worries that otherwise the teaching becomes out of date. Linking her research and her teaching is invigorating.

17.28 (7,8 Teaching) Do you teach qualitative research at all Matilda?

Not currently required to teach qualitative research, so has set up a discussion forum for PhD candidates to talk about their research methods. She also describes it as a learning opportunity for her. She has done so many things she finds it hard to remember where bits of knowledge come from.

18.59 (7, 8 Teaching) I'd love to hear more about that

She describes the process as a hall of mirrors, and because she didn't do her PhD in qualitative research she doesn't feel like an expert. She partly set up the forum because she could see the gap in provision. Lots of people wanted to know but there was very little teaching of research methods. She thinks a big problem in lots of areas. Students do small projects in their honours, and they are not taught, just told or they pick it up as they go along without a sound foundation. The series was an efficient way to learn, give presentation opportunities to PhD candidates for their CV, and they had the expertise; they had actually done it. She wanted to remind HDRs that they are surrounded by clever, capable peers, who have recent knowledge. Not to look for the expert that will come and tell them everything.

25:24 (13 Students enjoy) Did you notice any kind of themes or patterns in the what students were keen to hear from their one step ahead peers?

They liked to hear about challenges and solutions; work arounds, abandoned plans, doing it differently from how they started out. It looked they didn't get huge amounts of guidance from supervisors, but that may say more about the university than the person.

27.53 (16 Cautionary tales) Are there any of the stories that they told, that stick in your head that you think the people who use this data might find interesting?

For the series, she gave students some starter questions, which meant that it was often presented as a chronological story. They were modest about what they had done, and were modest or unaware of that their workarounds could claim acknowledged labels, e.g. digital humanities. Stories were often of projects growing out of control, trying lots of software and reverting to hard copy as data management was overwhelming. Two stories in particular (detail is vague) relate to having to start data management afresh. Organising material is not really taught, like it is in the sciences. Collecting can be haphazard and where you end up is different to where you imagine it at the beginning, and what worked early on, doesn't keep working. Doctoral work is uncertain. Some people find it unbearable. The message that you may have to start again is miserable, but dogged persistence is central to doctoral work.

35.52 (17 Avoid sharing) Do you think it helps students to know that some of these difficulties is normal in qualitative research, and good because it takes you in directions you hadn't expected?

Most people wouldn't believe you anyway. They start with a fantasy of how it will be and have no idea of the hard slog, especially in the middle, and then trying to finish what is no longer new and fresh. Matilda feels that her job is about telling people what they don't want to hear. Academic jobs are scarce, and she feels the contradiction of saying that when she herself has an academic job. Also, everyone thinks their research is the hardest and scientists have it easy being given a project. Scientists also moan that their experiments don't work, or they sit in a swamp for two days and get nothing. But she does think that talking about the challenges is helpful, as when they start to experience it down the track, they recognise that it part of a process. Professional doctoral candidates in particular often think they know the answer to their question and then need their data to fit. They are hugely knowledgeable about their topic, but not what a PhD needs of them.

40.45 (19 Common paradigm) Is the qualitative research paradigm common with your colleagues?

The vast majority are qualitative, with some adventurous forms, such as participatory and visual methods.

43.4 (19 Common paradigm, 23 You changed) Are you part of a community of qualitative researchers? How's that linked to your identity as a researcher?

Several. And Covid has made it hard to feel part of those communities. Even having written about researcher identities, Matilda doesn't know how she sees herself; an academic rather than a teacher, but with teaching being central, and unpacking the mystery of doctoral studies. Research is her way of reaching out into the community; learn from others and know what is current by presenting at conference. Presenting a paper is the price you pay to gain access to that; to share. Although she doesn't expect people to learn from her, as her purpose is to inform her own practice. She feels her path is different to the path of her colleagues, having been an academic first before moving into doctoral education. Others do it the other way round. Academic credibility is not easy to claim and researcher education is not a well-recognised discipline. I already had a researcher identity so didn't have to develop one in this area.

Becoming a qualitative researcher was a parallel identity to the literary studies researcher, but having done work in gender studies, so the subjectivity of qualitative research was familiar and comfortable. Not, like if she'd come from a positivist background. In this area people come from all sorts of backgrounds and come together to try and make sense. Having a literary background means that she makes sense through stories. "That's point of life... what else is there if you haven't got a story? ...Information is not enough."

50.45 (2 Type) Just to confirm conversation off tape, do you see yourself as a qualitative researcher?

Yes, but she doesn't have any other word for it because it's positioned in a binary with quantitative. But it's not an either or, it's and and both, but qualitative research makes sense to her in a way that quant doesn't. She returns to the theme of story and the centrality of stories to being human. We interact as humans and that's what share cares about, and therefore qualitative research through

stories is the obvious way to research. She loves how interviewing can take you to detail that in social settings would take four years of cocktail parties before you would be allowed to ask. She enjoys being allowed to ask intellectual questions, and bring different theoretical perspectives.

55.23 (22 Things changed) The method that we're using today I'd be interested actually to see what you think about this (Zoom) ?

She quite likes it. She can be less self-conscious about rocking in her chair a bit and not maintaining eye-contact. She would normally feel the need to behave like a nice lady. But it still is a spoken interview with spontaneous response. You might not always want what you get, but it allows people to reveal more of themselves than an edited written response.

58.33 (28 Voice, 27 Advice) Is there anything in particular that you really wanted to say or have other people hear through this piece of work?

Doing qualitative research is an extraordinary privilege; to be let into people's lives, to engage in intellectual process. People seem to think that doing a PhD has to be really awful, but it is a privilege to have that opportunity to explore with people. Grab it with both hands.