

18TH RESEARCH STUDENTS' EDUCATION CONFERENCE

**“Complexity in Research:
Researcher-Participant
Dynamic Interactions”**

FULL PROGRAMME



**03 July
2025**



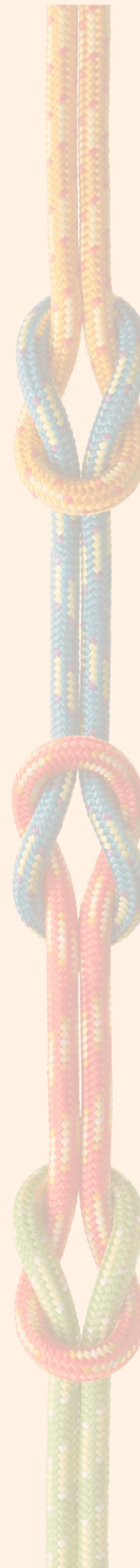
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Welcome Message



Welcome to the 18th Research Students' Education Conference

We are delighted to welcome you to the 18th Research Students' Education Conference (RSEC18), hosted by the School of Education at the University of Leeds. This student-led and student-focused event brings together emerging scholars from across disciplines to share, reflect, and grow in a supportive and inclusive environment. This year's theme, "Complexity in Research: Researcher-Participant Dynamic Interactions," invites us to explore the nuanced relationships that shape our research journeys. Through engaging presentations, thoughtful discussions, and collaborative exchanges, we aim to celebrate the richness of complexity in research and the transformative potential it holds. Whether you are presenting, attending, or simply curious, we hope this conference inspires meaningful dialogue, fosters new connections, and empowers you in your academic path

Anfal Almesbah
Co-Chair, RSEC18 Conference

Marianne Talbot
Co-Chair, RSEC18 Conference

"I have learnt so much from attending previous Research Students' Education Conferences, and made some really useful connections. I am looking forward to learning more new things and meeting more interesting researchers this year!"

MEET THE PRESENTERS



Carolyn Bradley
PGR, School of
Performance and Cultural
Industries, University of
Leeds

My research is focused on arts partnership projects, collaborative learning endeavours between schools and arts organisations, and their impact on teaching and learning in Drama. Prior to starting my PhD I was a secondary Drama teacher in the state education sector for 10 years. I support arts organisations with their learning resources as a freelance arts education consultant and am an OFQUAL Subject Matter Specialist for Drama and Teaching & Learning. I co-chair Pilot Theatre's Learning Advisory Board and sit on the advisory board for the Cultural Learning Alliance.

Janith Jayatilake
Kankanamalage
PGR, School of Politics
and International
Studies, University of
Leeds

J.K. Janith Prabashwara Perera is a Postgraduate Researcher at the School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds. His research interests lie at the intersections of education, peacebuilding, and social justice. Before beginning his doctoral studies, Janith was a lecturer at a higher education institution in London. With over a decade of experience as an educator, peacebuilder, and activist, he holds a BA (Hons) in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding and an MA in Education. His presentation at this conference explores the reflexivity of his recent publication in the Journal of Equity and Social Justice in Education (Dec 2024, Vol. 3).

Samuel Lee
PGR, School of
Education,
University of
Leeds

I am a practitioner, lecturer and researcher in experiential learning at the University of Leeds. I am reading for a doctorate in my spare (ha) time. Through my work and research I often find myself asking "but why is it always done this way?", and where the answer is not satisfactory, doing my own thing. This presentation is one of those examples!



Elizabeth Fair
PGR, School of Music,
University of Leeds

Elizabeth Fair is a Postgraduate Researcher at the School of Music at the University of Leeds where her research focusses on how music supports emotional wellbeing after a bereavement. Her research is primarily qualitative in nature, and draws on insights from psychology, sociology, and counselling. Alongside her PhD studies she has co-founded and continues to co-lead the PGR peer support network for emotionally challenging research. Prior to her doctoral studies, she graduated with a first-class honours degree in Music from the University of Oxford, and a Distinction in Music and Wellbeing from the University of Leeds.

Clare Copley
PGR, School of
Education, University
of Leeds

Clare is an Occupational Therapist with 20 years' experience, she currently provides wellbeing, and disability support to higher education students. In addition to this professional work, Clare has a personal connection to DCD, both through her own diagnosis and as a parent of a child with the condition. Clare is committed to improving support and advocating for greater understanding of DCD and her research is focused upon how sex and gender identity impact the experiences of university students with DCD. Clare is dedicated to transparency in her work and acknowledges the influence of her own positionality on her research journey.

**Asa Ismia Bunga
Aisyahrani, MA
Childhood Studies,
School of Education,
University of Leeds**

I am an MA student in Childhood Studies at the University of Leeds—passionate about diving into research. Beyond my academics, I serve as the Education Outreach Fellow for the Faculty of Social Sciences and as a Student Research Assistant at the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE). I have past experience as a Research Assistant at the Institute of Advanced Engineering and Science (IAES), contributing to research in psychology, education, and technology. Additionally, I have completed a lab-based international research internship at Academia Sinica, with a particular focus on interdisciplinary neuroscience. My research interests span education, childhood, parenting, psychology, and neuroscience.

**Charlotte White,
PGR, School of
Education, The
University of
Sheffield**

I am Charlotte White, a ESRC-funded PhD student in the School of Education at The University of Sheffield. My research explores Autistic girls experiences of mainstream primary school from the perspectives of primary school teachers and Autistic girls aged 4-10 years. My research is creative in design and I enjoy collaborating with participants and the research support group to create artistic interpretations of their lived experiences. I work with participants to create collages, comics and photography to represent their experiences through various modes of communication. I have led creative-workshops at national and international conferences. As Autistic researcher working within Critical Autism studies, my work seeks to provide joyful understandings of autistic lived experiences by working in collaboration with other autistic people.



**Megan Stock, School of
Education, University
of Leeds**

I am a second-year postgraduate researcher supervised in the School of Education, the School of Music and the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies. My broad research area is on inequalities of accessing music education, but it is one that is not my reality. I have received music tuition and taken advantage of musical opportunities that have supported my development on a musical, personal and educational level. Recognising my positionality as an outsider to inequality but an insider to what music education can provide is one that is a continuous process, especially without having participants to provide the outsider perspective.



Keynote Speaker

Dr Samyia Ambreen

BIO: Samyia obtained her PhD from the School of Education at the University of Leeds, where she served as a Teaching Fellow in the Childhood and Education Studies programmes. Currently, she works as a Research Associate at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research involves working with children and young people, exploring their educational lives through the intersection of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Presentation: Navigating Complexity: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research with Children

This discussion explores the collaborative construction of knowledge within interdisciplinary research contexts. Drawing on my research, I address the ethical and epistemological challenges inherent in such approaches. The discussion will also highlight the importance of reflexivity and critical self-awareness regarding researchers' roles and impacts, arguing why such reflexivity is essential for maintaining research integrity, and for generating insights that are meaningfully connected to the lived experiences of participants, who engage as co-researchers.



CLOSING PRESENTATION

Career pathways of PGRs at the School of Education: Insights from current PGRs and alumni

The traditional doctoral model aims to support UK-based, full-time candidates in obtaining their degrees and progressing to postdoctoral fellowships and tenure-track careers. However, this is no longer the norm, as PGRs cohorts have become more diverse in study duration, program types, and nationalities. In addition to academia, many doctoral graduates now pursue careers beyond academia. This changing landscape indicates that to optimize career prospects, PGRs need support in developing skills and experiences for various career paths both inside and outside academia. Understanding the roles postgraduates aim for and the competencies required is essential. Yet PGR employability receives little research attention.

Taking PGRs at the School of Education, University of Leeds as a case, our project aims to investigate the roles that these PGRs would like to secure after their doctoral studies, as well as the skills and experiences needed to achieve these roles. This project is part of the School's action plans to enhance the research culture and community among PGRs. Part of the project involved surveying opinions of current PGRs and alumni. In our talk, we will present initial findings and invite the audience to help interpret results and shape the next steps. Findings from this project will inform in-house training plans to better support PGRs at the School of Education in their employability and career progression.

CLOSING PRESENTATION PRESENTERS

Yen Dang

Associate Professor of Language Education at the School of Education, University of Leeds. She is the School's Deputy Director of PGR Studies and the Principal Investigator of the School of Education PGRs Career Pathway Project.

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Peter Hart

Peter Hart is a Lecturer in Inclusion, Childhood and Youth at the School of Education, University of Leeds. He is the School's Director of PGR Studies, Deputy Director WRDTP: Education, Youth & Children pathway, and the co-Investigator of the School of Education PGRs Career Pathway Project.

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ABTRACTS

**Carolyn Bradley, PGR, School of Performance and Cultural Industries,
University of Leeds**

Reflections on insider/outsider positions in participatory educational research

Responding to the conference theme of reflexivity, this paper will consider my positionality as a drama specialist working on participatory drama education research, and the theory influencing my research design. I will reflect on the insider/outsider positions (Le Gallais, 2008) I occupy as an embedded researcher conducting fieldwork in schools, and the value and challenges which this positionality brings. Through considering Hellawell's continuum of researcher positionality, I will consider if it is possible to occupy multiple or shifting positions (Braun and Clark, 2013) discussing the concept that "both empathy and alienation are useful qualities" (Hellawell, 2006, p.487), in relation to my own experiences in the field. I will interrogate the mechanisms of reflexivity I have used in my research and evaluate their impact on my work. One such mechanism is reflexive journaling focusing on each of Walsh's four types of reflexivity – personal, interpersonal, methodological and contextual (2003), and I will examine these four categories further in relation to their influence on my data analysis and interpretation. Finally, as my research is participatory and engages children as co-researchers, I will consider how having participants as knowledge-bearers who bring their own perspectives and position to the research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012) is influencing my data and outcomes. Borg et al state that to be reflexive, researchers must "be aware of themselves as the instrument of research," (Borg et al, 2012, p.11) and if children are engaged as co-researchers in fieldwork, is the same awareness expected of them?

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Janith Jayatilake Kankanamalage, PGR, School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds

Navigating Insider-Outsider Positionality: Reflections on Researching Mature Students' Access to Higher Education

This presentation critically reflects on the authors' positionalities in a 2024 study that explored mature students' access to higher education and the role of alternative higher education providers in the United Kingdom (Perera and Kulappu-Thanthirige, 2024). Framing access as an issue of equity, the research was conducted within an institution in London, where both researchers were lecturers.

Although professionally embedded in the study context with considerable experience interacting with mature students, the researchers had no lived experience as mature students. This insider-outsider positionality influenced every stage of the study—from study design to data collection through focus groups and the interpretation of findings (Yip, 2024). While this positionality provided deep contextual knowledge, facilitated access to participants, and fostered trust, rapport, and an understanding of participant attitudes, it also presented challenges, including the need to mitigate bias, avoid assumptions, and navigate power dynamics.

This presentation highlights how the authors' positionalities added nuance and depth to the research while also addressing the strategies employed to mitigate related challenges. In doing so, it advocates for the adoption of insider-outsider positionalities in similar research, emphasising their potential to bridge worlds by serving as powerful intermediaries between participants, the phenomena under study, and a broader audience. In the focused study, the researchers' professional experience and praxis played a crucial role in shaping the study's insights. Furthermore, this discussion contributes to broader conversations on reflexivity by critically examining how researcher identity influences research outcomes and considering its implications for future studies.

References:

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- Yip, S.Y. 2024. Positionality and reflexivity: negotiating insider-outsider positions within and across cultures. *International journal of research & method in education*. 47(3), pp.222–232.



Samuel Lee, PGR, School of Education, University of Leeds

A Messy Interrelated Ecology: Situating Researcher in the Rhizome of Research

How we conceptualise the world around us forms the structures (and constraints) we place upon ourselves when designing research. Through postmodernism, Deleuze & Guattari's (2014) 'rhizome' allows us to radically rethink our position as part of the research process, and indeed how we consider the scope of individual projects. Reflexivity is considered by some to be a significant contributor to the quality control process in qualitative research (Berger, 2015) but reflexivity falls into the trap of assuming our impact is knowable and can be 'countered'. Reflexivity also in many ways maintains the positivist structures of 'validity' and gatekeeping of academic knowledge. By contrast, the rhizomatic postmodernist paradigm allows a radical disruption of norms, the questioning of processes, hierarchies, and authorities.

This paper will examine how an ontological shift from an arborescent to a rhizomatic paradigm changes the position, significance, and performativity of researcher as part of research. Through this process I explore the practical effects of the difference in this paradigmatic shift and discuss the downstream impact on method and analysis.

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Elizabeth Fair, PGR, School of Music, University of Leeds

Developing best practice guidelines for research with the bereaved: Practitioner perspectives.

"Undertaking research on bereavement can be ethically complex due to the perceived vulnerability of the bereaved and discussion of potentially painful topics (Buckle et al., 2010). Guidance on approaching research is often based on researchers' personal experiences (Parkes, 1995), with little-to-no research on the perspectives of bereavement care practitioners (BCPs). This study aimed to increase understanding of the ethical issues involved in bereavement research, drawing on the perspectives of bereavement care practitioners. It examined how research can be carried out in a respectful, ethical and compassionate manner which safeguards the wellbeing of everyone involved. 14 semi-structured interviews with BCPs were conducted in Summer 2024. Interview questions included BCPs' recommendations for participant recruitment and how to safeguard interviewer and interviewee wellbeing, as well as the roles and support offered by charities. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: 'about grief', 'being a BCP' and 'doing research'. 'About grief' covered BCPs' descriptions of grief and the impact of grief on bereaved people's lives. 'Being a BCP' covered the range of support services offered by BCPs, their key characteristics and aims, and the identities held by BCPs. 'Doing research' covered advice from BCPs to researchers, including the participant-researcher relationship, and being participant-led. A set of recommendations were produced from the data, updating previous guidelines. Key findings included a number of actions and considerations for giving participants autonomy and control and navigating the participant-researcher relationship throughout the research process.

References:

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Clare Copley, PGR, School of Education, University of Leeds

Developing best practice guidelines for Lived Experience and Its Influence on the Researcher-Participant Connection

I plan to explore the impact of lived experience on the researcher-participant connection. This will be achieved through exploring my positionality as a woman with a diagnosis of 'dyspraxia' and the mother of a child with Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), conducting research into the impact of sex and gender differences in growing up with DCD. I will explore how my personal experiences, professional perspectives, and emotional connections with DCD has influenced my research design, recruitment processes and interpretation of data.

I will highlight how lived experience, often shaped by cultural, social, and environmental factors, plays a critical role in establishing trust, empathy, and mutual understanding between researchers and participants. This presentation aims to consider the complex dynamics within the relationship between those conducting research and those who participate in it. I plan to explore ethical implications, challenges, and opportunities that arise when lived experience is acknowledged and integrated into the research process, fostering more inclusive and authentic research practices

Asa Ismia Bunga Aisyahrani, MA Childhood Studies, School of Education, University of Leeds

Power, voice, and presence: Navigating research challenges with Indonesian parent-child dyads in the UK

Traditional concepts of parenting tend to highlight dominant parental authority over children (Sevón, 2015). Rather than viewing children as passive recipients, my research seeks to amplify children's voices by exploring the extent to which their agency influences or is constrained by parenting dynamics. Using a mixed-methods embedded design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), I will gather insights from four Javanese Indonesian parent-child dyads residing in the UK to illuminate the complex interplay between parenting dynamics and children's agency, with the aim of improving parenting practices.

Children will engage in self-reflection through drawing or writing (Altalib et al., 2013), followed by semi-structured phenomenological interviews (Bevan, 2014). Meanwhile, parents will complete the Child-Parent Relationship Scale-Short Form (CPRS-SF) questionnaire (Driscoll and Pianta, 2011). Both qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed independently and concurrently before being merged and presented through a side-by-side comparison (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Despite the research being designed with careful consideration, potential challenges may still occur. Establishing rapport with children and gaining rich data from them can be a complex and sensitive process. In addition, parents may experience discomfort with CPRS-SF results, and children may feel vulnerable if their disclosures become known to parents, potentially impacting the parent-child relationship (Davies, 2017). In my presentation, I will share how I navigate these potential challenges during the initial stage of research design, participant recruitment, and data collection, aligning with conference sub-themes 1) Reciprocal Relationships, 2) Cultural Sensitivity, and 3) Power Dynamics.

References:

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Charlotte White, PGR, School of Education, The University of Sheffield

Working with a Research Support Group: Collaboration and care in research methods

In this presentation I explore my collaboration with a Research Support Group (RSG) throughout my PhD study thus far. My research explores Autistic girls experiences of mainstream primary school from the perspectives of primary school teachers and Autistic girls aged 4 to 10 years old. The members of the RSG were invested in the design and progression of the project but did not fit the specifications of the participation group. Instead of being involved in the project as participants, I worked with the RSG members to shape my research design. This is often seen as a Steering group, however the members of the group were happy to call the group an RSG. They shared their enjoyment in helping with the project and made reference to feeling valued for providing their experiences to help shape future research.



The members of the RSG had either a personal or professional relationship with Autistic girls, for example as a parent or Speech and Language therapist. We have met either collaboratively or 1-1 three times. However, since my research is not yet complete, I anticipate more fruitful discussion will be had which further guide my project. In the meetings the group members would share their experiences and hopes for future research regarding Autistic girls experiences. These discussions have helped me as a researcher to adapt my project to suit the needs of the autistic community and reflect on my own position as the researcher. The members of the RSG have helped to curate the research questions and choose appropriate methods for the project. Their input has been invaluable in shaping the aims of my project and challenging hierarchies of knowledge.

During my presentation I will share my own aims of the RSG, the roles that the members took and practical advice for working with a RSG during a PhD research project.

Megan Stock, School of Education, University of Leeds
Navigating cultural sensitivity and researcher positionality without participants

Often utilised as a method to analyse policy due to the focus on language maintaining power and inequalities (Clark et al., 2021; Hyatt, 2013), I am conducting a critical discourse analysis on music education policy and debates, focusing on parliament's representation of inequalities, needs and culture. The purpose is to examine parliament's contribution to the inequalities that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged households face in accessing music education. I do not have participants, but I am handling data of public figures and existing research on inequality. Furthermore, my background is different from that of children who experience inequality of access. Examining my positionality and identity is an active process that I have considered from the start of my doctorate. The aim of this presentation is to explore my approach of being mindful of my positionality and identity to ensure that I can advocate for change from an outsider position without having participants.

Firstly, my presentation would outline my research and the academic justification for the research while identifying that my focus would be on cultural sensitivity and reflexivity. I would explain why I believe that my research is complex especially in regard to researcher-participant dynamics without having participants. The second part would provide an overview of where I am positioned within my research regarding my background and identity alongside my personal justification for undertaking the research and the impact of this regarding my cultural sensitivity and positionality. My presentation will conclude with my approach to understanding and mitigating the impacts while not neglecting or removing my identity.

**Thank you for your
participation in this year's
conference.**

**Organizing Committee,
RSEC18 Conference**

