

The Potential for Vygotskian Sociocultural Perspective in Researching Researcher Development

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Abstract

This paper builds on the recently emerged scholarship of researcher development and considers a potential conceptual framework to inform methodology in research on researcher development. Specifically, I begin by examining the knowledge base of researcher development and discussing a recently proposed agenda for research in the field. I then argue that there is a particular need for a conceptual framework to underpin research on researcher development and consider the potential of a framework that draws upon Vygotskian sociocultural and activity theory. At the end of the paper, I present analysis of qualitative data from existing researcher development literature to illustrate how this framework can be applied empirically.

Keywords: researcher development, sociocultural and activity theory, conceptual framework, research agenda, methodology

1. Introduction

Researcher development is a recently emerged field of scholarship. Its knowledge base is scant in conceptual analyses and debates, and empirically it is heavily dependent on the findings about the development of doctoral researchers. This knowledge base is to be enriched both conceptually and empirically for the field to move forward. In a recent article entitled "*The scholarship of researcher development: mapping the terrain and pushing back boundaries*" by Linda Evans, published in *International Journal for Researcher Development* (Evans, 2011a), Evans makes the first attempt to conceptualize researcher development as a field of research and scholarship and proposes a research agenda for the field. Echoing Evans's urge to take the field forward, the present paper builds on the recently emerged scholarship of researcher development and considers a potential conceptual framework in informing methodology in research on researcher development. Specifically, I begin by examining the knowledge base of researcher development and discussing Evans's proposed agenda for research in the field. I then argue that there is a particular need for a conceptual framework to underpin research on researcher development and consider the potential of a framework that draws upon Vygotskian sociocultural and activity theory. At the end of the paper, I present analysis of qualitative data from existing researcher development literature to illustrate how this framework can be applied empirically.

2. The Knowledge Base of Researcher Development

There are two main strands in the current knowledge base of researcher development: the bulk of empirical studies and the scant scholarship body that addresses the theoretical and conceptual issues in the field. The empirical research base is heavily dependent on studies of doctoral education and their focus on doctoral researchers' experiences (e.g. Golde, 2000; Grover, 2007; Jazvac-Martek, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011; Lundell & Beach, 2003; McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek, & Hopwood, 2009; Robinson, 2008). There has been a lack of focus on the development of other sub-groups such as practitioner-researchers, research staff, academics, early career researchers, and other constituencies contributing to the development of people as or into researchers. There are accounts of how some other groups of researchers and potential researchers develop (e.g. Geiblinger, 2010; Guerin & Ranasinghe, 2010; Zavros, 2010), but they tend to be personal narratives rather than empirical research. Although the field benefits much from these accounts, it also needs empirical data from multiple perspectives to enrich its research base. Commenting on this uneven coverage of research on researcher development, Evans

(2011a) wrote,

How researchers develop during their doctoral education seems currently to constitute the greatest volume of research and scholarship within what may broadly be considered to represent the literature relating to how people develop as or into researchers, or, expressed slightly differently, what the researcher development process involves. (p. 87)

Researcher development is still a nascent field of scholarship, and some major gaps continue to remain. Firstly, although the rich knowledge base of doctoral researchers' development provides a number of insights that has enriched the field to some extent, the uneven focus of research implicates the gaps in the research base that the field needs to address in future research. Secondly, within this extant research base, conceptual clarity and a coherent analytical framework remain absent. Studies have not conceptualized the key concept of researcher development. Methodological orientations have tended to vary due to the lack of a general underpinning conceptual framework.

In comparison with the empirical research strand, the theoretical and conceptual strand is much less established. With three papers (Evans, 2011a, 2011b, 2012), Evans is the principal contributor to this strand of the knowledge base. Within her works, Evans made the first attempt to define researcher development as a field of scholarship. Evans (2011a) brought up several issues for further debate and discussion, including:

- 1) What is researcher development?
- 2) What does the researcher development process involve?
- 3) How may researchers be developed?

In her pioneer attempt to address these issues, Evans defined researcher development as "the process whereby people's capacity and willingness to carry out the research components of their work or studies may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness" (Evans, 2011a, p. 82). According to Evans, researcher development in this sense has three components, namely behavioural development, attitudinal development, and intellectual development. Behavioural development is further deconstructed into processual change, procedural change, productive change, and competential change; attitudinal development into perceptual change, evaluative change, and motivational change; and intellectual development into epistemological change, rationalistic change, comprehensive change, and analytical change. In putting forward the definition and conceptualization of researcher development as above, Evans (2011a) aimed to kick-start debate and discussion around this concept. She also proposed a research agenda for researcher development based on the current state of the art. In the following section of the article, I summarize and discuss this agenda.

3. A Research Agenda for Researcher Development

Identifying researcher development as a recently emerged field of scholarship with its uneven focus on different constituencies and a lack of concern for conceptual clarity and definitional precision, Evans (2011a) proposed a research agenda for researcher development, on which she placed *processes*, *concepts*, *contexts*, and *policy* highest.

3.1 Processes

Under this item of the research agenda, Evans (2011a) identified the need for the field to enrich its knowledge base relating to how certain constituencies develop and the process in which research cultures develop. She emphasized that we need to increase our understanding of the developmental processes of not only researchers and potential researchers but also those who are responsible for the development of others as or into researchers, such as academic development professionals or academics in research leadership roles. According to Evans (2011a, p. 92), the key questions need addressing in this respect include:

What does the micro-level development process in individuals involve? (i.e. How does it occur?)

What motivates people to do research?

How do world class researchers (such as potential Nobel laureates) develop?

An increased interest in the process of development has been observed in similar development-related fields. For example, in the field of second language teacher education, which has been shifting towards constructivist, process-oriented theories of second language teacher education (Crandall, 2000; Silva, 2005), studies on the process of second language teacher learning have offered insights into how teachers develop in specific contexts and what supports or hinders teacher development process (e.g. Farrell, 2001; Farrell, 2008; Silva, 2005). Within

the field of researcher development, processes have also received much attention (e.g. Golde, 2000; Jazvac-Martek, et al., 2011; McAlpine, et al., 2009; Robinson, 2008). However, most of the existing research literature focuses on the development of doctoral students. Although there are several accounts of how some other groups of researchers and potential researchers develop (e.g. Geiblinger, 2010; Guerin & Ranasinghe, 2010; Zavros, 2010), these are mostly personal narratives and still much more scant in comparison with the number of studies on doctoral researchers' development. Therefore, I concur with Evans's (2011a) recommendation that field need to have many more research studies in this respect.

3.2 Concepts

While acknowledging the fundamental role of conceptual clarity and definitional precision, Evans (2011a, 2011b) observed a current lack of concern for these issues in social sciences in general and researcher development in particular. Therefore, she suggested the field build up a knowledge base of more conceptual analyses of researcher development and related concepts such as research capacity; researchers; research leaders; research developers and research cultures.

The issue of conceptual ambiguity is not exclusively expressed in researcher development, but a concern for any discipline. In language teacher education, for example, Borg (2003) notes that "identical terms have been defined in different ways and different terms have been used to describe similar concepts" (p. 83). Sometimes, studies use identical terms, but their underlying frameworks vary (Borg, 2006). While acknowledging the necessity of "terminological innovation", Borg noted that this conceptual inconsistency has led to "definitional confusion" (2003, p. 83). Therefore, it is really important for researcher development as a newly emerged field of scholarship to engage in conceptual analyses to enrich the field as Evans (2011a, 2011b) has noted. In addition to the concepts that Evans suggested above, I consider 'context' as another key concept that needs theoretical conceptualization in its own right. I believe that contexts are specific and might not be transferable. Whether context is local, institutional, national, or global, it needs to be conceptualized by a coherent conceptual framework so that findings can be aggregated and comparisons drawn across studies.

3.3 Contexts

Evans (2011a) highlighted the need for "focused attention" (p. 94) on the contexts of researcher development as "they offer much potential for widening the field's parameters and deepening its analytical capacity" (p. 93). Evans contended that the field would be enriched through a widened range of contexts under examination as well as comparison, contrast, and reasoning of distinctions and disparity across contexts. Taking into account contexts could support the field in answering questions related to how contexts influence processes and how they shape perceptions and conceptualizations in researcher development. This interest in context has been raised elsewhere, such as second language teacher education (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Golombek, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Singh & Richards, 2006; Waters, 2005). Given the significance of deliberate attention on contexts in advancing the field, the research base on the context of researcher development needs to be enriched. In the meantime, studies need to maintain conceptual clarity and scholarship works need to focus on theoretical conceptualization of the context.

3.4 Policy

Although Evans (2011a) considers policy as a contextual issue, she placed it as a separate item high on the agenda due to its significant role in shaping researcher development-related practice. According to Evans (2011a) policy is "an avenue well worth exploring – one that could become a main thoroughfare and defining feature of the field's landscape" (p. 94). Several directions for research in this respect include "coverage and consideration of new policy measures (in a range of contexts) and examination of the appropriateness and desirability of researcher development-related policy – both official policy and hegemonic practice that has effectively become transmuted into unofficial policy" (Evans, 2011a, p. 94). From a language teacher education perspective, as a greater awareness of context has been included in research on language teacher practice, Cross (2010) considered policies as "a key sociocultural 'tool' that mediate the genesis of teacher activity" and believed that "it will become increasingly necessary to account for the political dimension of how and what language teachers think and do" (p. 441). I believe that the need to understand the role of policy and its relationships with sociocultural practice are apparent across different fields including researcher development.

4. The Need for a Conceptual Framework to Underpin Research on Researcher Development

Based on the gaps in the current knowledge base of researcher development and Evans's (2011a) proposed agenda for the field, this section of the paper outlines the need for a conceptual framework to support research on researcher development.

First, it is now clear that there is a need for conceptual clarity and definitional precision. Evans has made the first attempts to address this need by proposing a definition of researcher development and a conceptual framework to understand the componential structure of it (Evans, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). However, as the field is set to overcome its uneven coverage and looks at not only doctoral researchers but also other constituencies, it will accordingly look at varied contexts of researcher development. Therefore, a conceptual framework is needed to allow for consistent definition of context at a broader conceptual level and to enable aggregation and comparison of findings across contexts.

Second, within the current knowledge base, there still remains a lack of concern for a conceptual framework to inform methodology of research on researcher development. Although Evans's (2011a) research agenda has proposed some key directions for the field to move forwards, it does not concern methodological issues, which are also essential in the development of an academic discipline. Given the complexities of researcher development process, a broad analytical framework is needed to take into account the multidimensional factors inherent in this process.

Third, Evans's (2011a, 2011b, 2012) componential structure of researcher development is a useful framework in identifying evidence of researcher development. However, Evans also acknowledged that using this framework alone, as illustrated by her data analysis (Evans, 2011b, 2012), is only useful for understanding researcher development at micro level within each individual and only "shows what researcher development is, rather than how it occurs" (Evans, 2011b, p. 31). When it comes to understanding the sociocultural roots of researcher development, this model needs to be considered using with other frameworks that can account for this sociocultural process and its context.

Furthermore, Evans (2011a) mentioned the need for the field to "raise itself above a level that is represented by simplistic descriptive accounts that lack depth and rigour" (p.86). This is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) argument that "mere description does not reveal the actual causal-dynamic relations that underlie phenomena." (p. 62). From a Vygotskian perspective, in order to overcome the simplistic descriptive nature of research, it is essential to have a special framework to analyse psychological processes in relation to their place and origin. This framework must allow for both description and explanation of phenomena. Such a framework has potential to address the key question raised by Evans (2011a): "what is it that prompts and sets in motion such changes [i.e. researcher development]– or ideas for change – inside researchers' heads?" (p.88).

In summary, the gaps in the current knowledge base of researcher development implicate that the field needs a conceptual framework that can allow for a broad conceptualization of context, inform research methodology, and support analysis of researcher development in relation to its origin. I end this section by referring to a similar issue in the field of language teacher education and citing Borg's (2006) conclusion:

[A coherent conceptual framework] militates against the accumulation of isolated studies conducted without sufficient awareness of how these relate to existing work; it reminds researchers of key dimensions in the study of language teacher cognition; and it highlights key themes, gaps and conceptual relationships and promotes more focused attention to these. (p. 284)

5. The Potential for a Vygotskian Sociocultural Perspective in Researching Researcher Development

In this section of the paper, I propose a conceptual framework that draws upon a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective and discuss what it can offer to address the concerns discussed in the preceding section. Given the increased influence of Vygotskian sociocultural theory in social sciences, I only focus on the aspects of it that are key to the discussion in this article, namely genetic method and activity theory, and the implications they have for research on researcher development.

5.1 Genetic Method as a Framework for Analysing Researcher Development

A principal theme of Vygotskian sociocultural theory is the social origins of human mental development. Vygotsky (1981) claimed that higher mental functioning in the individual is rooted in the individual's social relations. He formulated this view in the general genetic law of cultural development.

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category.... Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships." (p. 163)

Within Vygotsky's work, there is a prominent view that the nature of higher mental functions is social, and it is essential to understand the intermental functioning in order to understand the intramental functioning in the

individual (i.e. the higher mental functioning).

Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development is closely connected with his genetic method, which rests on the assumption that the only way to understand many aspects of human mental functioning is to understand their origin and the very process by which they are formed (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky noted:

To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for “it is only in movement that a body shows what it is”. Thus, the historical study of behaviour is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base. As P.P. Blonsky has stated, “Behavior can be understood only as the history of behavior.” (p.65)

Vygotsky argued that two types of process can have identical external manifestation but their nature may differ most profoundly. He found it essential to have special means of scientific analysis to discover the internal differences under external similarities. Vygotsky proposed genetic method to indicate a focus on analysing process, not objects and distinguished his genetic method from methods that analyse psychological processes without considering their place and development.

According to Vygotsky, “mere description does not reveal the actual causal-dynamic relations that underlie phenomena” (1978, p. 62) and “everyday human behaviour can be understood only by disclosing the presence of four general fundamental genetic stages through which behavioural development passes” (1981, p. 156). His genetic method involves four levels of analysis, or four genetic domains, according to their relationship with physical time, namely *phylogenesis*, *sociocultural history*, *ontogenesis*, and *microgenesis*. Cole and Engeström (1993) illustrated the relationship among the four genetic domains as in Figure 1.

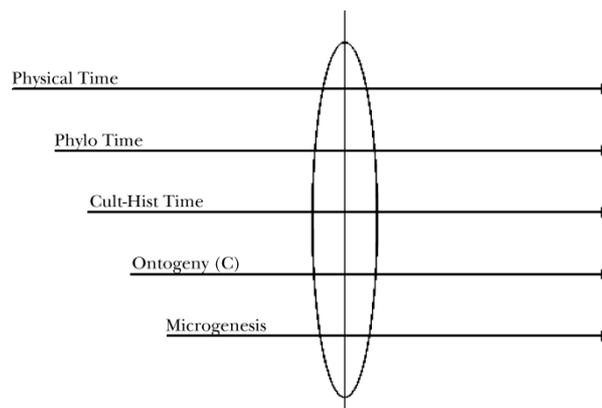


Figure 1. Sociocultural theoretical domains of genetic analysis (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p. 20)

Cross (2010) explained the genetic domains as follows:

[T]he phylogenetic domain concerns the development of humankind as a natural species (i.e., physical evolution), the cultural–historic focuses on development in terms of the broader “external” world within which humans exist (i.e., the social, cultural, and historic basis for development), and ontogenesis shifts the focus to development of the individual subject across the human life span. This, itself, is the culmination of microgenetic development—the momentary instances of concrete, practical activity that subjects engage in with the world around them. (p. 438-439; italics in the original)

In terms of the implications that genetic method has for research on researcher development, it offers a theoretical framework that enables us to take an explanatory approach to researching researcher development, which has potential to overcome the lack of depth and rigour in descriptive accounts (Evans, 2011a) that represent most of the existing research base of researcher development. A genetic analytic approach allows for an emphasis on the process of researcher development in relation to its history. This legitimates an explanation of why researchers, researchers-to-be, or other constituencies come to do what they do in the process. For example, in order to understand researcher development (e.g. behavioural changes, attitudinal changes, or intellectual changes) in people developing as or into researchers, we need to look at their ontogenetic development (e.g. background, experience, and history) and the broader cultural-historic domain comprised of policies, rules, community (including all the other people involved in the researcher development process and their relationships), and the division of roles and responsibilities within the community.

A unit of analysis is also an important consideration for research within this broad framework. At this point, I turn to Vygotsky's concept of mediation and its extended form of activity theory and consider its implications for analysing researcher development.

5.2 Sociocultural Activity as a Unit of Analysis for the Study of Researcher Development

Vygotsky consistently argues that the mind develops through our interaction with the world around us (Rieber & Carton, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981) and our contact with the world is an indirect relationship. Artefacts (e.g. language, books, and numbers) are mediating tools for humans to master higher mental functions. Vygotsky's concept of mediation has become familiar and has much influence in social sciences. However, according to Engeström and Miettinen (1999), its exclusive focus on the individual performing actions in a world of objects rather than the idea of historicity and the collective nature of human activity makes it problematic, especially when it is considered an attempt to understand the sociocultural context of the action. Engeström and Miettinen (1999) noted, "Individuals act in collective practices, communities, and institutions. Such collective practices are not reducible to sums of individual action; they require theoretical conceptualization in their own right" (p. 11). To address the problem, other scholars, led by Leontiev (1981), expanded Vygotsky's mediation concept to what is known as activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Smidt, 2009).

Although Leontiev and colleagues expanded Vygotsky's concept of mediation by crucially distinguishing an individual action and a collective activity, the graphic model of collective activity system had not been put forward before Engeström (1987) illustrated the activity system, which is the unit of analysis in activity theory, as in Figure 2.

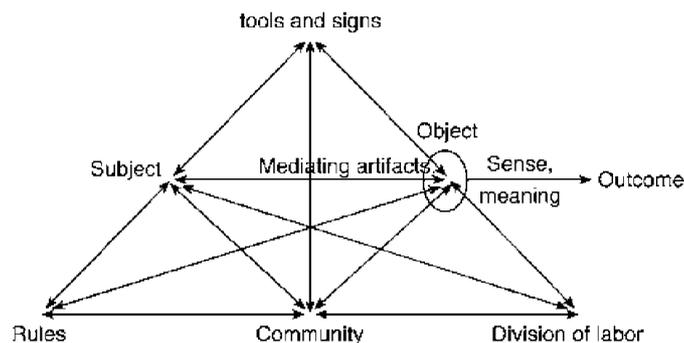


Figure 2. The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

According to the model in Figure 2, the activity system is comprised of the subject, tools, object, rules, community, and division of labour. The primary focus of the analysis is the production part which involves the subject (the individual or group of actors engaged in the activity), tools (anything mediating the transformation process) and the object (what is acted on or aimed at by the subject). However, the subject, tools, and object do not exist in a vacuum but are situated in a context and they must be understood in the context, which is made up of the community (the immediate environment where all the other components of the system are inserted), rules (the norms regulating the subject's actions), and division of labour (the allocation of responsibility to the community members in relation to the object). This social part of the activity system is where the limitation of Vygotsky's individual focus is overcome.

Activity theory offers a unit of analysis for research on researcher development. In analysing researcher development, what the researcher-subject does or thinks cannot be understood without considering its context, which is conceptualized as including the community within which it exists, the rules that regulate it, and the allocation of roles and responsibilities within its community. Each of the components of the activity system of researcher development under analysis also comes with its own history that needs to be taken into account in analysing researcher development.

6. Analysing Researcher Development from a Sociocultural Perspective: An Example

In this section of the paper, I focus on analysis of data drawn from the extant literature on researcher development. This analysis example aims to illustrate how Vygotskian sociocultural and activity theory can be applied in research on researcher development. In this example, I used Nguyen's (2012) narrative account as the data for analysis, Engeström's (1987) activity system as the unit of analysis, Evans's (2011a) componential model of researcher development as a way to analyse the structure of researcher development, and Vygotsky's (1978, 1981) genetic method as a framework to understand the sources of the development.

6.1 Object

Nguyen's (2012) narrative account on her transition from a lecturer to a doctoral researcher shows that she had two major objects. The first object was to upgrade her qualification. It emerged from "the constraints in research practices and the limited promotional opportunities" (p. 94) that she encountered at her home university in Vietnam. Nguyen's second object was to become an international researcher. The source of motivation for this object was her involvement in a journal editorial board and collaboration with a project team in working on an international book project. She noted on this object:

As my candidature commenced, I also officially became a reviewing editor at an academic journal. The collaboration I have with my reviewing team and the role I play in knowledge creation are great opportunities for me to actively socialize into the international academia and provide service to my profession. Apart from that, I also take part in a book project. The book, edited by one of my supervisors, is aimed for publication in the international academic market. This exciting project and my collaboration with the project team are a great source of inspiration for me to determine to become a professional international researcher. (p. 96)

6.2 Tools

The main tools that mediated Nguyen's development into and as a researcher include her Master's courses, interactions with other academics, PhD scholarships, seminars, workshops, conferences, library resources, and engagement with research as a lecturer and a supervisor. Following is an episode that shows how interactions with other academics during Nguyen's Master's study influenced her desire to become a researcher:

The nurturing, scaffolding interactions I had with my supervisors, lecturers and fellow students and the courses I attended had great influence on how I viewed myself as an academic and who I wanted to become – a professional researcher. (p. 94)

Similarly, note how other tools including scholarship, seminars, workshops, conferences, and resources mediated her development into a researcher in the following example:

As a fully-funded student, I am fortunate not to have to cope with financial issues, which gives me the opportunities to focus on my studies. I also have chances to participate in many seminars, workshops, and conferences and have access to virtually all the resources needed for my research to take place. (p. 96)

6.3 Outcomes

The tools enabled Nguyen to realize her objects and achieve the outcomes of the process of her development into and as a researcher. Using Evans's (2001a, 2001b) componential structure of researcher development, I can see from Nguyen's account that she had undergone *behavioural, attitudinal, and intellectual development* in this process. In terms of *behavioural development*, Nguyen explicitly reported several *productive changes*. Following is an example from the account:

The following year saw me publish several papers in international journals and in the proceedings of a regional conference [...] I also started collecting data for some other research projects planned for publishing internationally. (p. 95)

Nguyen's *attitudinal development* can also be seen clearly in the following extract:

They [The Master's courses] changed the way I saw research, language teaching and learning, and therefore challenged the old way I viewed myself as an academic. I started thinking about the teaching – research nexus, viewing teaching as the source of research ideas, and valuing the contributions of research to solving teaching – learning problems. (p. 94)

Apparently, Nguyen had come a long way from viewing research as "a burden added to the many different tasks apart from teaching that a lecturer was required to complete" (p. 94), a "painful experience" (p. 95) to seeing it as "a joyful activity" (p. 95). She reasoned her *attitudinal development*:

My engagement with research as a lecturer and supervisor during this time reinforced my research competence, passion and self-efficacy. I learnt to see research as a joyful activity rather than the painful experience I viewed it in the past. (p. 95)

6.4 Ontogenetic Analysis: Beliefs, Background, and Experiences

Information about Nguyen's beliefs, background and experiences can be very powerful in explaining her practice in the process of becoming a researcher. It is clear that her beliefs about research and its roles in academic

activity had great impact on her research practice. For example, when Nguyen first started her academic career in Vietnam, she considered research as “a burden” rather than something beneficial to her teaching. This belief or attitude explained why she did research simply because she was required to.

As a lecturer I was required to do at least one research project in each academic year, and that was perhaps the only source of motivation for me to do research during this time. I was not able to see the valuable benefits that classroom research can offer teachers and learners.... Producing a research paper each year was simply a way to survive as an academic staff member. (p. 94)

This is in contrast with Nguyen’s approach to research at the time when she had come to believe in the role of research in solving teaching – learning problems and in the importance of research publications in applying for doctoral study and becoming an international researcher. These beliefs reportedly kept her on track with research activity and triggered an increase in the number of her research outputs.

In Nguyen’s account, she also gave particular importance to her background and past experiences as a lecturer at a language teacher education university, her Master’s education, and her research experiences.

There is a strong link between my lecturer experience and my international research activities. In my current doctoral research role, I have brought together my professional and academic experiences, knowledge, skills and expertise. My understanding of how language learning and teaching occurs and how teachers learn to teach has contributed to the development of my research interests and epistemological approach to research. My research is tied to my home context, especially my expertise, because from scratch I have always wanted my studies to contribute to transformation of practice in this context. My career as a lecturer provided invaluable apprenticeship for my current role as a researcher. (p. 97)

These experiences reportedly had great influence on Nguyen’s development into and as a researcher. The excerpt above shows that her development of research interests and epistemological stance was shaped by the academic and professional experiences she had and it was also linked to the context where she came from.

6.5 Cultural-historic Analysis

Similar to ontogenetic analysis, cultural-historic analysis has potential to explain what happened in the process of researcher development. Analysis of the community, rules, and division of labour is presented below to illustrate the explanatory power of sociocultural genetic method.

6.5.1 Community

In the process of developing into and as a researcher, Nguyen participated in a number of communities. Some examples include the academic community in New Zealand, the Vietnamese teacher educators that she worked with, her family, the academic community in Australia, and the journal editorial board of which she was a member. It became very clear in the data that community was another key influence on the way Nguyen positioned herself as the subject of her researcher development activity and the kinds of experiences she had within the activity system. For example, describing the academic community that she interacted with during her Master’s study as “a diverse community of academics”, which included “world leading scholars in applied linguistics”, “supervisors, lecturers and fellow students”, she acknowledged its influence on her academic identity and aspiration. Similarly, as she participated in a journal editorial board and a book project team and published her research in international journals and conferences, she thought, “these activities affirm my membership of the global academia as a researcher.” Moreover, Nguyen described the many professional development experiences she had after her Master’s degree as attributed to the opportunity “to work in a fast-track English teacher education programme with a team of lecturers who had rich experience in teacher education.”

6.5.2 Rules

Nguyen’s participation in each of the communities was regulated by its own rules or policies, a number of which were reported to play influential roles in her development into a researcher. An example is the Australian PhD scholarship and admission selection criteria that she was exposed to when she contacted an Australian professor in her application process. Nguyen noted on the PhD recruitment policy and how it influenced her research practice and outcomes:

They reminded me that it was publications that counted and that I needed to put all my research skills and interests onto publications if I was determined to go on to PhD studies. That awareness has helped keep me on track with research. The following year saw me publish several papers in

international journals and in the proceedings of a regional conference. (p. 95)

Moreover, human research ethics rules at her Australian university also changed the way Nguyen conducted her research. She explained that in Vietnam researchers do not need to apply for ethics clearance. If human subjects agreed to participate in their research, researchers could start data collection process. However, in Australia,

as I want to observe a teacher in her classroom with students under 18, regardless of the fact that I only focus on the teacher, I have to apply to the university Human Ethics Committee and the DEECD and obtain approval from many people including the principal of the teacher's school, the teacher, and the parents of every single student in the class. I also have to provide a detailed description of my research plan to convince the committees that my research does not do any harm to the participants. (p. 97)

6.5.3 Division of Labour

The data show that Nguyen had different roles and responsibilities within the communities she participated in. It became clear that these roles and responsibilities heavily influenced how she viewed herself as the researcher-subject and her development into and as a researcher. In the following excerpt, Nguyen explained one aspect of her job as a lecturer in Vietnam and how it contributed to the unraveling of a researcher in her:

One aspect of my work during this period involved mentoring and supervising preservice teachers on teaching practice.... I became interested in researching scaffolding for preservice TESOL teachers during the practicum with a view that my research findings would be able to inform and transform practicum organization. (p. 94)

Besides, Nguyen also reported having tensions and challenges in the development process due to her multiple roles and responsibilities, some of which were conflicting. For example, she noted on the challenges she had when she first started her PhD in Australia:

During the first few months, settling my family in demanded a great deal of time. Given the limited amount of time in each day, the need to devote full time and effort to my PhD research, my participation in other academic activities and the time I needed to spend for my family, I had to work many extra hours and make a sound plan to manage all the activities. (p. 96)

The analysis example presented above is admittedly a much truncated one, given the complexities of researcher development and the time span in the subject's narrative account. This analysis also relied on a secondary and single source of data. As a result, insights from different sources of data would have been missed out from the analysis.

However, the example has provided some interesting insights into Nguyen's researcher development process. Most importantly, sociocultural and activity theory as a theoretical framework has made it possible for me to see not only the *what* (*what was involved in researcher development*) and the *how* (*how the subject developed into and as a researcher*), but also the *why* (*why the subject developed that way*) of this process. This is indeed one of the most powerful applications of a sociocultural theoretical framework in developmental research.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have engaged in the knowledge base of researcher development with a specific focus on discussing a research agenda for the field proposed by Evans (2011a). Although I concur with the points Evans made in putting forward the agenda, I believe some other items could well be considered high on the agenda, such as a unifying conceptualization of context of researcher development and a theoretical framework to support research on researcher development so that findings can be aggregated and compared across studies in different contexts. As a small contribution to addressing these gaps, I have discussed the potential for a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective in supporting this research. I have argued that a sociocultural genetic method could serve as a powerful lens to both describe and explain researcher development and that activity theory could offer a unit of analysis for analysing researcher development within this framework. I have also presented a truncated analysis example to illustrate how researcher development could be understood from a sociocultural perspective. In this analysis I used Evans's (2011a, 2011b) componential structure of researcher development as a guideline for this analysis.

Although the analysed data were limited, the multidimensional factors inherent in the process of the subject's development into a researcher, how she underwent this process, and why she developed in such a way were revealed. It is believed that if more sources of empirical data are used in similar research, they will be able to provide more diverse insights. Such research could have potential for theory building. Since it contributes to the

conceptualization of researcher development, its findings could contribute to the discussion around the componential structure of researcher development that Evans (2011a) has called for. To conclude, I concur with Evans in emphasizing that the potential and application of a sociocultural theoretical framework discussed in this article are open for debating and discussing. I believe that extending such forum will contribute greatly to the cause of moving the field forwards.

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