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Reconnaissance work in educational research: an exploration under pandemic conditions

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the emerging concept and method of reconnaissance in educational research through the lens of Rhythmanalysis and the work of Henri Lefebvre which explores the rhythms of the everyday within capitalism. The research was undertaken during the period of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 and involved postgraduate students and their supervisors across two Higher Education Institutions situated respectively in the North of England and the West Midlands. A reconnaissance exercise was undertaken on the use of reconnaissance itself as a research methodology under the demanding conditions in education of the pandemic. The findings from this brief exercise give voice to the role and nature of researcher curiosity and informality in research by exploring the value of reconnaissance as an approach to ‘grasping rhythms’ and challenges to familiarity during the pandemic.

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Introduction

Morbidity and mortality are seldom companions in the conventional journeying of educational research and yet they have become ubiquitous within the current pandemic context. For Delamont *et al.* (2010) educational researchers as experienced professionals in the field have long faced a familiarity problem; their criticality may be compromised by being too close to the very practice that they are attempting to research. However, arguably the contemporary challenge for researchers can perhaps be better described and understood as the unfamiliarity problem which implies convulsive change in education with diminishing certainty and predictability. We are forced therefore to ask how researchers can address this unfamiliarity problem given the likelihood that they too are also under additional pressures in the pandemic as practitioners on the ‘front line’ of educational provision and student engagement. In response to this challenge, although at a partial level, the paper will explore the concept of reconnaissance work in educational research as a method that may well prove to be advantageous. Moreover, it is the central contention of this paper that while we tend to talk a lot about the formalities of methodology, research design and ethical decision-making in research communities, the informal – or *internal* – aspects of research tend to be neglected. A such,

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reconnaissance as a concept and method has been under researched in education and it is certainly worthy of recognition and development as it moves beyond its origins.

Furthermore, the concept and method of reconnaissance in this paper will be addressed and explored through the lens of Henri Lefebvre and particularly his notion of Rhythmanalysis (2017). For Lefebvre, a pressing aspect of the everyday in capitalism was the prevalence and significance of rhythms although this had been relatively neglected in the work of Marx. In the everyday, ‘the commodity prevails over everything. (Social) space and (social) time dominated by exchanges, become the time and space of markets; although not being *things* but including rhythms, they enter into products’ (Lefebvre, 2017:16). Indeed, all too often it would seem for Lefebvre that the everyday seeks to ‘conceal the production of repetitive time’ (2017: 16) providing the Rhythmanalyst with the task of unearthing rhythms as both objects and mode of analysis and critique. ‘Everywhere where there is a rhythm there is a *measure*, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project’ (Lefebvre, 2017: 18).

In a deceptively simple metaphor in Chapter 3 of Rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre describes at some length looking out of his apartment window in Paris and the delight of viewing and perusing from his balcony everyday life in the street below. With this act of reconnaissance in what is arguably the key chapter in the book (Lyon 2021) Lefebvre begins to engage with the Parisian rhythms that surround him. ‘In order to grasp the fleeting object, which is not exactly an object, it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside’ (Lefebvre 2017:27). Therefore, perhaps at its most elementary and visceral-level Rhythmanalysis involves attention to both listening and observation *in situ*: first to one’s own body in the everyday and then increasingly to its widening space and temporal context.

However, Lefebvre also provides a methodological imperative to this mode of analysis: ‘to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it: one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration’ (2017: 38). Furthermore, for Lefebvre rhythms are often expressed in terms of repetition and difference. Each apparent repetition or return of the rhythm engenders an element of change and the pattern is never an exact repeat of itself. For Lefebvre, this dialectic of repetition and difference is potentially the thread of time. Therefore, what is possibly at stake here in this paper, at the methodological level and ‘seen from the window’ (2017: 37) with Lefebvre is that Rhythmanalysis can be conceived as an embodied approach; where reconnaissance includes feeling how rhythms are lived.

Reconnaissance work as concept and research method

Reconnaissance work at its basic operational level and in its most immediate and accessible form can be conceptualised as an exercise in ‘fact-finding’ (Ivankova 2014) or ‘information gathering’ (Walsh and Moss 2010) undertaken at an early stage within action research. Whilst reconnaissance originated within the action research tradition it can nonetheless arguably be utilised by other research paradigms and contexts. In short, it has the potential to move beyond its origins. The concept of reconnaissance is useful in educational research in the way that it can enable the researcher to draw out pieces of information about existing fields, practices and experiences which shape the facets of the ‘puzzle’ which is the locus of the research (Walsh and Moss 2010). These ‘information

gathering' approaches can include visiting potential research spaces and locations for the purpose of carrying out some initial and informal observational scoping, concept mapping and researcher pondering. Visits may be in person, virtual or a judicious hybrid of the two. On return, reflective and learning conversations can be held collectively with other researchers who have been involved with their own similar reconnaissance work. The reconnaissance findings are not reported in any detail in the final writing up of the research; they are formative or transitional in nature. Nonetheless, the reconnaissance process itself can be discussed at some length in the written account of the research with its impact on the thinking of the researcher identified. For example, how the reconnaissance may have informed and shaped the ethical considerations in the research, the research design and the mobilisation of theory and methodology.

For Wisker, 'charting and recording what exists' (Wisker 2008; 264) is an early and elementary task in research. It is a necessary aid and prerequisite to the later and more complex stage of formal data-collection and analysis. However, in order to develop the concept of reconnaissance further it may be of value to think it through using a Rhythmanalysis stance (Lefebvre: 2014) and consider the act of reconnaissance and the related skills of *reconnoitre* in terms of an epistemic rhythm. This rhythm constitutes a certain pattern or pulse which includes investigation, observation, patrol, return and reflection. The requirement to return and reflect on the findings is a central repetitive aspect of the rhythm. Each iteration of the rhythm being in some important if subtle ways different from the last as research experience, knowledge and learning accumulate. Indeed, this relationship between repetition and difference central to the analysis of Lefebvre (2017) is arguably also at the heart of what it means to *reconnoitre* in educational research. For example, effective reconnaissance is rarely a single one-off act or event but rather entails repetitive returns with new and differing experiences being gathered. More precisely, the necessity for return elicits the opportunity to observe what is repetitive and different in the research space including the work of time and temporality. Furthermore, it may be possible to identify, capture and analyse this rhythm, if only in a fleeting and partial way by the researcher conducting an informal version of the self-interview (Keightley et al., 2012) at the crucial iterative point of return and reflection.

On occasion, however, the rhythm of reconnaissance can be noticeably subdued and understated; a certain murmuring in the research process. Indeed, this may take the form of apparently loitering at research locations or what Powell and Somerville (2018) characterise perhaps more extensively as 'a deep hanging out' where the very informality and inarticulacy of the situation itself becomes a purposeful method. *To reconnoitre is to loiter* may well be an amusing *aid memoir* for research students yet the imperatives and skills of curiosity are never far away. The murmuring within the research, continuous and contiguous, is an involuntary reconnaissance narrative of questions, observations and reflections.

Using reconnaissance work therefore can be an effective way to gain information in an emergent and flexible way, as questions unfold as the researcher pursues what makes sense (Patton 2014). As Patton explains, rapid reconnaissance can be particularly useful in fields of Social Science where a crisis is being experienced and studied and when a quickly changing dynamic may occur.

The current pandemic is arguably just such a crisis and it may have the potential to provide a severe jolt if not a corrective to the familiarity problem in educational research discussed by Delamont *et al.* (2010). Indeed, for Reay (2020) this familiarity problem has become so severe in recent years that there is a noticeable inward looking and hegemonic preoccupation with 'what works' in educational research (Biesta 2017). Arguably, many professionals hold on to an 'unambitious, conformist perspective' (Thrupp 2001: 446) which is itself part of a wider picture of epistemic frailty. This stance is accompanied by a grudging acceptance, often masked as pragmatism regarding the dominant language, assumptions and policy frames of neo-liberalism. In order to break out of this limiting and self-limiting circularity Reay (2020) demands not only a heightened level of reflexivity in research but also a certain political ethic of fearlessness in the face of orthodoxy.

From a Lefebvreian perspective the pandemic moment within neo-liberalism is certainly fraught with danger but also ripe with potential and possibilities. Moments are in many ways compressions in the everyday of time and space that 'gives itself as presence and seeks the effects of presences' (Lefebvre, 2017: 32). Indeed, moments also enable or at least facilitate the 'the answer to strange questions' (Lefebvre 2017; 23). Within the intensity of the pandemic moment, therefore, the old monsters of social inequality and epistemic injustice may well reappear but new progressive movements, perspectives and struggles can also arise. The call by Reay (2020) for a fearless response within these swirling contestations therefore amounts to the possibility of a new beginning for educational research itself.

Perhaps given the magnitude of the pandemic moment it is appropriate not to over emphasise the casual aspects of reconnaissance work or convey a sense if unwittingly of a low friction endeavour. For the stakes in the Lefebvreian moment are always high and consequential. Even loitering on the 'front line' is not without its jeopardy which is amplified further by the researchers stumbling attempts to traverse this new, unfamiliar and possibly inhospitable territory. Furthermore, the epistemic rhythm of reconnaissance, including its inherent loitering and stumbling, has to operate within the shifting and often brutal economy of research credibility. For Fricker (2007) this credibility is inextricably linked to the attainment of a position she describes as the knower. To become a knower one must first confront silences and then engage with and explore one's own testimony. The credibility of the knower is also evidenced or at least marked by 'the presence of some property that correlates well with true belief' (Fricker 2007: 144). Indeed, the process of becoming a knower and more particularly 'the very idea of the knower' (Fricker 2007: 142) is also arguably the epistemic charge within the rhythm of reconnaissance.

Ivankova (2014) identifies the benefits of researchers engaging with reconnaissance work to inform the development of actions in the next stages of the research. As she says, meta-inferences can be created during reconnaissance work which may prompt the researcher to return to research design in order to fine tune data collection plans, or to revisit a conceptual framework and the research questions which underpin the research project as a whole. Similarly, Walsh and Moss (2010) describe 'stage one reconnaissance' which incorporates the collection of some baseline data and subsequent concept mapping enables the researcher to identify and clarify the 'puzzle' in question. Therefore, perhaps it is fair to say that overall, the time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted. However, in order to explore this claim further and the related credibility of the approach some

reconnaissance work on reconnaissance itself as a concept and method may well prove to be necessary and informative.

Reconnaissance in Covid-19 times

Clearly, we in education fields can take a lead from Lefebvre's perusal of life in Paris from his balcony and in certain ways begin to analyse educational responses and the impact on individuals of the Covid-19 in England, as well as internationally. This act of reconnaissance provides us with insights into some of the ways in which the interaction of diverse, repetitive and different rhythms animated experiences of education communities during the pandemic, much as Lefebvre engaged with the arrhythmic symphony of the Parisian streets around him.

During the first wave of the pandemic, educational establishments – schools, colleges, universities, and the like – closed to the majority of students and staff on 20 March 2020. While many schools fully re-opened for students in September 2020, the majority of universities and colleges did not, and a further full closure of establishments was experienced January – March 2021. The sudden and unprecedented response to the pandemic led to a shift to 'remote' education, comprising online instruction or, for schools, a hybrid model where online instruction was supplemented or replaced with physical resources for students who were unable to access online schooling. This has been described by some as emergency remote teaching, 'a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances' (Hodges et al., 2020). Whatever the approach taken, the result for educators was that the nature of their professional role changed radically, and almost overnight.

Lefebvre, from his balcony, observes the contrast of modern and historical buildings in the streets below, the strange contrasts appearing 'absurd' (2017:43), and the modern 'a meteorite fallen from another planet, where technology reigns untrammelled' (*ibid.*). Kim and Asbury (2020) similarly highlight how the shift to the 'modern' from the 'archaic', the move from perpetual routines of schooling to an online, technological environment, provoked fundamental challenges to educators' professional identity. In their empirical work throughout the first wave of the pandemic, they identified concerns that remote ways of working were in conflict with educators' core values, which tended to align with hegemonic socio-cultural moral and social justice expectations of teachers embodying shared values such as being caring, nurturing and fair (Lupton and Thrupp 2013, Boylan and Woolsey 2015). Similarly, Berry (2020) describes experiences of disorientation, including disconnection with others and working within unfamiliar and uncertain conditions, in his work as a teacher during the first wave of the pandemic. The relationship between repetition and difference central to Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis (2017) is arguably also at the heart of educators' experiences teacher during the pandemic response, manifesting in unfamiliarity and unanticipated shifts which transcended what had been before.

Reconnaissance on reconnaissance in the fields of education

The context of professional researchers in the fields of education may well provoke critical scrutiny of the transposition of research activities during Covid-19 across places,

institutions, and professional identity[ies] as individuals [re]locate themselves in heterogeneous cultures of their profession and research communities. Exploring the complexity of how professionals engage in research activity has been widely discussed elsewhere, not least through conceptualisations of research as ‘inquiry made public’ (Stenhouse 1975) and critical action research (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

However, invoking reconnaissance of professionals who are also researchers during a global pandemic potentially leads to consideration of how these individuals establish meaning, relevance and value associated with their research activities in relation to their own learning and transformational or developmental processes as they may be expected or experienced. Based in Lefebvre’s approach, reconnaissance of these professionals as researchers may provide an initial critical lens through which we can interpret their relations between their spatio-temporal environment and the activities constitutive of reconnaissance in their own research work. This opens up debates around how these professionals account for their own research activity during this global pandemic and how epistemic rhythms may have shifted in response to significant spatio-temporal shifts in personal and professional lives. This speaks to issues of professional research previously articulated as a contesting familiarity or established orthodoxies (Delamont *et al.* 2010; Reay, 2020) or experiences of epistemic injustices (Fricker 2007).

It is our intent here therefore to undertake reconnaissance on reconnaissance: to identify and grasp rhythms of reconnaissance or reconnoitre in research communities across two HE institutions working with professional educators engaged in MA, PhD and EdD degrees. Cognisant of the limitations and informalities of reconnaissance this initial foray of ours is intended to uncover epistemic rhythms that are congruous with what it means to reconnoitre in research, and which could then underpin more detailed research and analysis in future work.

Reconnaissance in a research community

Lefebvre (2014) prompts us to consider elements of reconnaissance: allowing, attuning and murmuring, which are related to the lived everyday experiences as rhythm, and experienced and practiced moments which constitute a certain pattern or pulse. For Lefebvre, human practices tend to be characterised if not dominated by relationships between repetition and difference. Thus, from a Lefebvrian stance, Rhythmanalysis provides grounds to reconnoitre everyday interactions based on the rhythms they display (Alhadeff-Jones 2019). The dimension of repetition could be described as the necessity to reproduce action in time. Therefore, social practices may be experienced as expected and desired, or may be unexpected and potentially alienating. Thus, in response to significant and sudden changes in public matters, such as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, previously well-established routine rhythms and patterns can be disrupted and distorted. For example, the requirement at short notice for families to work online from home whilst supervising home schooling or providing other caring responsibilities. Lefebvre’s focus on collective rhythms, as a means to identify and elucidate specific social processes within a defined community, can therefore prompt us to reconnaissance lived experiences through a lens of repetition and difference.

In viewing the rhythms of the streets of Paris from his balcony, Lefebvre emphasises that to grasp to analyse rhythms it is necessary to be simultaneously inside and outside of

the rhythm. This includes shedding light on links between public and private matters for an individual: in this case, how professionals experience external changes to rhythms of time, space and perceived boundaries of their research in progress, making the familiar unfamiliar (Delamont *et al.* 2010) and opening up (im)possibilities for their internal and external actions as a researcher. As Alhadeff-Jones (2019) puts it, this gives the reconnaissance researcher a concrete path to critically envision how individual and collective rhythms may relate to each other, how they are inscribed in power dynamics and how such relations are institutionalised within a community. This returns us to problematising epistemic rhythms in terms of some of the interdependencies of power, reason and epistemic authority (Fricker 2007), as experienced by professionals whose research activity may become reductive and overly simplistic, where linear rhythms, the ‘daily grind’ or ‘perpetual routine’ (Lefebvre, 2017) compress spaces and opportunities for radical, critical thinking (Reay, 2020).

For Haraway (2015) an open and curious practice, such as reconnaissance will often generate surprises. In a similar vein, Arendt (1992) understands the importance of training one’s mind to ‘go visiting’, to venture off the beaten path, to pose and respond to interesting questions and to be ready to experience something unanticipated. This also brings to mind Lefebvre’s observations from his window, the slow murmuring of the street where he urges us to ‘*let oneself go*’ (p.37, emphasis in original) in order to grasp and be grasped by epistemic rhythms at play.

Reconnaissance on reconnaissance

Two parallel reconnaissance exercises were undertaken under the prevailing pandemic conditions in education in 2020 and 2021. The first reconnaissance exercise included a sample of three teachers, all of whom were participants in a PhD research project and were themselves busy with their MA Education dissertation at the point at which the Covid-19 pandemic struck the UK in March 2020. All three students were in the early stages of data collection when the lockdown in England was announced and all decided to continue with their dissertation projects although under the new and very difficult and disruptive conditions which they would experience during the pandemic response. The reconnaissance took the form of an individual telephone call and lengthy conversation with each ‘front line’ teacher in April and May 2020, in which their response to the pandemic as researcher and potential next steps was discussed. Informal notes were taken on the telephone conversations and the subsequent reconnaissance of these discussions invokes both reconnaissance as concept and method for working with these teachers as research participants, but also reconnaissance on their own reconnoitre as their research approach changes during the pandemic.

The second reconnaissance exercise involved three experienced EdD supervisors and three established EdD students undertaking their Thesis stage during the challenging winter months of January and February 2021. A series of online meetings and electronic discussions were deployed to gather information which was instrumental to the concept mapping involved. No university or school research locations could be visited under pandemic conditions. The three EdD students who took part were also involved in ‘front line’ work at the time within teaching, health and nursing. The student participants were still new to the idea of reconnaissance and were beginning to explore and use it as part of

their research strategy. All six participants, EdD supervisors and EdD students, were asked to reflect on the concept of reconnaissance and its use or potential use in their research areas. Therefore, the subsequent feedback gained and the reconnoitre of these two postgraduate research communities *in extremis* forms the basis for the conspectus presented below

Conspectus: a means of grasping rhythms

A Conspectus is an initial and often perhaps a rather sketchy historical account or survey; a contribution to the narrative but not the narrative itself. Just such an approach was carried out by Lefebvre in his record of the Parisian upheavals and political struggles of March to May 1968. His focus was on ‘what is new and what is certain in the midst of uncertainty’ (1969: 8). It is undoubtedly a slender if immediate account of student politics in Paris ‘68 but also an interesting, deliberate and conscious swerve away from the more accepted conventions of data collection. Therefore, in a similar mode and fashion to Lefebvre no direct quotations are offered in this Conspectus but rather a brief exploration of reconnaissance in what describe as the seemingly chaotic and dark side of Higher Education. This dark side is most notably an educational space and time in the pandemic ‘where the bottom has dropped out of everything’ and includes an emerging culture of ‘administrative systems slowly moving off road’. Moreover, within this darkness there is also a pressing political necessity and need according to Barnett and Bengsten (2021) to listen not only to the compelling evidence of the moment but also the ‘murmur of silence’ which has descended along with these new forms of alienation. Therefore this Conspectus is in many ways an attempt to engage with and confront the dark side of Higher Education in the pandemic period and to politically identify, gather and more importantly grasp some of the rhythms of ‘events that actually happened but few people witnessed’.

Conspectus from an education PhD and MA community in a Northern University

The first Conspectus, following in the approach and perspective of Lefebvre, has a rather pressing and immediate quality to it which is perhaps inevitable given the conditions of the pandemic. The voice is a synoptic account by the immersive researcher of fragmentary and passing conversations between students and supervisors involved in an Education PhD and MA community in a Northern University. Some detail may well have been lost or neglected in this process, but the value remains in capturing the flashes of insight into the practice of reconnaissance and the way in which insights from reconnaissance work provoked directions for future research as well as further consideration of ethical issues related to participants’ experiences in empirical research during the Covid-19 pandemic. The voice of the PhD researcher reports,

Reconnaissance for me has been both explicit and implicit in my research. Early in my research journey I engaged in what I labelled in my mind as a ‘reconnaissance mission’ (complete with Mission Impossible theme tune) where I met informally with some teachers to talk about their experiences during their Master’s dissertations. The reconnaissance here

was purposeful: to identify potential themes for exploration in my subsequent research and to test out some early thoughts about a theoretical framework which would subsequently underpin my data collection and analysis.

Later on, reconnaissance became intrinsically linked to the act of reconnoitre and the time and space for deep thinking. Although initially quite implicit and almost hidden, the act of reconnaissance became more apparent to me when I considered how my teacher participant's experiences were converging with my own. The three teachers participating in my research consistently talked about time and how, due to the pressures of their professional role, they perceived there to be little time to immerse themselves into their research in the early part of the research project. But this all changed during the pandemic response: during the first stages of the Covid-19 'lockdown', after the immediate crisis management had been resolved, there seemed to be more time and space to think and re-think, for deep-hanging out, time to loiter and reconnoitre. It seemed as though when the world stopped a new space was created where the pace was slower and it felt more acceptable to spend time in intellectual mulling, letting ideas swirl and settle and re-form. I think the change in pre-assumed professional roles, responsibilities and accountabilities during the height of the initial pandemic in those late spring and early summer months significantly changed the usual rhythms and routines for all of us working in education. In the words of one of my teacher participants, it was as if we were inhabiting 'a new little world' where we could embrace the murmuring in our research, grasping at the fleeting thoughts as they emerged, an almost elemental form of reconnaissance which only becomes palpable when you reflect on the quiet nature of this research method.

Conspectus from an EdD community in a West Midlands University

In the second Conspectus the voice is also that of the immersed researcher in a synoptic attempt to grasp the rhythms of the practice of reconnaissance within the fleeting and partial conversations of students and supervisors involved with an EdD in a West Midlands University. Moreover, in its Lefebvrian vaticination the account also arguably unearths some of the potential and possibilities in reconnaissance as an approach for education researchers. The researcher reports,

So little is usually said about the informal aspects of research and how we can use and develop our curiosity; we tend to talk a lot about the formalities of design, theory, methodology and planning. The informality of research is important too but completely neglected by students and supervisors. No one teaches you about it. One of the EdD students commented that whilst she was involved in reconnaissance work for some reason the Pink Panther music was going on in her head. Reconnaissance may have different rhythms at different times depending on circumstances. The point of reconnaissance though is to be noticing whilst going unnoticed. Reconnaissance is just research snacking really when you are busy with other more pressing things at work or at home. It helps to create an internal narrative in your head, asking questions and looking at the same thing from different angles. You patch it all together to see the gaps and cross overs. Several participants reflected that reconnaissance has been a form of murmuring in my research but it has gained more noise and become increasingly intense with my awareness of it. Perhaps some have found new ways of listening or as one participant described it perhaps more exactly: listen-in to the murmuring. Bring in reconnaissance as another reflexive approach is my

advice but when do you stop being on reconnaissance? I find the emphasis on the elementary fact finding and information gathering tasks slightly misleading though given the subterranean working and nature of the approach. Is this a research method for students or a way of living? It's interesting to see what happens in your research when you decide to privilege if only for a while at least some of the main informal elements of reconnaissance such as noticing, allowing, attuning and listening; even just hanging out and doing nothing as a research method!

Lessons from reconnaissance

The concept of curiosity in research, opened up by Arendt (1992), Haraway (2015) and Powell and Somerville (2018), relates to the informal act of reconnoitre for these education researchers. This can be seen in their descriptions of the way that as their expected rhythms of teaching and researching were disrupted, they came to elucidate new (im)possibilities and potentials. For all of these professionals, engaging in the act of reconnoitre, or a deep hanging out, was a more open and curious experience than they had previously encountered. It is not accidental that some participants associated reconnaissance perhaps light-heartedly with a popular and easily recognised theme tune. Curiosity itself took on a rhythm. Some of the ways in which the familiar became unfamiliar provoked deep consideration of their positionality and identity too, including challenging some previous assumptions in ways that had been obscured in the past. Lefebvre (2017) might conceptualise the experiences of these researchers as the phenomenon of murmuring. An almost involuntary internal narrative of questions, observations and reflections. Indeed, it could well be argued that this murmuring created epistemic fragments and traces from which meaning began to (re)form in a care-full way for these researchers and professionals in relation to their research and their work. As has been highlighted previously, reconnaissance work can be significant in later stages of research not just at the outset, particularly regarding data analysis and conclusions (Walsh and Moss 2010, Ivankova 2014). However, for these 'front line' professionals in education, the opportunity to engage in reconnaissance and reconnoitre following the impact from the Covid-19 pandemic created new (im)possibilities and potentials that altered the relationship between repetition and difference in their lives and professional practice. This ultimately influenced in an informal but informed way some of the fundamental assumptions underpinning their work both as a professional and as a researcher. The challenging period of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has raised the opportunity and possibility of exploring anew research methods that are appropriate to unfamiliar and demanding times in education. The concept and method of reconnaissance in this paper is explored and investigated from the standpoint of the Lefebvrian extended metaphor of looking through his Parisian window at the street below which he develops as a device in Rhythmanalysis. In addition, perhaps on a more problematic level, reconnaissance may also be seen as an attempt to engage with Lefebvre's stance and insistence in Rhythmanalysis that in order to understand and explore a rhythm you must first be grasped by it.

Conclusion

The exploration of reconnaissance in this paper has certainly raised a number of lines of enquiry for further work and thought in the field. First, the role of informality in research or perhaps the research of informality. For example, is informality merely an early stage in the research process or something inherent and more fundamental to research itself? Perhaps in this sense reconnaissance could be said to be far more of a disposition than an exacting methodology or method. Reconnaissance is undoubtedly a form of low key and in *petto* investigative stance which in addition may allow us to ask what is in the heart of the researcher. Such an investigative stance could equally be a significant contributing aspect in understanding educational practices as much as it is a concept within educational research.

Perhaps on a different register altogether, it could be argued that the exploration of reconnaissance as a concept and method can make a distinct contribution if only in a small way towards an emerging interest in Lefebvrian pedagogy. For example, how do we listen-in to murmuring within the research process and what may it tell us that we do not know already? Is murmuring a central aspect of the missed, neglected or unreported truths within the research? Indeed, what happens to our research when we begin to engage with murmuring? Perhaps in Lefebvrian pedagogy too there are things that can be learnt but not easily taught in a conventional sense and reconnaissance as a disposition may be an example of this epistemic practice. Nonetheless, it will certainly be interesting to record the rhythmic response and reception of the education research community to the concept and method of reconnaissance as explored in this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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