

Editorial:

Critical perspectives on researching the professional doctorate

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The publication of this special issue of the *Work Based Learning e-journal* marks a time when there are already three generations of professional doctorates (PDs) in operation in the field which have tended to be discussed in the context of various locations and agencies involved in the production of knowledge. PDs have proliferated at the same time as a focus upon practice has illuminated the research field (Schatzki et al, 2001) not least in the practice-based area of PDs (Lee et al, 2009). The practice of those studying on professional doctorate programmes has provided an account of some of the complex relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). It is in this context that PDs have developed to become more involved with professional knowledge resulting in the focus of research education in relation to PDs to be an influential tool for the analysis and transformation of practices.

The expansion and development of PDs has been recognised by Middlesex University and the UK Council for Higher Education in the establishment of a series of international conferences on research connected with the professional doctorate. They have now been joined by the Special Interest Group (SIG) for Practice-focused Research, which emerged out of the first conference in this series. The papers, presented in this special issue, arose from the first 'International Conference on Professional Doctorates' in Europe held at the Cavendish Centre in London in November 2009.

The conference series was established because in recent years there has been increased recognition that a majority of doctoral graduates neither follow, nor necessarily intend to

follow, an academic career, as well as acknowledgement of the role of doctorates in career development in professions other than research or teaching in Higher Education. Whereas the conventional PhD degree continues to be primarily a pathway into the academic profession of university teaching for people in the relatively early stages of their lives and careers, the professional doctorate functions primarily as a means of professional and personal development for mid to senior professionals (Park, 2007). It is to be expected that these two populations differ widely, not only with respect to the background knowledge and understanding that they bring to their studies, but also with respect to their hopes and aspirations for life beyond the study period, and with respect to the role that they expect the degree to play later in their careers. Having drawn this particular broad difference between a PhD and a PD it is acknowledged that many PhDs are also engaging with mid to late career professionals and that many of the ways used for categorising knowledge are complex and also overlap. In these circumstances of radically altering knowledge regimes it is perhaps not surprising that nuances of identity of both the PD and the PhD continue to change.

The development of PDs has largely proceeded within specific professional boundaries which may be strongly discipline-based (such as engineering, medicine, psychiatry and psychology) more multidisciplinary or clustered in nature (such as education), or show a mix of both characteristics (such as business and management). In some professions the appeal of PDs is generally to recent graduates or early-career practitioners, with some programmes designed specifically for entry to particular branches of the occupation (such as EngD for research engineers or DCLinPsy for clinical psychologists). However complex models are emerging where doctoral candidates tend to enter a qualification with significant experience to their credit (Scott et al., 2008).

The rapid increase in the number and variety of PDs over the last twenty years (Brown and Cooke 2010) also brings an evolution towards pedagogical models that are more closely geared to practising professionals undertaking research and development in the workplace. To date, relatively little research has focused on this new set of stakeholders in Higher Education (NQAI, 2006). This issue on 'Critical Perspectives on Researching

the Professional Doctorate' in its complex relationship with its sponsoring professions and Higher Education, goes some way to identifying areas of uncertainty and tension, along with hidden lacunae in research.

The papers in this issue critically explore the professional doctorate in its relationship with a number of professions and Higher Education through a range of particular issues. The epistemological roots of research into the professional doctorate are interrogated; the notion of impact in relation to the development of the self is examined and re-interpreted; the emphasis on professional doctorate research as local and its relation to organisational and macro-social contexts is explored; and the challenge to confront issues of agency, structure and power are addressed.

All of these eleven papers focus variously on the issues of structure and the agency of 'research education' grounded in the professional doctorate. The tacit claim of this kind of research education is that the workplace opens up new possibilities for developing knowledge about relations between structure, power and agency which are directly derived from experience of a multiplicity of workplace activities.

In their deliberations of the 'The Managerial State', and in particular on the issue of 'Power, Politics and Ideology in the Remaking of Social Welfare' in England, Clarke and Newman (1997) had suggested that 'power', as an 'absent present' pervades just about everything we do in the name of research education which now is mediated by the professional doctorate. All the papers focus variously on issues of structure and agency of 'research education' grounded in the professional doctorate and this relationship has associations with power dynamics. We believe this is a useful conceptual theme for considering the papers in the current issue.

Scott's and Morrison's paper makes a play to examine the precarious juxtaposition between 'instrumentality' and 'criticality' in research education in the United Kingdom in the context of an emergent multiplicity of sites and agents for doctoral study. Once again the 'absent presence' of governmental sovereign powers is never far removed from

doctoral research education. In the UK the authors show how such powers have constituted significant drivers for the diversification of doctoral education. In contrast to the training model for research students favoured by policy makers' which positions learning as a metaphor for the development of skills that according to the ideology can be subsequently enacted in a multiplicity of workplaces, Scott and Morrison concentrate on the complex issue of identity.

In exploring a multiplicity of doctoral identities their paper begins to open a language for critically examining what actually unfolds behind much economically driven instrumental governmental agendas for doctoral education. Their paper paints a complex landscape for doctoral education in which identity is seen to both shape information and knowledge generation and to be shaped by a number of discourse communities in which doctoral students are variously situated. In the paper's recourse to the language of 'trust', along with its uncovering of a diverse range of regional and disciplinary variations in the discursive practices mediating identities, it begins to open the possibility of critically examining doctoral education sociologically in relation to 'disembedding' and 're-embedding' mechanisms for expert systems (Giddens, 1990). In its concern for various forms of trust experienced by those individuals involved in doctoral education, the paper also opens significant questions concerning the 'ontological security' doctoral candidates experience in the continuity of their own self identity.

Malloch's approach to the question of power is to examine critically the concrete operations of the Australian government regarding developments in Higher Education. In considering the national trends in the uptake of professional doctorates, Malloch observes first a significant proliferation and then the almost equally rapid demise of the professional doctorate in Australia. She attributes this to the power of the Federal Government which continues to place emphasis upon the PhD while failing to inject sufficient funds to support the professional doctorate.

Despite the imposition of such power Malloch observes a wide range of approaches used in developing professional doctorate programmes through her interviews with key agents

coordinating the professional doctorate in various universities in Australia. Her paper delineates a multiplicity of different ways in which professional doctorate programmes have progressed in Australia over the past three decades, including for many groups the reality of having to face the possibility of closure. For her there is wisdom in the model which takes seriously what new entrants into professional doctorate programmes bring with them into the research education; not least their capacity for learning. Her paper illuminates how the structures and resources reproduced in response to the power of the government work by granting freedom to agencies involved in the development of research education for the professional doctorate. At the same time Malloch makes clear a hard edged agenda in favour of the PhD, which is historically rooted in the very culture and experience of government.

Lester's focus on the macroscopic structure of an ever broadening range of qualifications at QAA Levels 7 and 8 draws particular attention to three qualifications that are not doctorates, but are considered to be at the same level. In so doing his paper uncovers a genuinely broader range of practices that are structured by these professional qualifications.

Concretely, his research highlights three significant post-qualifying professional awards at Level 8, equivalent to the PhD, but not requiring the same 'doctorateness'. These qualifications are now awarded by three august bodies, where again the 'absent presence' of power is palpable. They are awarded at the level of 'Fellowship' by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, The Chartered Management Institute, and the City & Guilds Institute. His paper highlights the significance of niche markets for these specialist qualifications, which he admits, until now have enjoyed only a very low uptake. His argument points to the fact that awarding bodies outside of the HE academy have a distinct advantage in exploiting such niche markets for professional extension programmes beyond master's level.

Poultney's critical examination of the structure of doctoral qualifications contrasts her experience of working with a Doctor of Education, Ed D, programme and a PhD programme. In developing her argument she is mindful of disciplinary powers invested in

the hierarchical community elaborated by Bernstein (1996) in his exploration of the pedagogic coding ascribed by Higher Education communities. Her paper places particular emphasis on the significant 'cultural and pedagogic challenge that the Ed D brings to the whole tradition in which the PhD has been established.

Given that the university at which these programmes are set is historically grounded in the tradition of 'Learning Through Work', it is perhaps not surprising to learn that Poultney makes the case for the Ed D to involve both Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge that is grounded in students' professional settings. Her argument places a strong emphasis upon applied knowledge in professional settings which has some impact upon practice. It provides an important case in point of a cultural shift in one organisation involving those formerly immersed in the history and culture of a PhD.

Anderson, Jones and Huttly evaluate the three core components in the professional doctorate in public health, (DrPH); a formal taught element, a professional attachment, and a research thesis. They discuss the challenges in providing supervision across the three components of the DrPH in order to ensure that the programme has intellectual rigour and doctoral standards. They found added value that can be gained from running case-study style structured learning courses for doctoral students which they found facilitates the development of critical analytical skills and allows for the development of reflexivity about their research and their actions. Students critically reflect on how research findings do (or do not) get taken up into policy and practice. The applied nature of the research offers the benefit of developing an awareness of the importance of considering the context within which public health research outputs will be implemented.

A comparison with the PhD is drawn and they find that an aspect of the DrPH that is relevant to the further development of the PhD is the greater attention given in the DrPH to structured learning, and the sharing of experiences among a student cohort. Further, the DrPH enables several formal assessment checks on student progression which provide separate opportunities to review progress and make progression decisions, whilst the PhD has a single key intermediate milestone in the form of the upgrading

process from MPhil to PhD. Few guidelines for PhD examination actually exist Except for the extremely general and of the 'contributing new knowledge' variety, rather than containing specific details. That is, most PhD thesis examiners have 'learnt by doing' - they have done a PhD themselves, have supervised PhD students and, somewhere along the way have started examining PhDs themselves. Often the examination is subjective with few 'objective' criteria developed for guidance. Consequently, for the DrPH this causes a problem, as so few people have, to date, completed a DrPH thesis and so the examiners do not have a frame of reference to work from. The provision of written guidelines for examiners has been an important development. They conclude that there remains a real need for the DrPH, Greater emphasis is however now being placed on the application of theory in practice, enabling a more practical slant to some elements of the programme.

The contribution by Weller, Garelick, Naylor and Shenyn lays fresh emphasis upon the relationship between 'learned workers' – 'organisational-sapiens' - engaged in a DProf award at one university, and their relationship with the development of organisations. Their research opens important questions concerning the 'situatedness' of DProf 'candidates' within a sponsoring organisation. Not least, questions emerge regarding how the learning derived from research within an organisation may be integrated and used within the wider organisation.

Once more the issue of power comes to the surface. It is made obvious by two vignettes that illustrate the particular conflicts that can unfold between learned professionals involved in doctoral research within an organisation and extant forms of hierarchically structured hegemony. The authors place this complex relationship in context by acknowledging and highlighting significant interplay between 'Mode 1' and 'Mode 2' forms of knowledge. In this particular study further questions are asked about the play of power in relation to Wenger's notion of 'communities of practice'. It reminds us of the need to consider relations of power mediating the complex, historically situated and continually unfolding relationship between the ever expanding horizon of learning of the candidate and the multiplicity of 'power practices' found in all forms of organisation.

Flint's and Barnard's initial premise in "The Power of Research" is to open further questions and to encourage continued debate in the field regarding the nature of power itself and its relationship with knowledge. Drawing on Foucault's oeuvre the authors challenge reflection on the notion that power traverses every discipline; that power is not something an individual possesses, but, rather, as a polymorphous and polyvalent phenomenon, it is dispersed throughout social bodies; that the primary benchmark for doctoral research as an 'original contribution to knowledge' continues to play out the illusion of disinterested knowledge that is somehow disconnected from any relations of power. This move in foregrounding power is not made to dismiss the production of disinterested forms of knowledge, but to place emphasis on the tension between the powers to provide epistemologically grounded knowledge as a basis for developing specifically located practice.

One of the essential dimensions of research education in the workplace opened up by the professional doctorate that is examined in Flint's and Barnard's paper, is of its possible emergence in the space between orders of domination and the play of power. In fact, Flint and Barnard are at pains to indicate how the idea of power – a concept closely related to the unfolding of being, which unfolds in every verb and noun in our lexicon – is closely connected with our relationship with language. It is this connection which prompts the authors to begin to examine diagrams of the mechanism of power mediating the production of dialogue at the heart of an education in research. This connection prompts Flint and Barnard to consider the problematic of a critical hermeneutics of work-based practice.

Alcorn's international review of the clinical *relationship* between nurses and health care assistants (HCAs) uncovers the significance of 'power play' mediating the sense of 'interdependence' and 'role understanding' each experiences in the context of caring for patients. It is the first study of its kind to examine the 'actual relationship' itself between nurses and HCAs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the paper illuminates a continuous spectrum of tensions in this relationship ranging from mutually collaborative helpers to separated

individuals who variously constituted liabilities in their association with each other. In terms of power practices it is interesting, and perhaps reflective of extant hierarchical structures in which such relationships tend to flourish or to fail in some way, that the article tends to foreground the nurse in relation to the HCA and not the other way around.

However, in highlighting the ways in which the work of HCAs is shaped by power play, in some cases reminiscent of the ‘doctor–nurse game’, Alcorn’s paper places a spotlight on a range of contingencies shaping their ‘informal negotiations’, rather than relationships being formed on the basis of extant policy that formally defines each of their roles. It was interesting to note that in the USA there was an emphasis placed upon performance, where the HCAs’ performance was found to be linked to the performance of the nurse. In the UK what became apparent was how the ‘power play’ in this relationship in some cases materialised through the control exercised by HCAs over communication between registered nurses and patients and in others ‘fears’ experienced by nurses at the prospect of losing the jobs was significant. In cases where HCAs had experienced development programmes, this was a source of threat to the nurses involved. Concerns regarding the understanding of roles and the impact on patient care expressed in the paper only add further to the multilayered complexity of the relationships formed between nurses and HCAs.

In the field of education Burgess and Wellington’s ethnographic study of largely mature ‘mid to late professionals’ opens continued debate concerning the impact of PD research upon students’ professional practices and their development. In particular, a number of issues emerge from the paper concerning ‘parity of esteem’, the nature of knowledge, and the development of the professional self. On the basis of the students’ narratives, the paper concentrates on just three significant impacts of student engagement in PD research. The notion of impact, which has emerged as a significant theme following the new ESRC ‘Research Excellence Framework’, REF, in the UK, is explored in relation to students’ career trajectories, in terms of any changes in the discourses they utilised, and in connection with their own lives.

Viewed historically the paper opens questions concerning the extent to which, in the continual temporal unfolding of the lives of these students, and in the rich contexts of their own organisational responsibilities and family commitments, their earlier motivations for entry in the PDP had significant bearings on their subsequent trajectories in the development of their careers.

In their turn to language Burgess and Wellington concern themselves with any possible changes experienced by students in the discourses in which they had immersed themselves. The authors provide examples to illuminate the various ways in which PD students gained in confidence in their 'use of language to persuade, change, argue a case, challenge assumptions and listen critically to others'. As Irigaray (2008: 231-2) has argued 'our Western tradition is founded on looking-at rather than on listening-to' and in listening to others there is a respect that 'truth is neither unique nor universal'. For the PD students the examples represented by Burgess and Wellington reveal their own perceptions of becoming more 'scholarly'. In reading this paper one is also struck by the embodied nature of PD research in which public research and private lives become 'intertwined'.

Costley's analysis, derived mainly from the 'experiences, judgements and reflections' of ten participants who have completed a Doctorate in Professional Studies (DProf), contrasts with studies which have been concerned with a balance of 'activity, focus and control' of doctoral research. This particular group of mid-career 'candidates' are all reported to be in senior management positions with each having a Master's qualification. At issue in this paper is what the candidates learn reflexively about their work from their experiences on a DProf a doctoral degree that is 'transdisciplinary' and holistic in its perspective.

As in Weller et al's paper there is a sensitivity to the 'situatedness' of individual candidates within a range of organisational settings outside the academy. The paper also highlights the formal procedures used in recognising and accrediting the professional expertise of the candidates prior to commencement of a DProf programme. In being

grounded mainly in the experiences of ten candidates, the paper places emphasis on the reflexive self as an embodied and deeply personal and on-going project of learning mediated by engagement in the DProf programme. It illuminates how the self in its complex and multilayered relationship with the workplace is continually regenerated and uncovers the personal dimensions of the self, which are characterised along three interconnected dimensions of ‘enhanced credibility’, ‘capability’, and ‘continuing development’. In so doing this paper examines critically how a DProf creates the ground for the constitution of the self as both critical user and critical innovator of forms of knowledge that have had direct and measurable bearings on changes in policy and practice across a multiplicity of local and national organisations and institutions.

Flint and Barnard, too, focus upon the multiplicities of the reflexive self. Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) *The Production of Space*, this paper highlights also the significance of producing space for personal development, without which there could be no such development. Here the absent presence of power, which has remained with us throughout these various papers, emerges in the form of a ‘bio-political’ concern with the politics of living (Dean, 2010: 118 – 9), here mediated by engagement in professional doctorate research.

Of particular concern in this paper is the multiplicity of discourses in which the self has been ‘thrown’. In reflecting on Heidegger’s lecture (1977{1952}), *The Question Concerning Technology*, the authors seek to illuminate the ever present risk and possibilities open to the self in its complex relationship with technology. Technology opens many possibilities to the self which would not have been possible without it. But, as this paper illuminates, there is a dark side to our relationship with technology; the ever present risk of the self being reduced to a puppet of means-ends structured discursive technologies (Peim and Flint, 2009), which constitute just one way of revealing the world. Email technology is a case in point and readers are invited to reflect on the extent they have experienced being controlled by it. Another such technology, of course, is that of Personal Development Planning, which has now become a requirement that must accompany research undertaken for doctoral level qualifications. Flint and Barnard argue

that there is always the possibility of Personal Development Planning, in its more reflexive modality, becoming aware of the possibilities of such technological framing.

The papers gathered here offer critical insights into what could be conceived as an emerging dialogical approach to learning *for, in and through* work by means of ‘research education’. Although such a theoretical position has not yet been fully articulated in this field, there is no question that such an approach to learning *for, in and through* work is already becoming a live force for research education and for projects seeking to develop practice in a positive direction (Flint, 2009, 2010). What is more, the global reach of such a position, as supported by the current programme of international conferences on the PD, ensures that any such emergent theoretical position will not ever remain singular and will not adhere to a monolithic model – and, as the papers illuminate, the meaning of a dialogical approach to learning as grounds for research education is destined to be transformed and continuously reiterated and re-appropriated. The present collection offers substantial critique, we believe, in the form of an invitation to consider the lacunae, the remaining contradictions and the many under-developed aspects of emergent theories that may have the potential to open other fruitful avenues for research and development.

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