

The view from over here is different: relations between doctoral study and professional practice

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In this article we use the metaphors associated with travelling, i.e. going through customs, being in transit, luggage and baggage, to interrogate the micro-processes through which doctoral study makes a difference to professional life. For the professional, original doctoral knowledge arises through reflexively combining understandings from practice with academic practices of writing a thesis. The article builds upon critical examination of the trajectories of Lorri, Karen and Marcia at different stages of their doctoral studies, with the data comprising personal narratives of their professional activities in relation to their research studies. As doctoral study is a process and not an event, these relations change in emphasis over time. This approach yields discussion of critical and sometimes painful transitions such as adapting into research 'communities of practice'; distinctions between academic and professional writing; developing 'theoretical perspectives'; methodological and ethical considerations changing ways of seeing; and relations with supervisors. In pointing to these issues, the article raises the question of how doctoral pedagogy might take account of personal stories of transformation, as the doctoral candidate moves to become a producer of knowledge.

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Introduction

Despite grand but largely unfounded claims being made by universities for the impact of undertaking doctoral study on professionals' career opportunities, empirical work (e.g. Drake, 2010a; Wellington & Sikes, 2006) suggests that doctoral study in professional settings largely has a transformative effect on researchers' identities. In this article we explore the uncharted territory of career and doctoral research, aiming to open consideration of doctoral study in relation to professional practices, actually during the (sometimes many) years it takes to complete a doctoral degree. We interrogate the micro-processes through which doctoral study makes a difference to professional life, and illustrate the fact of these relations altering during the course of doctoral studies.

For the professional person, original doctoral knowledge arises through reflexively combining understandings from practice with understanding and reproducing the required academic practices of writing a thesis. This confluence is unique for each practitioner-researcher who maintains a fluid and flexible stance with respect to each domain, sometimes behaving as a professional, sometimes as a researcher, and at all times making meaning out of the intersections between professional and research life. The compromises necessarily inherent in practitioner research must be argued for, and doing so makes it a complex and demanding endeavor.

The article builds upon critical examination of the trajectories of people at different stages of doctoral study, presenting an aspect of professional life from the perspective of how it is shaped by doctoral work. Thus, the data set comprises professional activities in relation to research study, and the analysis is that, as doctoral study is a process and not an event, these relations change in emphasis over time. Our focus is on the relations between doctorates and professional life at different points in the process. We locate our thinking in the ideas of communities of practice (led by Lave & Wenger, 1991); developing phenomenological methodologies (e.g. Creswell, 1998; Mezirow's theories (1991 as cited in Cranton, 1994) on transformative learning; and we are using autobiographical narrative as Karpiak would suggest to 'reconstruct[ing] these events from the point of view of the present' (2010: 47).

The authors began to explore these connections for the first time at the Australian Association of Research in Education in 2008, and since then, through continuing to correspond as a group called 'Up-Downs'. This article arises from a symposium at AARE in Melbourne in December 2010: *'Travelling doctors? Is practitioner research a one-way ticket?'* We use the metaphor of travelling as a means of exploring the self in relation to doctoral work. The ideas of 'going through customs', 'being in a transit lounge'; and deciding between 'luggage and baggage – what stays and what goes' frame progression through doctoral study in relation to professional practice, from the beginning phases of making sense of these different sets of practices, through enculturation into doctoral ways of thinking about practice through to having completed doctoral study and reflecting what elements of the experience and knowledge remain in practice.

The data comprises three autobiographical accounts of the doctoral work of three Up-Downs as experienced in the present (Behrenbruch, 2010; Beveridge, 2010; Felstead, 2010) written in response to their critical reading of the pre-publication manuscript of the book by the fourth Up-Down (Drake, 2010b). Behrenbruch had completed her doctorate in 2009 and at the time of writing their papers, Beveridge and Felstead were at the stage of submitting detailed research proposals. Two Up-Downs work as academics, one is a primary school teacher-leader, and one on completing her thesis moved from a position in school as a teacher-leader into an international organization. We speak from experience of studying for both EdDs and PhDs whilst continuing to work professionally.

Theoretical settings and positioning new knowledge

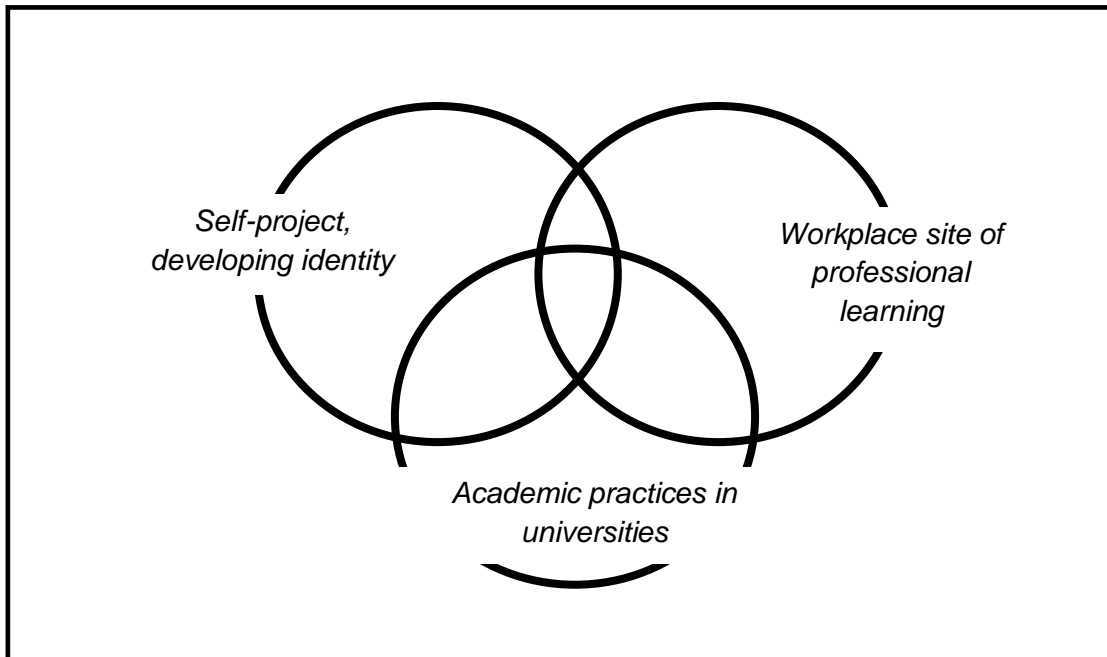


Figure 1 Location of practitioner knowledge at doctoral level (from Drake, 2010b: 62).

Doctoral researchers are working in the interstices between professional life, academic practices and the transformative project on the self that undertaking doctoral study embraces (see Figure 1). It is probably in the professional arena that the practitioner researcher undertakes their substantive research. For these researchers, the relationship between theories and their application is central, and the challenge of bridging a theory-professional knowledge divide characterises the project. However, 'integrating knowledge learned in the academy with knowledge learned in practice is neither trivial nor is it obvious how this integration should be accomplished' (Leinhart et al., 1995: 11). Drake suggests that 'professional knowledge is not only different from knowledge produced in the university but unrecognisable within it' (2010b: 17); and that knowledge production in the university requires 'evidence of having engaged in the dominant mode of production, i.e. production of text' (ibid: 17).

This means that new knowledge is not simply acquired or developed by the individual researcher in a vacuum, but that the researcher is positioned in a complex and socially stratified set of social complexities of power and status that enable him or her to make knowledge claims' (Drake, 2010b: 16).

It is through the practices of higher education that the researcher is awarded the doctoral degree. Thus the transformative experience is that which occurs as a result of becoming a producer of knowledge, of making the original knowledge claim that is required for successful doctoral outcome. It is the doctoral researcher who, through undertaking this work, experiences a personal transformation which there is no going back.

Engeström (2001) has developed the concept of 'expansive learning' to account for situations when, in addressing problems at work, people develop new knowledge that is specific to that situation, and so is not predictable in advance. Practitioner doctoral researchers are in this position, and so their required original contribution arises from the uniqueness of their situation which in turn is intimately connected with all three domains above, i.e. the professional setting for the research combined with the requirements of the awarding university and the medium through which the researcher communicates their project (normally but not always a thesis or dissertation).

It is tempting to refer to the domains of professional activity and academic life as communities of practice in the sense that practitioner researchers straddle these different environments throughout the course of their projects. As the case studies illustrate this representation can become problematic, and is discussed later in this article. However, 'community of practice' as introduced by Wenger (1998) and defined as providing the means by which situated learning (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) takes place is not merely a location nor is it solely a social grouping, but the combination of practices and access to practices through which practitioners are encultured into new ways of doing and thinking about things. Communities of practice necessarily provide learning opportunities, and learning in a community of practice is a transformative process. It is not just the newcomer who develops, but also the practice as well, for as newcomers gradually become experienced so they make a difference to ways of working. From this perspective, as doctoral work progresses, so we would expect the functions of the 'professional', 'academic' and 'self' to merge into new ways of thinking about each domain: about professional work; about academic work; and about oneself as a practitioner researcher.

Integration between each domain in itself provides the opportunity for unique insight on the part of the practitioner researcher. This means that personal narration of the account, the weaving together of a story that brings together practices from different domains is akin to the photograph of the sandcastle constructed on the beach before the tide washes it away (Drake, 2010a). Without the photograph there is no record of events on the beach. The dissertation/thesis serves the same purpose of providing a perspective on events and issues. Just as no two photographers would capture the same snapshot, neither would two researchers present the same research account, for it is the singular view that in itself helps provide originality of perspective. Erben argues for stories of self as an important means of understanding 'complex and unclear social situations' (2001, 416), and from this perspective these stories are an important part of the weaving of the doctoral account of practitioner researchers.

The cases: Lorri, Karen and Marcia

Lorri: Going through customs

Lorri is a is Assistant Principal in a state primary school in the Hunter Valley, Australia and currently on leave from school focusing on her doctoral studies. In the course of her executive work in schools, Lorri led a government funded professional learning program in two schools over 5 years. During that time, she worked as assistant principal in these schools and her focus area was teacher professional learning. She returned to school full-time when the project ended in 2009. The focus of her doctoral research is the sustainability of teacher professional learning. She has been on a PhD programme for three/four years now and is working on her proposal. This has to be accepted by a doctoral committee before she can progress to research. Lorri is finding it difficult to write her proposal as this has been returned for some development before it can proceed.

Lorri understands that she has to address learning across two communities of practice. Lorri has taken community of practice to mean 'the way we do things around here' (Reeves, 2009: 36). From this stance, one of Lorri's communities is the university setting where the teacher turned doctoral student is clearly a novice – with much to learn about accepted academic practice. The other community is to be found in her school setting. The teacher

undertaking doctoral study is often experienced and successful as a teacher. However Lorri reports that in school she is 'increasingly regarded with suspicion as her "critical" academic identity develops'.

Whilst working on the project Lorri wrote several reports and articles some of which have been published in professional magazines. She has found that her writing, whilst considered publishable in the professional field, is not acceptable in the academic field and she notes 'the genre of writing required in academia is foreign to the practitioner researcher'.

She suggests that 'PhD students do not often have the scholarly identity necessary for publication early in their candidature and it takes time and support from supervisors to develop an academic stance.' She reports that successful attempts to publish in scholarly journals involved 'inordinate amounts of time, liaison with and scaffolding by supervisors, loss of confidence, and continual drafting and rewriting that may have taken me away from my core business of finalising my research proposal which is taking much longer than anticipated.'

Lorri is in a difficult place and, as a practitioner-researcher she 'inhabits the hyphen' (Drake, 2010b: 38). She writes:

I am seen as an insider and an outsider – paradoxically stuck between two communities of practice and not fully accepted by either.

She has been told that her theoretical framework needs to be clearly visible before she can proceed to fieldwork and she likens this to 'awaiting customs clearance to proceed with my flight'.

When this work was presented in November 2010, an audience member asked Lorri why she doesn't feel her practitioner knowledge is valued in the university setting. She responded to this question 'Until I have a confident and accepted academic voice, I feel my

practitioner knowledge will not be valued'. This question and answer exemplified the binary division that Lorri feels exists between university and school settings.

Karen: In the transit lounge

Karen is a Lecturer in Literacy and Early Childhood at the University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. Karen is also completing a PhD, and her research proposal has recently been confirmed. Her research focuses on the home learning environment and the literacy practices that teenage mothers employ with their preschool children.

Karen discusses her doctoral learning as part of a transformative process that began when she changed jobs and moved into an academic environment as a lecturer. She had previously worked as a literacy consultant, and her job had been to disseminate new practices to teachers. She notes that in her previous job she would 'toe the party line', and 'I did not plan for practical experiences or weave in my personal teaching narratives'.

Having moved into a university job she says:

Rather than being part of a group of teachers in a school, I was now an individual where discourses were unfamiliar and management processes complex. Feelings of uncertainty and isolation were initially overwhelming. This experience was similar to arriving at the airport in a foreign country, and the signs were in other languages, the Customs officials may have spoken my language, but the accent made it difficult to interpret the questions.

She knew intrinsically that she would need to consider how to work with university students. Coming from the teaching workforce she brought many school stories, but it was not until she entered the higher education sector that she was able to recognise those stories as having value and could articulate their contribution to the undergraduate cohorts she was teaching. However, much of the early teaching work, revolved around a number of administrative tasks related to students and their progress. As a tutor, another academic organised the content of the courses and indicated strongly the way the work was to be presented.

Although I was offered, in some instances, opportunities for input, at other times it was clear that the direction had been set and no deviation was acceptable.

Karen likened this to being in the transit lounge, and so when in her second year of working at the University, she entered the gate labelled 'doctoral student' she was already prepared through her new experiences of teaching for further changes in the way she thought about her work. She observes that the doctoral itinerary differs from the teaching route because it 'has had many alterations' and 'the direction of journey are also renegotiated regularly'. The tools required to navigate the way are 'assembled when required'. As a doctoral student she manages her own time, and self-directed learning and critical thinking (Cranton, 1994) are key element in the process.

Karen's interpretation of the doctoral space and the persona she occupied within that space altered when she encountered academics from other institutions at her first academic conference.

The next question created feelings of extreme discomfort and doubt as the person proceeded to ask me, 'What is your theoretical perspective?' I could not answer this question and immediately saw myself as an "impostor" who was just playing at being an academic.

Here I stood in the transit lounge, unable to choose the correct gate to enter, in other words, I could not contribute to this discourse with confidence, and I did not fully understand the language. The other academic quickly lost interest and moved away. (I had a similar feeling of discomfort and doubt when all flights in Europe were grounded by a snowstorm and I was in a country where I could not speak the language. My world moved in slow motion as the panic slowly gained momentum then overtook at frightening speed before calm and rational thought returned some time later!).

This event draws attention to the importance of recognising that colleagues will be at varying stages along the continuum, some highly experienced, and some at the beginning in teaching and/or research. This is highlighted in findings by Gravett and Petersen (2007) who stated that their research participants found that

the initial period in academia was characterised by loneliness and a lack of intellectual stimulation, sometimes leading new academics to question their choice of career, their suitability for academia, their ability to develop as scholars and their resultant prospects for promotion. (2007: 200).

Marcia: Luggage and baggage, what stays and what goes?

Marcia Behrenbruch is Head of Professional Development for the International Baccalaureate Organization, Singapore. Previously the deputy principal of a middle school in Melbourne Australia she completed her doctorate in Inquiry Learning in 2009.

Marcia explores the metaphor of Plato's prisoners in a cave in the context of understanding the impact of her doctoral research as this image also formed the metaphor for her doctoral research into constructivism and inquiry learning. Plato's allegory describes prisoners who have spent their whole lives chained so that they can only see a cave wall in front them. Behind them burns a fire and beyond the fire a busy roadway that casts shadows on the wall in front of them. From the projected images the prisoners build a complete world; a language, descriptors, connections, hierarchies, religions and philosophies. One day, a prisoner is released and allowed to explore the world beyond the flames. What she finds bears only a small resemblance to the world of the shadows. When she returns to tell the prisoners, the companions of her past life, she is met with derision, disbelief and even fear.

Professionally Marcia reports having experienced several 'caves' with the shadows on her walls representing student needs in ways that were not explained by her technical skills of managing classrooms and delivering curricula. Outside the cave were always policies and government processes that did not match the needs of significant numbers of students. Her doctoral work enabled her to find that the teaching and learning theory that explained all these shadows was far more complex and emotive than she had imagined.

Marcia conceptualises the interactions between workplace and university communities as the space that new knowledge is created. This new knowledge goes far beyond a few pages of thesis conclusions; new knowledge is continually constructed at all stages from

the consideration of the research question through to final submission. She claims that successful bridging of these two communities requires a researcher to take charge, take responsibility and defend their integrity.

Although incredibly difficult at the beginning, working successful over more than one community of practice is the most important skill/attitude/insight that emerged from my studies. Looking over 160 emails received over a recent typical working week, I identified four distinct communities of practice with whom I am now deeply involved; a community of school teachers identifying professional development needs, a community of experts developing courses, a community of managers scheduling and delivering professional development, a community of curriculum experts looking at the implications of current research on teaching and learning, a community of accountants and business people looking at new products and services. My doctoral work was on inquiry learning and I value the results of my research as it gives me confidence and credibility to work with effectively with some of my communities of practice. I can understand and explain perspectives based on a theoretical stance. Yet, only a quarter of my emails call on that knowledge and I suspect that percentage will decrease over time.

How does learning about methodology help in transferring to new environments and working with new communities? Plato called his shadows on the wall 'phenomena'. Phenomenology – a qualitative method of understanding the reality beyond the shadows has its modern roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who subsequently influenced the work of Edith Stein, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology has several requirements; the researcher declares or 'brackets' pre-conceived ideas; there are research questions that explore the meaning of the phenomena for the individuals and gives them the opportunity to describe their experiences; data is in the form of open ended or semi-structured interviews with individuals chosen carefully for their experience of the phenomena; and a deep and reflective analysis of the data to find meaning and discover the essential structure of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 1998). Through months of extensive writing about her expectations and prior experiences, Marcia realised how often her own ideas have been challenged and changed in the journey through other metaphorical caves.

I reached a point where I could calmly look at conflicting or controversial data and look forward to finding that new reality. I realised that I had only seen part of the 'picture' - only a few perspectives. The new understandings led to a change in my practice of teaching and learning. This ability to critically reflect was my bridge to school and university communities and is now my bridge across the multiple communities to which I now belong.

The choice of an EdD or a PhD was a significant decision when she began, and as an educator with over 20 years experience by the time she started doctoral research, she chose an EdD. Research on students who chose a professional doctorate over a PhD (e.g. Jablonski, 2001; Leonard et al, 2004; Neuman, 2005; Servage, 2009; Usher, 2002) also singles out the importance of belonging to a community for support, the importance of structure offered by coursework in addition to the lure of making a difference to education practice. In reality, the majority of researchers and students at the end of their degree reported that the degrees were interchangeable. For both cohorts support was important and a majority of PhD students reported that they also completed a course component. In Marcia's case, after completing an 80,000 word thesis and 4 courses requiring 20,000 word submissions, she couldn't see less work or rigour. Having completed her doctorate, she now feels that 'this debate about professional doctorate or PhD is defiantly in my jettisoned baggage category.'

Critical reflection is also crucial to a post-modern interpretation of research validity – essential whether the research is for a university degree or a workplace inquiry. Validity in qualitative research is defined as 'how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the phenomena and is credible to them' (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 124).

The concept of 'trustworthiness' also serves to highlight the connection between methodology and ethics. Ethics, as with trustworthiness, considers power and equity issues and the values and judgements that are involved in research. The transferability of the professional doctorate is unique because it creates knowledge within a community of learners through methodology and ethical considerations. The 'what to learn' is part of 'how to learn' and 'with whom to learn'. This provides a foundational experience to continue a lifetime of developing knowledge across a wider range of communities. This

becomes a very valuable lightweight piece of luggage with flexible compartments that suits a range of travel options and destinations.

Marcia's final piece of luggage comes from the relationship with supervisors – the carefully crafted piece that travels by hand. Its design is the most difficult as it needs to within stand rough handling if thrown into the hold, yet versatile enough to protect the essentials as well as valuables collected along the way. Supervision is an unfortunate term with its intimations of power and authority. Its success lies in the personal interaction between two professionals from distinct communities who are prepared to learn from each other. Rather than hierarchical, it is side-by-side learning (Malfroy, 2005). Vygotsky (1981) focused on the significance of the relationship between teacher and student. He described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as that small place in time where a teacher could pull a student forward in her thinking using artefacts. Although Vygotsky focused on spoken and written language as the main artefact he also included symbolic languages such as art, diagrams and mathematics.

As my own research was on inquiry and constructivism, I was very aware of operating in 'the zone' with my supervisor. The suggestions for further reading and the critiques of writing, although at times daunting, moved me ahead in my understanding and broadened my perspectives.

John Dewey believed that constructing knowledge starts with the impulse of the student that the teacher turns into purpose through meaningful activity (Dewey, 1938). The impulse and the activities are shaped by the environment in which they occur which includes artefacts from the physical and social world such as books, other materials and other people – not just by the teacher. Dewey coined the term 'transaction' to describe a reciprocal relationship between an individual and this learning environment. It is no longer only teachers who help students construct learning.

As for the luggage and baggage: I travel with a good quality backpack that contains the results of my personal research question. It may be left behind at some point, but for now it is still useful and something I am proud of being able to carry. I have a very expensive, very old bag that contains the wisdom of methodology and ethics. I have a

new small carry on case that holds the friendship and professional discourse I have with my supervisor.

Discussion and conclusion

These accounts illustrate that progression through doctoral work raises questions regarding the practices of doctoral providers as well as challenges for candidates. The temptation to think in terms of academia and professional life as being located in 'communities of practice' that stand for different ways of knowing short-cuts the presupposition that a community of practice offers a means of situated learning, rather than simply a location in which learning takes place. That learning is inextricably related to the community of practice is a necessary condition and calls for a redefinition, as we can see from Karen's and Marcia's accounts. However, thinking about community of practice as 'the way we do things around here' raises the danger of becoming stuck between sets of practices that it is difficult to bridge. Doctoral success comes through presenting learning in the professional domain in a manner that is acceptable to the awarding university. This is not generally achieved simply by presenting the professional practice as equivalent, but through crafting a case for recognition on the grounds of there being a valid claim for original knowledge.

Feelings of isolation with respect to one's professional practices are highlighted by Lorri and Karen, both with respect to professional practice. Lorri's being 'increasingly regarded with suspicion as her academic identity develops' and Karen's initial confusion with respect to her new professional environment in the university are both recognizable and terrifying to practitioners and researchers alike. Yet for Marcia, confidence to move in and out of different communities of practice has she thinks been enhanced by her doctoral considerations of learning and methodological thinking about her perceptions regarding 'the shadows in the cave'.

The cases studies point, from both professional and research perspectives, to the changing relations between the substantive questions. Specifically we question whether engaging with a new community of academic practice alienates and separates (at least at first) from

professional life; and second we point to doctoral candidates' recognition of practice as generating 'theoretical framework' i.e. ways of knowing that are brought to research. Lorri and Karen show that this manifests itself in significant and sometimes painful ways, through learning how to respond to the (terrifying) demands for a 'theoretical perspective'. Marcia on the other hand, welcomes her theoretical stance as a means of engaging with the new discourses that she meets professionally.

Lorri highlights the need to develop and adopt new ways of writing. Authoring the thesis is the means through which the strands of work – substantive, methodological, ethical, theoretical are woven together and presented. Doctoral candidates relating research to practice are using writing tools to create new the new knowledge that will admit them to the academy, but this knowledge represents a synthesis of professional and the academic domains. Pat has written that 'insiders are conducting their projects adroitly managing tensions between their workplace, the awarding university' (Drake, *ibid*: 175) and that writing the thesis is not a technical exercise. Kamler and Thompson show how by not addressing the complexity of doctoral writing as being work on text/identity, this self-help genre of 'how to' feeds on the anxiety of doctoral researchers through assertive 'transmission pedagogies that normalize the power-saturated relations of protégé and master' (2008: 504). Drake continues:

Doctoral writing is situated in the professional setting and at the same time is constructed within the practice of academic writing that is culturally specific to doctoral work in western countries. Very importantly, writing transforms the writer, for writing is a means of working out what one thinks (Drake, *ibid*: 186).

On completing the doctorate and moving on professionally, we reflect that the memory of the experience is affected by our thinking about methodology, about making knowledge or validity claims. Transferability of the doctorate becomes unique because it creates knowledge within a community of learners through methodology and ethical considerations. The 'what to, how to and with whom to' learn provides a foundational experience to continue a lifetime of developing knowledge across a wider range of communities. It is the key to international mindedness.

Importantly, relationships with our supervisor stay with us, for better or for worse. The personal interaction between two professionals from distinct communities who are prepared to learn from each other is extremely significant. However, intimations of power and authority implicit in the word are also present in the fact of the supervisor, regardless of the word used to describe them, being an important gatekeeper to academic practices that must be achieved. Practitioner researchers are at the mercy at their supervisors, who are responsible for communicating the higher education practices, including the academic standards of the awarding institution. We see these power relations played out most obviously through doctoral assessment, whether this be the PhD confirmation, feedback on intermediate assignments, or on the thesis itself.

We end this article with a comment on the metaphor of travelling, for this has provoked responses whenever we have shared these ideas with colleagues at conferences. It has been pointed out variously that 'journeys have ends'; that the doctoral experience becomes more familiar the more experience one has of it, so visiting a motorway service station offers a good analogy – the more one visits the more one knows what to expect; and, critically, that travelling and journeying impose Western hegemonic vectors of linearity and progress onto something that is reflective and introspective. Clearly the choice of metaphor is a personal choice; in our case we chose 'travelling' rather than 'journey' because it offered the potential for humour; and because it enables us to speak about processes rather than outcomes specifically. What is important is that using metaphor seems to facilitate speaking about personal experiences, some of them quite painful, that are associated with the course of doctoral studies, and that may be associated with different stages of it. Roberts pursues this notion of our self, explaining that the stories that we tell are about something that is important to us: 'We continue to select the story because it fascinates us and is significant' (1998, 103). In our cases, metaphor allows us to illustrate some of the struggles in creating the new ways of thinking that lead to the completion of doctoral study, and that lead the doctoral researcher to make a claim for new knowledge.

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