

# **Perspectives on Professional Doctorate research and learning; the lived experience of the learned professional.**

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*This paper charts the reflective inquiry of a small group of practitioners into their identity and experience whilst undertaking a professional doctorate. The authors met at the 2016 international conference on professional doctorates, held on 24<sup>th</sup> March, in London, whilst taking part in a conference panel discussion on the Graduate Learning Experience. This paper is the result of our correspondence and particularly, the three reflective vignettes that were produced by three of the group. The analysis of the findings of a narrative inquiry indicate a desire or belief in wanting to contribute to society in some way as an outcome or consequence of their gaining the award and doctoral title and that this title included a notion of responsibility to others.*

## **Introduction**

The inspiration for this paper came from the Sixth International Conference on Professional Doctorates, held in London in March of 2018. This conference involved a wide range of professional doctorate perspectives on work, learning and research across many professional sectors, including health, education, business, religion, philosophy, science and engineering. The conference involved a number of plenary sessions, one of which was presented by Professor Pamela Barnard on the theme of 'what's unique about the professional doctorate

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– voicing the experiences of professionals in a changing landscape’. This presentation was an inspirational start to the conference consideration of the potential creativity and complexity of doctoral learners in the research journey. Burnard’s presentation, which was based on her recent publication; Burnard et al (2016), provided valuable ‘food for thought’ for the following panel discussion of professional doctorate candidates who were invited to discuss their experience of professional doctorate research and learning. The three students were drawn from the research and practice fields of Education, Health and Religious Studies. This paper will include a thematic analysis and discussion of the short vignettes that they have each produced. The vignettes are considered in light of the wider literature around the theme of the professional doctorate experience. This paper forms a starting point to considering the research question of ‘what contribution does the professional doctorate researcher make to their own development and that of other stakeholders and society at large?’

### **Methodological Approach**

The panel members were given an initial remit to provide detail about their background and when and why they embarked on a professional doctorate in their chosen subject. They were also required to summarise the core elements of their research, emphasising the impact it is having or likely to have on their professional environment. The candidates were also invited to evaluate their experience and in particular mention what they hoped to gain from the degree and to what extent their expectations are being or have been met, especially with reference to any changes and challenges they experienced in the professional context. Furthermore, they were asked to consider the wider impact that they hoped to achieve through gaining a professional doctorate (particularly for other stakeholders) and the wider society.

The three vignettes shown below provide a first-hand insight into the experiential world of the professional doctoral candidate. Each vignette includes the authentic personal power or agency of the individual author, each is discussed separately and finally, commonality and contrast of the three are analysed in comparison to current literature and practice. The methodological approach adopted is one of narrative analysis, seeking to understand what drives the learning and inspires one in undertaking the task of professional doctorate research and emerging themes from the discourse provided, following in the tradition of Bruner (1996) and Denzin (1989). The narrative approach attempts to engage with the lived experience of the research participant as captured in the story of themselves and the focus of their discussion. In this case, we are concerned with the life of the professional doctorate learner and their personal journey both professionally and socially, in the context of their cultural, social, professional and geographical situation.

The Cambridge Dictionary describes a vignette as ‘a [short piece](#) of writing, [music](#), [acting](#), etc. that [clearly expresses](#) the [typical characteristics](#) of something or someone’. Barter and Reynold (1999:1) describe the vignette; ‘In qualitative research, vignettes enable participants to define the situation in their own terms’. This seemed a useful way to explore the personal

identities and meaning that the three panel members held in relation to their professional doctorate study. Humphreys (2005:1) provides an investigation of his own career using vignettes and describes these as 'autoethnographic vignettes' which allow the researcher to investigate often taken for granted conceptualisations of the real world, allowing complexity to unfold.

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the vignettes has been undertaken cooperatively with each of the authors, which has enabled a self-questioning of their own vignette contribution in relation to the others. This is a relatively challenging approach, though introduced so that we could combine and interpret each piece from a different author's perspective, which might give recognition to similarity, difference and change. The authors also had chance to write a 'post-script' to their vignette, which could include any further thoughts and reflections that may have emerged in the analysis of the vignettes. In this way, each author played a role in the production of their vignette and the analysis of the other two co-author vignettes. Ethical consideration was discussed by the authors in preparing the vignettes and analysis. It was felt that the individual authors were accepting that they were happy for their contribution to be printed, though had taken the opportunity to alter any names of individuals and institutions where possible. As these vignettes are highly specific to each individual, there is a risk that institutions and associated individuals may be recognisable by some and in this respect, the authors have adapted certain identifiers in order to maintain a level of confidentiality.

The first vignette has been provided by Gail.

### **Vignette 1: Gail**

After fulfilling my dream qualifying as a Dental Hygienist in 1992, apart from mandatory Continual Professional Development (CPD) that was, or so I thought, my education complete. After working in the profession that I love I felt it would be rewarding to teach the future dental professionals and articulate my passion. I made the decision to move away from clinical practice into education. This transition directed me back to not only teaching education but embarking on my own educational journey. A Certificate in Education followed by a BA (Hons) in Education Studies heightened my determination to study further. A MA Education would have been the obvious choice although I was strongly advised to study a health-related masters. Completely out of my comfort zone I took the advice and enrolled on to the MRes Clinical Research. This is where it all changed for me personally and professionally.

I found me! The MRes was exactly the course I should have been on. Having an inquisitive mind, it fuelled my curiosity into research methods and analytical skills to attempt to answer a question. I learnt so much and completely enjoyed the full course. After completing the MRes I couldn't leave it there, my passion was research and I wanted to take it further. It is

evident now the MRes prepared me to be brave enough to embark on the next stage. The next stage was either a Professional Doctorate (PD) or a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), that was the decision I had to make. The attraction of the PD was the modular structure along with the emphasis on advanced research methods in the first two years of the programme. As research methodologies sparked excitement in me I was eager to learn more at a higher level. The assessments attached to each module would allow me to monitor my development and identify areas to focus on as I progressed through the course. Equally I liked the fact the PD required weekly attendance and being part of a cohort as opposed to only having contact with supervisors. A study by Janta, Lugosi and Brown (2014) concluded many PhD students felt isolated and lonely throughout their programme. The positives I had identified about the PD confirmed my decision to make that brave step and enrol onto the course.

Every positive assumption I had made prior to enrolling on the PD became reality once I was immersed in the programme. Initial feeling of fear soon disappeared as the PD was everything I hoped it would be. Although elements of my own self-doubt and disbelief were still (and presently) in my mind. Arguably, participating in weekly lectures not only increased my knowledge but involvement with the student cohort community (SCC) augmented my confidence. The SCC enhanced debating, critiquing and feedback skills along with the development of knowledge from other's strengths in topic areas in addition to discussing weakness (McSherry and Bettany-Saltikov, 2015). As a SCC we are on a journey together which for each of us have certain high points and low points although this support mechanism is invaluable and a positive aspect of the PD (Ellis, 2009). Equally the regular contact with programme lecturers has been an encouraging aspect as they are able to recognise us as professionals who are studying a research degree. The respect and dignity they provide is incredible and a key concept of the PD. As a student being invited to participate in lectures to students in cohorts beneath has been a rewarding and invigorating experience. It further enhanced my confidence that programme lecturers recognised my ability and capability to deliver the necessary information required at doctoral level.

Amongst the many positive aspects of studying for a PD, challenges are also at the forefront. Personally, initial challenges compromised self-doubt in my ability to achieve. One of the modular assessments in year 1 included a 3-hour exam, this filled me with complete dread to a point where it became my nemesis. In my mind, this would be the decider if I was able to progress. As the exam date loomed my determination to achieve increased although uncertainty was still there. Every day within the months leading to the exam I set time aside to revise and study. My ethos was 'if I fail at least I can say I couldn't have tried any harder.' The euphoria I felt when receiving my results was immense, 'I can actually do this', my confidence soared. My range of emotions included enormous pride, shock and disbelief although my motivation amplified. I knew now that with sheer hard work anything was possible.

One of the most frustrating aspects has been defending the equality of the PD against the PhD. Traditionalist scholars tend to have to opinion that the PhD is superior over the PD (Yam, 2005). Although McSherry and Bettany-Saltikov (2014) recognise the equality of the advanced level research degree as both programmes offer the same level of supervision and academic expertise input. The PD has permitted me to contribute to practice with an emphasis on research (similar to the findings of Burgess, Weller and Wellington, 2013). Should I have chosen the PhD option it is likely that I would have moved away from professional practice to focus on the academic nature of the research programme; a professional researcher, as opposed to becoming a researching professional, as generally emphasized with the PD (Yam, 2005).

My life has changed in many ways since embarking on the PD both professionally and personally. Professionally, the PD has changed my outlook and teaching style. I feel I can support undergraduate students more effectively, especially dissertation students, with my acquired knowledge of advanced research methodology. I can articulate study skills which have been effective for me and be empathetic when students are preparing for assessments. The PD provided me with opportunities I could have never dreamt of, such as presenting my experience both within the PD programme, to the wider school and internationally. I firmly believe that studying the PD has given me recognition and credibility within my institution and profession as an advocate of the PD.

Personally, I have had to adjust my lifestyle in order to accommodate the PD study. Initially I found the home, work and study life balance was challenging; working full time and having a family, it was imperative to find time to study with no distractions. I managed to allocate times when my family were busy alternatively, I can study in the University library should this be problematic. Studying daily has helped keep my momentum, focus, enthusiasm and a key aspect of my development. Timetabling when assessments and marking are due has been essential although at times it can be overwhelming. The support received from programme lecturers when it has been overwhelming has been vital in maintaining my determination to succeed.

A truly invigorating aspect of the PD has been the development of a research idea into a study proposal. The research methods module has allowed me to adapt a suitable methodology to attempt to answer my research question. My study will explore the perception and experience of forensic in-patients with a learning disability towards their oral health. It is recognised that people with a LD are identified as having significantly higher decayed, missing and filled teeth (DMFT) than the general population (Kaler, 2011). Arguably this is based on quantitative data, although the gap in knowledge is the question 'why' this happens. The PD has permitted me to develop a protocol/study to qualitatively address the question. The PD has further allowed me to apply my practice as a dental hygienist, lecturer and research knowledge to make an impact in an area which is under investigated (Rolfe and Davies, 2009).

Collaboration with a Speech and Language Therapist has exposed my study to a multidisciplinary team and raised awareness of the importance of oral health within the population. The wider impact consists of presenting the unique collaboration at a symposium; dental students have had the opportunity to provide workshops within the study environment and other local NHS Trusts to attempt to improve oral health.

The decision to enrol on a PD as opposed to a PhD has been life changing and the most positive decision I have made. This experience is thoroughly invigorating and rewarding. Challenges are ever present, however the positive aspects outweigh them particularly in respect to raising awareness in the study population.

***Post-script:***

From being involved in contributing to this paper I have recognised how the PD throughout the UK and USA is valuable to professional individuals in practice regardless of their profession sector. The PD structure is similar within each programme, with a common emphasis of making a contribution to practice. It is obvious that the PD focuses on professional practice linked to academia whereas the literature suggests the PhD has more of an academic focus (Burgess, Weller and Wellington, 2013; Rolfe and Davis, 2009; Yam, 2005). From writing the initial vignette I presented my study with the acknowledgement of impact of the poor oral health of my study population at the Annual Speech and Language Therapy Symposium to raise awareness of the issue. Without embarking on the PD it is possible that my research interest would not be possible nor deemed credible. I still maintain that enrolling on the PD over the PhD was the best and most life changing decision I have made. The reward of gradually making an influence on local practice has been astounding and with completion of the PD it is with hope, that awareness is raised about the complexity of a learning disability and oral health.

I wish to thank Gordon, Jordan and Richard for their influence and support in this paper. I echo Richards comment “the strength within our diversity” has certainly allowed us all to demonstrate the value of the PD regardless of profession.

**Vignette 2: Jordan**

I entered the professional doctorate program in Adult and Community College Education at the state university after eight years serving in academic support at the university. With an educational background firmly in the liberal arts, and being a ten-year employee of a liberal arts college, I am perhaps an unlikely candidate for the professional-based doctorate, but I am so glad that I opened my mind beyond the traditional Ph.D. I have now worked in the university setting for more than ten years and wish to continue to work in higher education that is intentionally developed for adult or professional learners.

In May 2016, my son had just turned three, my husband and I bought a new house, and I embarked on the doctoral journey. I will finish coursework over the summer of 2018 and embark on the dissertation over the next academic year, and my career goals have shifted from university program administration to teaching in a professional doctorate program in the field of Education. The transition for me has been from learning for learning's sake in pursuit of better understanding the world around me to learning about how to practically help other adult students learn and benefit from the same programs I've had the benefit of attending through the education offered in the doctorate in Education (Ed.D) program.

I was drawn to the education doctorate program because I wanted to advance my career in the university setting, and to do so, I felt I needed a doctorate. When exploring the options, I quickly realized that quitting my job to pursue a traditional, full-time Ph.D. was not in the cards for me – my family depended on my salary, and running up more student loan debt felt irresponsible with a new mortgage and a young family. I needed a program that would work in conjunction with my work life and my family life.

The education doctorate program in which I'm enrolled focuses on adult learners at two-year colleges and vocational programs. While I work at a traditional four-year liberal arts college, the programs I have worked for are geared towards working adults in the community, and therefore I felt that the subject matter of the degree would benefit me. I have been employed continuously at the state university with the Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences Program – an interdisciplinary, part-time master's program designed for working adults. I have also worked for the campus's Office of Professional Education, assisting with non-credit and credit programs for adults. The experience of being an adult learner has, in itself, benefited my work with programs for adult learners. The content of the program, including courses on leadership, change management, improvement science, quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as more administrative-based classes, have profoundly impacted the way I approach my on-going work at my local university campus.

Like the programs for which I work at the southern campus, the state university has a main campus in the north which hosts the Ed.D. program, which is designed for working professionals who may have demanding work hours and family responsibilities. Courses meet in a strict cohort format on Fridays and Saturdays. Though the courses are offered face-to-face, the program is considered distance education as the state campus is in the west of the state, approximately 160 miles from the north campus. Students on the program travel from across the state (as well as from neighbouring states) to attend this program. I personally drive two and a half hours each way for classes, which meets two to three times a month. For me, this schedule has meant that all the important forces in my life have had to work together to accommodate my pursuit of the degree; I give up a little bit of work time, a little bit of family time, and my classes meet in a very intense format that I'm sure is taxing on the professors, but allows for concentrated in-person class meetings. Each weekend can be around 12 hours of instruction from Friday evening to Saturday afternoon. This timeframe,

however, allows minimal impact on my employment, and still allows students to have a full weekend with their families twice a month and Sundays free. Everyone gives a little and takes a little to make the schedule work.

I was drawn to the program because of the emphasis on the adult learner, and my research has continued to focus on graduate programs with logistics specialized for working professionals. I believe this delivery of evening, weekend, or online courses is the future of graduate education. This program design allows adults to continue in their professional lives without interruption of progress or finances. The traditional master's and Ph.D. model of full-time enrolment is not a viable or sustainable option for many potential students as it requires time away from the workforce and therefore a decrease in wages. The professional graduate program that works around the professional schedule alleviates this financial burden of graduate school. It is my hope and goal to contribute research to this field in order to grow and improve these programs.

My research interest was really borne out of my own experience in the cohort. Equipped with my professional experience with a master's program for working adults, I have been particularly attuned to the logistical decisions made by the cohort's director to benefit student success and completion. My dissertation research will focus on best practices for teaching and managing a professional doctorate program, the benefits of cohort programming for graduate students, and teaching and advising adult professional students. It is my hope that this research will contribute to the success of professional doctorate programs as well as other graduate and professional programs designed for adult learners.

### **Vignette 3: Richard**

This vignette has been based upon a poster presentation entitled, 'The importance and abiding worth of the D. Prof degree for Religious leaders', which was presented at the conference mentioned in the introduction of this paper. It contains two iconographical images which illustrate the theme. First, the cover of the book 'Faith Finding a Voice' (Bloomsbury, 2018) by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols which my wife, Elaine and I have had the honour of editing. The book concentrates on four important topics: the understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, illustrated by the altarpiece (the cover design) by the Sieneese artist, Pietro Orioli, The Nativity with Saints; the importance of education in the context of life-long learning; inter-faith dialogue and the vocation and role of the Church's ministers - all issues with which we must wrestle as we explore the proposition. Secondly, there is presented a photograph of religious leaders in the London Borough of Harrow who are about to be presented to H.M. The Queen. This image demonstrated the cohesion of vision to which Religious leaders ought to aspire: corporate friendship and working for the common good of society and its improvement humanly and socially.

On the basis of these illustrations I present two theses: one general, one specific. First, I argue that religion, together with sociology, economics, politics and law form the basis for the

analysis and interpretation of human activity. The positive gain of this approach is to perceive the interconnectedness of academic disciplines and the advancement of personal friendship and intellectual ideas between scholars who have a similar aim: community harmony and the well-being of all people. Space does not permit to analyse such important themes as religion and secularism or to explore the tension between religious belief and religious observance except to comment that, if you travelled from Euston to Harrow and Wealdstone this morning you would observe devout worshippers attending Mass at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church; the Hindu faithful undertaking prayerful duty and social action at the Temple and many Muslim worshippers attending Harrow Central Mosque. Herein lies the value of the D.Prof approach in the work-based learning context: it recognises the imprecision of many of the tools of research methods (e.g., statistics which lead to generalisations) by illustrating local context, practical observation, existential encounter, a pragmatic approach - how things are - and the importance of human relationships within the overall umbrella of human activity in the home and in society. The condition, however, is that religion as a phenomenon should be understood rightly as the agent of divine love and compassion; that it should be practised correctly for the advancement of the human spirit and that religious leaders should be open to the new and exciting challenges engendered by a multi-religious society. The starting point for this intellectual journey, I would argue, is philosophy and, in particular, with two fundamental philosophical questions: First, what positive forces are at work to ensure a just society? Secondly, what attributes and circumstances are needed to form virtuous human beings? On the basis of these questions perhaps we should begin with Aristotle (Aristotle, 2016)?

My specific thesis is to illustrate the importance of religious leadership within this philosophical, theological and social complex. First, we need to understand the nature and significance of the intellectual capital required of religious leaders. Under the thesis outlined above the curriculum is now broadened to include other related disciplines. Given that religious studies and theology are sufficiently difficult on their own ground including, for example, philosophy, history, languages, dogma, ethics; two principle issues emerge: first, what knowledge do we need to acquire to become effective leaders and why? At what point does knowledge transfer into wisdom and 'best-practice'? Secondly, my proposition cries out for 'inter-disciplinary teamwork'. Some Ph.D students spend far too much time studying on their own with the result that they do not ask the fundamental questions: why am I doing this work and what do I hope to achieve in terms of my vocation and profession? Further, and by implication, how, and in what ways, does my research enhance community life? My second proposition within this specific thesis is to consider the nature of role: what activities should be undertaken by religious leaders, and why? Clearly the conducting of religious worship, the engagement with spirituality, the declaration of the ethical position and pastoral activity all are embraced within the concept of role; the factor which, in my judgement, needs to be addressed further are the issues relating to the positive relationship and dialogue of religious leaders both amongst themselves, and in connection with other professional groups within

politics, education, law, medicine and social welfare. Into this complexity should be included discussion relating to the role and purpose of religious leaders within the institutions within which these professional groups operate: schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, law courts and civic bodies. We know, as many of us work in, or are connected with, for example, universities; the manifold difficulties at the present time, both for staff and students, which have arisen relating to funding, pensions, 'teacher-pupil contact time'. In this context it might be suggested that religious leaders might be called upon to exercise pastoral skills, to be compassionate, understanding, challenging and prophetic, given that our corporate role is to uncover and discuss common ethical features which both enhance the particular community of learning and serve the common good of society as a whole. Given that the D.Prof degree concerns (among many other issues) the questions relating to professional status and skill, it can be perceived immediately that as professionals we offer 'a service' in order to demonstrate that the interests of those whom we serve are paramount, be they patients, students or, in the voluntary sector, worshippers or those in social or pastoral need. In the case of Religious leaders, however, it is difficult (and perhaps it ought to be?) to measure 'impact'. I am sometimes asked to comment on the question, 'can you be sure that you are making progress in the advancement of the religion dimension in life?' My answer often leads to disappointment: 'I'm not sure', I reply, 'but I know the work must be done and that we must move forward in faith', an answer which might be deemed to be too tenuous in the modern context. In fact, ironically, this uncertainty might be the way of highlighting the strength of my proposition: to perceive the importance and abiding worth of the D.Prof degree for religious leadership?

I should like to add two points by way of coda. First, the positive features of the journey which I have presented is due, in no small measure, to the excellent D. Prof teaching which I received at university and for the exciting dialogue which I enjoyed (and continue to enjoy) with my fellow students and travellers. I thank everybody most warmly. Secondly, it has been an honour and privilege for me to share my experiences along with Gail and Jordan. Our strength, of course, lies in our diversity of operation but we are united by our common educational philosophy which is inclusive, visionary, pragmatic and primarily, life affirming. It is in this latter category that our work will remain, in my judgement, of importance and abiding worth.

### **Combined analysis of the vignettes**

Analysis of narrative stories is always a difficult and complex process as participants may be influenced by a range of factors at the time of telling or writing their story. In this case, the three participants briefly told their story at the International Conference on Professional Doctorates in London, in March 2018. They then prepared a vignette to capture their story some months later in preparation for this paper. The analysis has been undertaken using the framework derived from the work of Mishler (1995) in his consideration of narrative functions, contexts and consequences, with particular reference to storytelling in interactional and institutional contexts. The method, similar in nature to thematic analysis

involved searching for common themes emerging in each of the vignettes and then seeking commonality amongst all three of the vignette pieces (see Kim, 2016: 213). There are obvious limitations to this form of analysis, which is based upon a relatively small sample of three participants/ co-researchers. Due to limitations of reporting, full details of the analysis are not able to be presented, only an overview of the merged main themes and sub-themes have been included for discussion.

Through analysis of each vignette, it is evident that three main themes are present within the scripts, these included; differences between the PD and PhD, personal challenges in undertaking doctoral research and contribution to practice and the wider community. The main themes emerged from a series of sub-themes, recognised within each of the main themes recognisable within the vignettes, as follows:

- 1) Differences between the PD and PhD:
  - Time to complete a part-time PD
  - Employed , parent, family adult (demographic of PD student)
  - Practitioner v theorist nature of PD
  - Recognition (parity of esteem) of the PD and PhD
- 2) Personal challenges and issues in undertaking doctoral research:
  - Planning family, work, study life-balance
  - Making the grade (accumulating module credit)
  - Camaraderie amongst PD cohort students
  - Risk of failure, confidence to undertake a PD
  - Personal and professional advancement
- 3) Contribution to practice and the wider community:
  - Improvements (from the research) to the lives of others
  - Change to impact practice positively
  - Role model, leadership to others
  - Responsibility to others

### **Discussion of the thematic analysis:**

Firstly, all authors relate to the many differences between the PD and the PhD. Jordan discussed 'the PD opened her mind beyond the traditional PhD' where she was able to maintain her working career along with her family life. Whereas Richard identified:

PhD students spend too far much time studying on their own with the result they do not ask the fundamental questions: Why am I doing this work and what do I hope to achieve in terms of my vocation and profession.

Gail considers there to be a difference in emphasis between the PD and PhD, such that the PhD is aimed at becoming 'a professional researcher, as opposed to becoming a researching professional, as generally emphasized with the PD'. This issue of parity of esteem between the PD and PhD was recognised by Burgess, Weller and Wellington et al (2011) and is evident

is all three vignettes as well as a recognition of the practice orientation of PD research and its impact on others.

Burgess, Weller and Wellington (2013) discuss how the PhD takes the student away from their professional practice to focus on a more academic route in comparison with the PD. Richard recognised 'the PD concerns the questions relating to professional status and skill'. His statement adhere to Yam's (2005) traditionalist scholars view that accomplishment of a PhD is more highly prized in the academic community than the achievement of a PD? With the progress of time, the PD is now becoming a popular doctoral route for many academic staff who wish to focus research upon their practice sector (Grove, 2017).

The impact of the PD has been apparent in all three vignettes as all acknowledge the challenge that undertaking the PD has presented to home and professional life, requiring social adjustments due to the often intense format of the part-time research programme. In addition, each vignette co-author recognises the personal and professional gains along with the potential contribution to their practice. Jordan identifies the experience of being a learner, which has benefited her administrator work practice and allowed her to approach her work role with students empathetically. Although Richard commented on his role as a religious leader, he finds it difficult to precisely measure religious impact, although it is evident in his vignette, that in his religious practice he considers theory from the PD to inform his vocation. Rolfe and Davies (2009) identify that the PD allows professionals to apply their acquired knowledge to make an impact in their individual practice. Also implicit within the vignettes is the recognition of a leadership responsibility for others, for example in their administrative and teaching role for Jordan and Gail, and in his ministry for Richard. There is recognition of the teacher leader role of the teacher role of the doctoral graduate as an advanced practitioner, for example, with the use of the title of doctor and potential assumed identity. This was recognised in the study by Weller et al (2010) and Burgess et al (2011) on professional identity for past PD graduates in Health, which showed that a high proportion of PD graduates used their doctorate title within their professional and social setting.

Benefits of the PD emerge throughout the vignettes with all co-authors in respect to individual's practice. Jordan focuses on her involvement in delivering a master's programme. Jordan has considered that her experience had benefited the student experience, along with contributing more generally to her professional practice. Richard further mentions that as professionals we have a duty to accommodate the interests of those that we serve as paramount to our careers/vocations. The PD has more generally informed us of our responsibility to practice ethically in terms of research, theory and skills. The structure, content and delivery of the PD within our institutions has provided us with such skills as working professionals along with being students on a PD programme (Rolfe and Davies, 2009).

The relevance to impact of the PD is interesting, with all three vignette authors recognizing their own personal gains in terms of impact, though this being often intangible and unquantifiable, though nevertheless, of importance. In seeking to justify parity of esteem,

many authors have considered impact in terms of self-esteem and benefits in terms of enhanced skills and abilities as well as benefits to the nature of professional research. A number of studies consider the benefits for employer institutions and organisations in supporting and employing PD graduates. Impact is often considered in terms of professional development and practice, enhanced learning skills potential and changes to beliefs and attitudes as considered in the paper by Hramiak (2017). Richard reflects upon the ethical nature of his doctoral learning and the potential for contribution to the wider community: 'the declaration of the ethical position and pastoral activity all are embraced within the concept of role'. This statement alludes to an aspiration of responsibility to others and seems to also be implicit within the vignettes of Gail and Jordan. The concept of role and leadership in Richards vignette further imply a form of agency or aspiration to a higher responsibility of the PD graduate.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The vignettes have generally supported much of the earlier research on the impact of professional doctorates on the individual, including potential impact upon others, for example within the workplace, practice and employment sector (see for example UKGCE, 2011). Volante and Weller (2018) consider the potential impact of the PD researcher on the workplace, they discuss the often arbitrary way in which professionals undertaking doctoral research are exposed to a new and often pressured expectation to develop a suitable research project within their organisation. This position was related to the philosophical reasoning of Martin Heidegger (1962), who considered the situation, which could be related to the PD researcher of 'thrown-ness', where the researcher is metaphorically jettisoned into a new situation and identity as a researcher. Heidegger also includes another relevant, and more positive philosophical point around the potential for attunement (deep understanding and social embeddedness within a team or group of people), relevant to the work based researcher through their familiarity with the organisation and social setting. This research has relevance to our narrative analysis through recognition of the practice orientation of PD research and implied social involvement and responsibility to stakeholders and the wider community who may be influenced through the research. The current study has highlighted the sense of aspiration of the PD researcher and perhaps the personal expectation of responsibility that is related to the PD 'Dr' title.

This last thematic point around role, leadership and responsibility to others seems different to the findings of previous studies on the professional doctorate experience and perhaps opens a door to a more general impact potential from the PD graduate, one which might benefit society more widely.

### **Conclusions and recommendations for further research**

This paper has sought to explore the following question: 'what contribution does the professional doctorate researcher make to their own development and that of other

stakeholders and society at large?'. In our reflections, what emerged from the vignettes was somewhat unusual and drew out more personal convictions to demonstrate personal responsibility, this was notable in all reflective accounts including emerging themes such as 'responsibility' 'supporting others'. In addition, a latent theme that might be considered in the vignettes, could be one of 'gratitude' which was understood as gratitude towards research supervisors, student peers and other supporters, including family members. Gratitude is an important aspect for the researcher and has recently been linked to benefits in well-being where those acknowledge gratitude towards others. Overall, there would seem to be a further important theme to be considered in the final outcome of the doctorate on personal and professional identity and any consequent responsibility considered. In some ways there seemed to be an unmet need for recognition of a new identity in obtaining the 'Dr' title and how this should be understood and voiced.

The themes of doctoral identity and responsibility, and exploration of unmet professional need or reciprocity in response to gaining the title, will be explored in a separate paper.

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