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Writing in/up a Professional Doctorate Portfolio/Dissertation

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Abstract

The starting point for this paper is the new production of knowledge literature (eg Gibbons et al 1994, and Schon 1995) and, specifically, the Lee, Green and Brennan (2000) conceptualisation of the Professional Doctoral curriculum. The purpose of the paper is to explore the form of writing congruent with this body of work, fore-grounding three concepts; portfolio, audience and researcher experience.

In many Professional Doctoral awards, “experience” is the key differentiating entry criterion from the PhD award. In exploring the consequences of this observation, the positionality of the author is discussed, including the question of authority (and the related issue of breadth/depth of experience in the portfolio/dissertation itself). A case study will be used to illustrate. It is argued that positioning the writer is essential in Professional Doctoral work. Consideration of the notion of audience for a Professional Doctoral product, within the Lee, Green and Brennan model, challenges (1) the primacy of academic writing as the genre and (2) the thesis as the product, for the Professional Doctorate. A consequent challenge is made to the formality of the traditional format of the dissertation/piece of research writing.

Introduction

The conceptualisation of second generation Professional Doctorates (Green, Maxwell & Shanahan 2001) is a productive way forward when thinking about postgraduate doctoral awards that are not only useful for professionals but recognise the important role that professionals have in the new production of knowledge. Second generation Professional Doctorates are characterised by Seddon (2000) as a focus upon learning rather than upon research. Based upon the consideration of the University of Western Sydney's EdD, the features of second generation Professional Doctorates were, for her (1) training in research and applied studies, (2) the portfolio, (3) a program comprising seminars, meetings and conferences, and (4) assessment which required a global judgment be made about the scope and quality of the award (Seddon 2000). Such Professional Doctorates are “likely to provide candidates with an integrated set of experiences enabling them to demonstrate, through research scholarship, a set of outcomes reflecting the qualities prized in modern professional educators” (Baumgart & Linfoot 1998, p.117). In a recent paper (Maxwell 2003), I have explored the claims for a second generation through a consideration of three case studies and then went on to analyse the changes that we have attempted in order to re-construct the ‘new EdD at UNE’. The latter is a concerted effort to make the EdD at UNE congruent with the second generation model. In contrast, most Professional Doctorates follow the course work plus dissertation model (Maxwell & Shanahan

2001) and appear to be dominated by academe. We have broadly characterised these as first generation.

Our work with these second generation Professional Doctorates can be seen as a development of the work of Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994). The new “knowledge society” is characterised by knowledge production occurring outside universities, ie a displacement of knowledge production from the disciplinary university to the places where people work, that is, knowledge produced in the “context of application”. They proposed a Mode 2 form of knowledge production in which knowledge is transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, heterarchical and transient. Such knowledge production takes into account the complexities of the professional workplace in the senses that they have a mixture of people working on problems that are relevant to them, in that situation. Importantly, Mode 2 knowledge is seen as a product of professionals (workers) reflecting upon practice where that reflection is generated out of their own interests. Mode 2 contrasts with Mode 1 knowledge production where in the latter the agency is with the academic and the disciplined-based inquiry produces a homogeneous, hierarchical and constant form of knowledge, argue Lee, Green & Brennan (2000, p. 124). Mode 1 is the hegemonic form. My interest in Mode 2 is not to colonise it by universities but rather to celebrate the differences and encourage researching professionals to take the complexities of their professional workplaces into account when/as they are researching it.

Mode 2 knowledge production has considerable similarities with Boyer’s ‘knowledge of application’. Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* is an elegant reformulation of what it is to do research in higher education. He elaborated on the four scholarships; discovery, integration, application and teaching (later to become ‘teaching and learning’ according to Glassick (2002, p.3)). Schon (1995, p.27) summarised the ‘old’ (discovery) and the three new scholarships well:

- [The] *scholarship of discovery*, which “has come to be viewed as the first and most essential form of scholarship, with other functions flowing from it”;
- The *scholarship of integration* gives meaning to isolated facts, “putting them into perspective ... making connections across disciplines, placing the specialities in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating non-specialists too”;
- In the *scholarship of application*, “the scholar asks ‘How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems? How can it be helpful to individuals as well as to institutions?’”; and
- The *scholarship of teaching*, which “begins with what the teacher knows,” means not only transmitting knowledge but *transforming* and *extending* it as well.

Of these, Boyer’s scholarship of application is the most akin to Mode 2 where the uncertainties of the social world are at play. There is, of course, potential for discovery (eg in industry-based fundamental research) in a Professional Doctorate, as there is integration where, for example, the facts of the situation are integrated with theoretical insights. The scholarship of teaching is evident in the form and elegance of the writing/speaking that takes place in the Professional Doctoral products. The latter in professional Doctorates are vital since the aim is improvement and as such products need to be considered widely, by professionals.

Schon (1995, p. 28) uses the swampy lowlands metaphor for workers trying to find answers to messy, confusing, often complex and important problems in the social realm. Further on, his argument makes sense that the research process associated with the lowlands, and by implication under-girding the scholarship of application is action research (cf Maxwell & Vine 1998). When we think broadly in this way about the kinds of research that might be done in a Professional Doctorate, any combination of the four scholarships seems to be possible. The portfolio much more than the dissertation is flexible enough to allow the possibility of more than one form of scholarship. Indeed the extended professional may well be able to display all four forms of Boyer scholarship.

I have tried to set the scene for the questions and issues that this paper will address. In fact the constellation of ideas associated with the research by the busy professional suggests the purpose of the paper, that is, to explore the form of writing congruent with the fore-going body of work, fore-grounding three concepts; portfolio, audience and researcher experience.

Portfolio

What form should of presentation should research take, if it is to be part of a university award, like a Professional Doctorate? The classic formulation is the dissertation, and this has its place. However, the portfolio as an alternative form needs to be considered. There are four good reasons for this:

- 1 The portfolio is flexible enough to allow different forms of scholarship.
- 2 The portfolio provides a vehicle that responds more easily (than the dissertation) to busy professionals' needs, in two senses. The researcher in the messy lowlands needs to have answers within a reasonable period of time. A portfolio containing a number of research studies allows this. Secondly, the busy reader simply does not have or, as I understand it, make time to read the long-haul dissertation;
- 3 The breadth of work that senior professional people undertake covers a wide range of possibilities. Allowing a number of studies recognises the breadth of expertise that a professional requires.
- 4 We also know that professional workers often move workplaces and when they do there is less disruption to the portfolio researcher, as compared to one on the dissertation pathway. This is another, pragmatic, support for the portfolio.

This is not to say that the portfolio is a new panacea for programs looking for an alternative more palatable for wary professionals. In fact it has been used in universities for some years, for example, in awarding higher doctorates at some universities in Australia (such as UNE), or even the PhD (Griffith). However, the portfolio is not a well understood product and it is still an empirical question whether a series of studies can attain the quality required at the doctoral level. Supervision and examination of the portfolio it would appear are in the process of development. Anecdotal evidence indicates that researchers using the portfolio approach can get over loaded. The challenge is to find the right ways to present the portfolio as a quality form of product at the doctoral level. Although the PhD dissertation is the 'gold standard', we need to remember that the quality of the PhD is not uniformly high. But for the reasons given above the portfolio has potential. Moreover, in my field of education, our feedback has been that the long-haul dissertation is a stumbling block for busy people.

The 'new EdD at UNE ' 1: Portfolio

The 'new EdD at UNE' (Maxwell 2003) has the Lee, Green and Brennan (2000) model as its primarily conceptual device. This model was first presented as a keynote at the 1998 Professional Doctorates conference at Coffs Harbour. We prefer the portfolio, but the dissertation is also an option. Our portfolio is conceived of as more than a collection of studies. The 'new EdD at UNE' requires quality research studies, and a linking paper as well. We see the linking paper coming from the prior work of the two specially written course work units, one concerned with workplaces and the other with the profession. The linking paper provides the theoretical framework and strong contextualisation of the research. The metaphor I have in mind is the linking paper as the roof over a series of columns (research), each well-placed to contribute to holding up the roof. The metaphor implies research pieces central to the task/to the professional workplace. Busy professionals don't have time to play games, so each study is likely to take at least a semester, possibly a year. In our program, two years for the course work and three years for the research suggests somewhere between the two and four studies. These studies are most likely to be within the scholarship of application and teaching (and learning).

Audience

Nelson and San Miguel (2000) at the last Professional Doctorates conference made the important point, amongst others, that the question of audience is central to writing. Their assumption was, however, that the audience for doctoral writing was the academic community and that the product should (only) be a dissertation. In the previous section the hegemony of the dissertation was challenged. In this section doctoral writing is re-considered, in part due to the kinds of criticisms Nelson and San Miguel themselves have observed, such as "How do I negotiate styles of writing – my style (professional) vs. your style (academic)" and "I *hate* academic writing. I don't want to have to write like that" (Nelson & San Miguel 2000, p. 1). These reactions of the nurses, although understandable, indicate that many do not see themselves in communication with (nurse) academics. This is also my experience with education doctoral students.

Alison Lee (1998) sheds some light on this issue when she critiques writing as an individualistic endeavour. She places writing as part of a 'discourse community'. Her point was that theorists like Torrance and Thomas (1994) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) had previously not included the social and the institution as audiences for writing. She also makes a case for the centrality of language in the process of research and also that researchers do not do the research and then write it up. Writing is part of the research as the best words and phrases are sought to communicate most effectively. Here she is not only encouraging researchers to write formal papers (and, presumably, a research proposal) but she acknowledges that the research can only have expression through the construction of text. Lee appears to mean here written text, but for our purposes other forms of text are possible such as recorded speech. Her interest is in the researcher finding a voice, one that speaks within a discourse community.

Who then constitute the discourse community within the Professional Doctorate? Lee (1998, p. 127) follows Bizzell (1992) and defines a discourse community as a 'group of people which shares certain language-using practices and is "bound together primarily by its use of language"' (Bizzell, p. 222), as well as other ties such as geographical, socio-economic, ethnic and

professional relationships'. A key criterion here is sharing language use. In the case of education at least, it is common knowledge that tertiary educators are strongly criticized by teachers for their use of language. In this case there is not one but two discourse communities with some overlap, it would seem. Other professions may well be in the same situation. Neither can we say that a discourse community is homogeneous or indeed that a professional is only a member of one discourse community. For example, a school principal will want to engage his parent community in a dialogue, with his staff and with others such as at a principals' meeting when some research of interest to them has been developed. If this is the case then there are multiple audiences for the research. Texts for different audiences need to convey meaning to these audiences using different registers.

A researcher writing a PhD does have to accept the invitation (in submitting the dissertation) to find the voice of the academic genre where the audience for the PhD dissertation is academics. But what of the producers of Professional Doctorate research where the discourse communities of the professionals in the field and the academics do not overlap, or only partly so? Here again the portfolio comes to the fore since the inclusion of different forms of writing/speaking is potentially possible.

Like Richardson (2000), as an academic I have been struck by my lack of pleasure in reading research in my field, particularly theses. Surely we want to engage our readers, and in so doing encourage a critical reading and thus a critical understanding of the research pieces. We need to ask what impact the work is having, a question of great importance for Professional Doctorates since most are formulated around the notion of improvement (Maxwell & Shanahan 1997). In order to make a difference it has to be accessible to the discourse community(ies) that has an interest in it. The Professional Doctorate text(s) needs to be constructed so that the possibilities of making an impact is maximised, for example, by finding new ways of forming text, such as of juxtaposing ideas, use of metaphor for teaching and learning, and stories.

The 'new EdD at UNE' 2: Audiences

Following the Lee, Green and Brennan model, different forms of the research product are acceptable within the 'new EdD at UNE' (Maxwell, Shanahan & Green, 2001, p.6-7). Three clearly identified audiences in the Lee, Green and Brennan model are academics, workplace colleagues and the wider professional community. Just as there are 'several possible accounts' of the research (Torrance & Thomas 1994, p. 108) and so too can there be several possible renditions of it depending upon the audience. I have in mind Bruner's 'courteous translation' concept. Specifically, I support the inclusion in the portfolio forms of writing, or even records of oral presentations, for different audiences. They would be items in their own right. Such an idea recognises that professionals have a variety of discourse community memberships - they need to communicate well to a variety of groups. The writing needs to be scholarly in the technical sense, and in the formal sense when the audience for the writing is academics. It does not always need to be 'scholarly' in the sense that one needs to impress with the breadth of literature read or in the complexities of style that can be found so readily. Many audiences will take the former on trust and be grateful for the lack of the latter. The professional educator needs to be able to show mastery of the different genres. Who then is the audience for this kind of portfolio/dissertation at UNE? Supervisors determine this in conjunction with the Head of School, and then the latter recommends to the Research and Higher Degrees Doctoral Committee. To my mind there is a very strong case to be made for at least one of three examiners being a well qualified

professional, a person with considerable experience who could relate well to the context where the research was undertaken and has knowledge of the different audiences the researcher was writing for. Currently at UNE the published criteria for examination need to be revised since they do not encompass what is proposed here. Likely that will be a challenge for us in the Academic Board deliberations.

What I am proposing may cause some tension with supervisors and others. Likely their experience will be in the encouragement of academic writing in the form of papers for publication and the dissertation at the doctoral level. Each may have had considerable success in doing so. Never-the-less the work is fundamentally the researcher's, albeit negotiated within the bounds of what is accepted either as custom and practice or against criteria for examination. I have argued here for breaking down of structural impediments to the writing of the research but would strongly maintain that the presentation needs to be understood within a quality driven framework (cf Evans 2001).

Experience

My interest in the question of experience and its place in doctoral education stems from my research in Professional Doctorates from 1998 (Maxwell & Vine 1998). Almost all Professional Doctorates have *experience* as a prerequisite for entry (Maxwell & Shanahan 1997). I began to ask the question about how such experience could be incorporated into a dissertation (as the UNE had then). In 2000, I was stimulated by the observation from an examiner of a successful EdD dissertation that the inclusion of the background of the EdD researcher really assisted the examiner's reading of the text. It was evident that positioning of the researcher, or the voice of the researcher, could considerably add to the quality of the writing by injecting credibility.

About this time I was aware that some PhD dissertations were challenging the form of doctoral writing. My colleague Cathryn McConaghy has had her PhD from the University of Queensland published (McConaghy 2000) and I understand that it is largely no different from the dissertation. It is interesting for a number of reasons but the point here is that she positions herself strongly in the Preface. Later, I became involved in an interesting Masters project in which the researcher/writer has a strong sense of what she wants to write and how she wants to write it. The writing is consistent with her findings and enhances the research. It includes poeticisation of the informants' words, amongst other devices. I think that it is effective, and the writing takes us a long way from the detached rationality of a lot of doctoral research/writing. Not only is it rigorous but it is engaging.

The issue is the matter of voice, or position. It is an issue that derives from the feminist position (eg Olesen 2000). Our values are there, in the writing. Experience has something to offer for the writing and the writer, indeed as Lee would have it, for the research(er) because our experience shapes us, or, "all texts are personal statements" (Geertz 1988, in Lincoln & Denzin 2000, p. 1051). Lincoln and Denzin (2000, p. 1051) comment "[t]he correct phrasing of this issue turns on the amount of personal, subjective, poetic self that is openly given in the text". My point here is that the inclusion of such personal material *adds* to the text because the reader is able to see the extent to which the researcher/writer is able to understand the informants and their context but is also able to show the breadth and depth of knowledge brought to the writing. For example, I had

an EdD student say to me recently that as he was gathering data the informant said “you know what I mean” and I am sure that my student did since the latter had been through the same set of experiences. Noting that we can never understand exactly what another is saying, the EdD researcher was able to bring to the researching situation such background and parallel experiences that the research was able to proceed smoothly and questions as well as answers negotiated in a tacit kind of way. The difficulty comes in the presentation of these personal data, yet I think that this is where the authority (credibility) of the researcher comes into play and where the writing has the potential to engage the audience. However, it also has the potential to create negativity for the audience, for example, through writer indulgence.

I began to talk about this to a colleague. He is an EdD student and I was impressed by a speech that he has sent me to read. What impressed me was its *authority* with which it was rendered. I mentioned my interest and sent him some papers. He wrote this in return:

I received the articles on rhetoric you sent me. Thanks. I found the one ‘Persuading Aristotle’ [(Thompson 1998)] the most reader friendly of all. Regarding how one can get students to write more authoritatively, I wonder whether this article (which of course is about speaking) on p96 re ‘Who Are You? What are Your Values and Beliefs?’ could be stressed/expected more from students in their written work? Similarly, when the writer says on p95 that ‘your values and beliefs are told most authentically through relevant and concise personal stories’, this could equally be applied to guidelines for good authoritative writing too in much the same way as the Ralph Waldo Emerson's quote "The art of speaking (and writing?) [are] what you mean and are."

Another colleague had pointed me towards what he called ‘a classic 19th Century text on rhetoric’ (Whately 1991(1846)). Thompson had pointed out how to position oneself and Whately establishes its merits. From Aristotle, Whately (1846, 1991 p,13) remarks that the speaker needs to create an impression:

He remarks, justly, that the character to be established is that, first, Good Principle, second Good Sense, and thirdly, Goodwill and friendly disposition towards the audience addressed; and if that orator can completely succeed in this, he (sic) will persuade more powerfully than the strongest Arguments.

The telling point is in the last clause. For those interested in exploring this idea further, more modern presentations exist such as Thonssen and Baird (1948 pp. 383-391) and Corbett (1990 pp. 286-293) in a section entitled ‘Ingratiating oneself with the audience’. Ingratiation, of course, is not the objective. We want to speak with authority, and to use that authority not as a form of evidence but rather as background to establish credibility. This is a challenge.

By encouraging EdD writers to portray their experience as a form of authority I would want them to do so in a manner that engages the reader. Here I am also making the claim that in so doing the writer is presenting a case for expertise. The positioning of the writer in the manner of Whately and Thompson will not only engage the reader if done well, but will also establish the researcher’s voice as an authoritative one, an expert if you like. I suspect through stories and other means, the breadth and depth of experience is brought to the complexity of the context and

the research. I think a reader will not only be re-assured but the account will be more likely treated as trustworthy and credible (cf Guba & Lincoln 1989).

The 'new EdD at UNE' 3: Experience

UNE's EdD regulations require at least 4 years' experience but the reality is that the mean level of experience of enrolees is about three to four times this. In 2003, "students" will, for the first time, be invited to consider the ideas above in a formal way in the unit EDCX 793: Professional Portfolio. A further challenge for us will be carry 'supervisors' with us, and indeed to ask them to work through not only the challenges that have been indicated above but others that will inevitably arise. We will have to change the published criteria slightly to encompass the portfolio and possibly to include of alternate forms of writing than the academic style and to make other forms of presentation than writing possible. Examiners are always chosen carefully and as we chart this new path the portfolio from UNE will need examiners who maintain the quality of the doctorate but understand the reasons such as the ones presented above about why the portfolio takes the form that it does/has and has, thematically or otherwise, the experience of the researcher clearly evident.

Conclusions

I have been arguing, with Lee, that 'writing up' a research study is too simplistic a notion. The process is more reflexive: we write 'in' for the learning and 'up' for the audience. Just as the research is negotiated, so is the language we choose to present what has been found. I argued that Professional Doctoral researchers are members of a number of discourse communities. As a consequence of this they ought to be able to include presentations to these audiences in the portfolio. The portfolio is itself a form of product that is consistent with the breadth of demands that a professional faces, each of which is potentially researchable. Professional Doctorate researchers can make use of their experience to create an authoritative voice as they carefully position themselves as writers. These positions will, in all probability, be challenged as portfolios are themselves challenges to the hegemony of the dissertation as evidence for the doctoral 'gold standard'. With the Professional Doctorate focusing upon improvement, my hope is that the research will be read/listened to by discourse communities with an interest to do so.

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