

Managing their own programme: a case study of the first graduates of a new kind of doctorate in professional practice

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This article contributes to current debates about professional doctorates from a lifelong learning perspective, focusing on those who choose to undertake a doctoral programme in mid- or late career and their responses to the challenge of demonstrating their ‘doctorateness’ as evidenced in their previous and continuing professional work. It is based on the first 10 case histories of an extensive grounded theory study of the 150 candidates who have so far presented themselves for the professional doctorate of Middlesex University (UK) and reveals some insights into the pedagogical processes that come into play when people are given centre stage in the design and completion of doctoral programmes based on their own professional work. Central to those processes is the extent to which, in response to that responsibility, candidates successfully demonstrate their professionalism at the highest level within critical academic and professional environments. In accordance with grounded theory we conclude with some tentative propositions about the way in which the academic community might usefully engage in discussion about the style and range of professional doctorates and how they might be developed.

The development of professional doctorates, particularly in the United Kingdom and Australia (Maxwell & Shanahan, 1997; Maxwell *et al.*, 2000; Bourner *et al.*, 2001; Lunt, 2002) has prompted debates about different approaches to work-related doctorate-level higher education. Discussions range over forms of knowledge (initiated by the work of Gibbons *et al.*, 1994; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003), definitions of what constitutes academic achievement at the highest level (UKCGE, 2002), the balance of responsibility for defining quality and relevance between the awarding institution on the one hand and the profession on the other, and tensions between what some see as the legitimate demands of the professions in response to needs in the work marketplace (UKCGE) and what others would call the purity of academic and intellectual advancement for its own sake (Costley, 2000). Most of these debates are about institutional issues, either academic centred or

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profession centred, and tend to underplay the different ways in which candidates participate in the process, thereby missing valuable insights into the learning processes involved. Notable exceptions include the work of Ruth Neumann, whose study of diversity and complexity in Australian doctoral programmes (Neumann, 2003) examined a range of aspects including student–supervisor relationships.

Professional doctorates have tended not to be defined in terms of the central role of the candidates in defining the programme and controlling the process of learning. Most are defined in structural terms, typically the mix of taught courses/subjects/modules supporting a piece of independent enquiry or project with an emphasis on relating theory to practice, applied research and preparation for high-level professional work (CDDGS, 1998). A market-driven definition of the professional doctorate is provided by the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) as ‘a programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University’ (UKCGE, 2002, p. 62). Such doctorates have proliferated in the fields of Education (Ed.D.), Business (D.Bus. or DBA), Psychology (D.Psych.) and specific activities such as teaching (D.Teach.). Whilst the areas and offerings across an ever-widening range of academic fields have increased, the numbers of students actually enrolled in many of these programmes within Australia, for example, have been in recent decline. In the United States, as well as elsewhere, the professional doctorate is often a qualification for entry or early advancement in a range of specialist employments.

Against this background of specialist programmes developed for particular professional groups, with specialist titles relevant to their field of study, there is a growing group of generic professional doctorates such as that at Middlesex University (hereafter MU)—the subject of this article—where the focus is more on the students themselves than on the profession or any particular discipline. In their study of Australian professional doctoral programmes, McWilliam *et al.* (2002) identified a shift to ‘student’ development as part of a wider move towards work-based learning, vocationalism and professionalism in higher education in which the candidates surveyed indicated a wish for a closer relationship with their profession or occupation, quality supervision and research training for their thesis (2002, p. 63). The MU idea that the central focus of the doctoral programme should be individual candidates’ distinctive professional experience, current activities and future professional development, as defined by the candidates themselves, raises challenges for quality assurance, tutorial support and professional recognition (Boud & Tennant, in preparation). Most of all, as this article aims to show, it presents particular challenges for the candidates themselves and an opportunity to reconceptualize professional study at a doctorate level in terms of the theories and practices associated with learners managing their own learning.

The MU model: putting the candidate in control

The MU Professional Doctoral programme (hereafter, MU D.Prof.) is not a typical example of schemes currently available worldwide. It rests comfortably with Scott *et al.*'s 'dispositional or trans-disciplinary' mode in that it is 'essentially concerned with the individual and their own practice' (Scott *et al.*, 2004, p. 51). What characterizes the MU professional doctorate is self-managed lifelong learning in a professional context. The candidates themselves build personalized programmes around their distinctive previous professional experience, current professional issues and longer term professional plans. The programme enables candidates to do this without interference from what Scott *et al.* call 'methodological imperialism' (Scott *et al.*, 2004, p. 48) in which some academic institutions feel obliged to champion a particular methodology and put all candidates, irrespective of their particular focus, experience and expertise, into programmes of prescribed taught (or supervised) content thought by the institution (or profession) to be of crucial importance to achievement at the highest level in that professional field. The MU programme provides a 'Research Methods' module to help candidates themselves make informed decisions when devising, and then justifying, the particular strategy most suited to their purpose. Moreover, in the MU approach, the nature of candidates' final work submitted for assessment is negotiated by the candidates themselves according to the needs of their programme, and can consist of artefacts, professional handbooks and significant innovations in their professional work through to the more traditional thesis or project report.

Middlesex University defines its professional doctorate in terms of the candidates' ability to:

- review and appraise their previous education and professional experience;
- engage their professional colleagues in collaborative ventures capable of achieving significant impact in the professional arena;
- articulate and justify to the university the plans for their final projects;
- deliver outcomes that have achieved or are capable of achieving professional impact; and
- present, at the end, a critical commentary of the doctoral experience as a whole, including its relevance to what might follow.

Candidates are assessed by their ability to do all of the above within the framework of the university's normal criteria for doctorate-level work.

The programme is organized within a credit-based modular structure. Each component of the programme must be demonstrated in the context of the university's generic criteria for judging performance at doctorate level. The Level Five generic criteria (as they are called at MU) are consistent with national standards for doctorate level, covering high-level cognitive and personal transferable skills developed and ethically demonstrated within a professional context. The Level Five criteria are sufficiently generic to allow candidates to develop programmes in whatever field they work and are presented to all candidates at the outset of their

programmes so that candidates can use them as personal guides to what is expected when preparing their reviews of learning, plans for their programme and their final products. People in the profession with experience and expertise relevant to the candidate's field are invited to join experienced university examiners at doctorate level in assessing, against the Level Five criteria, the appropriateness of the candidate's plans and the professional relevance of the outcomes.

In short, the MU D.Prof. is one that requires candidates to take full responsibility for negotiating and managing their own learning and continuing professional development within a critical framework established by the university, with professional involvement as appropriate. The question for this study is: what pedagogical insights can we glean from the exercise of that responsibility?

The study

Six years after its inception, MU initiated a research programme to gain insights into the operation of its D.Prof. and to make informed contributions, based on research evidence, to the development of theories about learner-managed work-based learning and personal, professional and organizational development. This article is the first to emerge from that work and provides some insights on which follow-up research and debate can be based. It is important to appreciate that the researchers were not engaged in a validation of the programme as a whole. The university has well-established externally refereed rigorous quality-assurance procedures consistent with national standards for that purpose—the most recent successful revalidation taking place in parallel to our research.

Methodology

A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997) was chosen for two reasons. First, the researchers wished to allow the agenda to arise from issues raised by the candidates themselves, not from academic debates about the nature of professional doctorates as a whole. Second, as some of the research group members were involved as programme managers and wished to distance themselves as much as possible from their own perceptions, particularly in initial data gathering and early analyses, this approach avoided preconceived templates being placed across the data.

All graduates of the programme (40 in total) were personally invited to participate. Ten graduates (four female, six male) who were both willing and available participated in the study. Lengthy open-ended interviews were conducted by colleagues not personally involved with the cases. Respondents were encouraged to talk freely within a loose chronological sequence covering the period before they applied, their experience of the programme and the period after graduation. Interviewer probes, including prolonged silences, were used to take respondents deeper into issues they themselves had raised, pressing for clarifications, personal

reactions, examples and implications for their programmes. This structure allowed respondents to make their own connections and construct a personally coherent account of the experience as a whole (Bertaux, 1981). All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed, with the final text approved by the subjects. All texts were disaggregated into numbered bite-sized components, facilitating subsequent audit trails. Typically, a transcript would contain 200 or more coded statements, giving about 2000 items of raw data in all. Initial coding and sorting were based on the loose interview structure, i.e. why they joined the programme (motivation), what happened on the programme (process) and what happened afterwards (impact), and were cross-checked by other members of the team.

Subsequent levels of coding and sorting were carried out within each of the initial coding areas (motivation, process and impact). Data relevant to 'process', for instance, were further coded and grouped according to the activity of the programme to which they referred (e.g. review of prior learning, programme planning, engagement with tutors). Statements of each feature were further coded and sorted using labels derived from the data that summarized concisely what was being described, e.g. 'criteria', 'support', 'hurdle', 'challenges' and 'pulling things together'. Coding and sorting at Levels four and five were used to synthesize generic issues arising from the detail. For instance, data describing specific experiences were coded according to whether the candidates regarded them as 'adding value', 'not adding value', 'helpful' or 'distracting', thereby making it possible to group those processes that had most impact, whether negative or positive, on the candidates' engagement with the MU D.Prof. programme. At each stage of this lengthy process the coding was shared with a research reference group who discussed the legitimacy of each code in terms of the interview data from which it was originally derived, giving confidence that the whole process had transparency and rigour.

Prominent amongst the negative features of the experience were impatience with some of the preliminary activities (wanting to get on with it), the bureaucracy associated with the modular structure and the lack of peers pursuing identical topics, but none of these features was common to more than 4 of the 10 candidates. On the other hand, some aspects of the process, both good and challenging, were important for at least 9 of the 10, suggesting that they may constitute common characteristics of the experience as a whole. Because of their commonality, it is these characteristics that are discussed later in this article.

Profile of the cases in the sample

At the time of their application to the programme, all 10 graduates were in senior positions of responsibility with an ongoing or emerging real-time work project that had potential for development into a doctoral programme. The generic nature of the programme is illustrated by the individual specialisms of those in the sample and the focus of their programmes for their D.Prof. awards:

- a headteacher seeking to establish a new community-oriented learning culture in her school;
- a senior interment manager for a major city tackling major problems of burial congestion, within major environmental, cultural and bureaucratic constraints;
- the administrative head of a major international religious group, setting out an informed agenda for its future development based on a review of past and current practice and likely trends;
- an architect seeking to become established as an authority on mediation of disputes and to contribute to wider understanding and practice in that field;
- a physiotherapist, seeking to raise the status of the profession via new in-service postgraduate opportunities;
- a vocational qualification consultant working on establishing the professional status of a specialist group currently lacking professional status;
- a psychotherapist, extending opportunities for experienced practitioners to advance themselves via a new practice-related higher level programme;
- a senior researcher for national assessments of school pupils developing systems, standards and procedures to meet current needs;
- a government advisor on special care services, developing audits of effectiveness of government services in that field; and
- a university quality-assurance manager developing systems for a new faculty.

All 10 were established in their careers; 2 of the 10 were close to retirement. For their final D.Prof. assessment, each submitted evidence of achievement of their professional goals (as briefly mentioned above) for assessment by experienced external examiners approved by the university's Research Degrees Committee using the university's generic criteria for doctorates as a whole. Where appropriate, external representatives of the professional field were involved. The university's assessment criteria for doctoral work, covering knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills and practical skills, are supplemented by evidence of professional impact of the work being assessed. Each in the sample was successful on all counts.

Experience of the programme

For the purposes of this article we give particular attention to the candidates' learning experience of the programme. Other articles are being prepared on the underlying motivation of candidates in joining the programme and the impact that the programme has had on themselves and their work (Costley & Stephenson, 2005).

Table 1 shows those features of the MU D.Prof. experience that emerged from the final coding exercises and mentioned by at least 9 out of the 10 candidates in the study.

The features in Table 1 are illustrated in the following case profiles compiled from transcripts of three of the candidates, with minor clarifications in brackets.

Table 1. Common features of candidates' experience

Feature	Elaboration
Control	Candidate has responsibility for the purpose, content, level and conduct of the programme, placing the candidate's persona and work at the centre of the process
Justification	Candidates repeatedly have to justify achievements and plans to academic and professional stakeholders to secure credit, approval to proceed, engagement with the profession and final recognition
Legitimation	<i>In response to personal initiative and exposure</i> , the programme recognizes the candidate's previous experience, current activities, academic abilities and professionalism as comparable in value and level to that achievable by Ph.D., in both the academic and professional community
Integration	The programme requires candidates to integrate their programmes with professional experience, current activities and future intentions, with reference to doctorate-level criteria
Support	Support from the profession as well as tutors is responsive to candidate initiative, is readily available, and is focused on helping with candidates' personal, academic and professional development
Engagement	Engagement with the wider professional community, as sources, contacts, partners, signatories or assessors, is key to enabling the candidate to secure legitimation from the profession and develop useful and relevant projects
Reflection	Reflection on previous experience, current activities, wider professional involvement and the level of achievement are key ways in which capability is enhanced
A forward direction	Forward direction is encouraged via the programme approval procedures, building on experience, engagement with the profession and integration of personal and professional aims

Case A: architect moving into work usually done by lawyers

I found myself working in mediation of disputes, an environment dominated by the legal profession—where an architect was a stranger. I wanted a programme that would help me to locate myself in this unfamiliar territory, to get that extra bit of mettle—one that is professionally based—to advance the profession and take it forward. The programme preliminaries [review of learning and research methods] helped me reflect before diving in—to take time before committing myself. It was very important for me to do this myself—‘off my own bat’—with support from others. Being able to do this was part of the added value.

The Review of Learning really made you think about the way you were learning, working and thinking NOW. That was a surprise. Schon really chimed with me. [Research Methods module]—sharing problems and anxieties was important. I was not completely alone. It was good for building confidence. On earlier courses, this was led by the tutor's preferences. Here it was up to me.

The Learning Agreement [negotiated with the university and the profession] is key. It means the profession thinks it's OK. Getting those signatures [showing support for the proposed programme] was tough. I had to make a presentation to get their signatures. Existing professions like Law are unfamiliar with the D.Prof. so I had to be very explicit. You have to persuade other people that what you want to do is important. Approval from

the university meant the programme was good enough [for a doctorate] but Law Society approval meant I could sell it to my peers and get their professional support. It said to me ‘This means something’, a proclamation that it was worthwhile. The combination of having signatures on an agreement to progress, plus one’s own personal ambitions is a powerful mix—with real implications. It was not a luxury—like my [other university] MA. This was work needed for yourself.

[Doing the project] helped me clarify my location within the profession and raised crucial professional issues about whether mediation was just the preserve of the lawyers. Provocative papers [written as part of the programme] led to some helpful responses via the Internet from all over the world, from fellow professional mediators, some of them lawyers. It helped me to develop the project, bring back improvements to discuss with tutors. The papers have now appeared on other Websites around the world.

[Re final assessment] the choice of external examiner was ideal. She had a huge background in the field worldwide—also with ties in the Law Society panel of mediators. It was an important professional validation. It meant I had done my apprenticeship here—it was very important—a greater acceptance into a community often hostile to outsiders.

[Overall] you cannot take it easy—you have to persuade everyone—employer, profession, the university, that it will be of value. There is no way that you can take a back seat. You have to sustain it all the time. It gave me a structure within which I could do that.

You have to justify the difference from a Ph.D. It is as close as you get to academic with a clear practical impact—really exciting. It is a great programme—it hasn’t left me. You keep the habit of reviewing your learning.

Case B: freelance consultant in vocational qualifications and the professions

I went through a logical sequence of qualifications and progressed to a Ph.D. on the idea of professionalism. I was looking for a longer term commitment with more developmental potential so I left the Ph.D. I was looking for something linked more to the work I was doing. I wanted to challenge orthodoxy so I wanted to look at the bigger picture. The D.Prof. was more developmental and more focused on my needs and interest. I wanted something to help me move on.

The D.Prof. provided a link to an academic community, an opportunity to bounce ideas, hear different perspectives, throw ideas around and get other ideas. The programme treated its candidates as practitioners and experts not as part-time students. It was linked to your work, a live piece of work with tangible outcomes.

My aim was to raise the level of what I was doing. As part of the programme I wrote eight articles [for publication]. I also put them on the Web and they produced feedback from a much wider community. Negotiating academic credit for previous learning and experience highlighted where I was. I was being authentic. The level statements were quite helpful.

Getting programme approval made me think how I was going to make something appropriate that would work. I was able to integrate the D.Prof. template into one of my existing client projects [with a professional group]. It made me view that work project in a different way, made it seem more appropriate and encouraged negotiation in my real work project. The reflective bit also helped me to see the potential of the work project, how my work fitted into it etc. The client realised this as well and they agreed to support the programme and within six months they saw the value of it to them. It was important

for me to get the client's backing. It also meant they got more out of me.

During the writing up [for assessment] four articles emerged. I was also talking to big professional groups—testing ideas out, getting feedback from the field. This is still ongoing. I had to stop artificially in order to break off and hand it in. Support from the university was in the form of emails. It was very good to get the feedback, both critical and creative. It stopped me from being too narrowly focused.

The final assessment was an interesting discussion, a good-quality professional exchange. No one was trying to catch me out. The D.Prof. has validated the work I've done, via the status of the external examiner. It confirmed that the quality of the work was good.

It is difficult to separate the D.Prof. learning from client activity. I am now more comfortable and confident working in politically sensitive areas with the confidence of the client, to be able to retain some detachment without losing empathy. I am better at getting people to think in terms of systems, the whole picture, giving a pragmatic linking of the academic with the proactive. The conservation community [a client] wanted me to use the D.Prof. title—because they felt it reflected well on them.

Case C: physiotherapist developing learning materials for a postgraduate programme

There has always been this tension/hierarchy between the medical and non-medical. A Ph.D. didn't fit too well with my work at that time. Research was not compatible with private practice and not relevant to my work.

The review of previous learning was a perfectly appropriate start. It was a cathartic activity. You can see your journey and it helps you focus on critical incidents. It made me feel worthy in areas in which I was an authority—not just a handmaiden to doctors. We physios have not become an autonomous profession. I was the embodiment of Schon, Kolb and Rogers. It also meant I could get specific credit for the previous work I had done. It was an affirmation of my earlier achievements, and was also giving credibility and recognition for the book I'd written.

I had to demonstrate the level of my previous work. The university's level statements were particularly helpful, an excellent point of reference. I still use the indicators at Level Four in my educational activities. Getting approval for my programme was approval for the work I was doing. Lots of components overlapped. You had to provide coherence and drive it through yourself.

My work would not have been as coherent without the wrap-around commentary [on my work] that had to be submitted. My final project in effect was credit for my existing work. It just hit my life at that stage. It was current, relevant to my life at that time but it was also something that was carrying forward. I could do another D.Prof. on the next stage of my development. I saw it as taking people onwards to further stages. It was self-driven and a big justification of what I had done—linked to the Level Five criteria.

I felt secure in the presentation process [in my final assessment] itself but it was totally new. It was hard to know whether it would be OK. You cannot rehearse such a thing. I felt I had met the criteria but would others agree, especially the specialist examiners? [Named examiner] was perfect for the role. I respect him so much—at the top of his profession; he values the educational dimension and understands physiotherapy. He also publishes—he was an appropriate vehicle for credibility. I had a job accepting myself I had the doctorate. It was about myself as a person and as a professional.

[On getting the award] There were lots of hoorays. It was very gratifying to hear that from my professional peers, including the medical doctors.

There was a huge knock-on effect. I had encouraged others. Without the doctorate I might still have managed to get the Masters programme going but the doctorate ensured that the person responsible had achieved a level higher. There was now some parity with other doctorate colleagues. The others had research degrees; I have a professional degree. The D.Prof. has changed me—how I approach new challenges. I can now see the wider picture and the help I need and from where. I am hugely happy to seek help and criticism, derived from personal security, and much happier to share what I have done. I see myself as a resource for others—and vice versa. I am collaborating as an equal. I am the only D.Prof. in the profession.

Personal value-added from the experience of the programme

The formal assessment ensured that candidates successfully demonstrated doctorate-level achievement within their specialist fields. As observable in the cases, each candidate reported other significant personal and professional benefits from the experience. A parallel analysis of the post-completion personal and professional impact of the MU D.Prof. on candidates (Costley & Stephenson, 2005), using other data from the same cases, suggests the benefits perceived by successful participants to be:

- greater personal and professional credibility;
- enhanced personal and professional capability and belief in their power to perform; and
- strengthened commitment to continuing development.

The emerging proposition

The internal coherence of the autobiographical accounts makes it possible for us to construct from the evidence propositions about how the dynamics of the self-managed learning process might have had an impact on the candidates themselves. We present the following as an emerging proposition:

- Central to the enhancement of the candidate's credibility, capability and continuing development is *the pivotal position of the candidate as the principal agent of control of a programme situated within critical and demanding academic and professional contexts*. It is the responsibility of individuals, not the university or the profession, to link the academic and professional constituencies, to create and justify programmes consistent with their previous experience, current work activities and further intentions, to expose their status and professionalism to critical comment from colleagues, to secure approval for their programme and to match their achievements in their professional context against university criteria. Positive affirmation in response to such initiative and exposure enhances belief in themselves and their power to perform. Exercising and justifying their responsibility for the programme involves candidates in critical reflection and requires proactive engagement with the professional field.

- The *programme structure* contributes significantly by requiring the candidate to match their own professional performance as a whole—including past, current and planned activities—against *generic criteria* consistent with the highest level of academic achievement, thereby facilitating the capacity for critical *reflection*, *intellectual integration*, *synthesis* and judgement of good practice.
- *Support from tutors* on the programme is particularly helpful when it (a) is focused on generic issues relevant to programme procedures and criteria for success; (b) helps candidates to formulate, articulate and justify their achievements and intentions; (c) is responsive to candidate initiative and suggestions; (d) is focused on helping candidates take themselves forward; and (e) is readily available when required.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the sample (10 candidates out of a total of 40 completions selected according to willingness and availability) are obvious. However, analysis of individual autobiographical accounts, as constructed by each of the 10 participants in this study, is an established tool in social science research (Bertaux, 1981, Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2002), allowing insights and propositions on which further research can be focused. Planned follow-up studies include interviews with more recent graduates, groups of existing candidates and those who have withdrawn, to test the wider relevance of the points raised in this study, and to encourage other perspectives to emerge. Cross-reference with similar studies of D.Prof. and Ph.D. programmes will be explored.

Discussion

Learner-managed learning

The emerging proposition—that candidates' successful application of their pivotal position as principal agent of control within a demanding and critical environment significantly impacts on their personal and professional benefit—is, we argue, a useful contribution to debates about the nature of professional doctorates. It suggests that the style of candidate involvement in the programme may be as significant as programme structure and partnership between university and profession in the enhancement of candidate professionalism. In particular, it contributes to debates that draw on a range of related theories and research that emphasize the nature and manner of agency in a field that has become known as learner-managed learning.

As clearly shown in the case profiles, the personal agency of the learner has centre stage, often drawing in professional contacts relevant to their programme. Such a perspective draws upon a range of related theory and research about pedagogy and sophisticated adult learning, particularly in the context of reflective practice (Schon, 1987), meta-cognition (Biggs, 1985; Jackson, 2004), agentic behaviour (Bandura, 2001), tacit knowledge and tacit learning (Polanyi, 1967),

self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1994), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and the development of personal and professional capability (Stephenson & Yorke, 1998). We suggest that this theoretical lens offers a useful understanding of the enthusiasm and uptake of the approach designed into the MU D.Prof. and thus has pedagogical implications for this type of university higher level study.

The experiences reported in this article, we suggest, are consistent with three key aspects of learner-managed learning identified by Cairns (2003), namely *Place*, *Agency* and *Mindfulness*. In this conceptualization, *Place* is defined and negotiated by the learner in a socially situated location where there is learning expectation by self and others, but, significantly, it is the learner who is seeking the learning and defining the place. All candidates in the present study referred with satisfaction to their tutors being available when they themselves felt they needed them. In terms of *situated cognition* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which there is active interaction with the social situation, the self-managed learner decides whether and how to engage. All candidates in this study decided for themselves to engage more fully with their personal and professional working environment, not just as working colleagues but also as part of the process of justifying their professionalism to gain the award. The examples cited refer to the significance of including the real workplace and the activities therein as major aspects of satisfaction and perceived relevance for each candidate.

With respect to the second theoretically proposed component, *Agency*, it is clear in the data that one of the key features of the MU D.Prof. that emerged from the interviews was that candidates were challenged by (and also relished) the fact that they had control (agency) and that this was both daunting and empowering. In addition, successfully justifying personal professionalism and professional achievements to significant critical bodies built confidence in their status and power to perform. Enhanced self-efficacy based on self-attribution is increasingly being recognized as a key element in informal learning in the workplace (Stephenson *et al.*, 2000). Extensive research in three professional activities (Health, Engineering and Accountancy) has led Eraut *et al.* (2004) to identify the interrelation of confidence, challenges, feedback and support as key *informal* processes involved in enhancing self-efficacy.

The third element of Cairns' 2003 model, *Mindfulness*, is postulated by Langer (1989, 1997) as an idea about how individual learners contemplate and think about their own thinking rather than operating in a *mindless* manner, and is further pursued by Varela *et al.* (1993) in a treatise on the 'embodied mind' as more akin to the Buddhist tradition of ultimate meditative contemplation. This concept goes somewhat further than the popular 'reflection' idea (Schon, 1983, 1987; Van Mannen, 1977; Boud *et al.*, 1985; Loughran, 1996) and is being argued in this paper to be relevant to sophisticated learners who are managing their own learning.

The MU D.Prof., we suggest, as detailed by our respondents, takes these informal dynamics into an explicit, formal and critical arena. Our observations about the primacy of the self as agent in securing from significant constituencies (i.e. the academic and the professional) formal approval for plans and credit for achievements go deeper into the personal psyche and the pedagogical dynamics than earlier

observations of the importance of independent learning in motivating adults in the workplace (Osborne & Garnett, 1998) and the use of learning contracts as a device for personalizing programmes of study leading to formal awards (Laycock & Stephenson, 1993). The MU D.Prof. programme requires candidates to put their lifelong personal and professional credibility on the line and gives them the responsibility for seeing it through. We are arguing that this deepness is a matter of the candidates being aware and mindful of the place and agency of their learning in a manner that is quite explicit and well articulated by them. As one candidate remarked when comparing the D.Prof. with his earlier experience of a PhD: 'The DProf works because it is about you and your work.'

What mode of professional doctorate?

There are also implications of this study for discussions on classifications of professional doctorates. Typologies that focus on the balance of institutional and professional responsibility for programmes gloss over the potentially critical role of the candidate as the primary agent of control. The data from the study suggest that the MU model is close to Scott *et al.*'s (2004) dispositional and trans-disciplinary knowledge mode in that credibility comes from recognition amongst professional colleagues as much as academe, that methodological imperialism is resisted in favour of what is appropriate according to the candidate's case and that the focus is on the development of the individual through reflection with responsibility for 'displacement' passed to the student. Our study also shows the importance of not underplaying the pivotal role of learner control, with its exposure of personal and professional credibility to critical appraisal. The importance of learner agency is similarly underplayed in other models such as the hybrid curriculum (Lee *et al.*, 2000), illustrated by three overlapping spheres representing university, profession and workplace. In the MU example, each sphere of the hybrid curriculum is clearly evident but it is each individual participant who creates the programme, builds the alliance between the university and the profession and defines the workplace(s) where the programme is made manifest. The evidence of this study, and its key feature, is that much benefit for the candidate derives from the exercise of the candidate's sense of agency within each of Lee *et al.*'s three critical environments and comes from a structure that requires, supports and tests the exercise and outcomes of that agency. The role of the institution is one of quality assurance in which criteria and procedures for judging doctorate-level work are made explicit to the candidates from the outset, and support is readily available and responsive when required.

Conclusion

This study of candidate experience of the MU professional doctorate has focused attention on the learning processes involved from the learner's perspective and adds a different slant to current debates about professional doctorates focused on curriculum

models and forms of knowledge construction. The study confirms that the candidate can be the primary agent of control and that the exercise of this agency within critical academic and professional environments is the basis of the benefits that accrue to both the individual and the profession. In addition, it appears that the 'knowing' or mindfulness by the candidates that they are in control and that they have sought out a programme that has enabled them to achieve the engagement they see as relevant to them and their work is a major strength of such a programme. Successful justification of professional worth at doctorate level, in both fields, is the engine that drives the enhancement of personal and professional credibility, capability and commitment to continuing development. Partnerships between university and professions are driven by the needs and initiatives of the candidates themselves, within rules of the university supported by professional expertise and judgements employed by the candidates themselves as appropriate to support each case.

We are left with a further thought. Are we describing a distinctive mode of professional doctorates based on learner-managed learning, or does a similar picture emerge from similar investigations of the personal accounts of candidates on other kinds of doctoral programme? Are there studies that show similar personal benefits from the completion of the traditional research-based Ph.D.? It would be useful to find out. Consistent with the emergence of grounded theory, we would be very pleased to receive any such information and to engage in serious debate about the pedagogical underpinning of professional doctorates.

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