

‘Submitting to a different form of interrogation’:
supporting epistemological and methodological
shifts in Prof Doc students’ thinking.

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Overview

1. Setting the context – current pressures in HE
2. Appreciating the nature and demands of research
3. An illustration in the context of doctoral education
4. Tentative implications for your practice

Seven key issues facing the higher education sector in 2015 and beyond

- Operating in a global market
- Increasing costs and shifting funding
- Rising student expectations
- Linking estates, strategy and the student
- A demand and need for new technologies
- Attracting and retaining the best talent
- Making research sustainable



Deloitte (2015) *Making the Grade: The key issues facing the UK higher education sector.*

Research – what's involved?

Re-SEARCH

'the systematic investigation into and critical study of materials and sources'

Something searchable

- What can I search for (and what not)?
- How can I search for it?
- Can I search in enough detail / rigorously?

RE-search

'in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions'

'paying appropriate attention to context'

Re-position yourself ... Re-describe the area of interest

- How do I think about this?
- How could I think about it differently?
- In what sense can I ever discover 'facts'?

Pressures on the Doctorate.... Questions for the Professional Doctorate in Education?

- Assumptions about ease of transfer and transformation
- Simplification and routinization of doctoral awards – PD vs PhD
- Navigating spaces (workplace and university; teaching and research)
- How is criticality developed through the (doctoral) research process?
- What are the pedagogic relations involved in the doctoral process?

Pilot project

- Three areas of interest:
 1. Students' relationship with professional practice; including how supervisors support critique of this practice.
 2. The role of theory/theorising.
 3. Students' shifts in understanding.

Overview

(Shaughnessy & Pratt, 2016)

University as **Teaching /
Admin** space

Workplace

Common-sense
discourse

Evaluative research
frame

University as **Research**
space

University

Critical, social-
constructionist discourse

Explanatory research
frame



Student challenges:

- Epistemological and methodological shift
 - Developing sound judgement
- Emotional and professional challenge

Developing Theory

Talking about how other people have used the theory to analyse problems. Testing the analysis of data, using theory to help, then writing to see if it works. *'How can the theory steer me through?', 'Data analysis grounds the theoretical conversation'* (A)

There are stages of resistance, or repulsion [laughs] and then they put their toe in the water to try to start to engage. And then there can be real excitement, particularly if they can find a theory which helps them with their research question. And that's the thing that I try to tie the theory to. What is it you want to find out? What theory is going to help you? (J)

Developing Theory

I think you have to present in a different form the question that I have been asked what is your theoretical framework? One of the things I have tried to do is unpack that and say you are in the realm of social theory how do you understand not just your particular belief but the relationships. How do you understand those? So for example, if people are trying to find out the relationship between what people are doing and the wider context there are a number of people like Bourdieu, or Giddens that they might use to understand the relationship between structure and agency for example. If they are working in an area that relies on notions of self perception and self esteem they have got to find some area of psychology where people have discussed those concepts..... I think. You cannot just write, I think. X or Y (P)

Emotional and Professional Challenge

'they have to submit to a different kind of interrogation' and they sometimes 'revert back' to at the end when the thesis demands that they take it back into the world of recommendations for work. (J)

'having the confidence to position themselves alongside the bearded gits [theorists].' And that 'It's the confidence to change their focus as they go, but then that they don't have to include everything. It's the confidence to let go.' (T)

Implications for researcher developers and researchers in universities

Development of 'Searching'

- Training; development as acquisition of a skill set
- Development of skills and techniques for methods
- Visible, noticeable
- Emphasis on the individual
- Immediate
- Easy to commodify
- Easy to 'deliver' and accredit
- Easy to manage and control, showing improvement and meeting targets

Development of 'Re-Orientation'

- Exposure to, and engagement in, dialogue around multiple perspectives on the world
- Challenging truths
- Less visible
- Emphasis on the collaborative
- Long-term; developing over time
- Hard to commodify
- Hard to 'deliver' and accredit
- Hard to manage and control, and to show improvement, meet targets

Conclusions and implications

- Re-Search ... how does separating this word alter the way one might think about the role of research development?
- To what extent do university research development programmes focus on each side? Equally? ... and if not, why?
- What implications does this have for your work?
 - What challenges?
 - What opportunities?

And finally,

- What implications does it have for the practice of researching 'research development'?

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