The Dance of Authenticity and Multiple Ways of Doing: Defining a Pedagogy for Accessing the Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education and Developing Researcher Independence

Kelly Louise Preece

This chapter will explore how I developed and defined a pedagogy for the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) at the University of Exeter. The RDP 'is designed to support [postgraduate researchers] at all stages of [their] research degree' (University of Exeter, n.d.). I led the RDP from 2015 to 2022, during which I redesigned the programme so that it enabled doctoral scholars to bridge the conceptual boundary between formal and informal learning by introducing multiple 'ways of doing' and thereby uncovering the Hidden Curriculum. This chapter will trace the pedagogical roots of this approach back to my disciplinary upbringing in

K. L. Preece (✉)
University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
e-mail: k.preece@exeter.ac.uk

D. L. Elliot et al. (eds.), *Developing Researcher Independence Through the Hidden Curriculum*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42875-3_11

contemporary dance, specifically improvisation. I will argue that by introducing researchers to multiple ways of doing, combined with the practice of authentic teaching, we empower them to find ways of working that suit their research context and their preferences and, in doing so, develop independence, here conceptualised as taking responsibility for their research and their learning, and through this becoming confident to improvise from a place of authenticity in their professional lives.

'The Only Way to Do It Is to Do It' (Merce Cunningham)

When I started my role as Researcher Development Manager at the University of Exeter, I inherited a (prolific) collection of PowerPoint slides for training sessions on everything from conducting a literature review to writing an academic CV. Despite the range and scope of these materials, I was struck by the vagueness inherent within them. This is in no way to criticise my colleagues: on the contrary, as I immersed myself in the resources I had inherited, I found so much that was useful, insightful, and important for doctoral scholars. All the materials that I inherited emphasised the need for researchers to take responsibility for their own learning, and to critically reflect on their approaches and practices. The programme, like many in the UK, is underpinned by the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) which 'describes the knowledge, behaviour and attributes of successful researchers' (Vitae, 2023). The RDF is used nationally to develop policy and practice, as well as being a tool for researchers to critically reflect on their strengths and areas for development. In focusing on this process of critical reflection, I provide opportunities for researchers to discuss and reflect on the different possible 'ways of doing', offering options with which doctoral scholars could experiment and choose an approach that was relevant to their disciplinary context, and to their working and learning styles. This approach to reflection, grounded in practice and ways of doing, is not new to education scholars—indeed, the concept of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) is well trodden throughout educational literature. But it is not from the experiential learning cycle that I developed the pedagogy of the Researcher Development Programme. Rather, it is my background in contemporary dance, where the knowledge and practice of embodied and experiential learning and knowing by far pre-dates Kolb's writing.

I began my career as a Lecturer in Dance, having worked since my early teens as a professional dancer and later as a choreographer. Teaching and learning in contemporary dance are rooted in 'embodied practice' in the studio (Bannon, 2010, p. 49), as well as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in the tradition of Donald Schon (1983). This reflexivity is central to contemporary dance and draws on a variety of schools of thought about learning and knowledge-making as an *experiential* process, including embodied knowing (Davidson, 2004 and Parviainen, 2002) and practice-as-research (Nelson, 2009). As a student and a teacher my practice was and is improvisation—the practice of 'composing whilst dancing' (Buckwalter, 2010). Improvisation is plagued by misconceptions that its practitioners engage in nothing more than 'aimless, even talentless, noodling' (Gere, 2003, p. xv). However, improvisation practitioners know that improvisation is all about rules or 'predetermined overarching structural guidelines that delimit the improvising body's choices, such as a score for the performance, or any set of rules determined in advance' (Foster, 2003, p. 4). In other words, improvisers know that we make our most interesting and creative choices when experimenting within a set of constraints. A task I returned to in every class was called the Slow Journey, developed from the book *Body Space Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (2014) by Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay. Near the start of every class, I would task students with the simple task of moving between standing and lying on the floor—but doing so as slowly as possible over 5 minutes.

Framing Improvisation

Consider that if I were to ask you now to stand up and improvise something, you would likely be unsure where to begin. When faced with unlimited options and possibilities, we are blinded by choice and often paralysed and unable to act. However, if I were to ask you to move to the other side of the room without your feet touching the floor, now you have a task, a goal, and a framework something concrete upon which to act. And even if every reader of this book were all given the same set up and the same room, it is unlikely that any two would approach the task in precisely the same way.

Improvisation as taught in contemporary dance requires critical reflection in action, to enable its practitioners to make movement choices, choices informed by years of training and experience. One of my first

academic colleagues, Professor Fiona Bannon, once said the same to me of research. In one of many influential conversations in her office at the University of Leeds, Fiona proposed that she could start a group of doctoral scholars off on the same research project, and everyone would produce a different thesis because they would have different experiences and training to bring to the topic and would therefore make different choices through the research process. Just as a dancer has their training and technique upon which to draw, researchers need a concrete grounding upon which to reflect and act. While some of the tasks and skills required of postgraduate researchers may be familiar, so many are not; they are part of the Hidden Curriculum. For example, networking at conferences is an important part of developing your research profile, and most institutions offer workshops on networking or 'Making the most of conferences'. These workshops offer multiple ways of engaging—including introducing yourself to another scholar, asking your supervisor to introduce you to their colleagues, or using social media to develop relationships and networks within the academic community. Different approaches are more comfortable, and more appropriate, for different researchers, different disciplines, and different contexts. Like improvisers, researchers need something concrete and practical upon which to reflect and make choices—here, about how to approach networking. This was the basis upon which I developed a pedagogy for the RDP, which accessed the Hidden Curriculum and ultimately developed researcher independence, through framing the options, the importance of choice, and the influence of the self, in making research and career decisions.

I argue below that this need for choice and personalisation is as true for the pedagogical choices we make in developing researchers and research skills as it is for the process of research.

A Pedagogy of Multiple Ways of Doing

In supporting our postgraduate researchers at Exeter, particularly those just starting out on their doctoral journey, I wanted to elucidate the Hidden Curriculum for them whilst moving through the four stages of competence cited in Elliot et al., 2020, pp. 10–11—in particular passing the threshold between stage 2, conscious incompetence ('I'm attending this literature review course as I don't know where to begin'), and stage 3, conscious competence ('I am confident in my approach to searching and selecting literature) (Castle & Buckler, 2018, p. 54; Clarkson & Gilbert,

1988 cited in Donati & Watts, 2005, p. 478). I argue that to effectively pass through this threshold, doctoral scholars need something concrete upon which to base their reflection *on*; the equivalent of an improviser's rules, structure, or score. Many doctoral scholars will come to doctoral study without having undertaken a literature review—or if they have completed one before, it is unlikely they will have been asked to construct one around a gap in knowledge, given that the requirement for originality is distinct in doctoral study. Achieving the transition to conscious competence can be supported through offering a range of opportunities for personalisation, for example, for how to take and organise notes for a literature review, or by helping researcher to build their own strategies to identify thesis structure. I call this introducing doctoral scholars to 'multiple ways of doing'.

You could argue that this 'multiple ways of doing' sounds a lot like the formal, structured learning or curriculum of seminars, workshops, and supervisory meetings rather than the Hidden Curriculum. I would, however, assert that this approach crosses the conceptual boundary splitting the two (Elliot et al., 2020, p. 7). The formal curriculum guides researchers towards the product—for example, to complete a doctorate, a researcher must produce the 'product' of a literature review. The Hidden Curriculum represents 'the how', offering students different ways of doing—of searching literature, note-taking, or structuring their writing that guide them through the process (Elliot et al., 2020, p. 8). The formal curriculum is the task; the informal curriculum is the multiple 'ways of doing' that bring researchers to that product or outcome. Through this, multiple ways of doing becomes a framework for building researcher independence, through considered choice. By providing multiple ways, rather than one way, to access the Hidden Curriculum, and giving researchers examples of the tools they might use to get there, they are given something concrete upon which to reflect and make choices—therefore taking responsibility for their choices in research and in their professional learning and thereby developing independence. (These principles are in line with adopting the four domains of doctoral intelligence discussed in Albertyn's chapter.)

Example: Introducing Strategies to Identify Thesis Structure

When I have run workshops on 'writing your thesis', one of the main concerns doctoral scholars arrive with is how to structure their thesis. Whilst there are disciplinary norms, there isn't 'one way' to structure a doctoral thesis—just like there isn't 'one way' to do a literature review. The thesis structure needs to be responsive to the research, and so doctoral scholars need to be given the tools to critically assess their research material to develop a thesis structure that most effectively tells the story of their research—and their original contribution. I do this by:

- Introducing the institutional regulations and basic structures
- Introducing a collation of ways to identify a structure for your thesis including:
  - Starting from argument and contribution—with examples from Susan Carter (2018) and Inger Mewburn (2016)
  - Analysing existing theses—with examples from Cally Guerin (2018) and Vitae (n.d.)
  - Mind mapping your thesis—with examples adapted from Pat Thomson (2016)
  - Research storyboarding—with examples from Patrick Dunleavy (2017)
  - Thesis skeleton—with examples from Steve Draper (2003)
- Offering a case study/example from a doctoral graduate
- Providing a blank template and activity outlines for trying and evaluating the different strategies

This example provides a grounding upon which for doctoral scholars to reflect through different tools they can use to identify their structure—ways of doing—alongside an example of this in practice. In doing so, it takes postgraduate researchers from conscious incompetence (I have no idea how to structure my thesis) to conscious competence ('I have a range of tools I can use to identify my thesis structure, that I can use and adapt to suit my research and my preferences'). You can read a full version of this example developed into an online resource (Preece, 2022). As exemplified

here, the author also served as a creative pedagogue of the Hidden Curriculum; see Frick's chapter.

An Authentic Approach to Training and Development

Explicit engagement with the Hidden Curriculum, then, is a vital part of how I developed a programme that fostered independence in decision making. Alongside the pedagogy of 'multiple ways of doing', my own manner in the classroom is crucial to my pedagogy and how I create effective learning environments for accessing the Hidden Curriculum and developing independence. This is because my teaching 'style', grounded in authenticity, represents my own choices, carefully selected from multiple ways of doing—of teaching. In their research on teacher authenticity, Johnson and LaBelle define authenticity in the classroom as 'existing in a way that is consistent with one's own thoughts, feelings, emotional and overall sense of self' (2017, p. 424), this is turn creating 'a more open and supportive classroom' (2017, p. 426). They identify five sets of behaviours associated with authentic teaching: approachability, passion, attentiveness, capability, and knowledge (2017, p. 429). Through sharing personal stories of academic success and failure, being uninhibited in my enthusiasm for my work, willingness to share my knowledge and expertise, being open to 1-2-1 conversations and a gentle use of humour (see Kobayashi and Berge's chapter on humour supporting researcher independence), my Researcher Development workshops are a safe space for students to share their own experiences and receive advice, support and ultimately problem-solve. As a practitioner of authentic teaching, I consider this approach crucial to facilitating the pedagogy of 'multiple ways of doing'. Being present in the moment, responding to situations arising, and carefully choosing my response is a form of improvisation. This approach creates an open environment for dialogue, reflection, and sharing. (See also Makara et al.'s chapter for another example of using authentic and safe space for doctoral learning.) After a workshop on presentation skills, one postgraduate researcher commented on the feedback form that the session was:

> [g]enuinely inspiring. It was great to be told that it's ok to be yourself onstage and that you don't have to be a spotlight-hogging extrovert to give a good presentation—it felt like if you were naturally a thoughtful quiet person, or sarcastic, or had a sense of humour, or were passionate about a

> particular aspect of a topic, it would be ok to let that come across appropriately in your presentation and not just conform to 'what you think a lecturer MUST sound like'.

Within my authentic approach, the postgraduate researcher was able to identify multiple ways of doing, and use my authenticity, the embodiment of my own choices, to make informed decisions about their own approach to delivering presentations. In doing so they took responsibility for their research and learning, and therefore moved towards independence.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have articulated a pedagogy to develop researcher independence by offering up multiple ways of doing. I am reminded of choreographer Twyla Tharp's proposal that '[c]reativity Is a habit, and the best creativity is a result of good work habits' (Tharp, 2006, p. 7). Tharp's assertion that creativity is a habit seems paradoxical, and '[w]e think of creativity as a way of keeping everything fresh and new, whilst habit implies routine and repetition' (Tharp, 2006, p. 9). Tharp elucidates how creativity is not necessarily a bolt of lightning from above, but is instead a product of habit and routine. Through habit and routine, we make the conditions for creativity to emerge—in the same way that in improvisation we create the conditions for new movement patterns through rules, structures, and scores. In fact, Tharp's approach to and seminal book on creativity is something I refer to regularly when discussing project and time management with doctoral scholars. I argue that in developing habits and routines for their working day, they are setting themselves up to be creative and productive in their work, by making informed choices from a range of options and being aware of their own authentic style; this empowers them to confidently improvise in their research lives. (See also Frick's chapter on creative supervising and supervising for creativity.)

To return to the Hidden Curriculum, through offering multiple ways of doing, we create the conditions for researchers to develop their independence as scholars. We give them options to enable them to make choices.

Acknowledgements My thanks to Dr Caitlin Kight and Dr Edward Mills for their feedback in the development of this chapter.

But most importantly, my deepest thank you to all the doctoral scholars I have had the privilege of working with throughout my time leading the Researcher Development Programme at the University of Exeter.

References

Bannon, F. (2010). Dance: The possibilities of a discipline. *Research in Dance Education, 11*(1), 49–50.

Buckwalter, M. (2010). *Composing while dancing: An improviser's companion*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Carter, S. (2018). Turning facts into a doctoral story: The essence of a good doctorate. *Doctoral Writing SIG*. https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2018/02/19/turning-facts-into-a-doctoral-story-the-essence-of-a-good-doctorate/

Castle, P., & Buckler, S. (2018). *Psychology for teachers* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Davidson, J. (2004). Embodied knowledge: Possibilities and constraints in arts education and curriculum. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds* (pp. 197–212). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Donati, M., & Watts, M. (2005). Personal development in counsellor training: Towards a clarification of inter-related concepts. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 33*(4), 475–484.

Draper, S. (2003). *Creating the skeleton for a thesis*. Website. https://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/resources/skel.html

Dunleavy, P. (2017). Storyboarding research. *Writing for Research*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/writingforresearch/2017/07/17/storyboarding-research/

Elliot, D., Bengtsen, S., Guccione, K., & Kobayashi, S. (2020). *The hidden curriculum in doctoral education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foster, S. (2003). Taken by surprise: Improvisation in dance and mind. In A. Cooper Albright & D. Gere (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader* (pp. 3–12). Wesleyan University Press.

Gere, D. (2003). Introduction. In A. Cooper Albright & D. Gere (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader* (pp. xiii–xxi). Wesleyan University Press.

Guerin, C. (2018). Reading theses to write a thesis. *Doctoral Writing SIG*. https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2018/05/14/reading-theses-to-write-a-thesis/

Johnson, Z. D., & LaBelle, S. (2017). An examination of teacher authenticity in the college classroom. *Communication Education, 66*(4), 423–439.

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Prentice-Hall.

Mewburn, I. (2016). Better than Donald—How to argue like a pro. *The Thesis Whisperer*. https://thesiswhisperer.com/2016/11/09/better-than-donald-how-to-argue-like-a-pro/

Nelson, R. (2009). Practice-as-research knowledge and their place in the academy. In R. Nelson (Ed.), *Practice-as-research: In performance and screen* (pp. 112–130). Palgrave Macmillan.

Parviainen, J. (2002). Bodily knowledge: Epistemological reflections on dance. *Dance Research Journal., 34*(1), 11–26.

Preece, K. L. (2022). *Structuring your thesis.* Website. https://researcher-development.co.uk/writingyourthesis/structuring-your-thesis/

Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. Basic Books.

Tharp, T. (2006). *The creative habit*. Simon and Schuster.

Thomson, P. (2016). Mapping your literatures. *Patter*. https://patthomson.net/2016/04/04/mapping-your-literatures/

Tufnell, M., & Crickmay, C. (2014). *Body space image: Notes towards improvisation and performance*. Dance Books Ltd..

University of Exeter. (n.d.). *Training and development*. Website. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/doctoralcollege/researcherdevelopment/training/

Vitae. (2023). *About the researcher development framework*. Website. https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework

Vitae. (n.d.). *Getting starting on writing your thesis*. Website. https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/doing-a-doctorate/completing-your-doctorate/writing-and-submitting-your-doctoral-thesis/getting-started#analysing-a-thesis