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2. TRANSFORMING IDENTITIES

From Students and Reformers to Researchers

This chapter considers the place of publication of research in higher degree training programs. The following chapters in this book are the result of an exploration of what transformative processes might be entailed in higher degree research supervision and education to assist candidates to make a transition in identity and practice from being a student to being a researcher. This transition is examined from two perspectives. The first is a reflection on this transition of the higher degree students and graduates who are the first authors in the subsequent chapters in this book. The second perspective arises from contemporary scholars researching and theorising the impact of common and innovative approaches to doctoral studies and doctoral education. These two perspectives form the basis of a discussion of the implications for the supervisor's role in supervision and training, and for a more deliberate and enabling doctoral pedagogy.

Entering into studies as a higher degree candidate marks the commencement of a lengthy and transforming process. A candidate's identity as a student undertaking a higher degree is replete with novel connotations and identity challenges. In their new role, higher degree students are cognisant of expectations of them to undertake largely unfamiliar tasks, namely, to pose astute research questions that will challenge the status quo and the taken-for-granted understandings of some aspect of the world and its people, and to execute a systematic and scholarly inquiry to address them. At the same time, they will be required to establish a relationship with research supervisors. In the best circumstances, over time this relationship changes from one of a guiding research mentor and novice to one of collegial partnership that is often expressed in shared authorship in the dissemination of the research. The subsequent chapters in this book are examples of such a process. This incremental transition from student to independent researcher and scholar occurs in a context of personal, cultural and ethical challenges where there are few guideposts for the uninitiated and many influential, yet tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions. This chapter places the act of publication of the outcomes of higher degree research at the centre of its exploration of this transition from student to researcher.

As noted in the Preface, the first authors, who in all cases were higher degree candidates or graduates, were invited to reflect on their experiences of undertaking research and the process of becoming a published researcher to give some

indication of what it meant for them, and to submit this reflection along with the chapters they produced with their supervisors. A core sentiment from these reflections is captured at the beginning of each chapter. In this chapter, we analyse these first authors' reflections and identify core themes to give some understanding of what changes occur as the students transition from student to researcher through the publication process. We relate this analysis to reports from research on higher degree students' learning and the supervisory practices involved in co-publishing with students. In the final section, we propose a tentative pedagogy for higher degree supervision that includes co-publication.

PUBLICATION IN PHD RESEARCH

Globally, research performance is a common primary measure for ranking universities. Governments and institutions are increasingly imposing minimal research performance standards by which to measure the research achievements of institutions, faculties and departments, and ultimately individual academics. Publication rates in high quality journals as well as research candidature completion rates are typically significant measures of research performance. In this climate, the agenda of higher degree participation and supervision is changing to include not only the completion of a thesis but also research publication within the term of candidature. Conceptually, this change in research candidature expectations expands and refocuses the supervisory role. No longer is it restricted to one of expert guidance related to a particular field of study with the aim of successful completion of a piece of research. Notwithstanding the importance of thesis completion, supervision is fast becoming a process of educating candidates to be enterprising researchers, which includes becoming successful future publishers of research (Johnson & Broda, 1996). This increased expectation of research publication within candidature is not a simple additional supervisory task. Rather, it constitutes a challenge to common, taken-for-granted assumptions regarding pedagogical and interpersonal practices within the supervisory role. These implications regarding the delineation and expansion of supervisory practices have become the focus of considerable scrutiny (Catterall et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2014; Thein & Beach, 2010). This research has found that the supervisory relationship between supervisor and student is significantly impacted by the higher degree research candidature experience, which is found to be replete with transitions and transformations, not only in terms of knowledge and skills gained, but also in identity formation that is deeply intrapersonal and interpersonal.

BECOMING A PUBLISHED RESEARCHER

The 14 first authors (PhD candidates and graduates) of the subsequent chapters reflected on the transitions and transformations they experienced as a result of their higher degree and publication experiences and the meaning they made from them. Unsurprisingly, these authors were from quite diverse backgrounds. Many were international students from developing nations. Importantly, in return for their scholarships, most were expected to publish their research findings before their

home institutions and sponsoring organisations would acknowledge their higher degree. Many of these candidates had to interrogate, overcome or reconsider cultural understandings in the interpretation and discussion of research findings. They were charged with a mission to help their developing nations answer pressing research questions and to establish themselves on return as research experts who could enable change.

In a discipline such as education, it is not uncommon to find that students enter higher degree candidature as mature, experienced practitioners who are highly knowledgeable experts in their own field of practice. Often, strong personal dispositions as reformers drive their participation in higher degree candidature. These candidates possess passionate and pre-emptive convictions about the answers to the pressing problems they intend to research. Such personal convictions can be impediments to exercising the kind of open-mindedness expected of researchers and their utilisation of appropriate academic discourse within the thesis and their publications.

The two conditions – unique cultural values and tacit wisdom of experience – are not mutually exclusive. Many international students are respected authorities in their home countries. Similar to mature, experienced local professionals, they come to higher degree research with deeply entrenched work-based practices, professional values and worldviews. The transformational challenge of the PhD process requires them all to reconsider their personal cultural values and to exercise academic scepticism regarding personal accumulated workplace wisdom. Both conditions represent challenges that demand personal, perceptual transformation in the journey from student to graduate researcher.

Four themes were observed within the first authors' reflective discourse. First, they reflected on their motivations for engaging in PhD research and publishing, and the outcomes those endeavours would achieve. Second, there were reflections on the centrality and importance of their supervisory relationship and its role in both the research and publishing. Third, there was an identification of specific skills they needed to develop and maintain to be successful in reporting and communicating their research through quality publication. Fourth, there were some expressions of concern regarding the maintenance of their newly attained knowledge and skills in research and publishing once their candidature was over and they returned, unsupervised, to their own context.

Motivations and Purposes for Research and Publishing

The first authors in the following chapters identified personal purposes and motivations for engaging in higher degree studies and accepting the invitation to publish. A key theme was the value of a PhD and research publication in helping to achieve the learning and personal changes needed to establish their academic credibility within education and for their career advancement.

To transition from a student to a published researcher is a bit like stepping back from the “finish line” and having to re-run much of the race. The thesis is merely a measure by which you are granted a standing in the academic

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community. Knowledge that remains unknown or without use is simply information. (Arrowsmith)

There was a recognition in the reflections that becoming a published researcher did not emerge merely as a result of doing the PhD. For some, it was a long-held but distant, even unattainable, ambition.

I felt that my ambition to be a real researcher through pursuing PhD was very high, like a rainbow in the sky. It is very beautiful but could not be reached. But, with the support from important people around me – particularly my supervisors, family, and friends – I could still stand on my feet on the journey. They motivated me when I felt down, and held me up when I was very weak. (Rasyid)

Prevalent in their reflections was a discourse of reformers motivated by a desire to embark upon a PhD research project that would enable them to contribute to change. It was apparent that some had, very early in their candidature, embraced the challenge of research dissemination, motivated by their change agenda.

As a PhD candidate I have used social media, given conference and video presentations, and published in journals and edited books for that purpose. My intention is to enable dissemination of the opinions of the participants in order to promote discussion, which might lead to changes in policy and practice. (Townsend)

In doing so, a number of our PhD authors regarded themselves as reformers and change agents. Publishing for them took on a moral obligation to their communities and wider society. They moved from knowledge consumers to knowledge creators.

Publishing my research opened a new chapter in my life. I had the opportunity ... to communicate and share my research findings with people in the same or different field. I believed that through research I could help others, and I feel it is my social and academic responsibility to contribute to the development of my community. (Alfian)

In particular, and not surprisingly given the discipline in which the research was conducted, concerns were commonly expressed about the relationship between research and practice, and research and teaching. In this regard, research, including its publication, was considered a tool for transforming educational communities, practices and, in particular, teachers and teaching.

Rwanda's vision towards rebuilding and developing a knowledge-based economy led to the provision of open access to education to all the population without any more discrimination. Through my own studies as a student and career as a teacher, I realised the critical role of education and educational research in realising this vision, and I felt a strong need to play my modest part in rebuilding the country. ... This part of research process has indeed given me a meaningful lesson and assisted me to transform myself from a student to a researcher. (Ngendahayo)

Intrapersonal transformation was a key factor in these authors' reflections. They reflected that research participation and authorship impacted on their identity and self-worth.

As an international student who comes from a non-English speaking country, growing and being a real researcher is really challenging. ... During my candidature, there were times I felt strong and saw myself like a strong eagle who was able to explore the universe but at many times I felt just like a powerless newly-born chick that could do nothing. (Rasyid)

At the same time, authors reported developing multiple identities during their time as higher degree candidates, shifting from being a PhD student to a published author.

My reflection on transforming from a student/researcher to a researcher/publisher brings to mind an image of a tadpole metamorphosing into a frog. I feel at this moment my tail is shrinking and I am developing my hind legs. The water that once supported me – the guidance of my supervisors – will soon hold less significance as I move from the watery environment of being a student to land in my role as published researcher. (Le Lant)

At the core of this insight was a revisiting of their early aspirations and comparing these with what they had achieved in the process of the PhD and then being published.

After I published my research and I read a lot of publications, I encouraged myself to do more research and now I am not only experienced in the academic field, but also I could clearly understand the power of research in changing the world. (Alfian)

The Supervisory Relationship

The changing nature of the authors' relationships with their supervisors was important to them. They described the incremental development of the relationship that went from high dependence, to mentoring, to independence and co-authorship.

My supervisors challenged me to work more independently to build up my competency and confidence to be an independent researcher and a prospective knowledge creator. I am aware that this PhD terrain has shaped my academic competence, elevating my research skills and self-esteem. (Habiburrahim)

The relationship with their supervisors and the supervisory practices was also regarded as significant in terms of the ways it provided them with links to important academic and social networks.

Doing research is a joint venture. Students need to push themselves to expand their knowledge, become more inquisitive, critical, and reflective. Supervisors, on the other hand, should push and challenge the students to

become better thinkers and help them use their knowledge and skills to their advantage. ... I benefitted from the intelligent questions from my supervisors and the support and guidance they gave me. (Masakale)

Developing Skills for Research and Publishing

The PhD candidate and graduate authors in this book identified skills they believed they needed to achieve their goals. Central to their reflection on the new skills they needed to develop was the capacity to write in ways that would enable them to communicate with academic audiences, policymakers and practitioners. They regarded practitioners as their most significant audience because they held a common belief that their PhD research could have the most useful impact on their fellow practitioners. In saying this, they recognised the notion of audience and the complexity inherent in their audiences' diverse interests. There was considerable reflection on the challenge of having to reframe the content of their thesis to communicate to diverse audiences. This entailed knowing the purposes of their writing in order to manage it and to determine the appropriate focus for each publication. Writing for academic purposes was a particular kind of challenge.

It is about knowing what you are doing, and about communicating and acting, so as to learn in action. Perhaps it invites researchers purporting to be doing something relevant to professional practice to look at themselves somewhat differently. Writing as a teacher-researcher, one does not want to change identity from one to the other, but to retain the crucial link to practice, and demand from research networks some genuine joint operation, based upon communication – the communication that is at the heart of intelligent inquiry and action. To whom do researchers wish to communicate? If it is to those professionally engaged in real-life tasks, they need to talk to them and learn with them. (Nielsen)

In addition, they reflected that transiting from an academic into a researcher was challenging, especially if someone had little-to-no experience with research.

The metrics for success in research are different from those in teaching. Shifting from rigid schedule in teaching to flexible schedules in conducting research is one instance. I need to be able to adjust managing time more than I used to. Building a strong social network to do research is another example. In short, the shift of focus requires me to fully adapt to the new role if I want to be a successful researcher. (Mirizon)

Retaining Research and Publishing Capability

Many of the reflections illustrated that once PhD candidates had finished their thesis, they were considerably challenged by personal commitments and obligations, which made publication difficult. Many expressed concerns that they would lose their new research knowledge and skills.

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I feel that to become a researcher I need the support and mentoring of my supervisors but being so far apart becomes a challenge. ... Coupled with the pressures of work and family obligations and compounded by unavailability of funds to sponsor beginning researchers, my dream of becoming a researcher, using the skills I gained to become a change agent in my country, are a blur. (Masakale)

Interestingly, those who went into an academic role upon completion of their thesis expressed a converse perception. They felt that engaging in publication had become more feasible.

Owing to the work/life/study commitments I faced during my candidature, I found it very difficult to publish, and now, as I attempt to create articles and chapters for publication from my thesis, I feel I am starting anew. (Le Lant)

Despite challenges, some graduates experienced considerable success as researchers through continuing collaboration with their supervisors.

Continuing collaboration with my supervisor, together we have written chapters for books and journal publications, which has helped me overcome the barriers. With the experience gained from my PhD, I have published several journal articles, written a book, and I have been invited speaker for several conferences both nationally and internationally. I have also been appointed to work for the Quality Assurance Agency at university level (the focus of my research) and I have opportunities to implement the findings and inspire others. (Rasyid)

Impact

The impact of undertaking a research higher degree went beyond the production of a thesis to include a profound impact on self-image, and on the research engagement of those around them.

Now I can be a motivator whose experiences and reflections motivate other young lecturers to study overseas, to be potential researchers and knowledge creators like my own supervisors have done for me. (Habiburrahim)

PEDAGOGY OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION

The transition from novice to accomplished researcher is needed to serve multiple purposes. Traditionally, research higher degrees were perceived as academic apprenticeships (e.g. Mobray & Halse, 2010) that would produce the next generation of university lecturers and researchers. However, many higher degree candidates have other career destinations due to increasing numbers of graduates and declining opportunities for employment in the academy. As economies become more knowledge intensive, there is a demand for research higher degree graduates who will work outside the academy, for example as high-level practitioners or leaders in their professions, or as policymakers and advisors (Department of

Innovation, Industry, Science and Research [DIISR], 2011; Edwards et al., 2011). This broader range of destinations has bred a demand for these graduates to have diverse skills. Certainly, they are expected to have extensive and deep disciplinary knowledge, but they are also expected to develop a range of generic skills, including advanced communication skills (verbal and written), highly developed interpersonal skills (teamwork and collaboration) and project management skills (Borthwick & Wissler, 2003).

One of the key issues governing higher degree practices in universities relates to how the function of higher degree research is conceived. Hughes and Tight (2013) examined the metaphors used to describe the doctoral education experience. Prevalent among them is the notion of a journey, which, when narrated as a story, has nuanced stages beginning with a call or motivation to engage in research, progressing to the challenges and frustrations of the research practice itself, and continuing until reaching the final goal. This, Hughes and Tight (2013, p. 771) argue, speaks of “neo-liberalism, where personal motivation is all that is required to succeed”. They also argue that while this notion of the doctoral process has truth, an emerging metaphor of PhD research as work is ignored. They cite Barnacle’s (2005) critique of the contemporary discourse that describes doctoral studies as work “with obligations to the economy” (Hughes & Tight, 2013, p. 772). This latter metaphor is reflected in knowledge work, skills and accountability in habits, as well as the practices and rigour that accompany doctoral studies. The notion of work is observable in, and arises from, increasing managerialism in research and higher degree candidature. Metaphorical depictions of doctoral research as either a personal journey recounted as a story of discovery or as managed work with contractual obligations and responsibilities for the primary purpose of the production of a thesis perpetuates a binary perspective that fails to recognise the diverse variants in a fusion of the two metaphors. Both metaphors, and their fusion, have implications for the nature of supervisory work.

Spiller et al. (2013, p. 833) argue against the isolated silos of supervisory partnerships of “student acolyte learning from expert supervisor” and advocate for conversational inquiry among supervisors to address the increasing external challenges to higher degree research. Conversational inquiry processes advocated by Spiller et al. reflect Wenger’s (1998) notions of communities of practice wherein experienced supervisors’ accumulated “wisdom of practice” can be captured, shared and reformed to meet new contexts and new needs. Buissink-Smith Hart and van der Meer (2013, p. 295) extend Spiller et al.’s concerns regarding the isolated, siloed relationship of supervisor and student, arguing the case for greater deliberateness in fostering “communities of practice” and enabling the formation of peer support programs for higher degree students. Their case is based on studies that have demonstrated the benefits for students who participate in peer communities of practice in research. Such students are more likely to complete their degree on time; have a more enjoyable, less stressful experience; internalise personal accountability; and gain publication support and thus entry to the academic world.

Our answer to the insights gained from the higher degree research authors’ reflections on attaining authorship is to suggest that a sound pedagogy for

supervision includes pedagogy of publication that evolves from departmental mindfulness of the higher degree research journey, recognising the PhD process as both an individual journey of self- and academic discovery, and as work that has obligations. Central to a pedagogy of supervision is building productive networks among academics and students, reducing the isolation that is traditionally present in social Science research. Pare (2010), cited in Aitchison et al. (2010), argues persuasively that good pedagogy within the supervisory role includes an obligation to enable authorship. This requires supervisors to teach writing for publication and to model the rhetorical turn of the disciplines within which the higher degree thesis is located. Furthermore, like all profound learning, the intrapersonal and the interpersonal impacts are critical factors that need to be acknowledged. Our authors have ably and colourfully reflected this in their explanations of their higher degree research and publishing experiences.

CONCLUSION

A significant issue here is that those who consume the extant theoretical literature and research on academic practices are largely scholars of higher education rather than everyday academics whose primary allegiance is to their discipline. The question is, however, who is attending to these grounded scholarly arguments for greater deliberateness in doctoral supervisory practices and management? All too often the outcomes of studies on effective supervisory pedagogy are consumed by those with a scholarly interest in the field of higher education itself. We would argue that this limits everyday supervisory practices to a reliance on common practice and the supervisor's own experience as a higher degree candidate. Such supervisory practices, reliant largely on tacit wisdom of practice, are open to untested and unchallenged, even erroneous assumptions that fail to align with the contemporary needs of students. Past supervisory practices also risk failing to support the research goals and targets of departments, faculties, universities and governments in a neo-liberal climate. Less isolation of participants and greater intentionality in evidence-informed practices are the cornerstones that are needed. In particular, higher degree candidates need to be supported in developing self-critique to assist them in making the required cultural shifts in terms of refocusing their cultural values and managing their desire to be catalysts for change to enable them to adopt the stance of openness in research inquiry that will see their commentary on their fields of expertise taken up in high quality journals and other respected publications.

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