

International Conference on Professional Doctorates Cardiff, April 10-11 2014

Workshop Title:

The Professional Doctorate by Public Works is both a research degree and a degree in research: pedagogical issues in the critical engagement with significant outputs in the public domain.

Workshop Leaders:

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Extended Abstract:

Most practitioner research begins with a professional dilemma or intended action and involves systematic and rigorous inquiry leading to a greater understanding and possibly transformation of the practice situation. The DProf by Public Works begins at the other end with a *fait accompli*, with work that stands as testament to a significant professional contribution, one that is valued by peers and in many cases may have contributed to fundamental professional or societal change.

The nearest equivalent to the DProf by Public Works is the PhD by Publications/Published Works/Public Works. Both are research degrees but are not regarded as degrees in research. Both invite senior members of the disciplines or professions to write a critical examination, an exegesis, of their works. These works have to be in the public domain and their influence/impact on thinking and practice has to be evidenced. The claim is acknowledgement of 'doctorateness'. The PhD traditionally looks for discipline specific exploration including methodology and positioning in current thinking on the issues. In the DProf by Public Works¹, at the Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University, something different is emerging which has been commented on by examiners who are usually PhD holders and PhD examiners.

This workshop does not seek to differentiate between the two pathways to a doctoral award but rather to see how the experience from the DProf by Public Works might influence the focus and function of such an award which is achieved through a critique of artefacts or objects of knowledge. This might include taking fuller advantage of the critical commentary by expecting it to be not only on the specific area or domain but on the complex skills and attributes of negotiation, communication and enterprise which has resulted in such impact. If all research is to be considered useful then a magnification of how to achieve usefulness may illuminate transdisciplinary practices, a more sophisticated notion of leadership and the constituents of personal and professional transformation. Currently both the PhD and the Professional Doctorate by Publications/Public Works are considered as either a form of honouring or acknowledging evidenced influence and high level

¹ This programme can now draw on the experience of over 30 graduates

contributions to knowledge and practice or a substantial claim for prior learning (Armsby 2012). This workshop will not include here the 'prospective route' ie public works in progress (Butt 2013) but the retrospective route, that is, an exploration into substantial works already done, the outcome of which should inform future directions – a *reculer pour mieux sauter* approach.

This workshop, based on research into the practice and assessment of the Professional Studies Doctorate by Public Works, proposes to explore understandings of the programme as a research degree by considering the following propositions: it is research into the dynamic relationship between self and the world through critical reflection and positioning; it deepens the discourse on the accreditation of prior learning; it problematises practice; it exhibits the process of effective innovation; it requires transdisciplinary understanding of the assumptions, motivations and influences on practice and is subject, through examination, to critical peer review; and it makes a case not only for usefulness but how that is arrived at.

To open the discussion we imagine Antonio Stradivari as a candidate. Antonio took his secrets to the grave. No one since has been able to tap into his knowledge or match his skill. As the knowledge embedded in high end achievement is often tacit, it resides in the ways of being and doing of its practitioners, leaving traces in the people and materials it has impacted. We suggest that this programme acts as the translational bridge between the tacit knowledge of the expert practitioner and those who seek to learn from such knowledge and continue its development.

Some comments/feedback from research among the graduates:

- *that the dialogic adviser relationship was essential (unanimous)*
- *that the undertaking was a piece of complex research requiring knowledge of research methods and application to practice and gaining a wider view of research methodologies (unanimous)*
- *that the outcomes informed future directions, thinking, roles and achievements (unanimous)*
- *that a direct outcome of the programme was new and exciting roles for the graduate (unanimous)*

Descriptions of the process as research: *autoethnography, critical autobiography, applied research*

The undertaking: *intensive, short, challenging, more rigorous than other such undertakings, therapeutic, personally and professionally changing*

Other comments:

- *academics don't yet understand the complexities of the master practitioner. It is thousands of years since the first spear was thrown and even today academics cannot explain the mental calculations that are conducted by the master spear thrower ... That is, principles that are basic to the master practitioner are completely under-researched*
- *I had expected writing a coherent statement to be relatively straightforward but the complexities grew*
- *this was research into my own research methods and research methods generally*
- *understanding the process of forensic deconstruction of my work processes to align*

theory with practice

- *The critical friend approach that (the adviser) took ... helped me to address areas that were previously invisible to me.*

What we would now very much value are comments and reflections from our peers involved in professional doctorates.

References

Armsby, P (2012) "Accreditation of experiential learning at doctoral level", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 24 Iss: 2 pp. 133 - 150

Butt, M (2013) "One I made earlier: on the PhD by publication", *TEXT Special Issue 22. Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards.* eds Jen Webb, Donna Lee Brien and Sandra Burr.

(998 words including title, authors and references)