

It is worth asking indeed what is it that doctoral education *does* – what is it for?

(Bill Green 2012, p.11)

This paper emerges out of our OLT-funded project into the examination of creative doctorates (Webb & Brien 2010), where we explore what constitutes a doctorate in the creative arts and what it means to conduct research in and through creative practice. Despite a decade of sustained investigation from within the academic community, policy, practice and discourse shows that there is still considerable uncertainty about this area of research training. The three of us leading this project hold a conventional humanities PhD, two creative practice PhDs and a DCA; we have also supervised around 60 research candidates in both conventional and creative PhD projects, and examined almost 100 research dissertations. This broad experience along with our research findings reveals that variations in approach and quality are considerable; that student experiences are often less satisfying than they might have been; and that supervision and examination are individualised practices.

We are not alone in this observation. During 2011 we held three day-long roundtables with senior members of the creative arts disciplines in Australia, and 12 focus groups with recent graduates, supervisors and examiners of creative arts doctoral programs: visual art, creative writing, design, performing arts and media arts. The conversations held in those meetings ranged across attitudes to creative arts research; the place of art within the academy; the role of policy and procedures; and the quality and structure of doctoral programs. There was a surprising degree of agreement on key points, such as what is required of a doctoral degree in a creative arts discipline and on the peculiar difficulties associated with such a degree. For instance:

‘In the creative doctorates we’re developing people to work as creative practitioners as well as scholars, and we’re pulled between these two forces or two fields’.

‘It’d be good to have someone say “I have a PhD in visual arts or creative writing”, and not have people snort that it’s a Clayton’s, a fake kind of PhD’.

‘We have to write a thesis, and produce the original artworks and have an exhibition. It’s like we have to do a double doctorate’.

Another point that attracted significant discussion was the question of just what constitutes a doctorate in creative arts. A surprising number of the participants were uncertain about what a ‘doctorate’ means for artists and in art; some seemed to be overwhelmed by the range of possibilities available; and others suggested that the various offerings are so different that it is difficult to speak about ‘the creative arts doctorate’ at all. Given this, we want to explicate the various modes, and then move to the question of the doctorate in art.

The Doctorate: A Brief Taxonomy

The word ‘doctorate’ comes from the Latin *docere*, which means ‘to teach’, ‘to show’, or ‘to cause to know’, and traces of that origin remain in the fact that a doctorate is an entry criterion for an academic position. Yet when we speak about doctoral programs, teaching takes a backseat, at best: the focus is on research. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) endorses and indeed prescribes this approach, stating that a doctoral degree:

qualifies individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice. (AQF, 2011, p.61)

There is no mention here or elsewhere in the AQF document of teaching; research and knowledge are the reference points.

The AQF defines two doctorate types: the doctorate by research, and the Professional Doctorate (PD), which means that some doctorates fall outside this framework. The ‘higher’ doctorate is awarded to scholars in recognition of the value of their contributions to knowledge. The honorary doctorate is awarded to recognise public contributions made by a distinguished visitor to an institution. The doctorate by published works allows for the submission for examination of a body of work published over several years but undertaken outside the structure of a HDR program. Where the first doctorate relies on and generates a great deal of intellectual capital,

the second relies on and generates a great deal of social capital. The third is more problematic: unlike the honorary doctorate it relies on conventional academic measures, and unlike the higher doctorate it is associated with concerns about quality assurance (Wilson, 2002).

The 'problem' with the doctorate by published works is avoided in the two AQF-defined doctoral courses. Of these, the PhD is the one most often offered and in which most candidates are enrolled: in 2009, 44,292 students were enrolled in doctorate by research, and only 1,465 in doctorate by coursework, in Australian universities (DEEWR, 2010). Enrolments and completions have increased remarkably in Australia and internationally: between 1949 and 2009, Australian universities awarded 94,423 doctorates (Dobson, 2012, p.95), with the vast majority awarded in the last two decades (from 1949 to 1989, only 1,209 doctorates were awarded).

The PD is tiny, compared with the PhD, and is usually considered to be a kind of 'new kid on the block', since the first was offered in Australia as recently as 1991 (Kemp, 2004, p. 401). However, under the AQF definition, it could be argued that the PD is the original form of the degree. Bourner, Bowden and Laing (2001, p.65) point out that doctoral degrees have been awarded in Europe since the 12th century, when they were named degrees, from which were graduated doctors of theology, or law, or medicine, trained for professional service. This sounds very much like the current version of the PD.

The Creative Arts Doctorate

Undertaking a PhD in the creative arts involves the candidate either conducting research into a field of practice, and presenting that research for examination in the form of a conventional written dissertation; or conducting research through creative practice, and presenting for examination a creative artifact and a critical dissertation. Undertaking a creative arts non-PhD doctorate (one of the variants of the DCA) may involve the candidate in coursework study, but always involves the candidate conducting research through creative practice, and presenting for examination a creative artifact and a critical dissertation.

This sounds, on the face of it, as though there is little or no difference between a PhD and (what is effectively) a PD in the creative arts. Where a university offers both PhD with creative product and a creative PD, a point of distinction is often established in terms of entry criteria, with candidates for the professional doctorate being expected to demonstrate high level skills in their art form. The other most consistent point of difference between the two modes is that the creative PD *must* include a major creative component, while the PhD *may* include a major creative component.

The creative disciplines are not alone in lacking precision about the structure and outcomes of their degrees. Professor of Education Bill Green writes with reference to the professional doctorate in Australia that:

its development and consolidation has been inseparable from mounting concerns about the PhD and about postgraduate research education more generally, and accordingly there continues to be widespread confusion and controversy in this regard. (Green, 2012, p.12)

Such confusion and controversy are evident in the Arts and Humanities sector; not only is it difficult to see the material difference between the PhD and the named doctorates, but the latter are often poorly understood and/or valued. We have heard many times that a creative PD is 'not a real doctorate', or at best a 'lightweight' degree. This is despite the fact that neither the AQF, which lays out the terms under which degrees can be offered, nor the Deans and Directors of Graduate Schools, who oversee the delivery of research degrees, draw any distinction between the PD and the PhD in terms of research quality (DDoGS, 2011, p.6). The AQF is particularly clear, writing that a PhD 'makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge', and a PD 'makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the context of professional practice' (AQF, 2011, p.61).

The lack of clarity about what a PD really is can be attributable, Green suggests, to the fact that its development 'has been largely policy and market-driven' and that this contributes to what he identifies as 'considerable range in terms of the quality both of educational provision and of academic-scholarly understanding as well as rigour' (Green, 2012, p.12). We can agree that the creative arts doctorate, whether PhD or

PD, began life primarily as a result of the 'Dawkins' policy changes. It is true too that the market – student demand – has continued to drive the expansion of offerings. The range of quality is probably inevitable, given the number of universities that offer creative doctorates. A scan of websites and policy documents indicates that 35 Australian universities offer doctoral studies in at least one art form – either PhD, named PD, or both – and the institutional self-accreditation of these degrees makes it difficult to compare the quality and options of the courses. It is, though, possible to compare the expectations held of what candidates should produce as outputs, and in what the outcome of such a candidature should be.

With respect to outputs: regardless of whether it is a creative PhD or PD, all universities require the artifact to be accompanied by critical writing, though the volume of such writing ranges from 10,000 words to 60,000 words. The scale of the creative artifact varies too: one university, for example, requires that candidates produce 3 performances of up to 4 hours, and another requires 75 minutes of performance; one requires a 35,000-word creative writing manuscript, another requires a minimum of 70,000 words.

In terms of outcomes, universities show more consistency. Effectively, there are two sets of outcomes – one very similar set of expectations across the professional doctorates, and a second set attributable to the PhD with creative component. These precisely match the designation of each degree type that we saw above: for PDs, the expectations are that graduates will have enhanced capacity to contribute to their industry/art form; for PhDs with a creative component, graduates are expected to have the capacity to make an original contribution to knowledge. Broadly speaking then, the structures of PDs and PhDs with creative component are very similar; they are methodologically closely related; and in terms of research design they are pretty much indistinguishable. The outcomes expected differ only in relation to the target of the knowledge generated: the PD's knowledge is located firmly in applications to practice while the PhD seems to range more widely across the field of knowledge.

What Can the Doctorate Do?

We started this paper with an epigraph from Bill Green: 'It is worth asking indeed what is it that doctoral education *does* – what is it for?' (Green, 2012, p.11). The language of university higher degrees policies, of the AQF, and of DDoGS suggests

that we know precisely what doctoral education does, or is for: to put candidates through a program of supervised research that will result in their having the capacity to make one or other of those contributions. In practice, however, this is rarely the case; as the participants in our project observed, doctoral education includes a range of other functions and effects. These include: training in technical and professional skills; the provision of three years of income and other resources to candidates; one-on-one mentorship; connection to a field, industry and/or peer network; the provision of a sense of identity and purpose; and a position at the front of the queue for casual academic work.

When asked 'what is it for?', many of the participants gave what we might term the 'right' answers: a contribution to knowledge; the achievement of intellectual rigour; research training; and making a contribution to their field. A creative doctorate should also, the participants insisted, train candidates to be skillful 'artist-academics', a role that involves a number of different qualities: 'how to present at conferences', 'how to run a good exhibition', and 'how to write'. It should, that is, provide what one participant called 'a new set of skills' for artists, summed up as 'the ability to be articulate – to talk about their work and enter into a wider dialogue'; 'to teach their art form and to talk about it in culture'. Interestingly, while several people offered a variation on the idea that the doctorate should 'develop the candidate's practice' and 'result in an interesting original work', only one person claimed that the point of a creative doctorate is to produce a fine creative artifact. A number of participants in fact insisted that the artwork cannot take precedence because, 'It's not about writing a book or making an artwork; it's about writing a thesis'.

This is a very substantial list of requirements, and one result is the sheer workload involved for students. If someone is genuinely going to produce high quality, innovative, well contextualized and knowledge-generating artwork in 3 to 4 years, and at the same time research and write an essay of up to 60,000 words, and achieve all those skills our participants identified, they are going to undertake an enormous amount of work. They are not alone in this; despite the complaints that circulate in the artist-academic community, a double doctorate, most doctoral candidates similarly engage in complex and demanding practice that results in a huge body of data that must then be organized and analysed, contextualized and theorized. The difference between the doctoral experience for the sculptor and

another kind of HASS scholar is not, we suggest, in the amount and complexity of the work undertaken but in the split attention that artists must negotiate. A social researcher may complete a wide range of very discrete processes and acts, but all will be a part of an established scholarly work. An artist will, conversely, have to work across two quite distinct domains: the creative and the scholarly. Though the written work submitted in a creative doctorate is typically shorter, less analytical and less in-depth than in a conventional doctorate, the intellectual and technical work of translating across domains, and covering two distinct approaches, is dauntingly difficult.

Despite the volume of work and the complexity of practice and thinking that is involved in a creative doctorate, the fact that so much of the time is spent in practice and in developing approaches to practice means that, necessarily, less time is spent on conventional research methods and analysis than in a conventional doctorate. Because creative arts doctoral candidates are, however, often associated with humanities and social science academics, there is often an expectation that their research will similarly address issues of theoretical interest or social problems. When it does not – or when it does so but not at the depth of a conventional PhD, or when instead it tackles questions of process or practice – the quality of a creative arts doctorate may be denigrated. This is where the negative commentary about ‘Clayton’s’ or ‘not real’ doctorates, emerges.

Conclusion

There are no easy answers here, but a starting point may be to conceptualise all creative arts doctorates – whether PhD or named degrees – as, or as equivalent to, PDs. Bourner et al (2001) observe:

For the Doctor of Philosophy, the candidate is normally expected to undertake a preliminary literature search and review to identify a gap. For professional doctorate research, the candidates are normally expected to start with a problem in professional practice that needs investigation and resolution. (Bourner *et al.*, 2001, p.74)

This duality provides the way forward. A candidate who focuses on a perceived problem in professional practice will find the creative arts doctorate highly

appropriate; and is unlikely to produce a 'Clayton's doctorate' because the methodology, methods and approach, and field of study will be fully aligned. The work will be manageable in the time frame permitted because it will draw on and develop pre-existing capacities (the candidate does not have to undertake a crash course in grounded theory, for instance) and thus avoid the 'double doctorate' burden. It also may provide a better fit between candidate and field, as the outcome of a creative arts doctorate should be, according to one participant, that we build a community of 'scholar-artists: a different category of artists, who teach and transmit knowledge, who have a new kind of practice'.

We acknowledge that not all art projects belong in a university setting, as not all will add knowledge or improve practice. Nor are all artists suited to academia. But where there is a reasonable fit between artist, research project and doctoral program, the outcomes can be both productive and satisfying. In order to achieve this happy outcome, we need to define, refine and articulate to students, supervisors and examiners a workable and relevant creative doctorate. In this way, we can intervene in policy and in practice, shift the discourse, and craft a better place for art and artists within the university system.

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