

Round-table Discussion - Theme B

Monday 9th November, 12.15 - 13.00

Professional Doctorates -
an Australian perspective

Dr Marg Malloch

Reader - Cass School of Education

University of East London, UK - Formerly of Victoria University, Australia

Email: malloch@uel-exchange.uel.ac.uk

Dr Marg Malloch has recently moved to the Cass School of Education at the University of East London from Victoria University in Melbourne Australia where she coordinated a suite of postgraduate programs. Key areas of interest are workplace learning and women in education.

Professional doctorates proliferated in the Australian academic environment in the 1990s with programs being developed in diverse academic fields and with overseas partnerships. By 2000, the numbers of professional doctorates doubled (Maxwell and Shanahan, 2001), with courses in 19 areas of study offered in 30 universities (CDDGS, 1999). This growth has been followed by a retraction and diminished popularity paralleled by a change in government funding.

Professional doctorates also expanded in England, where the ESRC (QAA2000) provided broad principles for recognising professional doctorates (PDs) in that they must lead to outcomes that are demonstrably at the same level although different in style and content, that they should lead to contributions to knowledge and practice, that there should be evidence of the cohort working with and learning from each other; if the cohort is small,

evidence of interaction with other research students in the institution should be demonstrated, that students should be expected to complete their studies within 6 years and it must be possible to fail, and the staff delivering the PD must be able to demonstrate their commitment to researching and working with professionals.

In 1996/7 Middlesex University introduced the professional doctorate delivered through the Centre for Work Based Learning. The Middlesex University (MU) Professional Doctorate is focused on the individual learner's professional experience, practice and interests. In 2003/2004, a cross section of participants from the first cohort of 40 people were interviewed. Trends which emerged emphasized the importance to the participants of motivation, links with work, manageable time factor, the course structure, supervision, academic skill development, intellectual challenges and support from

work place and colleagues and concerns as to administrative procedures. The links between study and work are integral to the success of the professional doctorate for the participants.

The focus of professional doctorates is very much influenced by the professional identity of the student. The professional work of the course participant is important, and hence their workplace learning. Lunt (2002) identified challenges for the future of education professional doctorates considering the appropriateness of the thesis as the product of the qualification and questioning the 'nature of professional knowledge and relationship to academic knowledge'.

This paper explores these national trends whilst drawing upon experience of the delivery of a professional doctorate at Victoria University, characterised by taught subjects and substantial independent enquiry presented in the writing of a thesis. The professional practice and workplace learning of the participant is important.

The research methodology employed is that of qualitative, ethnographic research and the methods of interviews and participant observation are drawn upon.

The paper considers how learners' needs are met, the links between study and workplace practice and impact of their study. The future of professional doctorates in Australia is also considered.

The professional doctorate, in the form of a Doctor of Education, is characterised by a number of taught subjects and a substantial piece of independent enquiry presented in the writing of a thesis. There is an emphasis on applied research. The focus of professional doctorates is very much influenced by the professional identity of the student.

The focus of the course is on professional practice. 'The course is aimed at experienced, busy, career minded professionals in the fields of education, training and related fields who are seeking to improve their understanding of their workplace, including the wider policy context in which is located, and to enhance theoretical understandings underlying their professional practice.' (Course outline, undated) For the units of study, assessment tasks enable students to draw on their own workplace learning. These focus on issues related to specific work challenges.

The people enrolled in the course are professionals from the fields of nursing, school education, higher education, adult education and training, law,

occupational health and safety, agriculture and business. There is therefore a new market for this level of study. These typically research issues and challenges at work, leadership, change, professional development, mentoring, reorganization. Participants generally do not envisage an academic career. The student, or course participant and their work are the focus of the program of study rather than a concentration on making a contribution to knowledge as is the case for undertaking a doctor of philosophy.

How does the program meet the needs of the learners, what are the links with their workplace practice, what impact has undertaking the doctorate had on the students and their work?

Professional doctorates offer opportunities to bring together work and learning, professional practice and research. The study reports on students' goals in undertaking the doctoral program, some reporting having been 'wounded learners,' others focused on becoming a 'doctor' and others on benefits to their careers.

In the USA the professional doctorate is closely linked to entry to professions. There has been considerable debate in recent times as to the development of a new practitioner oriented degree comparing 'actuality' of practice, concrete existing practice with more complex forms of practice.

Coordinators closely involved with program development and delivery have moved on to a range of transformations of the professional doctorate program, influenced by the impact of the 21st century economics and commitment to providing alternative pathways for doctoral study. One coordinator described the professional doctorate as 'always the bridesmaid, not the bride.'

References

Bourner, T, Bowden, R & Laing, S (2000) Professional doctorates: the development of researching professionals in Bourner, T., Katz, T., & Watson, D., (eds), *New Directions in Professional Education* Buckingham, Society for Research in Higher Education/ Open University Press

CDDGS (Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies) 1998, *Guidelines: Professional Doctorates*, Unpublished Paper prepared by Terry Evans, Adrian Fisher and Wolfgang Gritching

- Cairns, L.G. (2003) *Examining Place, Agency and Mindfulness in Learners Managing Their Own Learning*, Professorial Lecture at Middlesex University, downloadable from www.icml.com
- Costley, C., (2000), Work-based Learning: an accessible curriculum in *The Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* vol.2:2
- Eraut, M., Steadman, S., Furner J., Maillardet F., Miller, C., Ali, A. & Blackman, C. (2004) *Learning in the Professional Workplace: Relationships between Learning Factors and Contextual Factors*. Paper Presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, San Diego, April, 2004.
- ESRC (2001) *Postgraduate Training Guidelines* www.esrc.ac.uk/content/postgradfunding/postgraduate
- Evans, R., *Existing Practice is Not the Template*, Educational Researcher, Vol.36, No.9, pp553-559
- Lee, A., Green, B. and Brennan, M. (2000) Organisational Knowledge, Professional Practice and the Professional Doctorate at Work. In John Garrick and Carl Rhodes (eds) *Research and Knowledge at Work: Perspectives, Case Studies and Innovative Strategies*, New York and London, Routledge pp. 117-136.
- Lunt, I. (2002) Professional doctorates in education, Escalate. Available online at: www.escalate.ac.uk.
- Maxwell, T.W. & Shanahan, P.J. (1997) Towards a reconceptualising the doctorate: Issues arising from comparative data on the EdD degree in Australia, in *Studies in Higher Education* 22, 2, pp.133-150.
- Evans, T., Fisher, A., and Grichting, W., for the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies, Guidelines on Professional Doctorates Resolved AB99/44 pp1 – 3
- Malfoy, J., Conceptualisation of a Professional Doctorate Program: Focusing on Practice and Change The Australian Educational Researcher Vol 31, No. 2, August 2004 pp63 - 79
- Maxwell, T.W., Green, B. & McCrea, N. (2000) *Doctorates within FEHPS: A Discussion Paper*, mimeograph, unpublished, Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies, UNE, 3p.
- Maxwell, T. W., Hickey, C., and Evans, T., (2004) Professional Doctorates: Working toward impact 5th Biennial International Conference on Professional Doctorates, Deakin University, Australia
- Neumann, R. (2003) *The Doctoral Education Experience: Diversity and complexity*, Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, EIP 03/12 DEST, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Stephenson, J., Yorke, M., (Eds), (1998), *Capability and Quality in Higher Education*, Kogan Page, London.
- Stephenson, J., Malloch, M., Cairns, L., (2006) Managing their own programme: A case study of the first graduates of a new kind of doctorate in professional practice, in *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 28, No.1, pp17 - 32 http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_research accessed April 23, 2006.
- Scott, D., Brown, A., Lunt, I., and Thorne, L., (2004) *Professional Doctorates Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge*, Open University Press, McGraw Hill Education, Berkshire, England
- UK Council for Graduate Education (2002) Report on Professional Doctorates, UKCGE