
Doctoral level feedback and reflection for
academic writing in Mode 2 knowledge contexts:
A study of candidate development within a DBA
professional doctorate programme

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Background

- Established history of doctoral education
- With regard to academic **writing**
 - progressive development of doctoral student *academic* writing (Eyres et al., 2001)
 - feedback regarding **conceptualisation** has previously been found to be the most helpful for participants (Page-Adams, 1995)
- Professional doctorates associated with what Gibbons et al (1994) referred to as **Mode 2 knowledge**

Mode 2 knowledge (1)

- A **definition**:

“Mode 2’ knowledge is **generated within a context of application**. This is **different from the process of application** by which ‘pure’ science, generated in theoretical/experimental environments, is ‘applied’; any technology is ‘transferred’; and knowledge is subsequently ‘managed’. The context of application, in contrast, **describes the total environment in which scientific problems arise, methodologies are developed, outcomes are disseminated, and uses are defined.**”

(Nowotny et al, 2003: 186).

Mode 2 knowledge (2)

- Mode 2 knowledge hallmarks
 - **creativity** is no longer seen to **reside solely in individuals**, but to be a **product of collective processes**, demanding **cognitive** and **social skills**
 - integration of action and research increases **complexity** and has implications for **epistemology, methodology and explication**
 - **contextualised knowledge** ‘produced under an aspect of **continuous negotiation**’ (Gibbons, 1997:10)

Potential student development challenges (1)

- important to **help students** with the **emergent process of inquiry** as much as with the content, literature and methodology (Reason and Marshall, 2001, p. 413)
- action researchers:
 - may have **little difficulty** in facilitating a process that leads to **practical improvement, innovation, positive change or development**
 - **find it difficult** to facilitate the participants' and their own **reflection** on and in action, which leads to **conceptual, theoretical knowledge in their theses** (Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher, 2007)

Potential student development challenges (2)

- research and writing tasks are dissimilar in nature
 - writing must **exclude** what is not essential for developing the argument
 - action research involves lots of **exploration, experimenting, and trying out** ideas – keeping some and rejecting others
- adopting a **critical** (Mesirow, 1998) and **self-critical** attitude is necessary for personal and organisational change to become truly *transformational*

Recognition of broad issue

- **socialisation** of doctoral students to the traditional **academic norms of research and scholarship** is acknowledged (Weidman and Stein, 2003)
- doctoral programmes **can align academic and practice considerations** (Malfroy and Yates, 2003)
- university departments **can reorient their doctoral training programmes to prepare students for Mode 2 knowledge production** (Bruun et al, 2005)

Research question

- What **role** does **supervision and feedback** play in **supporting student development** in operating within **Mode 2 knowledge generation contexts**?

Methodology (1)

- Analysed **development** within a **case study professional doctorate programme** and used **constructivist grounded theory** to provide *an* interpretation of some key facets
 - BCU DBA programme centred around **feedback and reflective practice processes** to enable candidates to achieve, personal, organisational and academic learning
 - candidates were required to produce a series of **three academic articles** of publishable standard.
 - **blind reviewing process** by uniquely assigned sub-panels of two members of a standing external review panel of experienced academic or practitioner editorial board members and journal editors.
 - candidates were given **feedback** upon the papers, and where necessary, invited to revise/resubmit

Methodology (2)

- data from the **reviewers' comments** were analysed using **constructivist grounded analysis**
 - **Grounded analysis** (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) is an **inductive** comparing and contrasting process to construct representations of salient differences within the data
 - **Constructivist** grounded analysis (Charmaz, 2000) acknowledges “Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its **temporal, cultural, and structural contexts**” and that the **researcher** therefore, not as an objective independent viewer of the observed world but as an **interpreter** of the views of the studied participants
 - The **interpretations** reflect my **role** as the creator of that version of the DBA programme and one-time course director
- analyses explored facets of **Mode 2 knowledge progression** apparent in contrasting feedback upon **early** and **later** DBA student papers

Findings concerning writing (1)

Mode 2 consideration	Early writing	Later writing
Practical application sought	<i>Immediate problem solving</i>	<i>Capacity building</i>
Context	<i>Broadly but unspecifically and descriptively sensed</i>	<i>As a dynamic</i>
Understanding of role	<i>Privileged perspective</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>
Plurality	<i>Basic elaborative quotes</i>	<i>Strong participant voices</i>
Own philosophy	<i>Denied</i>	<i>Acknowledged</i>
Concepts	<i>Voluminous but shallow. Reified</i>	<i>Selected. Acknowledged as potentially valuable interpretative frames</i>
Previous literature	<i>Uncritical acceptance Chronological Lack of integration</i>	<i>Not given higher status than own work Thematic Coherent</i>
Complexity	<i>As handicap</i>	<i>Incorporated</i>
Methodology	<i>Lack of rigour</i>	<i>Pragmatic but rigorous</i>
Action	<i>More 'formal' cycles</i>	<i>As way of knowing</i>
Professional practice	<i>Minor modifications</i>	<i>Transformational change</i>

Findings concerning writing (2)

Mode 2 consideration	Early writing	Later writing
Abstraction	<i>Low</i>	<i>Higher</i>
Golden thread	<i>Not sensed</i>	<i>Identified and theorised</i>
Critical perspective	<i>Low</i>	<i>Greater</i>
Generalisation	<i>Over-generalisation then under-generalisation</i>	<i>Wider implications understood</i>
Impact	<i>Introduces some academic concepts to practice</i>	<i>Raises new organisational possibilities</i>
Organisation of work	<i>Loosely coupled</i>	<i>Coherent and integrated</i>
Communicating context	<i>Descriptive</i>	<i>Marshalled. Highlighting contingency</i>
Referencing	<i>Citation etiquette issues. Extensive technical errors in referencing</i>	<i>Minor technical errors</i>
Spelling, grammar, punctuation etc.	<i>Not concise. Poorer grammar</i>	<i>Focused and professional communication</i>
Skills developed	<i>Negotiation, Risk-taking, Experimentation, Conceptualisation, Academic referencing</i>	<i>Reflexivity, Facilitation, Project management, Strategic perspective, Opportunity spotting, Communicating to multiple audiences</i>

Findings concerning referee 'emphasis'

Consideration	Academic knowledge emphasis	Mode 2 knowledge emphasis
Context	<i>As setting</i>	<i>As frame</i>
Aims	<i>Conceptual</i>	<i>Change</i>
Analytical framework or research question	<i>Required from offset</i>	<i>Emergent</i>
Multiple concepts	<i>To be minimised</i>	<i>To be utilised singly or integratively</i>
Role of researcher	<i>Bias. Value statements</i>	<i>Reflexive practitioner</i>
Voice of researcher	<i>To be minimised. Use third person</i>	<i>More accepting</i>
Practice/academic	<i>Wary of work being "too practical"</i>	<i>Important to capture wider academic issues</i>
Implementation	<i>Incidental</i>	<i>As key learning opportunity</i>
Evaluation	<i>Organisational practices lack theoretical validity</i>	<i>Informs practical evaluation</i>
Recommendations	<i>Not a priority. Based solely in research findings</i>	<i>Valuable to context</i>

Conclusions from the study

- I **sensed**:
 - **distinct Mode 2 challenges** for professional doctorate **students** and **assessors**
 - some **practices and skills** that students may **require**
- There is a need for **further study**:
 - the '**student experience**' as their professional doctorate studies unfold
 - there may be **different issues** with **separate programmes** (e.g. DBA, EdD etc.)
- The study provides **focus for discussion** amongst those supporting doctoral education