

The impact of professional doctorate study on health care practitioners

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Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care
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November 2009



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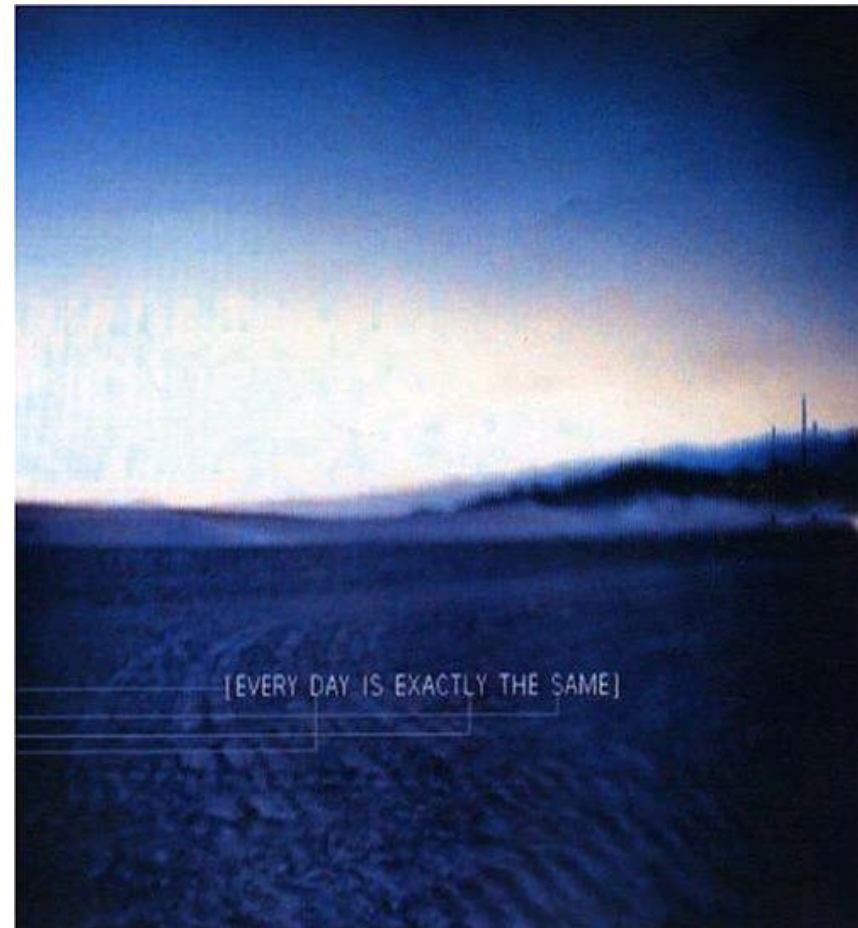
Prof Doc programme
offers
professional development
for
experienced practitioners, managers & academics
to become
researching professionals



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Primary aim
is
to make a difference
to
professional practice

But does it?



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Research question:

What changes occur in relation to a student's personal and professional growth during study for a professional doctorate?



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Methodology

Evaluative case study

over 4 years (2005 to 2008)

from one professional doctorate programme in UK



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Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care, University of Brighton

10 named doctoral awards:

- Biomedical Science - DBMS
- Counselling and Psychotherapy - DCP
- Health Care - DHC
- Midwifery - DMid
- Nursing - DNursing
- Occupational Therapy - DOccT
- Pharmacy - DPharm
- Physiotherapy - DPT
- Podiatry - DPod
- Social Work - DSW



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Structure of Prof Doc programme

Stage One (Years 1 and 2)			Stage Two (Years 3, 4, 5, 6)
At 5 months	At 12 months	At 20 months	Between 48 and 72 months
<p>Assignment 1</p> <p>Identifying a researchable problem</p> <p>(6000 words)</p>	<p>Assignment 2</p> <p>Exploring research methodologies</p> <p>(8000 words)</p>	<p>Assignment 3</p> <p>Research Proposal</p> <p>(12,000 words)</p>	<p>Thesis & Viva</p> <p>Substantial research study involving professional practice</p> <p>(60,000 words)</p>

Data collection

Six Focus Groups

- Neutral interviewer not involved in PD programme
- 4 student cohorts from year 1, 2, 3, 4
- 32 participants

Questionnaires

- 37 end of year course evaluation questionnaires

Studentcentral – online virtual learning environment

- Reflective statements from students

Alumni

- 3 alumni provided comments on their experience



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Focus group participants

Group 1 Year 1	Group 2 Year 2	Group 3 Year 3	Group 4 Year 4
9 participants	8 participants	7 participants	8 participants
<i>2 PT</i>	<i>2 PT</i>	<i>3 PT</i>	<i>3 PT</i>
<i>2 OT</i>	<i>2 OT</i>	<i>1 OT</i>	<i>2 OT</i>
<i>1 Pod</i>	<i>1 Pod</i>		<i>1 Pod</i>
<i>3 nurses</i>	<i>2 nurses</i>	<i>2 nurse</i>	<i>2 nurses</i>
<i>1 midwife</i>	<i>1 SW</i>	<i>1 midwife</i>	



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Ethical considerations

- Approval by Faculty of Health Research Ethics and Governance Committee
- Anonymity and confidentiality important
- Ongoing informed consent



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Interpretive phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Smith & Osborn 2003, 2004

Used to develop understanding of individual experiences of the programme

Participants commented on themes developed from analysis



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Findings

Personal change
and
Professional change



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Personal change

A growing confidence:

I am feeling more articulate and verbally confident. Yr 1

There is a greater self-awareness and an ability to tolerate uncertainty. Yr 2

A growing sense of scholarship, more questioning and challenging:

It's made me question every single thing I do...nothing is taken for granted. Yr 2

I think more critically now; in a more research way than just a whingeing way...more cautious about my previous assumptions and more open to question. Yr 3

Developing problem solving skills:

I'm actively trying to think of solutions that can be demonstrated scientifically. Yr 2



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Professional change

For many, an expanding vision of role and identity:

It's a feeling of professional growth...moving out of the confines of my work. Yr 2

My thinking is now wider than my own profession. Yr 4

Some felt unsettled:

There's a sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment ... this programme challenges previous beliefs about my own profession. Yr 2

I now find work colleagues and their attitudes disturbing. Yr 1

But also a breadth of vision:

I have a wider view ... more finely tuned ... this type of research gives one the luxury of thinking again in practice. Yr 3

I am now a player in a broader field... this may increase potential for moving into a consultant's post. Yr 4



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Questioning practice

Some discomfort when exploring theoretical foundations for their current and previous practice:

...the unsettling thing was all of a sudden here I am leading this team of nurses and here is the evidence that says none of it is working. Yr 2

This new uncertainty led to serious critique of current research:

I continue to be horrified by what is going on around me, masquerading as evidence based practice. Yr 3

It makes one question the robustness of much research in health practice. Yr 4



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Communication with fellow students

Being a member of a multi-professional student cohort had been both supportive and stimulating:

it has helped me appreciate alternative perspectives... but also realise that other professions face similar problems in practice. Yr 4

...action learning set meetings with colleagues from other professions have been really enlightening... and a force for getting things done. Yr 3

...the strength of the course design is the inclusion of regular study days with seminars, learning sets and workshops. This allowed us to share our own experiences and areas of expertise and is an advantage over the traditional PhD route that for some can be a lonely experience. Alumni 1



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Communication at work

The doctorate affected communication with colleagues:

I am sharing knowledge from my studies ... things are certainly leaking out! Yr 4

I think I'm more tolerant and open to different ways of practice now. Yr 2

Doctorate studies changed how others perceived them:

...it does give that edge .. people will actually listen to you in a slightly different way...you need a doctorate to be listened to, almost. Yr 4

...it gives you more credibility ... people listen in a slightly different way because of the professional doctorate label. Yr 3



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Becoming a change agent

The need for new skills to influence and lead change:

*I do want to change practice and I think I already have, in the last couple of years
.... but the embedding of research-mindedness into practice requires huge tact
and dogged determination. Yr 4*

Difficulties in planning and implementing change:

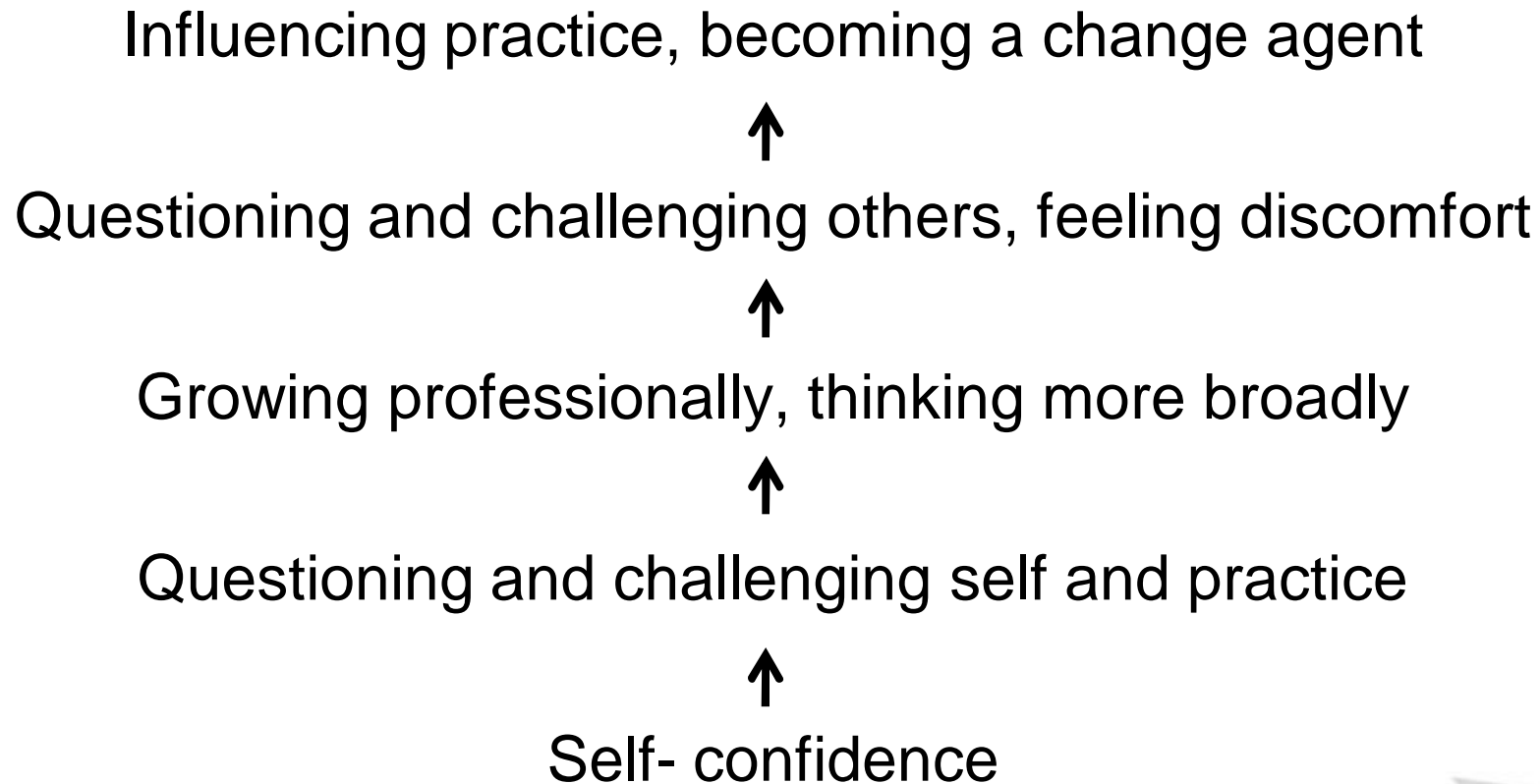
*...trying to get people on board with new ideas, and making them think about what
they do, I suspect that I'm going to get sabotaged. Yr 2*

*The professional doctorate has allowed me to combine scholarly inquiry with
professional practice and to stimulate changes in policy and practice ...making it
an attractive mid career option for senior professionals who want to make a
difference. Alumni 2*



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Summary of findings



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Study findings lead to further questions:

- What else do we need to know about the experience of being a Prof Doc student? What further research do we need to do?
- How can Prof Doc programmes enhance employer and work colleague engagement?
- How can we help Prof Doc students become more influential in the workplace and in their profession?
- How can researching professionals be supported and developed?
- What is the future for Prof Doc programmes?



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