



Challenges in the Delivery of Professional Doctorates: Integrating Clinical and Research Training for Psychologists

Prof. Vanja Orlans
Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University

International Conference on Professional
Doctorates, London, November 2009



The Context

- n An educational programme for graduate psychologists: The Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych), a joint programme between Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University;
- n Accredited for *professional* training by the British Psychological Society (BPS), the Health Professions Council (HPC) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP).




The Context (contd.)

- n The DCPsych brings together standards of proficiency for accredited practice as well as doctoral level requirements benchmarked by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA);
- n The challenge is to develop an integrated programme of learning which brings together a variety of demands.



The Professional Doctorate

- n Three key capabilities as reflected in QAA doctoral level descriptors:
- n A high level of critical capability;
- n A significant or original contribution the practice field;
- n The capacity to evidence an authoritative stance.



Challenges in Relation to Specific Capabilities

- n Critical capability:
- n In the psychotherapeutic context this capability needs to have a *reflexive* quality in order to integrate with the standards and capabilities of therapeutic requirements;
- n This means that the person of the researcher is central to the development of the project;
- n Criticality incorporates attention to self, to the relationship between self and project, and to the contextual elements of both.
Etherington (2004); Alvesson & Deetz, (2000); McLeod (2001)



Reflexivity

- n Approaches to reflexivity highlight both a constructivist and a constructionist approach; the former is regarded as leading inward whereas the latter brings the investigation into a relational, social and contextual realm (Gergen & Gergen, 1991).



Reflexivity (contd.)

- n The emphasis on reflexivity poses the idea that disembodied knowledge may not be possible, a position that challenges more fragmented ways of knowing;
- n This approach takes us into the domain of critical theory, postmodernism, and qualitative forms of inquiry (e.g Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).



A Significant Contribution to the Practice Field

- n A significant contribution is contextual in terms of raising awareness about key issues in practice;
- n It also addresses the ‘so what’ question – that is, how will current practices in counselling psychology and psychotherapy be informed by the outcomes and effects of a particular doctoral project;
- n Conceptual knowledge itself is not sufficient (cf. Giddens, 1987; Polanyi, 1966; Schön, 1983).



An Authoritative Stance

- n An authoritative stance in this context requires evidence of more than the quality of the content of submitted project work;
- n The person of the therapist/researcher stands in the centre of the work;
- n Not a place where you can hide!



Implications of these Requirements

- n Epistemological challenges to our ideas of ‘knowing’;
- n Methodological challenges in terms of how research questions are ‘evidenced’;
- n Challenges of adopting a more integrated position that brings research and practice together.



Delivering the Programme

- n The way that we select candidates is crucial and needs to reflect the kinds of challenges that we have highlighted;
- n Examples of our intake requirements include: A good degree in psychology (2:1 or higher); work experience; demonstrated reflexivity; self management and self-confidence; relational sophistication, an interest in integration, and an assessed capacity to 'have a feel for' doctoral level descriptors.



Delivering the Programme (contd.)

- n Places demands on curriculum design which seeks to bring research and practice together; this in turn places considerable demands on course tutors to be able to span a wide range of issues covering philosophical concerns, practice based knowledge and skill, and a capacity to know what to look for in submitted work.



The Professional Doctorate vs. the PhD

- n While there is some current competitive tension in evidence I would suggest that the DCPsych and similar programmes place significant demands on a candidate that in many ways go beyond the traditional demands of the PhD; at the same time both have scholarship and the development of significant knowledge as key concerns.