DOING THE DOCTORATE DIFFERENTLY: CREATIVE METHODS/PEDAGOGIES

EVENT SUMMARY

BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY
16TH FEBRUARY 2018.

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EVENT OVERVIEW

This full-day UKCGE workshop, hosted and led by Birmingham City University, examined alternative and creative form of doctoral provision. It highlighted current exemplars of creative doctorates, and examined the pedagogical and policy contexts that may allow those types of doctorates to flourish.

OVERTURE

Geof Hill of BCU has pioneered academic cabaret as a medium of doctoral education and started with an extract from Stephen Sondheim’s (1984) ‘Sunday in the Park with George’ which included verses which resonated with research students and their supervisors.

WELCOME

Stan Taylor welcomed delegates on behalf of the UKCGE, and set the historical context for the workshop in terms of the appearance of a new genre, the modern creative doctorate. He pointed out that, in contrast to all previous kinds of doctorates where communication of original research had been in writing, this had the distinguishing characteristic of such communication also being in the forms of practice and/or performance.

INTRODUCTION

Geof Hill identified a key turning point for practice/performance doctorates as the publication of the Frascati guidelines (OECD 2002) on collecting and reporting data. These explicitly recognised creative works generally and performative creative works in particular as research and hence appropriate as a form of doctoral education. Subsequently this had been built upon by institutions across the globe, giving rise to the modern creative doctorate.

He set out the programme for the day in terms of:

- The institutional context
- The pedagogical context
- The student context
- The supervisor context.
THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT
This part of the workshop was delivered by Professor Alex Kendall, Associate Dean (Research and Business Development) at BCU. She identified six key factors in facilitating the development of creative doctorates, namely:

- Commitment on the part of academic staff to embody creative practice and performance within doctoral programmes;
- Permission from institutions to do so through their regulations and policies and procedures;
- Scaffolding in the form of content including training students in creative methodologies and in appropriate supervisor development and training;
- Resources, particularly adequate spaces, to support the development of creative practice and performance;
- Cohorts of students able to support each other in their creative endeavours’
- Networks of examiners and institutions to calibrate learning opportunities and standards.

THE PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT
This involved three presentations by three BCU staff.

Jacqueline Taylor – Faculty of Art, Design and Media
She noted that the faculty had 160 doctoral students, many of whom were doing practice-led degrees and pointed to key features including:

- Many of her colleagues in the faculty were themselves creative practitioners and had a strong commitment to supporting practice-led doctorates;
- A shared aim of promoting an epistemological and ontological shift among students in opening their minds to practical/performative research;
- The scaffolding available to students via the faculty’s Postgraduate Certificate in Research Practice which incorporated ‘Principles of Research’ ‘Principles in Practice’ and ‘Methods in Practice’;
- The availability of fluid spaces for performative research;
- The opportunities for networking, including the ‘Beyond Borders’ postgraduate research conference.

Amanda French – Head of Department: Professional Development, Research and Enterprise in the School of Education
She taught on the EdD programme, and described features including:

- A conscious attempt to take students out of their comfort zone in terms of conceptions of research;
- Scaffolding by using the taught part of the programme to investigate epistemological and ontological assumptions and explore new and unfamiliar practice/performance based methodologies for research;
- Demonstrating potential by inviting previous students to give examples of their practical/performative work;
• Re-calibrating conceptions of doctoral assessment to incorporate portfolios, blogs, podcasts, audio diaries, live presentations, visual presentations or artefacts.

Tony Armstrong – Director of PGR Studies in Education, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences
Key features included:

• Scaffolding available through the inclusion of new and emerging methodologies including those relating to practice/performance in the faculty’s research methodology seminars;
• Giving students explicit permission to investigate and use these, including auto-ethnographical and experimental methods, in developing their research;
• Following on from Tilly (2012), organizing ‘contentious gatherings’ in which essentially-contested practices are discussed, analysed and located relative to interests, time and spaces.

THE STUDENT CONTEXT
In all, four BCU students presented their work and there was then a panel discussion.

Kathryn Peckham – Education
She was undertaking a study into how potential for high achievement in adult life could be nurtured in early education. The first stage of this involved identifying the characteristics in childhood of those who subsequently became high achievers. She had sought to do this by conducting elite interviews with high achievers including Fellows of the Royal Society and Nobel Prize winners. But instead of using conventional question and answer, she had developed a set of flash cards naming key topics to act as a visual and tactile reference point for interviewees. This strategy had been highly successful in stimulating responses and enabling her to gather the relevant data.

Becky Snape – Education
Her work was an investigation of how creative writing was been taught at Key Stage 4 in Schools. She had gathered her data using conventional techniques in terms of interviewing, coding, and mapping, but had decided to take a creative approach to representing her data. So rather than repeat their comments verbatim, she had translated them into a series of short succinct poems which captured their voices. This was not only a discipline in terms of encapsulating the essentials of what her respondents had said, but also a means of communication which it was thought would appeal to policy-makers.

David Collins – Social Work
David was both qualified social worker and an artist. His doctoral work was based upon action research methodology as a tool for exploring his professional identity. To present his project, David symbolically took over the persona of an alter ego, Richard Loverage, a gallery curator. He explained that David had decided to design a Johari window to visually represent his self-known, other-known, and unknown selves. The project was as yet unfinished but would eventually form a unique visual auto-ethnography as an original contribution to knowledge and understanding.
Jean Dyson – Art and Design
Jean’s starting point was the way in which the Key Stage 3 art and design curriculum relied almost entirely upon drawing and painting, as it had since the 19th century. She wanted to design a new curriculum which would take full advantage of developments in art and media in the same way that many curators had transformed museums into lively and contemporary spaces. In order to achieve this, she had become a curator herself and designed a new virtual gallery. This was based on three levels, the first representing the current curriculum, the second possible alternative curricula, and the third setting out what she had found from her researchers.

There was then a panel discussion including David Collins and four other BCU doctoral candidates, Bally Kaur, Louise McKnight, Clair Meares, and Stuart Mitchell. Participants identified a number of key issues for students and their supervisors in terms of confidence about undertaking practice/performance based research, changes over time in topics, and explicating standards.

SUPERVISORS
Following Kenway and Fahey (2009) Geof Hill called for supervisors to promote research which:

- Challenged existing modes and was uncomfortable;
- Examined the unexamined;
- Questioned the question;
- Involved digging not surfing;
- Strove for complexity;
- Was intellectually exciting.

He argued that such challenges demanded a new approach from supervisors in terms of:

- Embracing performative modes in their disciplines;
- Addressing the acquisition of performative skills through micro-skills workshops;
- Acquiring understanding of new methodologies and approaches;
- Employing them in their own research and acting as a role model to others;
- Encouraging publishing and networking;
- Determining ‘doctoralness’ in a practice/performative context.

There was then a wide-ranging discussion, of which a central point was how to ensure equal opportunities for a highly diverse candidate population to undertake and succeed in undertaking practice/performance-based doctorates.

FINALE
Geof Hill ended the workshop with another recital, this time amalgamating Sondheim’s (1981) “Our Time” and Lindley’s (1999) “Our Hand”. The lyrics uncannily represented the feelings of many doctoral graduates and their supervisors about their success.
MUSICAL REFERENCES


REFERENCES

