PROVIDING THE FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION AND CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN A DPROF PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

As the introductory contribution to the Middlesex Symposium Dr Annette Fillery-Travis will critically engage with the pedagogical design of the Professional Doctorate Programme as a framework for reflective dialogue between advisory team and candidate that facilitates the exploration and creation of actionable knowledge within the practice of both (Brockbank and Mc Gill, 2006).

The Professional Doctorate at Middlesex University has developed over the last fifteen year with over 180 candidates either graduated or currently studying. It is an individually negotiated programme where the primary resource for the candidate is the one to one support of the academic advisor and the consultant. Within this paper the workbased learning design of the programme is described and its essential features which enable individual change to occur and the programme to provide high level professional development. I then consider the passionate and creative advanced practitioners that engage with the programme and how their practice is knowledge producing and validating in its own right enabling it to be described as epistemic. The engagement of these practitioners with research and enquiry is considered and specifically the relational aspects of both the focus of the research and the interaction with the supervisory team.

Finally the Professional Doctorate is considered in light of whether it is a vehicle for co-creation of actionable knowledge as defined by Antonacopoulou (2010). The result is not straightforward and requires a consideration of both the power distribution and leadership of the research activity. In the following contributions to this symposium two advisor-candidate pairs will discuss their experience in this doctoral programme. Hopefully this paper will have provided some context to the challenges they have experienced and the co-created knowledge they have produced.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Professional Doctorate enables advanced practitioners to undertake a doctoral programme where the focus of their research is their area of practice and work. The individuals who undertake this programme are senior in their field; engaged in high level non-routine tasks often operating in environments that are highly ambiguous. This paper is a critical reflection upon the structure of the programme and how it addresses a number of issues that arise when considering the continuing development of such high level practitioners. Specifically I wish to explore how practice at this level can be identified as epistemic; how it engages with research; the relational aspects of the learning relationship between the practitioner and their advisory team and; finally whether the resulting research practice can be described as co-creation. This paper starts the conversation which will be continued within the symposium through exploration of the experience of two advisor-candidate pairs.

2. THE PROGRAMME DESIGN

Work Based Learning (WBL) has been a pedagogic framework for the development of senior practitioners through professional Master and Doctorate programmes. These degrees are now well established in the UK with a broad range of HEI's providing professional doctorates in a number of professional areas. These profession-specific doctorates may contain specific taught modules taken prior to the completion of a research project. The professional doctorate at Middlesex University is, in contrast, a generic doctorate where candidates undertake a project that is built around their specific work/practice activities. These activities are not restricted to recognised professional practices nor indeed paid work but can embrace voluntary and unpaid activities. The programme specifically seeks to make a contribution to practice through impact at the organisational or community level.

At its most fundamental the DProf programme design is based around the generic elements of a individual change process (Dingman 2004); it starts with a review of the learning that has brought the individual to this point in their professional development, the goal of the change initiative is then identified and a detailed plan constructed of how that goal will be achieved. This plan is then implemented with an appropriate monitoring of progress.

In the DProf programme the process starts with the candidates undertaking the review their own learning. This requires a critical reflection upon their professional development and practice to date. Candidates also make a claim for the recognition and accreditation of their prior learning (APEL) from relevant certificated programmes and/or experiential learning. Specifically a claim for advanced professional learning can be made at this point which allows the exploration of the non-routine elements of the candidate's practice and how they have developed specific and high level expertise or mastery of a professional area. This consideration of learning and the required self assessment at both Master and Doctorate levels leads to the development of

sophisticated analysis skills which the candidate then draws upon throughout the reminder of their programme. The candidate is supported in this work by resource handbooks, a virtual learning environment and through tutorials and feedback from a dedicated adviser. This advisor uses a coaching mode of interaction with the candidate to provide support for reflection thereby enabling connections to be made between past, current and future learning (Jarvis, Lane and Fillery-Travis, 2004).

This enrichment of the candidate's self awareness becomes the corner stone of further professional development and drives the formulation of the programme plan itself. Within this document the candidate identifies the learning sought from the programme and the research/project work to be undertaken. The successful completion of this plan relies not only on reflection upon practice but also on an analysis of requirements for further learning thus embodying the concept of reflexivity in the application of the subsequent learning to their work. Supporting candidates through this process involves assisting them to develop a clear vision of their future and the means by which to achieve their goals. At this point a subject specialist will also join the supervisory team as consultant to the candidate to maintain currency of scholarship and innovation.

The development of project work allows the senior practitioner to generate new knowledge using appropriate research approaches. During the project the adviser-as-coach maintains a relationship with their candidate over what can be several years for a professional doctorate. A genuine, authentic relationship and approachable style are crucial to manage the inevitable changes and challenges that will occur during this period.

Throughout this process the advisor is not an expert in the organisational context or in the multi-disciplinary focus of the candidate's work. The advisor is required to sit with a relatively high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty as they cannot control or dictate the learning sought or achieved by the candidate. The candidate is also experiencing appropriate uncertainty in relation to the development and progress of their programme. The uncertainty of the candidate and the advisor is shared, albeit from different perspectives. This shared exploration of uncertainty is at the heart of the critical reflective dialogue.

The DProf is a complex programme requiring significant self direction on the part of the candidate and advanced facilitation/coaching skills from the advisor. Clearly this complexity raises a number of questions about how the candidate engages with doctorate level learning both within their own practice/work activities and through researching practice itself. In the rest of this paper I will explore some of these issues by considering what we mean by practice for our candidates, how their practice can be seen to generate research and finally how the relational aspects of both their practice and research provide challenges for the advisory team.

3. OUR CANDIDATES, THEIR PRACTICE AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE

What do we define as practice within this context? Historically practice has been the province of the professions and the 'professional' is considered as an identity based on the rational, scientific and impartial use of knowledge (Lane and Corrie 2006). As Gherardi (2009) identifies there is a great difficulty in defining practice 'due to the various epistemic positioning of different researchers'. We cannot explore this in detail here so we define practice more generally as human activities 'centrally organised… around shared practical understanding' (Schatzkai, 2001). Practice in either definition provides for the identity and work of the practitioner to be socially embedded and this has a number of major implications for us when we are considering the professional development of those advanced in their field of work. For example; priority is given to certain forms of knowledge within a field of practice and this in turn is shaped by both context and environment. As identified within Lane and Corrie (2009) 'we work, think and act within the targets set by others' as we have internalised the regimes of truth that are specifically operating (Faucault, 1983). This has led in the past to the perception of practice as regular and routine responses to concrete experiences within constrained environments.

A moment's reflection is all that is required for us to identify that instrumental problem solving or rule-following is not the whole story of practice. As Schon (1987) identifies mastery is concerned with 'the action in the field' not the taught operational procedure. The art of practice is learned through experience and the 'knowing how' as opposed to the 'knowing about'. The complexity this provides is thrown into sharp relief when the current social transitions are also considered and the shift from industrialisation to the knowledge society (Berger, 1974). We can identify that as individuals we are

> '*confronted with knowledge based and knowledge centred activities in many areas of social life'* (Knorr-Cetina, 2001 p176).

Practitioners are required to categorise, analyse and critical engage with knowledge from a variety of settings before applying and testing within their own practice. This knowledge -creating and - validating defines epistemic practice. Originally constrained within the scientific professions the nature of work within knowledge societies requires the recognition of epistemic practice within the work activities of many advanced practitioners in a variety of contexts.

4. CREATIVITY AND DESIRE

How does this impact upon the professional development of such individuals? The first element which comes to mind is the highly tacit nature of the knowledge which underpins individual practice. Indeed there is an interesting definition of expertise as 'the ability to function fluently and flexibly in complex domains without being able to described or theorise one's expertise' (Claxton, 2003). The expert musician can fluff their performance as soon as they become conscious of the process of producing it – their practice. A deconstruction of practice to illuminate and provide the bedrock for further development is an essential element of the meta-model approach to development

(Lane and Corrie, 2006). The component or contributing elements of a model of theory or practice are made explicit and critically engaged with in terms of congruency and efficacy. The use of the review of learning at the start of the DProf programme is one vehicle for such an approach.

No doubt routine activity, and the knowledge that underpins it, is a significant part of practice but it is not the epistemic practice of knowledge generation and validation. As we explore epistemic practice we are concerned with the issues that arise when the practitioner is acting out of their routine as they are confronted by the non predictable and the ambiguous. Here the individual becomes dissociated from the object of their practice (process, activity etc) which is problematic or 'incomplete' i.e. it has unknowns which are complex and liable to 'unfold' into further uncertainties. This dissociation allows for the investigation and examination of the object as the practitioner seeks to know it. This desire or wanting provides for real pleasure and engagement in the exploration. Knorr-Cetaina (2001) has written on the relational aspects of expertise and the 'chain of wanting' which can form a basis for knowledge activities and provides for the satisfaction experienced by experts within their practice. Her definition of experience is 'an arousal of the processing capabilities and sensitivities of the person'.

Our experience of the candidates who want to engage with a professional doctorate is of the practitioner engaged in what Knorr-Cetina (2001) identifies as epistemic practice: passionate and creative individuals engaged in non-routine tasks operating in environments which are highly ambiguous. As they explore their professional learning to date and prepare their APEL claims (which can be made at Master and Doctorate level) the highly creative and generative nature of the work they have undertaken in their practice is revealed.

Clearly the nature of practice and the objects we are considering in this paper mean that there is never a time when the process of knowing and the 'chain of wanting' come to an end. Therefore the advanced practitioner enters into a process of continual exploration or research into knowledge objects within practice.

5. PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

This raises a series of questions about how practice can be described as engaging with research, incorporating change and the 'engrossment and excitement of research work' (Knorr-Carin, 2001). The theory/practice divide has been explored extensively within a range of literatures from nursing to marketing. Traditionally universities were considered as the primary creators and custodians of knowledge; able to judge its credibility and robustness. Within the professions there was a nod towards practitioner research through the practice literature e.g. medical case studies, but these were in general of secondary importance to the development of an academic body of knowledge.

Within the developing knowledge economy Gibbons et al (1994), has postulated that the mode of knowledge production has moved away from Mode 1 back to Mode 2 identified by transdisciplinary working aimed at specific applications through the collaborative engagement of networks of investigators. Such a research production

mode uses fluid networks of workers contributing to the 'solution' of a single issue of social and political import. These networks engage not only the scientific elite but also other 'actors' such as practitioners and policy makers. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's (2000) triple helix model describes the resulting dynamic and fluctuating interplay between university-industry-government.

Thus the conventional linear model of innovation where research is seen as the creative first stage in a process, leading from research through to the creation of technique/product ending in application within a practice setting, is no longer seen to apply. As Salter et al (2000) so eloquently state 'such a model is dead.' Kealey (1996) argues that there is a far more complex interaction between innovation and application. Knowledge transfer can no longer simply encompass the one-way flow from university to practitioner – it must be two way! Easy enough to write but the 145 million hits on Google returned for the search term 'academic practitioner divide' is perhaps a measure of the persistence of this divide. At the heart of the issue are the differences in the values and ideologies of the very separate communities of researchers and practitioners which get in the way of communication and exploitation. Not only are there issues of focus, mode of enquiry or timescale and resources there is also a distinct difference between the questions academics ask and the problems and questions that practitioners face (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman and Scherer, 2010).

But the context of the divide has changed and with it the drivers for communication (Rynes, Bartunek and Daft, 2001). Practitioners are being presented with intensified competition for their work/services/products and are increasingly receptive to anything which can give them an advantage. They have also not been idle in using research methods themselves. Action research and appreciative enquiry methods are now common tools within organisational development providing practitioners with an increased familiarity with the underpinning tenets of enquiry. For academics the call for employee engagement and research funding from the private sector is now urgent and there is increasing competition from private HE providers and consultants for research services and training. Universities need to show they have a legitimate offer to organisations and professional associations which has a currency and relevance to their practice and market needs.

There are, of course, voices from both sides of the divide that see the inclusion of practitioner perspectives as detrimental to the robustness of the research; specifically through the use of practitioner research approaches. But practitioners do not always see rigorous methodologies as relevant or helpful to them (Van de Ven, 2007). This rigor-relevance dilemma is at the heart of work based learning approaches to enquiry and has been part of the ongoing exploration of practitioner methodologies.

We have already identified the emotional investment in epistemic practice and Bartunek (2007) identifies an interesting, relational perspective on the issues of communication between the two communities. Using the categorisation of rhetoric derived by Aristotle (1954) she identifies academic writing as operating in the arena of *logos* which empathises logic and clarity of argument. *Pathos* is generally associated with emotional appeal to values, beliefs and affect in an imaginative way which moves the reader to

action. *Ethos* refers to credibility and trustworthiness. Aristotle argued that all three were required within a text however clearly different dissemination routes may favour one over the other. Bartunek contributes her own experience on this point and identifies the need for *pathos* to appeal to a practitioner audience and my own experience would confirm such a view. Practitioners value 'resonance' with their own practice and that will include their emotional involvement with that practice. This is reinforced by several studies which have identified that individuals seek and interpret information in ways which preserve their self image (Dunning, Perie and Story, 1991). Clearly this will influence how research is received within the practitioner community.

It is such considerations that have led to the call for a *relational scholarship of integration* (Boyer 1990, Bartunek, 2007). Within such a scholarship the complimentarily of the knowledge base of both communities can be explored by fostering positive mutual relationships (Dutton and Dukerich, 2006).

> *'Academics need to enter into and understand practitioners' worlds and modes of knowing as well as appreciating the complexities of practitioners experience and knowledge'* (Bartunel and Trullen, 2007)

Such relationships are not easily won and it is commonly acknowledged that it takes considerable relational skill to communicate across the boundaries and negotiate the issues of rigor and relevance. The DProf Advisor role sits at this interface and must maintain respect for the expertise of the candidate specifically in the multidisciplinary context of their practice and research.

6. THE RELATIONAL DIMENSION

I have identified within this paper two specific relational aspects to the practice of advanced professionals on this type of programme.

1) The relational engagement with the 'chain of wanting'; the search for knowing within practice. This is epitomised by the real passion I have experienced from candidates about their focus of enquiry and which sustains them through the enquiry process.

2) The relational requirements of the co-producing learning partnership itself.

We will now deal with this in relation to the DProf and the particular requirements of its advisors. Conventional supervisory roles for higher degrees concentrate upon the generation of research training and research outcomes. They provide students with the opportunity to achieve their professional or academic goal and to learn about research within an academic community operating on pre- defined standards. In return for their contribution to this learning the supervisor has a willing worker on a research project within his area of expertise and own research focus.

Project work within higher WBL degrees, offers a radical alternative to this convention as explored by Boud and Costley (2007). Within this research they identify and expand upon the movement, '*to focus learning in the 'real-world' projects of individuals and groups doing 'real-time' work, paid or unpaid'* (Boud and Soloman 2001).

As such, the projects are the subject of 'learning agreements' explicitly drawn up between the candidate, their organisation and the university. This removes the project from both the location of the university and from the expertise or discipline base of the research supervisor. The knowledge is transdisciplinary and practice-based (Gibbons et al 1994) so the student becomes the 'expert' in terms of the existing context and knowledge boundaries. As a practitioner-researcher the candidate will be drawing upon a range of resources from themselves, within the work context and the university. They will be designing the project outcomes for impact within the work context as well as achieving academic standards. The result is a shift in power and judgement from the supervisor towards the student. The resulting collaborative engagement between supervisor and student can be acknowledged within WBL programmes by the change in name from supervisor to advisor and student to candidate.

Clearly the role of advisor is profoundly different from conventional research supervisor and requires a range of specific competencies over and above that of conventional research expertise. Boud and Costley (2007) found five clusters of competencies:

- Knowledge of work and its context – working cultures; their restriction and opportunities
- Learning consultancy skills – acknowledging candidates knowledge base, identification of learning opportunities, construction of project within the work context
- Transdisciplinary awareness –ability to identity and communicate knowledge which embraces a range of disciplines
- Enquiry approaches – knowledge of flexible and collaborative methods of enquiry leading to research and development opportunities
- Reflexivity and reviewing skills –a reflective and evaluative approach which incorporates both self awareness and management with formalised assessment protocols and procedures.

It is in the consideration of these competencies that a description of project advisor as advisor-as-coach becomes apparent. Specifically the aim of advising has shifted from achievement of technical outputs to development of the learning of the candidate. The projects are learner managed with a negotiated contract identifying fully the expectations of learner, organisation and advisor (through the university).

As identified by Boud and Costley (2007)

> ' *To support project work now is to find ways of assisting students to develop the expertise needed in any given situation... There is little appropriate didactic role in transmitting knowledge.* '

We would suggest that an advisor-as-coach construct is a more unified description of the advisory role. The coaching style of the advisor will respond to the ability of the candidate to engage in higher level analysis and reflection and we would expect a fluid movement between the assessor and tutor styles in response to issues such as meeting academic standards and advising on research approaches. The question for the advisor

becomes not how much do you know but rather how effectively you can help others to learn (Schon 1987).

7. IS THIS CO-CREATION?

Antonacopoulou (2010) adds a further development to the concept of research in practice by considering its co-creation to produce actionable knowledge i.e. knowledge which will have impact upon practice. She identifies the critical role of *phronesis* – 'the practical judgements that inform the choices made in the ways which research practice is performed'- and that research is a practice in its own right and hence it has an individual nature for each practitioner. There are multiple performances of the practice by different practitioners with their own individual purpose.

I do not agree with her separation of purpose along community lines, i.e. academics being involved in knowledge generation whereas practitioners are concerned with problem solving in the short term, for the reasons already discussed. In my experience of practitioners involved in doctorate level work the depth and scope of the work is comparable with that of academic researchers. The scope and depth of the studies undertaken within practice in general may be more a product of the work context and the resource allocation than researcher identity.   The argument concerning impact however is well made:

> *'Impactful research practice emerge as co-created experiences where the co-researchers have the potential to engage in a learning partnership committed to support the development of each other's agenda'*

It is a point of reflection that as we have already discussed in relation to the triple helix model when we identified that the linear cascade of theory through to practice is not in general realised in practice. The interaction is more complex and relies on connections between all the 'actors' in the field. Co-creation is identified as a shared interest and expertise in the way practice forms, advances and establishes knowledge.

Are we, as advisors and consultants, engaged in co-creation with our candidates in the DProf? The consideration of co-creation within the DProf is not trivial. As it is defined by Antonacopoulou there is an emphasis on moving away from considering co-creation as purely the use of specific collaborative research methods and relationship building. It deals more specifically with a critique of the research practice itself. Central to this is the ability to ask the right questions – those which are appropriate for scholarship and for practice producing impact through knowledge which is actionable (Antonacopoulou 2009).

Within the DProf:

- The research question is determined by the candidate themselves, influenced by their experience of practice and the prevailing environment. The subject specialist is there as consultant only; facilitating the rigor of the research undertaken. The choice

of mode of enquiry is also candidate driven, influenced by the regimes of truth which operate within their context and their own *phronesis*.

- The consultant and advisor generally make no contribution to the research activity itself rarely visiting the site of the enquiry or reviewing primary data; relying on reports of the work from the candidate themselves.

This may at first glance negate the concept of co-creation but that assumes a requirement for a shared research agenda and I would suggest that this is not necessary. The candidate- consultant nexus may share similar interests but generally not the same passion for the research focus. The same can be said of the candidate-advisor nexus and given the requirement for self direction by the candidate there is an argument that this is highly appropriate. The research interests of the advisor should not overshadow or unduly influence the candidate's focus so that the research can remain firmly based in practice and work.

I would suggest that co-creation can be seen to be present if the contribution of the advisor is considered as being a *facilitator* of the research. In moving the leadership of the research from the professional researchers and scholars to the practitioner there is a shift in power which is highly significant as it places the research professionals and scholars at the service of the practitioner's research agenda. The practitioner approaches the research activity as the expert in the *context and goal* of the research – the work environment and the requirements of the actionable knowledge– and the advisor and consultant approach as experts in the *process* of research and inquiry.

Clearly the power balance between advisor and candidate is a delicate balance of allowing the expertise of the practitioner not to be overshadowed by the professional researchers. The candidate through the development of their research question seeks to produce actionable knowledge and the advisor through their holding of a learning framework and relational interaction enables that creation. This places significant emphasis on the mode of interaction between advisor and candidate and preferences a coaching engagement as we have described.

In the following contributions to this symposium two advisor-candidate pairs will discuss the relational elements of communication and the choice of research approach in this doctoral programme. Hopefully this paper will have provided some context to the challenges they have experienced and the co-created knowledge they have produced.

8. SUMMARY

Clearly it has not been possible to consider all the questions which arise when considering the professional development of high level practitioners within one paper. Within this work I have sought to introduce some reflections upon:

- the Professional Doctorate in light of the changing description/expectation of practice and

- the relational elements which must be taken into account for candidates and advisors when considering the focus of the enquiries undertaken by practitioners and how they can be advised/supported within the research process itself.

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