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Juggling competing activities: academic staff as doctoral candidates

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This article explores the experiences of a group of established academic staff in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as they undertake a doctorate in their home institutions. Our interest is in how individuals negotiate this dual status from a cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) stance which explores how rules, tools, community and divisions of labour, and interacting activity systems, shape doctoral experiences. The focus in this article, having analysed their detailed narrative accounts, is on how academics experience three interdependent activity systems: those surrounding the thesis, the institutional context, and the home-life spheres. Issues related to time, workload and supervision issues, variability in collegial support and impact on personal priorities and time emerged. There is a range of particularities – from easy access to resources/supervisors, to inflexible institutional regulations – applicable to this group of doctoral candidates. Negotiating life as an academic with concurrent doctoral candidature provides positive outcomes in terms of teaching, research confidence and general personal and professional development. However, a range of difficulties can also be encountered, particularly in relation to personal and professional relationships, and workload management.

Keywords: academic work; doctoral education; doctoral supervision; professional development

The growth of dual-status academics

This article focuses on dual-status academics: those employed in universities with teaching and research/scholarship duties who concurrently undertake doctoral studies in their employing institution. Our interest is in how individuals negotiate this dual status from a cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) stance (Engeström, 2015) exploring how rules, tools, community and divisions of labour, and interacting activity systems, shape doctoral experiences. We acknowledge but do not distinguish between different forms of doctoral programme or available modes of participation, depending on institutional regulations but it is important to note that UK participants are enrolled as

part-time students, whereas the New Zealand (NZ) cohort could only register in full-time mode. Regardless of enrolment status, all worked towards their doctorates in a part-time fashion.

In the UK, and elsewhere, many institutions now encourage – or may even require – existing academic staff who have yet to attain a doctorate to pursue this path (Bao, Kehm & Ma, 2018) but we are also aware of concerns surrounding work/life balance (McAlpine & Åkerlind, 2010). The experiences of those with multiple roles and responsibilities (Denicolo, 2004) who take on this additional challenge are therefore important. There is limited literature exploring this very particular kind of doctoral experience, though Watson (2012, p. 567) draws attention to '*colleague students*' – what we term dual-status academics – and whether they benefit, or may feel disadvantaged, by their positionings. To further understanding, we have undertaken an exploratory study of dual-status academics in three institutions on two continents to address three research questions:

(1) How do academic staff experience doctoral candidature?

(2) In what ways might doctoral candidature impact on the 'day-job'? and

(3) What support is available to, and used by, dual-status academics?

These questions reflect key components in Engeström's (2015) CHAT model: subject-object relations (Q1); rules and division of labour (Q2); and community/tools available (Q3). We explore what our participants said about each of these questions focusing on the agentic relationship between the dual-status academic, their thesis progress and their wider community. Initially, we outline the basic tenets of CHAT (Engeström, 2015), and then discuss the applicability of this framework to the study of adult educational contexts (Galvin & Mooney Simmie, 2017). Our data, drawn from narrative accounts is analysed paradigmatically (Polkinghorne, 1995), to foreground
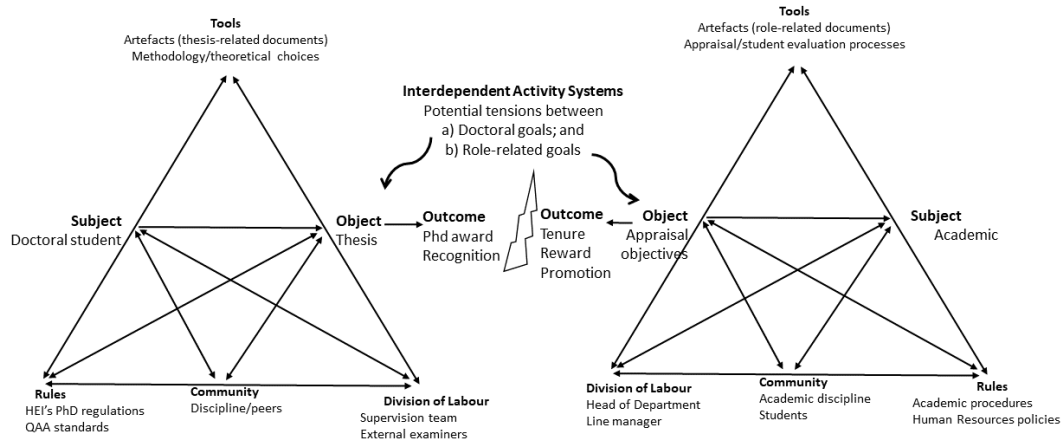
benefits and tensions in relation to three interdependent activity systems (thesis, work and home), highlighting the particularities of dual-status academics.

A CHAT perspective on dual-status academics

Activity theory has a long developmental trajectory, tracing back to the early work of Soviet theorisers such as Vygotsky and Leont'ev. In early work, a range of mediating artefacts – such as literature resources – is shown to make actions possible, and without which a doctorate cannot be completed. Developing this early theorizing, Engeström (1987) demonstrated the importance of community as learning increasingly became conceived of as a social activity. Individuals interact with each other in a process aimed at achieving goals, with Engeström (1987) noting that this activity is situated within specific environments. Now, the CHAT framework sees learning firmly as a social practice, where not only tools, communities and divisions of labour are important, but that a range of factors, including potentially conflicting activity systems, influence behaviour.

We recognise that currently employed academic staff work within certain strictures. There are institutional rules governing employment activities and a further set related to the conduct of a doctorate, so that activity systems interact in what is now recognised as a realistic CHAT model embedded in an appropriate cultural context (Engeström, 2015). We surmised that these two goals – continued employment and doctoral attainment – may conflict, and an illustration of potential tensions is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interdependent activity systems adapted from Engeström, 2015

Tools
Artefacts (thesis-related documents)
Methodology/theoretical choices

Tools
Artefacts (role-related documents)
Appraisal/student evaluation processes

Interdependent Activity Systems
Potential tensions between
a) Doctoral goals; and
b) Role-related goals

Subject
Doctoral student

Object
Thesis

Outcome
Phd award
Recognition

Outcome
Tenure
Reward
Promotion

Object
Appraisal
objectives

Subject
Academic

Rules
HEI's PhD regulations
QAA standards

Community
Discipline/peers

Division of Labour
Supervision team
External examiners

Division of Labour
Head of Department
Line manager

Community
Academic discipline
Students

Rules
Academic procedures
Human Resources policies

As Galvin and Mooney Simmie (2017) suggest, in an adult learning context set within the neoliberal regime that currently characterises much of higher education, a *'humanisation discourse'* (p. 2) is needed. CHAT, by foregrounding the various elements of complex activity systems allows an exploration of such discourse. We sought to discern the complementarities and potential tensions between employment status and simultaneous doctoral candidature. Considering recent concerns over audit pressures (Smith, 2017) and institutional imperatives, the experiences of dual-status academics is a fruitful area for exploration.

An orientation device for dual-status academics

Multiple cultural contexts are accommodated by CHAT (Engeström, 2015), and we suggest that at least three orientations are at play for dual-status academics. First, the university ecosystem and its productivity imperatives (Billot & King, 2017) foregrounds the need for academic staff to acquire doctorates to enhance performance on standard metrics. What, to the university, may seem a simple counting exercise amongst a raft of other metrics, may pose challenges to their staff. Second, powerful social media accounts (Morrish, 2015; 2018) illustrate the human costs of dehumanising discourses,

suggesting threats to academics' identities and values (Clegg, 2008). Third, structural properties such as probation (Smith, 2010), induction (Billot & King, 2017) and teaching evaluations (Skelton, 2012) can exercise dehumanising influences on academic staff (Morrish, 2018). Countability seems to conflict with the *'expansive learning'* that Engeström and Sannino (2010) advocate and is implied by doctoral study.

It is well-established (Dann et al., 2018; Kamler & Thomson, 2006) that doctoral study can challenge a candidate's sense of self, but this is not, however, a one-way process. The focus on countability (Collini, 2017) overlooks the value of personal and professional development for dual-status academics and their sense of achievement on attaining their doctorates. The thesis, as the object of doctoral work *'works back on us and impacts our subjectivity'* (Galvin & Mooney Simmie, 2018, p. 7). It is for this reason that we wished to investigate the experiences of dual-status academics to explore understandings of doctoral processes and their influence on the 'day-job'.

Sensitising concepts

Sensitising concepts provide a framework for examining specific instances of experience, suggesting 'directions along which to look' (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). At the start of this study, we acknowledged and discussed our prior concerns regarding dual-status academics. This helped us frame our research, the questions we asked of ourselves and of our participants, and the way we later characterized the themes that emerged from our data. From the limited research investigating the experiences of dual-status academics, four sensitising concepts informed Figure 1 and guided our thinking: *colleague supervision*, *power relations*, *collegial support* and *self development*.

First, the concept of *'colleague supervision'* is drawn from Denicolo (2004) who problematises this under-researched relationship. Her findings included a perception of vulnerability (p. 706) in the colleague supervision relationship. Watson (2012) explored

the notion of vulnerability further with both doctoral candidates and colleague supervisors in his own institution and found a more positive situation. Both Denicolo's (2004) and Watson's (2012) studies imply potential rather than actual conflicts that relate to a second sensitising notion: *power relations*. The configuration of academic work leads to many instances of non-positional leadership roles (Juntrasook et al., 2013). By this, we mean that academic staff who are senior in one context – in a promoted post, or programme leaders, for example – can simultaneously be junior partners in the doctoral candidature setting. As many supervisors are very senior academics, they may have both supervision and line management responsibilities (Watson, 2012) for colleagues who are simultaneously supervisees. These multiple positionings raise interesting questions around the exercise of power for dual-status academics.

Third, dual-status academics have a range of roles, responsibilities and interactions beyond their supervision team, what Watson (2012, p. 569) calls *'colleague support'*. This can include immediate colleagues, but may also involve a graduate school or equivalent, and a range of senior managers. Thus, a notion of wider collegial support is helpful. Time spent on the doctorate is time no longer devoted to these other roles and relationships, and we were keen to explore the additive impact of managing increasing demands in the context of the current metricisation agenda (Morrish, 2015). Lastly, a developing sense of self can be an important dimension of the doctoral process (McAlpine & Åkerlind, 2010; Kamler & Thomson, 2006), and this can become pressing when doctoral qualification becomes an institutional metric (Dann et al., 2018). Increasing uncertainty in academic life (Bosanquet, Mailey, Matthews, & Lodge, 2017) mean that many, particularly from professional or vocational fields, now enter academia without traditional academic baptisms through the doctoral process. This results in dual-

status academics who do not have a homogenous profile that typifies early-career researchers (Bosanquet et al., 2017) whilst simultaneously having concerns over career maintenance or development.

Participant information

Each participating institution followed its own ethical approval protocol. We were clear that participants would need to consent to an audio recording, and that anonymised transcripts would be shared securely with the whole research team. Even with a limited research base to draw on, it was clear from our literature review that being a dual-status academic can be sensitive ground (Dann et al., 2018; Denicolo, 2004) so members of the research team contacted colleagues known to be registered for a doctorate alongside their 'day-job' in the institution, either directly or through their graduate schools.

Eight current and two recently completed dual-status academics shared their doctoral stories in face-to-face interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. All participants were mature professionals with a wide range of working backgrounds and experiences. None had come directly from undergraduate/taught postgraduate qualifications and all were working in academic posts with between three and 20+ years' experience. Our sample included both male and female dual-status academics.

Transcription was professionally undertaken to further maintain anonymity, although this places important interpretative decisions in the hands of others, as Riessman (2008) notes, *'flattening'* an interactive encounter to words of equal weight on paper. We chose to focus only on dual status-academics, and not their supervisors (Denicolo, 2004). Thus, we have one side of a story from three very different institutional settings – two in the UK (one teaching-intensive, UK1, one research-intensive, UK2) and a newer, research-aspirational one in New Zealand (NZ1). We had purposively selected these three locations anticipating clear variation between them

(Stake, 1995) in order to complement existing literature which often understandably draws on single-site samples (e.g. Dann et. al., 2018). The NZ university provides a comparable but distinct context for study, and this institution offered a 'half-way house' between the two extremes offered by the UK HEIs. However, the variation that emerged from our study related to individuals, not institutions. We explore this aspect in our Discussion section.

Paradigmatic analysis of participant narratives

We invited our participants to narrate their doctoral stories. In this context, a story is a co-constructed account between narrator and interviewer (Riessman, 2008) that is later transcribed for analysis. As our interest was understanding the dual-status academic's doctoral experience, we used the idea of Squire's (2008) *'experience-centred narrative'* to hear about individuals' doctoral candidatures rather than specific events within those journeys. This has the benefit of allowing participants to privilege elements of their candidature as they saw fit, rather than narrating them in relation to systemic features (upgrades, annual review, etc.). As Polkinghorne (1995, p. 5) suggests: '*Narrative-type narrative inquiry gathers events and happenings as its data and uses narrative analytic procedures to produce explanatory stories'* to further our understanding of dual-status academics' experiences. As doctoral stories are unique to their tellers, and we are working with such a small sample, we have chosen to present our findings in anonymised form to further protect participants from inadvertent identification.

We used a shared interview schedule for this geographically dispersed project, and the resulting stories are *'perspectival, reflecting the power of memory to remember, forget, neglect and amplify moments in the stream of experience'* (Riessman, 2008, p. 29). As interviews were conducted by those with local knowledge, some of the difficulties associated with cultural (mis)understandings were avoided. Importantly,

however, following Riessman (2008), all stories are partial and told for a specific audience. Our context was the formal research interview, with which dual-status academics could expect to be familiar, and participants were at a range of stages of their doctoral journeys, including two who had completed by the time of interview.

Once transcripts were available, segments of the narratives were analysed thematically (Riessman, 2008). Each author initially worked individually with the complete data set. Following Polkinghorne (1995), we wished to discern themes relating both to elements of the CHAT framework (Engeström, 2015) and to our sensitising concepts of colleague supervision, collegial support, power relations and self-development. Individual analyses produced comprehensive summaries relating to our conceptual frameworks, which were then interrogated collaboratively (first by email exchange, then by video-call discussion, and finally by a further round of emailed review and revision). As Riessman (2008) notes, if analysts do not conduct or transcribe interviews, much can be lost. The collaborative nature of analysis allows some of this colour to come back to the transcribed accounts through local knowledge and experience of the encounters. In this way, we believe we can move *'from stories to common elements'* (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12) to say something about the experiences of dual-status academics who have responded to pressures to acquire doctorates (Bao, Kehm & Ma, 2018; Dann et al., 2018).

Findings: Three interdependent activity systems

In this section, we consider key aspects of each activity system in turn. We asked dual-status academics about the contexts of firstly, their doctoral activity and secondly, their academic role. As the tangible object of doctoral study is the production of a thesis, in this section we discuss initially the resources they use as they work towards that object. We then look at how the work environment supports them. Finally, we consider a third

activity system – home-life – which emerged as a strong theme in participants'
narratives. While some elements may be familiar from studies of doctoral students in
general, here we highlight those that were key to our participants. The Discussion
focuses on *why* the dual-status experience differs from that of other doctoral students.

Thesis Activity System

Many universities, including those in our study, provide a range of tools and activities
such as reading/writing groups, research seminars, and other skills development and
peer networking opportunities to support the process for all students. Our interest was in
how dual-status academics access and use these resources in developing their thesis, and
whether specific issues arose for them.

We found ready access to specialist equipment was easily negotiated. For example:

> I think we've got the access to, like the equipment and the facilities that are
> required. Which is hugely smooth for me… it's pretty easy and just friendly for me
> to kind of do all of that kind of stuff. Yeah, so that's a primary role of [institution].
> NZ1c.

Other forms of support, however, such as reading and writing groups or skills
development workshops were not always felt to be accessible or appropriately targeted:

> I'm not highly involved with a lot of the groups of PhD study groups around the
> place. I think, sometimes, because I'm an academic as well, I've sort of felt that
> those groups a) aren't necessarily targeted to where I'm at, and b) are often dealing
> with things that I'm reasonably confident about already. NZ1d.

> The problem is, lots of the PhD stuff here is when I was teaching, so I couldn't go
> to loads of things… UK2b.

> …unfortunately some of the seminars chosen were not what I was expecting so I
> felt like I was in a classroom, not wasting my time, but it was things I already

knew, because obviously I am teaching research here, it's not like I don't know the basics and most of the seminars I've attended were that basic that I could read in a book… UK1c.

The timing and level of institutional researcher development provision can be problematic for dual-status candidates and, for one participant, even locally organised sessions did not work well. There is, however, privileged access to some resources, typically of a more technical nature. Supplementing research skills development, peer support and networking can be invaluable for doctoral candidates. Whilst one participant chose not to participate in these activities, dual-status academics who did, found their specific experience overlooked:

something that is missing from the support networks and everything that revolves around. Like, I don't know quite what it is, but doing a PhD while being a staff member has massive, massive impact on your life outside. And your life then has massive impact on your PhD and your roles and there's always been, like it's never discussed. There seems to be support networks for every other aspect of your PhD aside from that… NZ1c.

I mean really for me it's feeling like part of some sort of research culture, I do feel sort of peripatetic and an outsider just because of the nature of, it's in part because I can only get here so often. UK2c.

Only one participant (whose current role was reported as 'less demanding') felt the institution's offer was personally supportive:

I think, as a PhD student here, it's absolutely brilliant. I guess the concept of the [graduate school] must be something new because I've never come across it before. They don't do handholding but there are key milestones in which you have to make sure you've passed in order to progress which I like. UK1a.

Dual-status candidates were not critical of their universities' attempts to support doctoral students, but simply observed that their thesis efforts conflicted with their work

circumstances. Furthermore, it meant participants tended not to feel like 'real' doctoral students:

> So I kind of feel I sit on the periphery of that a little bit. Being a staff member as well, I have kind of extra responsibilities around that kind of thing and so I don't feel that I can fully immerse myself in being a student. Half the time I feel like, I'm giving pastoral care to other students. NZ1c.

Despite thesis responsibilities, work roles and responsibilities take precedence, leading to frustration, and sometimes concern with meeting institutional milestones. Following their interviews, we know at least three of our UK dual-status colleagues either withdrew from candidature or resigned from the academy.

Work Activity System

To explore whether and how doctoral candidature impacted on the day-job and vice-versa, we asked dual-status academics about their concurrent workplace experiences. Issues surrounding the division of labour and experience of the wider community were reported.

Division of labour

Regarding the role of supervisors, we found all participants were able to draw on extant networks to exercise choice in constructing supervisory teams. We heard of only one negative experience:

> Well, I think the first thing is that mediation should occur immediately [comments redacted] when there are major disruptions in research projects within a PhD where parties do not agree, and there should be an absolute compulsion for a supervisor to activate that mediation. NZ1b.

More common was an appreciation of the 'academic hierarchy' where micro-politics

play a role:

> It became quite apparent quite quickly how political the supervisory role is, …that I was going to be subject to other people's interests and personal battles… 'cause you kind of think just [laughs], can you not meet- leave your petty squabbles or your petty whatever to one side and just get on with supervising me? UK2a.

> It's more politics in terms of what I was advised to do, and what they would have liked me to have done, but I think because I'm a bit stubborn I ended up doing my own thing. UK2b.

> I do find there's a challenge and an energy drain in terms of managing my supervisors which I feel is, has become a big part of my role as a doctoral student, which is frustrating. NZ1c.

To avoid these frustrations, one participant deliberately sought supervision in a different department, hand-picking a *'fab team of supervisors'*:

> to me it felt it would be too incestuous having colleagues and then supervisors within the same department… They were disappointed. I'd say they were a bit, almost… aren't we good enough? UK1a.

Like many doctoral students, dual-status academics can suffer from supervisory churn but in both NZ and the UK, institutions seem less proactive in managing this situation for their staff candidates:

> They said it was kind of my responsibility to kind of sort out and find a new primary supervisor and reshuffle the team and when you're halfway through, that wasn't… And I didn't feel like I got a huge amount of support with that. NZ1c.

> I now have the supervisor that the original supervisor said 'don't go with them, don't go with them', and it's absolutely fine but it kind of means that the direction of the study has slightly changed as you're kind of having to get to grips with a new person. And then that has changed again because one, the second supervisor

has left, so now, after two years or so, I have two completely different supervisors from the ones that I started with, which is, it's not easy. UK2a.

Apart from the experience noted above, supervisory relationships worked well, and boundaries were acknowledged:

And, actually, just being… something I said to my supervisors, as well, I said "I'm going to be completely honest and open from the start. If I can't do something I'll say it."[…] They see me as a student, but also as a fellow colleague as well. It's just nice. UK1a.

Because sometimes your supervisors, while you've got a good relationship with them… and that I guess goes back to that challenge of that they are colleagues. You don't want to spew forth on the table and burst into tears in front of them. NZ1c.

Supervisory relationships were built on existing trusted networks that acknowledged the challenges of the dual role by forgiving missed deadlines or accepting a lack of meeting preparation. The wider academic environment, however, displayed less latitude and thesis activity collided with the day-job most frequently in time and workload concerns. Participants recognised the autonomy of their roles in many instances, but some tasks and deadlines were non-negotiable:

I don't necessarily think that that's always through my own mismanagement of my own time or my own inability to organise myself. Some of it might well be but I think there are so many other pressures that some things have to give and quite often it's the PhD that has to give, because if you are at a board or you've got to have marking done, that has to come first. You can't have students waiting around for marks because then you get it in the neck for it, don't you? UK1b.

Similarly, dual-status academics' control over scheduling duties might not be ideal:

The other issue is that in [department], we don't get our timetable until a week before we start teaching. UK1a.

There was also recognition of the elasticity of the academic work-week:

> But I think that's academia anyway, so that's sort of 24/7 and it doesn't stop. So, yeah, don't feel lucky, but do appreciate the uniqueness of it. And it would be silly not to make the most of doing it as well. NZ1a.

> I said no to a change of role... And they [still] rang me whilst I was on holiday… UK2a.

If day-job workloads impinge on the time available to carry out thesis activity, in some instances, co-located colleagues can also be a source of friction. Time allowance for thesis work is commonly set at 20% in the UK but this may impact colleagues' working conditions:

> In the beginning people would say, oh it's great that you are doing a PhD but then okay, you should not give up that module, you need to do that and why do you have to do more hours and I start feeling bad about saying, well, this is my PhD day… UK1c.

> So there is that, er, lack of parity I think sometimes in the roles and the expectations which, having worked in an educational institution for a really long time, you wouldn't get, people were treated the same, the expectations on everybody were the same and you just, you don't get that here. UK2a.

In NZ1, there appears to be more flexibility, and an established system of study leave, which perhaps places less immediate pressure on dual-status academics, despite their full-time student status:

> So I'm probably the third in our team to go through it. So that's incredibly supportive. I find that the school, outside the department, supportive as well too… That I can structure my day how I want. And I guess I'm old enough and ugly enough to have been around the block to manage my own time and to manage my own deadlines. NZ1a.

But there are also instances where the day-job requires changes that impact on thesis activity:

> …or hand a responsibility to me that is completely fair in terms of my workload within the department but just quite difficult to reconcile with having decent blocks of time to work on research. NZ1d.

In terms of variability between settings, it seems the UK is a little less forgiving in providing workload relief to dual-status candidates, but the pressures of academic work are clear in both countries. Our institutions gave minimal acknowledgement that academics are entitled to bounded work-time.

Home-life Activity System

Whilst we are fully cognisant of the affective dimension of doctoral study, we did not feel it appropriate to enquire specifically in the interview about personal circumstances. However, the importance of home-life and personal relationships was volunteered by all participants. How both the academic role and the additional demands of thesis production impacted on themselves and family time was clear in participants' subject-object negotiations.

As the work week expanded, it conflicted with domestic circumstances:

> And I'm not pressuring myself to say it has to be done in this kind of timeframe. Because it is on top of work and life and everything else. And I don't know any colleague who has done a PhD without something biting them in the bum. NZ1a.

> So there are other pressures that come up and of course there is family life as well. I have children and they're all young and so I don't always want to be that dad that's sitting in a make-shift study in one of the rooms that's just there reading and typing away. I can't do that. […] I've got to give them time. You only get that time once. I'm not going to forego that. UK1b.

I'm here at six o clock in the morning, I leave at eleven, I'm doing a PhD outside of my hours of work so okay, it's not that I'm not doing anything… I might sleep a bit less but it's not that bad. I wouldn't be able to do it if I had a family and kids to look after. UK1c.

Irrespective of domestic situations, the doctorate meant dual-status academics must balance the demands on their time without feeling persistently guilty that they are not *'doing either of them right or giving enough time to them'* (UK2b). We heard dual-status academics rationalising their choices in the face of competing demands, and they also articulated the benefits of their dual-status such as an increase in confidence in relation to the day-job:

So I feel I have a clarity about my research direction, my overall development, sort of trajectory as a researcher that I didn't have before. And I think it makes me a better teacher. NZ1d.

… so when I redesign my course I'm embedding [particular technologies] into key modules which the students will study so it will fully inform my curriculum, so that's one way that I've managed to reframe the PhD so that it fits in with what I'm doing at the university. UK1b.

Conversely, it is difficult for the dual-status academic to ignore the 'imposter syndrome' concerns common to all doctoral students:

I wanted to prove to myself and other people that I was actually capable, that I could get a doctorate, that I wasn't a fraud working in academia… I'm really hard on myself thinking I'm not doing enough here, this isn't learned enough, this isn't going to meet the standard… UK2c.

But just as participation in activities and networks proved difficult due to time and work constraints, eight of our participants expressed some form of dislocation by not belonging to a doctoral community where they could simply be students or ask what

they considered 'dumb' questions.

The NZ participant for whom supervision had proved problematic, reported strong links to a professional community that were damaged by the issues in the doctoral process, whilst others questioned the personal costs of their choices:

> And I think that a lot of people in my department who've done their PhD they kind of felt throughout the way that they were by themselves and fighting throughout that so when you ask them now, you spent six years doing your PhD part-time, what are you doing with that? They would be like, I don't even want to hear about it anymore. UK1c.

For one participant, it was a relationship-breakdown that facilitated the doctoral process:

> So I was actually having every second weekend alone. And I thought, I'm going to do something with this time. Yeah, so that was a factor. The same factor as to why the relationship is now finished. NZ1a.

CHAT provides a means of expressing the tensions we find within the thesis activity, and between it and the other two related activity systems. In summary, for our participants, it seems the thesis and work-worlds collide in a frustrating way. An important factor is how these choices impacted on the personal world. Learning to say 'no' to additional work demands induced feelings of selfishness, and the ambiguity of dual status contributed to the stickability or otherwise of UK candidates who lacked the NZ institutional device of doctoral study leave.

Discussion: Juggling competing activities

Having considered our findings in relation to three interdependent activity systems, we explore the implications for dual-status academics and their roads to completion.

Institutional resources and institutional support are key to positive outcomes, but always in tension with domestic responsibilities, and both personal and professional relationships.

Institutional resources

As noted above, access to certain physical resources is likely to be privileged: specialist equipment is easily accessible and even library-loan allowances can be higher and of longer duration than for non-dual students. Dual-status candidates have well-developed internal networks, making it easy to identify and negotiate with gatekeepers so that, in this respect, staff status is beneficial. Other institutional resources such as researcher development activities, however, are far less accessible or even appropriate when considering the staff side of the equation. As participants mentioned, their needs in their 'student' persona appear not to be addressed by developmental provision that is flexible, either in timing or level. While institutions encourage, or even require, staff to undertake a doctorate, little thought seems to have been given to their needs.

Academic life is paradoxical: it can be highly autonomous or rigidly restrictive, depending on teaching and citizenship activities (Smith, 2017). Institutional schedules tend to the restrictive: research skills workshops, for instance, are often timetabled in identical slots year-on-year. Our participants outlined clearly how academic duties take precedence and some tasks cannot be moved to facilitate attendance at developmental events, potentially isolating or even disadvantaging dual-status candidates, who can have less diary control than their non-dual student peers.

Nonetheless, the agency dual-status academics can exercise in supervisory arrangements (Denicolo, 2004) is striking. Every participant negotiated their initial and subsequent supervision teams. In contrast to non-dual students who have a supervisory team provided at the beginning of candidature, dual-status academics were able to

'hand-pick', most often from colleagues, but also from external sources, including internationally. UK1 expressly encourages such external collaborations for staff candidates. As with non-dual students, all participants experienced supervisory churn: retirements and job changes serve to make supervisors unavailable. However, dual-status candidates appear to be left adrift institutionally and need to identify their own replacements to satisfy inflexible regulations. The lack of support in this process was notable, as the micro-politics (Ball, 1987) of academic life influenced study direction. This can impact on the ownership of the doctoral project, with only two UK participants expressly sticking with their original intentions. Both were supervised externally.

Tools, resources, and community appear variable in their availability and appropriateness to dual-status academics. Academic authority is beneficial in some instances, but we found little evidence of participants establishing effective student identities (Dann et al., 2018). If the aim was to prioritise doctoral work, even where it was encouraged (NZ1 and UK1) or sometimes required (UK2), we found that any attempt at assuming a doctoral student identity was subjugated to the demands of the day-job. This suggests that institutions should further support dual-status colleagues in their endeavours.

Institutional support

The division between staff and student status is clear for non-dual students, with entitlements, expectations, and regulations enshrined in institutional policies. Identical regulatory frameworks and expectations are imposed on dual-status academics who labour under very different circumstances, detailed above. Entitlements, however, are more fluid when applied to staff candidates.

Immersion in a field of study is a basic principle of doctoral study (Kamler & Thomson, 2006) that non-dual students enjoy, but we were struck by the notion of the

'peripheral' in participants' narratives. It seemed impossible for all but one of our dual-status academics to develop any sense of student identity or build a doctoral-peer community. When embarking on the doctorate, there was acceptance that some thesis-related work would slot into the crevices between demanding day-jobs and personal time. As Watson (2012) observed, colleagues sometimes expressed disapproval at thesis-related activities that took dual-status academics away from teaching or other departmental responsibilities. Most participants undertook doctorates closely related to their professional roles for both interest and pragmatic reasons, but, frustratingly, the concomitant benefits in teaching and confidence were not recognised by their immediate networks. In some cases, therefore, proximal networks act as a conflicting activity system (Engeström, 2015).

Conflict was also evident in looser university networks. In theory, time and funds are provided in institutions to support doctoral study, but often we heard of the erosion of time allowances as workloads grew. Professionalism amongst our sample demanded they always prioritised the day-job but a reciprocal duty to honour promised workload relief in the UK was easily abandoned. In NZ1, a well-established but competitive scholarship scheme exists to support those close to completion that benefited our participants but similarly, dual-status academics had to negotiate changing responsibilities during candidature.

When neither immediate colleagues nor institutional managers are mindful of colleagues' doctoral endeavours, the thesis activity system expands to impact the only remaining controllable time: the personal. Any part-time student will be familiar with juggling the competing dilemmas of study deadlines and family life, but we argue that only dual-status academics live for an extended period with the existential threat to livelihoods implied by failure to complete.

Domestic responsibilities and relationships

Most of our participants remarked that the time they expected to spend on the object of their studies was squeezed to the margins over time. In this respect, NZ participants stood out by applying for, and being granted, study leave for writing up their theses. We did not hear any commensurate stories from UK-based academics. We have seen that dual-status academics who have yet to attain a doctorate feel their *'currency'* is devalued and, in many cases, this acts as a useful motivation to complete their thesis. However, we see control of the official work-week lying elsewhere, leaving dual-status candidates with no choice but to pursue their goal in personal time.

The ceding of family time was roundly resented. In already busy professional lives, dual-status academics foreground marking deadlines and student support requirements as needing to be satisfied before their own family commitments. In this study, those currently without family responsibilities could not conceive of how dual-status colleagues with partners and children navigated the competing activity systems. Despite the benefits of doctoral study voiced by dual-status academics for both their immediate work-role and their institution's reputation, participants suggested that the costs in terms of personal relationships and family life often make the goal undesirable or unattainable. We acknowledge that all doctoral students need to balance such responsibilities. This weighs particularly heavily on international students who make huge investments in pursuing this goal (McAlpine & Åkerlind, 2010), but dual-status academics have the added pressure of both professional legitimacy and, courtesy of the day-job, limited opportunities to immerse themselves in their studies.

Conclusion

This exploratory study addresses a gap in the literature regarding dual-status academics.

Sensitive to ranking metrics, institutions encourage or require academic staff to attain a doctorate, and in theory provide workload relief and staff development funds to realise this goal. In practice, however, these benefits do not always materialise. This suggests further research, in a variety of contexts and focusing on disciplinary practices, would be beneficial.

Dual-status academics must juggle a strong sense of professional commitment with an equally strong sense of researcher peripherality where the day-job is prioritised, and difficult personal dilemmas must be confronted. The day-job consumes more than the contracted work-week, so only personal/family time remains available to pursue the doctorate. Our findings indicate that dual-status academics require more than determination and ability to achieve doctoral status. Navigating the often-equivocal researcher-worker space requires a deft and flexible approach, but it is also clear that institutions must be held to account if they do not honour their commitments to staff actively working toward enhancing institutional league table rankings.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflicts of interest.

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