The Doctorate:

stories of knowledge, power and becoming

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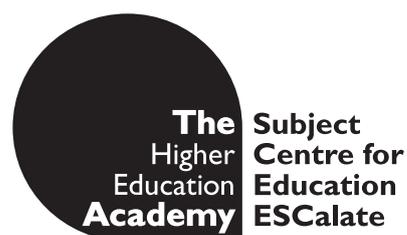
The Doctorate:
stories of knowledge, power and becoming

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Introduction

Reading the contributions

The contributions to this publication suggest that education is necessarily disruptive; demanding engagement rather than indifference and change rather than status quo. Something in education is inherently worrying. It demands that we change and provokes us into becoming different as a direct consequence of the education we experience. We too, recognise that change to the self is a necessary outcome of the education process, but we often remain ambivalent, resisting the opportunities for change that education heralds.

Freud observes that all education provokes an essential disturbance because it reminds us of the reparative work that we know we still have to do, as a consequence of our desires for the possibilities that education offers. Education continually produces a need for an *after-education*: a deferred activity whereby education invites us to address our previous discontents provoked by reminders of our earliest desires and phantasies. What Freud (1914) describes as deferred is recognised and revised by remembering, repeating, and working-through.

It is interesting to ask where the locus of power resides. It is perceptively explored by these contributors. Agency – a concept antithetical to indifference – emerged as a strong theme in several of the narratives. Themes of intellectual and emotional struggle – of compliance and resistance – also appear. When reading the narratives from a perspective that explores power relations between protagonists, doctoral studentship appears to demand intellectual and emotional vulnerability to the forces of change: sometimes welcomed and experienced positively, sometimes resisted and experienced as an attack or threat demanding submission. In all cases the forces of change are accompanied by the possibility of a reconstitution of self.

Study demands shifts in identity that bring feelings of *otherness*, states of disconnectedness which can offer a sense of purposefulness, fulfilment and becoming – a sense that despite everything, the struggle has been 'worth it'. In contrast, otherness can result in feelings of distance, dependence, deference, vulnerability, confusion, anger and loss, particularly where the student feels used by the supervisor in some way – by having been intellectually high-jacked. The final stages of the doctoral process augur the becoming of a new self – for most a self that is constellated positively, already beginning to break away

enthusiastically from old positions through a process of disentanglement from the trappings and bindings that have held the student and the supervisor in the intimate embrace of supervision.

The relationship between student and supervisor is a fundamental part of the supervision process that unsurprisingly features prominently in most students' (and supervisors') accounts of the doctoral process.[1] Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* offers a challenging perspective on the dynamics of relationships which I found useful when drawing together my thoughts about the contributions to this volume. Butler employs the word *subjection* and maintains the complexity of her discussion by using the word to refer both to the emergence and identification of the *subject* and also to a process of *subjugation*.

Butler explores the dynamic between the existing subject – the knowing one – and the process of becoming, thus allowing an exploration of the power dynamics of self transformation. Applied to the relationship between supervisor and doctoral student, it allows for discussion of the way power plays out between them, informing the process of realisation and introducing the notion of being subject to, and subjected to. In this Butler follows Foucault, "We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects" (Michel Foucault, Two Lectures). The basic ingredients of Foucault's theory of knowledge and power are well known: knowledge produces power and creates subjects. For Foucault, ontology is not fixed, stable nor a given reality, but rather a heterogeneous historical construct, which nevertheless does not lessen its reality or materiality. As subjects, what we are or become is a complex product of many parts

including discourse, history, and bodies. The discursive elements of doctoral supervision can therefore be seen as involving a play of interdependencies: within each subject, between subjects and beyond the subject in extradiscursive social spaces.

Controversially, following Butler, these contributions can be read from a point of view that asks whether the 'agency of the subject appears to be an effect of subordination' (p.12). Is the agency of the student to be read as an effect of the subordination to the supervisor – and indeed vice versa? From Butler's perspective there is a power that initiates the subject, which is different from the power that the subject (eventually) wields. To follow this line of argument is to suggest that the power arising out of the process of doctoral supervision initiates the conditions for students' subordination, and vulnerability: a vulnerability that is a prerequisite for becoming. This does not rest easy with arguments for equality or professional roles based on constructivist views of knowledge exchange. However, the writings in this publication suggest an interplay of relational dynamics that shape and indeed change identities in complex ways.

At least two of the contributions hint at the benefits of vulnerability. Liz Hoult's supervisor comments that she might get closer to her subject (the nature of resilience) by - as Yeats put it - 'walking naked'. Yeats' implication is that to be stripped in this way brings us closer to a more faithful real, lived experience, implying that to become disrobed and vulnerable creates more productive conditions for doctoral working. But what power is being deployed in using a metaphor with sexual overtones as a vehicle for

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[1] *Unsurprisingly, of the 16,524 postgraduate research students participating in the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) for 2008, 96% cited supervision as the most important factor for successful completion of doctoral studies. See (www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/surveys/pres/PRES2008.pdf)*

introducing the idea of self-enhanced vulnerability into the student's supervision? In Hannah Smith's account we read that supervision leads her to an increased sense of naïvety, or rather, to an increased awareness of what becomes available to her and her supervision through taking up a position of greater naïvety. What power dynamics are being brought into play when the student perceives that to move to a position of a 'less knowing' subject can potentially offer a richer, though possibly more difficult supervision? Choosing increased vulnerability changes the position of the student, the dynamics of the supervision and potentially the quality of the transformative experience that doctoral study offers.

We are not seeking claims to truth here –we'll never know the 'real' motive if such a thing even exists. Instead, we are reading the text (in this instance from what we see as Butler's perspective) in ways that allow us to explore the new possibilities available when taking up alternative viewpoints.

Themes of resistance are evident in several of the contributions, (resistance to supervisors and supervision, to identity change created within doctoral supervision, and to the whole business of power shifts). How might we think of resistance in terms of the shifts of power that can accompany the becoming of a 'new' subject? Some forms of resistance can be read as avoidance. And avoidance can be read as an inner recognition of unpreparedness: of being not quite ready for whatever is required. Resistance can also be read as the recovery of power and conversely, the recovery of power can be read as resistance - 'this ambivalence forms the bind of agency' (Butler, 1997: p.13). The doctoral process can be read as a form of regulatory power that offers to form the subject – as the *doctor*; through the requirements of power that incorporate norms, through the subjection of desire, and more controversially through the creation of a desire for subjection.

We can think of the act of completion of the doctorate as a significant shift away from power constituted in and through the subordination of the student, to power exerted through the subject's own agency following conferral: a shift of power which contributes to a reconstitution of the subject. Conferral legitimises the exercise of power by the subject (student) but it also brings the subject into being, for example as a newly constituted authority in the discipline. Subjection can be seen then, both as the subordination and the becoming of the subject. Power 'acts on a subject but… enacts the subject into being' (Butler 1997, p.13). Conferral of the doctorate is conferral of a right to speak as an acknowledged expert within the academy. The challenge still remains of course for the newly constituted doctor to find and to exercise the voice that speaks both with authority and as an authority, to an audience of doctoral peers and others. For some students this latter stage is conducted through the post-doctoral process and accomplished in part by supervised contributions to research projects and the co-authoring of academic papers.

The doctoral process, from initial plans, through the long period of study, the articulation of a thesis, through to 'writing up', to defence of the thesis by examination and subsequent conferral, can be read in terms of the interplay of complex relational forces where power shifts create the identity of the person *becoming*. Through numerous requests and invitations to engage with transformative processes and through a series of discursive events, there is a sustained play of interdependencies between and within each subject, in ways that inevitably involve psychic shifts of identity and exchanges in power that shape and define both the process and those who occupy the supervisory space.

My experience

After convening the group and organising our two meetings, I was encouraged to write a brief account of my supervision experience to add to those already written. My own PhD took six years part time whilst I worked in a college of higher education. The beginning was messy. I had collected data about student identity over several years. What I lacked was a theoretical framework to analyse it in ways that allowed me to explore the disturbance to identity that students reported. At first I didn't recognise that I was already researching at an appropriate level. It took me some years to locate a suitable university department and even longer to negotiate supervision. Eventually I approached colleagues at the Open University and found they were the most helpful, constructive and open to my ideas. I registered there and ended up with two supervisors. Klaus (the main supervisor) took the university gatekeeper role. He managed the university's rules, regulations and reporting processes. But he was based at Milton Keynes, two hundred miles away from me. When the second supervisor had finally been agreed, Klaus acknowledged that Ewan had more expertise in the areas I wanted to study and suggested Ewan should provide most of the discipline-focused supervision. I would meet Klaus two or three times each year, typically in the café overlooking the large performance space in the Royal Festival Hall at the Southbank Centre, with lunchtime jazz performances as a backdrop. These were mainly to record progress and to ensure the supervision was meeting my needs. Sometimes Ewan was also there. He was second

supervisor, but in effect was my main academic supervisor throughout. We had been involved in the same professional association and had already known each other vaguely for more than ten years, having met occasionally at conferences and workshops.

Ewan had retired from university teaching but agreed to register at the OU as a part time supervisor, which gave him the benefit of access to the substantial library resources as well as his fee. He provided the largest part of the intellectual input and pedagogical space for the development of my ideas. He was unusually qualified in that he had extensive experience of the two fields that I was researching: mathematics education and psychoanalytic theory.

Klaus was surprised by my request to register – he knew a little about my work and assumed I already had a doctorate. Ewan was also curious, wondering why I wanted to bother with the nuisance of a doctorate. He did not possess a doctorate himself and was cautious, somewhat resistant to the idea of becoming formally involved in higher education again. Not so much –it seemed to me– about taking me on as a student, but more about wanting to avoid being bothered by university bureaucracy and any formal assessment role. What he enjoyed was intellectual dialogue. I can't recall, but he may not have supervised a PhD student before, (and he never supervised again, to my knowledge) although his teaching career had spanned thirty years in a Russell Group university. Klaus suggested that he perform the official, regulatory role, though he would also

contribute to the discipline support, which he did very effectively by email, by directing me towards texts and by encouraging me to attend the regular workshops and seminars for doctoral students in the department. Ewan's motivation on the other hand was discussion and the development of theoretical ideas involving psychoanalytic theory rather than 'supervision'.

Over time our professional roles shifted to a strong personal friendship although we only ever met infrequently. Between meetings he would respond to the ideas that I worked on, by counter argument and pointing me towards academic texts. When we met he made extensive notes during our discussions, and used them later to write to me and to pursue the ideas for his own interest. He liked the Victorian habit of posting short notes, and would often send postcards containing references to useful books or insightful short observations on material I had sent him. This was something that he did with perhaps twenty or thirty people at any one time: discussing complex calculus problems with a university study group, devising children's games and mathematical activities for a company that he ran, discussing Goethe's poetry in the original German with a colleague, giving talks in South Africa on developments in mathematics teacher training in a post-apartheid era, discussing Italian literature in the original with an online study group. His range of interests, knowledge and activities was enormous.

Ewan had no wish to get involved in nagging, checking up or deadline setting. He never once asked me to meet a deadline or produce writing. He drew on a vast repertoire of knowledge and information and he would link my ideas to psychoanalytic theory and maths education literature, providing countless possibilities for further work. In addition to his other activities he read a book almost every day of his life and kept an annotated daybook of all his activities. He enjoyed critiquing my ideas when I was ready to

send them, responding with short pieces of his own writing. We began corresponding by post and email, but later this developed into a routine where we met and worked intensively over a weekend. I would travel to his house on a Friday evening once each term, for a meal. Ewan's wife Jacqueline who was training as a psychoanalyst would also join in discussions and her contributions helped enormously as she often disagreed with him over psychoanalytic issues. On Saturday mornings we would meet at breakfast and plan the day: both of us working separately in different parts of the house, meeting briefly for lunch. We would meet formally in the mid afternoon for a lengthy and wide ranging discussion, where I would report what I'd been doing, present ideas and make notes of Ewan's comments. Then we would separate again to work until the evening meal was ready. Sometimes I would help with the food preparation. On Sunday mornings I spent a couple of hours reading and writing, usually leaving around lunchtime. Occasionally, if they had business together, Klaus would arrive for a brief formal meeting on the Sunday morning and then stay on after I had left. It obviously helped my supervision that Ewan and Klaus had common interests and some joint projects to discuss. We continued to correspond and meet from time to time until Ewan's death seven years later. It is interesting that love of the subject and love of the person who contributes to one's understanding of the subject can sustain each other and become almost indistinguishable over time. During our final meeting when Ewan was waiting to go into hospital for an operation to remove a cancer – an operation he didn't survive – our conversation continued to be an enthusiastic mix of the highly personal and lengthy abstract theoretical ideas that we were taken up with.

I think I knew that my experience of supervision was unusual though I never chose to articulate this or form it as a clear thought: it just was, and suited me perfectly: a tutorial model that I suspect grew out Ewan's experience as a student at Oxford. He was an

intellectual powerhouse in several fields other than those in which he supervised me: translating Turkish stories of Nasreddin Hodja, a student of German poetry, translating and writing about eastern European religious texts, writing about psychoanalytic theory, working on readings of Shakespeare's plays with a theatre group, playing Schubert's cello repertoire to a high standard. Perhaps one of the most self-effacing people I have ever met, his wealth of knowledge had to be teased from him. Whilst I tapped only a small part, I felt it was freely given. This of course is a naïve view, one which indicates the difficulty of grasping an objective understanding of knowledge-power relations. Klaus' role too was highly supportive, with valuable contributions to theoretical ideas and careful management of the formal processes of supervision such as the production of annual progress reports and careful preparation for the *viva voce* examination.

Using this publication

There are plenty of books that offer to guide, inform and instruct doctoral students in how to manage the intellectual aspects of the doctoral process. There is much less published on how individuals use the affective domain to organise and learn from the experience and how they engage directly with it. The idea that learning is an intellectual pursuit separate from emotional processes has long been dismissed as nonsense. This publication explores the ways in which doctoral students harness ever-present affectivity. The narratives written for this publication are not intentionally instructional, but in their clarity, detail and storytelling power they are 'instructive', particularly of the challenges posed by shifts in/of knowledge, power and identity.

This publication grew from an invitation to a small group to write about their experiences as doctoral students. Most have been researching in the field of education, one in English and another in musicology.

In our group discussions it was clear that the experiences and themes we shared transcended the discipline areas. The experiences that group members reported and wrote about resonated strongly with other members of the group regardless of discipline. The publication is likely to have resonance for colleagues and students working in any number of disciplinary contexts. In such a project there is no desire to engage with positivist ideas of validity, truth and generalisation. However, the question remains as to how these narratives of doctoral students' experiences can be accessed by the reader in ways that are rewarding. The invitation to the reader is to adopt a noticing paradigm: by laying the narratives against the reader's own lived experience in order to check for authenticity through resonance and discord. The reader's noticing of resonance provides opportunities for reflection and interpretation. For those readers who are planning to embark on a doctorate there is the additional opportunity to use the narratives as part of a process of preparation.

It is hoped that readers with relevant stories to tell about affectivity and power relations within doctoral supervision will offer additional contributions that can be accumulated and published.

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The HE Academy Subject Centre for Education at University of Bristol
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Embracing uncertainty: how the processes of 'not doing' may illuminate the writing of a thesis

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Jack Mezirow (1991) begins his exploration of the transformational dimensions of adult learning by stating: 'As adult learners, we are caught in our own histories' (p.1.) This piece of writing is an attempt to untangle my history in relation to the experience of adult learning that I engaged in whilst studying for my doctorate. The quotation from Mezirow resonates particularly with me when I think about this intense period of my life as it causes me to ponder on the impact of the past, present and the potential of the future selves on learning.

For me, my doctoral studies were dominated by a generalised feeling of uncertainty. Looking back I can trace this feeling of anxiety to the transition from a very happy and positive undergraduate experience into a murkier 'real world' in which I was not sure how I fitted in and where I would find my niche. In some ways postgraduate study offered stability, a continuity of what I had enjoyed and been good at before. In reality however, it proved to be much more demanding and ultimately 'transformational' in the sense in which Mezirow uses the term. The following quotation offers a definition of adult transformational learning:

Formerly accepted sources of authority and the early learning provided by socialization and schooling no longer suffice for them. Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of knowing, they discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives (p.3).

This process of transformational learning might happen for some adult learners at undergraduate level, at an Access course, or at a literacy class, for me it happened during my PhD. Through extended reading of philosophical texts and in dialogue with my supervisor, I began to challenge my taken for granted assumptions about the world. With a growing realisation of my own naïvety, I felt tremendous pressure to change, and like the seismic shifts of an earthquake this created ripples of impact in my home, relationships, and work dynamics.

With hindsight, I think this relates to the transformational dimension of education, which if engaged with fully cannot help but change one in its wake. At times it felt like being hit by a tsunami, as new ideas, theories and debates radically changed my thinking and shattered many of the constructions about the world which I had developed. I grappled with challenging new theoretical ideas, principally developed by the deconstructionist project and the more I 'deconstructed' the world around me the less real everything began to feel.

My project centred on language and how we construct ourselves and our identities linguistically. Principally I focused on how certain groups, in my case deaf users of sign languages are marginalised through the metaphors and images associated with their language, Sign. Engaging with this project was a process of certainties falling away, of hyper-questioning, and of challenging of fundamental preconceptions. The accompanying emotional reaction was of feeling at times lost and bewildered (taking into account the etymological link to 'wilderness' here). Perhaps this is what Merizow refers to as 'liminal spaces' which he defines as when an individual is: 'between established patterns of thought and behaviour' (p.3.).

For Merizow this is a positive space in which challenges to the status quo and to established sources of authority can emerge. For me the experience was more equivocal. I began to feel a creeping uncertainty or 'nothingness' entering into my life in which I began to question whether anything was real. The more I engaged with poststructuralist theory, the more complexity I seemed to welcome into my life. As Richardson (2000) argues, the postmodern world makes everything less clear cut as we no longer see ourselves as existing in the 'static social world imagined by our nineteenth century foreparents'

(p.922). For me this was accompanied by a growing sense of distance between my friends and family as I unconsciously asked myself: how can they understand this new way of seeing the world? There were highs as well as lows. The thinking I did in this period has enabled me to challenge fully how we respond to difference in our society and to apply this to my chosen field of inclusive education in a rigorous and empowering way. In order to reach this point however, I had to embrace a sustained period of uncertainty.

For the purpose of this piece of writing I would like to focus on this experience of uncertainty or 'nothingness' and relate it to the practice of writing my thesis, in the hope that if anyone else is having or may have similar experiences they might not feel quite as alone as I did. I have decided then to focus on these acts of 'not doing' which seemed to dominate the early parts of my relationship with my thesis. I include references here to popular music, film and TV as these things were (and are) a huge part of my life during the writing of my thesis, often forming an antidote to what I perceived to be the values and processes of the academic world.

On not writing about my PhD

There will be no highlights on the eleven o'clock news and no pictures of hairy armed women liberationists and Jackie Onassis blowing her nose.
The theme song will not be written by Jim Webb, Francis Scott Key, not sung by Glen Campbell, Tom Jones, Johnny Cash, Englebert Humperdink, or the Rare Earth.
The revolution will not be televised. Gil Scott-Heron (1971) *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.*

Whilst listening to the radio recently I found myself listening in a new way to the lyrics of the famous Scott-Heron track 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised'. This track is a powerful political and cultural statement critiquing the negative treatment of African-Americans by the media of the day. The references to the many TV advertisements, soap operas and news imagery critique the ubiquity of the media, the 'opium for the masses' of the TV age, and highlight the lethargy and passive acceptance of the status quo.

Hearing the song again however, I 'saw' the media images Scott-Heron paints and reflected that this song was also a testimony to the pervasive nature of such images. The revolution will not contain such images and yet the song conjures them into life. The attack on televisation is constructed through continuous references to the power of television. This got me thinking about the tensions between what we say, what we intend, and what we construct. It reminded me of the process of writing a thesis in which the tensions between meaning, inference, image and the construction of knowledge are constantly being grappled with by the student, supervisor and examiner. How do we construct the meanings with which we are concerned? How to shed light on the issues that concern us? Which angle will best illuminate the ideas that preoccupy us and how will they appear when they come into being? The anxieties that preoccupy the writing stage of the thesis revolve around fears of making our personal reflections public. We may ask ourselves: will our ideas be misinterpreted, judged or overlooked? The meaningful spaces we construct and the processes by which we arrive at them may result in words on a page that may feel lacking in relation to the richness of the experience in which they have been produced.

As Howard S. Becker argues:

When we write, we constantly make such choices as which idea to take up when; what words to use, in what order, to express it, what examples to give to make our meaning clearer. Of course, writing actually follows an even lengthier process of absorbing and developing ideas, similarly preceded by a process of absorbing impressions and sorting them out. Each choice shapes the result. (1986, p.16).

During my doctoral studies I was very interested in the spaces between words and meanings. This was partly to do with my subject area: Deaf culture and sign language. I was concerned with the distinctions drawn between sign languages and spoken languages, particularly in regards the logocentric assumptions that meaning and knowledge were tied to spoken words and to the voice. I thought a lot about how people who had grown up in a visual, rather than an oral and aural world constructed meaning and knowledge through language in a way which challenged the authority of speech. Writers such as Derrida, Foucault and Butler helped me to understand the cultural processes by which language and difference were powerfully intertwined. This process of thinking so intently about language and about the power of the word had a negative impact on the ease with which I found myself able to write. As I deconstructed the linguistic webs I perceived, it became more difficult to reconstruct my own personal version of meaning that was required in order to pass the PhD. Having listened to others who have also engaged with this process I believe that this may be a common experience. For this reason in this

piece I will be exploring the challenges and opportunities offered in periods of 'not writing' and I hope that, like Scott-Heron's cult song, this may at the same time, illuminate some strategies for successfully writing and finishing a thesis.

On not starting

For me the beginning of the PhD journey was characterised by an anxious consideration of the task in front of me. There were many times when I obsessed about the vastness of the word count and agonised over how I could possibly complete it. My subsequent experience of tutoring students undertaking projects has made me realise that this is a common phenomenon. Students may become overwhelmed by the thought of producing an end product which seems beyond their capabilities. It may seem to be an impossible task, that for particular personal or circumstantial reasons they begin to doubt whether they will be able to complete.

During the meeting of the writing group which produced this publication, individuals reflected on how at times during their studies they had 'felt like a fraud'. In some ways the status attached to the end product can have a negative impact on the individual's productivity. It is the classic 'writer's block' in which too much is at stake and so nothing gets done. This experience of 'not starting' and 'not writing' is a common one and individuals may not be aware of the many ways in which they sabotage their writing practices through their ruminations. A PhD student reflected that her anxieties about writing for

an academic audience meant that the whole process became drawn out, painful and characterised by procrastination.

For me, the stage of 'not starting' was characterised by a need to get a hold on the task ahead of me. This experience is encapsulated in the well-known story of a group of Hungarian soldiers who had become lost in the Pyrenees (Weick cited in Colville and Murphy, 2006). As the soldiers despaired for their survival one of them stumbled across a map and with this they were able to navigate their way back to base and to safety. On arrival however it was discovered that the map was not in fact of the Alps at all and yet it had created the illusion of navigation and hence had made survival possible. As Colville and Murphy (2006) argue '…when you are lost, any old map will do' (p.671).

This situation of dealing with uncertainty which concerns the PhD student at the start of their studies relates to processes of sensemaking and 'the *ways* in which people *generate* what they subsequently *interpret*' (Colville and Murphy, 2006). What is important then is what people *do* when they are in a period of uncertainty not what they *plan*. The problem comes when anxiety becomes paralysing or so self-sabotaging that nothing is done.

In order to write a thesis, I believe that it is necessary to be able to tolerate a certain level of uncertainty as the generation of original thought requires it. This was a challenge to me. I can now see that it is

necessary to let go of a certain amount of control and to let the processes of learning lead where they will. However, in order to avoid the paralysis described above, 'maps', however illusionary, need to be applied and it is at this stage that the support of the supervisor can be particularly helpful. My experience of teaching has suggested that it is much easier to focus on small, achievable tasks than to contemplate the finished whole. Equally, attempting to detach personally from the task to a certain extent and focussing instead on the subject matter may help students with confidence issues to circumvent the self-sabotaging internal voice which so plagued me. A supportive supervisor may be able to gently point this out and suggest strategies to put into place in this situation.

On not writing

Fantastic expectations
Amazing revelations
Final execution and resurrection
Free expression as revolution
Finding everything and realizing
You got the fear
F.E.A.R. (You got the fear)
Ian Brown *F.E.A.R (2001)*

The above lyrics aptly describe the paralysing anxiety I felt when contemplating writing for my thesis. 'The fear' which can be applied to so many experiences in life (and which I have also heard described as 'the yips'!) prevents one from doing the best work and in the case of writing a thesis may result in a failure to get anything useful down on paper. Many people may recognise that the hardest thing about completing a large project like a thesis is making a start. One postgraduate student commented: 'Before you start it

feels overwhelming, and you lock up, but if you can push past that and get the first sentence on paper, it starts to feel manageable again'.

This feeling of getting going with writing is described variously as creative flow or 'getting into the zone'. There are strategies for encouraging this and many helpful books on the subject. At the heart of this issue is cultivating self-understanding, which Nel Noddings (2006) describes as the most important goal of education. She poses the following pertinent questions: 'What motivates us to learn? What habits are helpful? Why do I remember some things and forget so many? Does the object of learning ever enter actively into the process? If so, how can I encourage it to speak to me?' As a teacher I encourage my students to reflect on the forces in their lives which may sabotage their writing practice. As a writer however, I recognise that it is easy to give this advice and hard to follow it oneself. Unpicking the processes of self (and other) distraction are complex, but once insight has been gained into personal bad habits, strategies can be adopted to overcome them.

Noddings (2006) encourages us to reflect on motivation and study habits. She considers: 'Some think best while soaking in a hot bath. Some need to pace to and fro. Some need silence; others need music. Physical exercise seems to stimulate some mental workers; others are exhausted by physical activity and must avoid it to think well.' Becoming aware of our unhelpful habits and striving to cultivate more helpful ones is a strategy for avoiding long periods of non-writing and the added anxiety that this brings with it. Working with the body clock and the rhythms of life will go a long way to creating writing space. For me, the process of undertaking the PhD was a process of learning about myself, how I could help and hinder my own creativity.

Although it is important to put aside extended periods, especially at the beginning of a PhD, for reading and thinking, I was given some excellent advice from a former tutor to beware the seductive nature of reading, in which it may feel as if work is being done, and of course it is, and yet the process of the reconstruction of knowledge is not being actively engaged with. Another problem with reading is knowing when to stop. There are an infinite number of books and articles that can be read and it is important to set limits otherwise reading could continue infinitum! A helpful quotation for me is the following by Richardson '…poststructuralism… frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone' (2000, p.929). This is reassuring as it encourages taking the risk to write *something* rather than agonising over trying to write *everything* and failing to write *anything*.

On not being supervised

> *"My mother's adopted,"* Angela says in a voiceover. *"For a while, she was searching for her real parents. I guess that's what everybody's looking for."*
> My-so-called-life, 1994. Pilot episode, 'My-so-called-life'

As the above dialogue suggests, parenting, like supervision, is a process in which expectations and needs are not always met at appropriate times. Listening to the stories individuals told about their experiences of supervision suggested to me that it is very rare indeed to stumble across a supervisor who will perfectly support you through the difficult process of writing a thesis, and yet the group had strong feelings about what good supervision *should* be. In this area I was extremely fortunate. My supervisor was responsive and devoted to my project. She would read my lengthy, sometimes unintelligible drafts virtually overnight and offer detailed feedback. She always had time to meet with me and we had long, in-depth discussions about my work which were of great value.

Unfortunately, this is not the case with everyone. The writing group shared experiences of supervisors leaving institutions, disappearing for months on end and even unethical practice. Like fledglings leaving the nest, support and nourishment may be patchy and the onus is on the student to fend for themselves. Perhaps, in this area we are all searching for our ideal supervisor, the person who 'gets' us and offers just the right support at the right moment. Unfortunately, as in other areas of life, it is unlikely that everything will run smoothly in this area. As with the experience of starting out this is another area in which PhD students are required (if they are to continue and complete the process) to tolerate chaos. They may have to cope with absent, neglectful supervisors or the problem may be overbearing, demanding tutorials.

Strategies that may counteract the process of 'not being supervised' may include drawing on a wider network of academics who can offer advice and support to patch the holes in official supervision. Developing peer support networks can be an essential life-line to the potentially isolated PhD student and can offer points of comparison and advice about when the supervision is just neglectful and when it is unprofessional and should be tackled.

Howard S. Becker (1986) argues: '…writers solve the problem of isolation by developing a circle of friends who will read their work in the right spirit, treating as preliminary what is preliminary, helping the author sort out the mixed-up ideas of a very rough draft or smooth out the ambiguous language of a later version, suggesting references that might be helpful or comparisons that will give the key to some intractable puzzle'. This was something that I did not take advantage of during my own studies. I think that this resulted in feeling isolated and I would therefore encourage others to take up such opportunities for peer support.

On not finishing

G'mork - Ha! Brave warrior, then fight the Nothing.
Atreju - But I can't! I can't get beyond the boundaries of Fantasia.
G'mork - Ha,ha,ha,ha,ha!
Atreju - What's so funny about that?
G'mork - Fantasia has no boundaries.Ha, ha.
Atreju - That's not true! You're lying!
G'mork - Foolish boy. Don't you know anything about Fantasia? It's the world of human fantasy. Every part, every creature of it is a piece of the dreams and hopes of mankind. Therefore it has no boundaries.
The Neverending Story (1984) dir. Wolfgang Petersen

In the end I wrote most of my thesis in a few months. It was an intense period of writing in which I had time for very little else. I survived on tea and chocolate biscuits and emerged occasionally to watch episodes of TV daytime dramas. Eventually, I ran out of steam and I knew, quite clearly, that I had finished. My supervisor was slightly astonished, but having read the work agreed with me. However, a thesis is very much a 'never-ending story' in that, like reading, it can go on and on. In some ways a thesis is never finished as there is still learning, reflecting, processing and writing that could be done.

In some cases it is not up to the individual to decide whether or not they have finished and instead the supervisor will make that decision based on their experience. Some individuals, like myself, may feel strongly that they have come to the end of this particular journey and have to persuade others that they are ready to move on. In some ways, this act of persuasion is part of the viva voce examination.

Others may lack confidence and put off the final submission. A colleague of mine was 'submitting next term' over a period of three and a half years. Knowing when to let go and move on is another area where a supportive supervisor can step in to assist.

On choosing not to do a PhD

When I embarked on my thesis, I did not really question exactly *what* it was that I was undertaking, by which I mean the intrinsic value of 'getting' a PhD. Nor did I question closely *why* I wanted to do it. Throughout the whole process however, I maintained a characteristic resistance to some of the processes and hierarchies I encountered. For me this revolved around how much we surrender our individual identity to that of the intellectual institutions we inhabit. Richardson asks 'How do we put ourselves in our own texts and with what consequences?' We might ask: am I doing a PhD or is a PhD being done to me?

I would encourage students considering taking on such a project to scrutinise carefully both their own motivations and those of the institution and academics with whom they will work. There is a world of difference between a PhD which is undertaken in order to gain credentials and one that is undertaken from a philosophy of transformational education. There are instances where an individual's expectations will differ significantly from those of the institution. Undertaking a thesis involves an extended period of study, which is highly personal. Some students (such as myself) are not prepared for the transformational aspect of this process and may find the growing pains too difficult to persist with. It is however, probably unrealistic to want to be prepared for such a process, as by its very nature it must be unpredictable and challenging in order for it to be transformational. Another aspect of this process is the impact of personal change on those around us and the frictions that this may cause.

The process of submission and examination may result in further personal challenges. It can be difficult having to 'defend' a piece of work that has been lived and breathed for a significant period of time. This makes it tricky to take on board negative criticism even if it is meant in the spirit of encouraging development. It is important to establish personal values and to have the strength to stand up for them when necessary. However, it is equally necessary (if contradictory) to be flexible and to know when to compromise. Despite the finality of the hard binding it may be more helpful to envisage the thesis, not as the final word on the subject, but more as a point of departure with which to debate the subject matter with other academics.

> *Writing about writing is one way to grasp, hold and give added meaning to a process that remains one of life's great mysteries. I have not yet found the words to truly convey the intensity of this remembered rapture – that moment of exquisite joy when necessary words come together and the work is complete, finished ready to be read.*
> (Hooks, 1999: xvi cited in Gale, and Sikes, 2007)

As Hooks eloquently expresses here, there is a satisfaction associated with feeling that the end of a particular journey has been reached, and that despite all the difficulties, the periods of not starting, not writing, not being supervised and not finishing, despite all these manifestations of chaos *something* has emerged in which it may be possible to take pleasure and pride, not least in the fact that uncertainty or 'the nothing' has been successfully battled. Writing this piece has enabled me to begin the process of reframing this period of my life, not as one of 'nothingness' but instead as a period of intense growth and change which has left me with a developed empathy for those undertaking academic study and

also an appreciation for the work of the reconstruction of knowledge in its many forms.

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Exploring resilience

Dr Elizabeth Chapman Hoult, Canterbury Christ Church University

The following piece of writing was drafted in early 2008. It was the beginning of the final year of my PhD. It represents a snapshot of how I was thinking and feeling about the doctorate at that point when I made the transition from the middle stages of the work into the final year. Since I wrote it some of the things in the paper have been resolved and some haven't. Indeed, new issues have arisen that were not evident to me then. Rather than re-writing it now from a point of near arrival, though, I want to preserve the authenticity of what it represents as a particular point in my learning trajectory.

My thesis is entitled 'Representations of Resilience in Adult Learning'. It is an exploration of the nature of resilience in those learners who survive and thrive in universities, despite all sorts of obstacles that might reasonably be predicted to prevent them from doing so. In this sense I am both inside and outside the study; I am both a resilient learner myself (for reasons which will become clear further on) as well as (apparently) being an expert *on* resilience in adult learners. The first draft of this paper was completed as part of an experiment in writing. I was keen to represent my own experience truthfully but I found that reality infuriatingly slid away as soon as I tried to

frame it within academic language. My supervisor challenged me to take on board W B Yeats' assertion that ''there's more enterprise/in walking naked''. In other words, it is more courageous and more productive to shed our theoretical 'clothing' once in a while, in order to write authentically. For Yeats, this meant dispensing with his rich mythological framework in order to write about his own life. For me, it meant coming out from behind the disguise of academic language and theoretical references in order to be honest about what this experience of working on a PhD has been really been like. After that I did indeed cross over into a kind of writing territory that allowed me to represent my own story creatively and honestly. This piece ends with the realisation that this would be necessary. So here it is, an account of the sorts of resilience that I have needed to develop and demonstrate in order to complete this thesis, as well as some of the events that gave rise to the need for resilience.

Resilient learning and the PhD

Isolation is the biggest challenge that I have faced, and continue to face, in the course of working on this PhD thesis. Other aspects of the experience have certainly tested my stamina, my patience and my

nerve but they have not required me to be resilient in quite the same way. These other things are: finding the time to read and write intensely while I am working full time; complying with the tedious and unimaginative bureaucratic structures that govern the PhD process; and the struggle to get past low expectations into a space where I could take risks and work creatively within the boundaries of the doctorate. I've had to knuckle down and bare my teeth at times over the last couple of years but that wasn't so bad – I've always had to look after myself. What is much, much worse than any of this is coping with the intense loneliness that accompanies the process.

I understand, of course, that completing any PhD is always a solitary experience. By definition, any piece of work that aims to make an original contribution to the academy must be created independently and must go beyond what has gone before it. This piece of work, though, has put me in a particularly lonely position for two reasons. Firstly, I am working in a space between and beyond two disciplines – Education and English Literature. This does not give me two homes – it makes me homeless. It has also meant that, whether I liked it or not, I have adopted a subversive position because I have ended up challenging some of fundamental precepts of both disciplines. Secondly, I have developed a methodology that combines biographical interviews with literary criticism and autobiographical writing and which uses writing itself is a form of enquiry. I am not 'writing up' some other piece of research that is going on elsewhere in the conventional way. My decision to go down this path was not based on a whim or the desire to be flamboyant. I have made these choices because, early on in the study, it became apparent to me that human resilience in learning situations is too complex and too elusive to be pinned down and explained by the application of either conventional, evidence-based approaches to research, or by the

pure critique of literary texts. Neither discipline alone seemed to be capable of providing a language that could adequately describe some of what began to emerge from the study about resilience – questions of love and loss, of death and resurrection and of hope. This was difficult. I like to think that I am an articulate person and my original disciplinary home – English Literature – is constituted entirely of the written and spoken word. To find myself in a place where words were inadequate was challenging. So I have had to find a space beyond the confines of the two disciplines that would allow an adequate language to emerge. I have therefore put myself in exile. Exile is dangerous and lonely but like other voluntary migrants I have chosen it because I understand the risks of staying at home to be far higher than those I will encounter abroad.

There have been three particular aspects of isolation that have tested my resilience. These are: the lack of safe readers; the search for home; and the loss of my academic faith.

Lack of safe readers

No reader is completely safe but some are much more dangerous than others and this is particularly true for the sapling text. The sapling is fragile and needs space to breathe and grow. Luckily for me, I had a great supervisor; I couldn't have done it without him. Others I encountered did not have such green fingers. All readers take the text and make something else from it. For safe readers this is a quiet, questioning and imaginative act of reading. Safe readers understand that the text needs shelter but not control and that it is both connected to themselves as readers as well as to the writer but that it also has a life of its own. They are teacher/readers and they are recognisable by their tentativeness and encouragement. It is a lot to ask of a reader and there aren't many of them around. By way of contrast, the dangerous readers see the text

as alien and therefore to be mastered or dismissed. They are definite in their responses and they put a lot of energy into responding to what is *not* in the text. They are either noisy or silent. The silent ones are the worst – those readers who choose not to engage in the text at all. I have found the silence of readers who refused to, or who were not able to, engage with the text very challenging because when I was on shakier ground than I am now, I found it difficult to read that silence as anything other than rejection or disapproval.

The struggle to create something while it is under surveillance (from the academic management system), and particularly to answer endless questions about its linear direction while it was still evolving, made me very defensive of the writing. And yet as a writer I have needed readers to validate my work. Negotiating this paradox has been very demanding. The repeated demands to account for where I was going (the research degrees sub-committee: "As part of your proposal tell us what you will find out at the end of this study before you begin"; the first annual review: "Before you go any further, we would like you to write your methodology chapter,") seemed to me not only a pointless waste of time but antithetical to any understanding of transformational learning that is, well, transformational. That is to say, learning which has the potential to be a force that is beyond the control of the teacher and the learner.

In the middle stages of this work I was most vulnerable to the dangerous sort of readers because I desperately wanted affirmation, and to talk about the thing that was taking up so much of my time and playing such a big part in my life. Now, in the final year, I am much more secure. I am happy with my group of safe readers whom I trust and respect and I also work with another group of virtual safe readers in my imagination. These are the authors of books that I find very helpful and encouraging. Their writing feels like home to me. They haven't read my work yet but I know that when they do they will be safe. Ironically, now that I need them less and now that I have developed a stronger writing style, I am attracting more safe readers to the work. The text has developed its own energy; the sapling has become a living thing to be reckoned with. As it grew to be a tree it started to look after itself, it needed me less. And later it started to shelter me. Earlier on, though, protecting the sapling work from the dangerous readers was tiring, and relationships have been damaged by the process – in the words of Virginia Woolf, I have had to upset some *very good fellows*. This sense of writing in the desert has been isolating and it has certainly called on my reserves of resilience in order to keep going. There are benefits to spending so long in the wilderness, though – I can see that now. Deserts are arid and frightening places but you can hear more clearly under the bare night sky. And some trees grow there.

The search for a home

In recognition of the lack of safe readers who were available to me, I spent nearly a year and a half – the latter part of 2006 and all of 2007 – attending conferences and seminars and presenting papers in order to find like-minded souls. Early on, when the

work was nascent and vulnerable, I thought that if I looked hard enough I would find a ready made community of people who understood what I was doing and who would encourage me in it. I looked in earnest on conference websites and journals listings but to no avail. What tested my resilience in this period of the work was that I felt compelled to behave in relation to the thesis in ways that I would never behave in other aspects of my life. I am confident and grounded and I have a strong group of close friends. I am not accustomed to feeling needy and asking people to be friends with me but that is how I felt academically as I made contact with people after conferences and forced myself to network. And like all needy people, it made me very vulnerable to other people who might choose to get back to me or not, to respond to my work or not (see previous section). It was the academic equivalent of sitting at home and waiting for the phone to ring. The attack on my pride and self-concept as a successful and confident person was a real challenge to my resilience, and I hated it.

What I did find, was not exactly a community, but a loose affiliation of other hermits and the odd prophet in the wilderness (some of whom were linked to the HE Academy's Subject Centres) who could offer support and who understood what I was doing and who encouraged me. I met some excellent people who were selfless in their support for me and the work. This made it a helpful exercise and it made me re-appraise what I understood by community. Communities exist in the desert but they are moving, nomadic and loosely affiliated. The guarded citadels behind city walls could never provide a home for me – besides, even if I wanted to get in, the gatekeepers wouldn't let me pass.

My eighteen-month tour of the desert also taught me to be as wary as a fox about whom to trust. I was not prepared for the aggression and hostility that the work would ignite in some quarters of the

educational research establishment. My work plays around with the broadly post-structuralist assertion that all texts are narratively constructed and therefore one type of text (say an analysis of an interview) has no more claim to truth than another type of text (say a play script). At one conference a senior professorial figure in this world took strong exception to the concept of using drama as a way of looking at anything educational. "You're in danger," he said most sternly, "of using something that has been written by a male playwright and comparing it to interviews with real women!" That was exactly what I was doing! What shocked me about that for a while was not the grilling – of course I understand that some people think that is what gatekeepers are supposed to do – but the way that my understanding of a theoretical position could be so different from another one which was apparently inside the same (post-structuralist) stable. The incident has stayed with me and it taught me an important lesson in that there is a need for caution in working with those who appear to provide a home in terms of content but might be miles away in terms of approach or philosophical position. It was an important lesson learned and, in retrospect, I realise that it was a very lucky encounter early on, but it did underline, again, that I was isolated with regards to mainstream educational research and, in particular, with the wing of it that might look like home.

Loss of my academic faith

As I searched for a community in which I could feel supported and at home I became increasingly disillusioned with both disciplines – Education, because of its heavy reliance on a narrow version of evidence-based sociology (and to a lesser extent, cognitive psychology) and English, because of its disconnectedness and introspection. The things that had made me feel frustrated with the discipline as an English Literature graduate in my early twenties re-surfaced. And worse than that, I was starting to regard the very process of literary criticism (as

opposed to English teaching) as something that was parasitic, indecent even. It felt like voyeurism. The idea that thousands of people were making their living out of other people's creativity without ever putting themselves on the line, or facing the fear of exposure that comes with any sort of personal or creative writing, seemed now to me to be bizarre and wrong. Being on the outside of both disciplines was making me see the sham of each of them. But now there was something deeper still. It *all* started to appear as a sham to me, *all* of it seemed to be a parade of the emperor's new clothes. Academic writing seemed to be a masquerade and a distraction from the really difficult thinking and writing that happens without frameworks – a guard to protect people from engaging with what is real, difficult and authentic. Just before Christmas, 2007, as I was moving out of the middle stage of the work and into the final year, I wrote a play with a colleague in the Faculty of Education. We were attempting to use Boal's notion of *theatre of the oppressed* to dramatise some of the most difficult problems faced by student teachers in their encounters with secondary school students. So we wrote a play (Skinner and Hoult, 2008) that dramatised the course of a disastrous Year 10 English lesson on war poetry, taught by a student teacher. Inhabiting the characters' voices was so challenging and yet so liberating, that it allowed me to write in a way that I had never done before. This was so much harder than any thing I had done until then – it didn't come easily to me at all. We then took it to workshop with the student teachers themselves, with them taking the roles of the Year 10 students. The drama freed us all into new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and what exactly happens in the classroom. The whole process – from writing to workshop and rehearsal to performance to an audience of professionals from Education and Health – allowed a completely new level of honesty about the realities of teaching to be articulated by everyone. Somehow the mask of drama allowed a truth to be told that I had never encountered in other forms of thinking and writing about education.

The creative writing of the play crystallised a set of latent concerns and it made me question my faith in the whole 'scholarly' system. *All* of it – the referencing, the peer reviews, the methodology debates, the hypothesising and the concluding – the certainty, in fact – all of it was starting to appear to me as a gigantic sham, designed to keep people in their places and to screen academics off from what is messy, authentic and difficult. Like an atheist in a seminary, I was aware that I had lost my faith and was angry with the others who couldn't see through the hocus-pocus. But militant atheism is a deeply unimaginative position to be in – forever tied to closed versions of theism, like squabbling Siamese Twins, and forever trapped by language into denying the existence of what can't be described. I now need to move on from angry disbelief to find a kind of academic writing that is authentic and that acknowledges a space for other writers who can allow me to develop my ideas, while at the same time allowing that raw, risky revelation of the self to emerge.

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Doctoral supervision: imagery and integrity

Dr Hazel Bryan, Canterbury Christ Church University

Through purblind night the wiper
Reaps a swathe of water
On the screen: we shudder on
And hardly hold the road,
All we can see a segment
Of blackly shining asphalt
With the wiper moving across it
Clearing blurring clearing
Macneice, L (1974)

The imagery of the shuddering car, barely holding the road, in Louis Macneice's The Wiper perfectly captured my uncertainty as a doctoral student. His leaden description of the monotonous road, with its "hardly visible camber, the mystery of its invisible margins" reflected my experiences as a student – passionate, enthusiastic yet deeply uncertain as to the map, the shape of terrain to come. Whilst there were gauges to measure my speed and distance covered (word counts, supervisor comments, reviews), the importance of developing resilience in the face of uncertainty seemed to me to be central, with:

… never a gauge nor needle
To tell us where we are going
Or when day will come, supposing
This road exists in daytime.

Macneice's The Wiper has beautiful synergy for me as a doctoral student and the journey I took. Yet what of my expectations of my supervisor? Certainly, the wiper, "clearing blurring clearing" resonated with my needs – to be firmly at the wheel, yet with supervision that illuminated, took me deeper into darker uncharted territory, then illuminated again; a role that was absolutely central but not driving the study.

So, what now as a relatively new supervisor myself? Is the wiper a sufficient metaphor for how I should inhabit this role? Or will there be an expectation that

I will function as a deeply interventionist satellite navigation system? Before I attempt to construct my thoughts about the possibilities of the supervisory role, I feel it important to explore my beliefs in relation to the identity of the doctoral student. In *Human Traces*, Sebastian Faulks' two key characters (Jacques Rebieres and Thomas Midwinter) are psychiatrists practising in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Their joint quest and passion is to understand the mind, to further explore what makes us human and to begin to discover ways of treating mental illness. Whilst united in their quest, their life experiences were vastly different before they met; their belief systems are different and over time, their methodologies and therefore approaches to their work develop differently, sometimes causing emotional chasms between them. In this penetrating study of the human condition, Faulks illuminates a point about integrity and human enquiry. Rebieres and Midwinter are driven by impulses that have their genesis in what makes each of them who they are; the direction their research takes them is intricately woven into the fabric of their being. They are only ever able to be true to themselves – their world view and therefore their beliefs in their work were shaped by their DNA and coloured by their experiences. Whilst reading the exquisitely observed, often harrowing journey taken by Rebieres and Midwinter I was struck by the way in which they each sought out experiences and 'teachers' that resonated and had synergy with their differing methods. Whilst they

were both pioneers working at the frontier of knowledge, and often practising in the face of hostility, they were yet resilient and at home with their uncertainty. As a study of enquiry, methodology and integrity, Rebieres and Midwinter offer rich harvest. Their story illuminates the ways in which enquiry is deeply interwoven with personality, passion and beliefs. This seems to me to be a good place to start in terms of my construct of the doctoral student, as someone who is resilient enough to survive when enduring the arduous trek over *terra incognita* and seeks to be liberated through "curiosity, fascination and mobility of thought" (Brice Heath and Wolf, 2004, p.13).

If this then is my perception, my construct of the doctoral student, how am I to understand and inhabit the supervisory role? What are my possibilities of being? Central to my world view is Freire's work on transformational adult learning – that the process and struggle not only results in 'learning' but in real transformation of lives – a political endeavour. On reflection then, and thinking about this more deeply as I write, perhaps the doctoral experience is not so much a journey as an evolution. How might the supervisor support such an evolution? In the spirit of enquiry from the Enlightenment, whilst there has to be passion, there needs also to be control and cool analysis – a good place to start in terms of my supervisory beliefs. In this way the supervisor can explore with the student the dialectical relationship

between compliance and contestation in enquiry that is at the heart of the doctoral experience and in this spirit, Stephen Rowland's integrity and intellectual love in academic enquiry can be realised (Rowland, 2006). The doctoral process of evolving into a new self will probably involve the student in revisiting, rejecting, and rebuilding concepts. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), wrote of how young, academic women went through a process of ''murdering one's aunts'' to gain independence. This, I think is helpful in terms of doctoral supervision – the student is likely to go through a process that involves challenging and rejecting the supervisor's beliefs at some stage. Anticipating the murder of one's aunts seems to me to be a healthy supervisory expectation! Finally then, I am drawn back to the idea that the central supervisory role is one where the supervisor provides the context whereby the student can ''borrow the courage to explore'' (Claxton 2001 p.1).

An understanding of the importance of courage, resilience and ''hanging in with uncertainty'' (Claxton 2001, p.2) seems to me to be key for both the student and the supervisor. The doctoral student has a contradictory identity – as a rich, powerful and successful learner and yet one who must exist in deep uncertainty. Seamus Heaney's 'Tollund Man' articulates this contradiction and complexity most exquisitely:

Out here in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost
Unhappy and at home

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Living PhD: metaphors of research, writing and supervision

Dr Joanna Haynes, University of Plymouth

(with a contribution from Prof Karin Murris, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.)

Metaphors and analogies are often employed to characterise thinking, writing, teaching, learning and this was certainly the case as soon as the contributors to this publication began talking to one another about their experiences of doctoral research and supervision. This piece of writing explores some metaphors drawn from the experiences of PhD students in this writing group, and includes my own. Such metaphors reveal the epistemological stance that informs the research in question, as well as offering a meta-dialogue concerning the researcher, the process of research, relationships with self and others involved with them in this lived experience. The exploration of such metaphors can help us in the process of understanding or challenging positions of knowledge and authority in the university and with the kind of transformation that is implied by becoming a Doctor. I am suggesting that it is useful for doctoral students to notice, and to work quite explicitly with the metaphors that surface in their thinking, in the supervisory space, and within the PhD research itself.

My own PhD thesis is an enquiry concerning listening as a critical and philosophical practice in education. It asks what listening means and examines ideas about listening in educational settings in general and in adult/child relations in particular. I draw directly from my thesis, as well as my personal experience, in considering here the complex processes of learning and teaching involved in PhD studentship and supervision.

Listening is central to teaching and learning relations and to the creation of new knowledge, understanding and meaning. In characterising listening as '*the other side of language*' Corradi Fiumara suggests that when we seriously engage in listening, our 'rational' point of view may be impoverished by the state of disorientation that results (1990, p.43). Somehow, this intellectual and emotional disequilibrium is to be faced. She uses the concept of space to illustrate the departure to be made from an '*excessively logocentric culture*' and argues that we need to:

> *develop a capacity for genuine listening, that is an attitude which occupies no space but which in a paradoxical sense creates ever new spaces in the very 'place' in which it is carried out (1990, p.19).*

Listening is a vital aspect of receptiveness towards that which is elusive, perplexing and opaque. For Corradi Fiumara, the strong nature of listening is that it '*possesses no territory*' and '*occupies no space*' (1990, p.51). As far as thinking is concerned, critical and liberating capacities are bound up with the way that listening '*draws upon those depths where 'truth' does not lend itself to representation by means of institutionalised languages*' (1990, p.51). This description of listening and the struggle to articulate ideas expresses vividly the kind of creative and inventive work that brings the PhD into being, a 'space' that both student and supervisor can choose to occupy.

Corradi Fiumara's (1990) thesis on listening is one that involves silence, inner listening, dwelling, self-transformation and a trajectory towards co-existence. Her later work draws out the importance of attending to the metaphoric, symbolic and affective dimensions of communication within an expanded account of rationality (Corradi Fiumara, 1995, 2001). It stands in stark contrast with the kind of rationality traditionally associated with the doctoral research process.

Corradi Fiumara (1995) explores metaphor as an interaction between life and language, a process that shapes our reasoning and grasp of experience. Metaphor bridges the segregated categories of body and mind and the traditional distinctions of rational-versus-instinctual, often in highly personal ways:

> *Through a metaphoric appreciation of language, knowledge is seen not so much as the task of ' getting reality right' but rather as the enterprise of developing linguistic habits for coping with whatever reality-in-the-making we may have to confront.*
> (Fiumara, 1995:72)

Gestation and delivery metaphor

For me, the appeal of the gestation and birthing metaphor lies in its allusion to fundamental processes of life and growth. Ideas, like babies, are conceived, often through intimate relations. It is a metaphor that has personal significance for me as one who has carried and borne children, whilst engaged in periods of academic study and writing. For me, in spite of the lack of sleep and other distractions associated with the presence of small children, these have been intensely fertile and demanding periods of intellectual development in my life. Gestation and delivery can be interpreted as a metaphor for the tumultuous and at times unpredictable life cycle of knowledge creation. It is one that I have found extremely apt for my experience of the PhD.

I undertook my PhD as a mature student and was already established in an academic post in teacher education at the time. In preparing to do the work that this ESCalate publication includes, our writing group carried out a preparatory email correspondence about our experiences of doctoral research and thesis writing. In attempting to express my experiences, this is what I wrote:
Mine was a difficult conception, a complicated pregnancy and an arduous labour. Like an elephant, the gestation was lengthy. I had anticipated an institutionalized delivery, expecting carefully planned and structured supervision in a well established programme

of ante-natal care. However, what I got was a neglected pregnancy and a largely unattended natural birth and home delivery.

My first supervisor, a professional colleague, fell ill quite soon after I started and was not immediately replaced. My second supervisor I only met once and I decided he was not for me when he declined to return some of my writing that he had annotated, claiming that he needed to keep this for his records. I then approached another colleague to undertake the formal supervision, who was not a specialist in my field but whom I trusted to get me through the hoops. At the very final stages yet another second supervisor read a final draft of the thesis. That was a turning point: she acted as midwife. Recognizing that I was fully dilated and ready to push, she asked me what I was waiting for and told me to get on and deliver the baby. This was the encouragement and recognition I needed at this point to be able to complete the work and hand it in.

In fact, most of my 'real' supervision came in the form of on-going dialogues with two colleagues – each of whom provided different things. One (we could call her the 'health visitor') was an expert in my field and able and willing to respond to the writing as each chapter was written. The other (he was more of an 'obstetric technician') was very good at supporting the writing process and the practical/production side of the thesis. Both the health checks and the technical expertise were essential elements of my ante-natal care. Both were critical and trusted friends who listened to me and offered personal support as well, understanding fully how the thesis had to be balanced with work and family life and being familiar with the detail of this at particular points in time. The whole process of writing was further complicated by some persistent, inescapable and time consuming family difficulties just as I freed myself up to work solidly on writing the thesis. These difficulties and family demands could perhaps be symbolized as an

anxious or jealous older sibling. My experience was that, heavily pregnant with the thesis and impatient to give birth I had carefully set aside a time and space to attend to the last trimester, to take leave from my other roles. At this point, some particular issues for attention in my family suddenly and urgently came into view, pulling me away, physically, emotionally and intellectually, from the impending birth. Caring deeply for my family and knowing that this was the life I was living, I did not resist the pull but I felt the tension of trying to keep hold of the threads of writing and the courage to finish the thesis during this long period of my baby being 'overdue'. During this time, the health visitor and the obstetric technician described above played a crucial role in helping me to keep my heart open to eventual completion of the thesis.

Perhaps most PhD babies are monitored more carefully than mine was before birth and delivered in proper university labour wards. There were many disadvantages to the poor formal supervision I experienced but I couldn't give up on the study because it would not leave me alone, kept agitating within me. Once pregnant I had to deliver. Now I am delighted to be no longer pregnant. The advantage of the university's neglect was that I was able to write the thesis as I wished, without too much institutional restraint or interference. It was a naturalistic and creative process for me and it was crucial for me to present my work in a form and style consistent with the enquiry itself. My examiner's final report included a comment on the originality of both content and presentation noting my ability to work successfully 'outside the normal academic conventions'. Now of course, with a little distance from the birth, I am curious about my baby. How will she grow up outside these (academic) conventions? And what happens to the conventions now that she has been born?

The pregnant body metaphor

Below Karin Murris reflects on her experience of her PhD, through the metaphor of the pregnant body:

I was sitting next to a pregnant woman on the train, re-reading my thesis as a way of preparing for my viva. My thesis was about the metaphors that adults use when they think about children's thinking, conceptualising thinking as a thing, enabling thinking to be thought of as something 'slow' or 'fast', 'mature' or 'immature', measurable, controllable, divisible into chunks or skills and content. Bonnett (1995) uses the metaphor of the thinker as an agent as doing something , as if teaching is something 'out there' that the teacher can distance his or herself from, challenging the way that personal identity has been conceptualised in Western metaphysics for centuries. I can't recall whether I started playing with this idea as a result of, or before reading Battersby's (1998) of the absence of the female body in the history of epistemological ideas.

The presence of the pregnant woman reminded me of my own pregnancies, looking at a picture of a foetus and thinking: Have I got an alien in me, a stranger? It made me think of Aristotelian logic, something is 'a' and therefore cannot be 'not a' at the very same time (otherwise it's a contradiction). Thus, in Aristotelian terms I cannot be one person and two at the very same time, though this was what I experienced. A new person doesn't just come into existence (i.e. counts as 'one') when it is born. You communicate with this other person long before birth. It is not just a psychological awareness of this complex relationship – it's also the way you are treated by others. For example, other people think it is ok to touch your belly because you are pregnant in a way they would never do otherwise.

I thought it might be a valuable metaphor to illuminate the ways that bodies interact in teaching and learning situations. As a result of conversations about this with a friend, John Colbeck, I temporarily changed my spelling of 'I' to 'ii' as an expression of how I conceive of dialogical teaching; with 'the other' always already present.

On the train I suddenly became aware of distancing myself from the thesis, the static nature of the whole process of writing a PhD. Almost as soon as the thoughts are captured in words on paper (and that's what you will be judged on) they are stale. There is fluidity in dialogue that cannot be expressed. In addition, over the course of writing the thesis, the older material has to be left alone at some point, if any progress is to be made to completion. Yet as I approached the viva, I was conscious of aspects of my work that had already moved on and that I did not want to 'defend', as I assumed was expected in the examination process. So much emphasis seems to be put on the thesis (baby) itself, rather than the lived experience of the process (pregnancy). (Karin dictating to Joanna, Charney Manor, Oxfordshire, 18th March, 2008)

Developing and using metaphors

Following our writing group's email correspondence about some of our experiences, when we eventually met together to discuss ideas for this publication, the pregnancy and birthing metaphors seemed to trigger

other metaphors for members of our writing group. There was nothing deliberate about this, it just seemed to happen. Sometimes one person picked up the metaphor and extended it. At other points, associated metaphors were introduced. We did not necessarily share one another's use of the metaphors, but we could play in their shadows.

In our small group deliberations, metaphors of the body occurred frequently. The PhD process was described as a 'useful migraine' by one member of the group, who also used the idea of 'being scarred' by the experience. What was striking in this case was how positively these metaphors of suffering were embraced. Another person spoke of 'constipation' in the writing process and 'turning her back' on her thesis when the PhD was over, poignantly referring to it as 'stillborn', and as such a baby whose arrival provoked avoidance and silence. Metaphors of place such as 'black hole' and 'desert' were used by the group to express the desolation and isolation sometimes experienced during the doctoral process.

Some participants were able to make effective use of the group to articulate, or to create and develop, narratives of supervision. One person described the highly charged eroticism of the entangled space between the learner and teacher in supervision and the auto-erotic character of being a research student: painting in the bodies of supervisor and author. The research student can elect to be polygamous, responding selectively to the various qualities that different supervisors bring to the project. This narrative contained nuances of flirtation, disappointment, voyeurism, frustration, romance, betrayal and infidelity in the pedagogical space.

Parent/child and other family relations and circumstances featured both literally and figuratively in the discussion. In one case the great academic success of a younger brother seemed to result in one

of the group reporting that she did not feel 'real' and often questioning of her own 'legitimacy' as an academic. In another case supervision was experienced as overbearing parenting, a misguided effort to encourage and draw out the child and insist she speak, when the words would not come. The intensity of this mother/daughter mode of supervision rendered the experience something akin to psychoanalysis, during which the researcher's fears about writing remained unresolved, re-surfacing when the thesis was complete. In another case, readers and respondents to papers and presentations were characterized as 'safe' or 'dangerous' for the research student or for her nascent theorising. The character and quality of supervisors' listening to the PhD student featured in all these accounts.

The effort of supervision

For the supervisor, both the ongoing relationship and particular encounters with the student may be demanding. Two of the keys to Corradi Fiumara's account of the philosophical attitude are 'attention' and 'effort'. She characterises philosophical attention as steady, resilient and imperturbable, not able to be disturbed by the disorientation of unfamiliar ground (Corradi Fiumara, 1990, pp.144-5). As far as philosophical effort is concerned, listening can be very easy, even effortless, when there is momentum and flow and freedom from anxiety. Equally, it can also become intensely difficult, requiring the effort of stepping aside and making room for the incipient thought of the other. Corradi Fiumara describes the effort thus:

Philosophical work is an 'effort' if listening is to be both accepting and critical, trusting and diffident, irrepressible and yet consoling. The coexistence of these irreducible contrasts is the very strength it anchors to (1990, p.90).

She argues that listening is not linked to a particular philosophical orientation but is itself a 'form of rationality' (1990, p.91) that is '*underlying, going along with or reaching beyond, but not as being in opposition to anything*'. This philosophical effort is one that '*tends to free the movements of consciousness from those meta-paradigms that predetermine it*'. Listening points to the exits from outworn paradigms.

Supervisors may feel a tension between offering their expertise from the field, or drawing out lessons from their own good or bad experience of being supervised and the processes of listening to the originality of their student's enquiry and contribution. Karin Murris reports on an experience of PhD supervision from the perspective of a supervisor, alluding to the attention and effort that Corradi Fiumara describes:

Conception

As a supervisor, the obstacles to learning I have encountered myself have sometimes reappeared in the supervision process when I have tried to put myself in the place of students. But these are not necessarily their obstacles, they are mine. My obstacles were a lack of external dialogue with experts in the field to help my inner dialogue. I felt that my ideas were beyond my supervisors and they could not grasp them. I am aware that I may project my resentment at the comparative 'luxury' of the circumstances of others onto my students – I did it in these difficult conditions, so why are they making a fuss? I know I thrive under difficult circumstances, and as a resilient learner I can have high expectations of finding that same resilience in others.

It is all too easy to think that the conditions for conception are going to be similar to one's own. Some people would be very anxious without financial support or housing or the relationship often considered necessary to conception and pregnancy. It is crucial to discuss expectations in the early stages in an honest way and each time to negotiate ways of working that can

accommodate the people involved. The supervisor must understand the PhD student as an individual learner. For some, conception needs to be carefully planned. Others are happy that it will happen, sooner or later. At PhD level conception and early pregnancy involve a considerable degree of surrender to the unknown and this can create anxiety. You don't know at conception what the baby will look like. You cannot know how you will be changed by the experience.

Whose baby is it?

Getting to know one another is a necessary element of the supervisory experience and ideas become entangled in the process of construction. This is part of teaching. It is an intimate relationship. It can be difficult to identify ownership as ideas emerge in this space. Ownership of ideas is only problematic, in the context of a 'knowledge market', when ideas are attached to individuals as their belongings rather than to the process of interaction between the two, as in the case of the mother and the unborn baby. (Karin dictating to Joanna, Charney Manor, Oxfordshire, 18th March, 2008)

Metaphors of supervision

If notions of conception, pregnancy and giving birth surface in the experience of those undertaking PhDs, how suitable is the metaphor of midwifery to illuminate the experience of the supervisor and the relationship between student and supervisor? In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates, the son of a midwife, describes a number of possible faces of the teacher, philosopher, truth seeker. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, a dialogue concerning the nature of knowledge, the role he describes is that of the midwife.

The Socratic method is dialectical, aiming to arouse a genuine desire for authentic learning, moving the student from strongly held opinion, to floundering uncertainty and loss; from confidence to unease, confusion or anguish (Abbs, 1994; Matthews, 2003). The midwife's task in this process is to question in ways that help to reveal ambiguities or contradictions

that need to be resolved in the pursuit of truth, as Socrates puts it: *'the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the young man brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth'* (Plato, 1987).

The maieutic method involves assisting in the birth of ideas. What does it imply? Each birth is unique, although births have certain things in common. It is the mother who delivers the baby, many of whose features are unknown to either mother or midwife until the baby appears. It involves intensive labour, whose exact length and process is to some extent unpredictable, and so on.

Corradi Fiumara develops Socrates' metaphor of listening as midwifery and the effort associated with labouring and the delivery of newborn thoughts and ideas (1990, pp.143-147). The word 'delivery' has been prominent in recent educational debate in the UK. It often conveys the idea of the university or school as a warehouse, and the tutor/teacher as an operative, delivering the course/curriculum to students/children, according to a menu and pre-packed, as a courier might 'deliver' a bouquet or a pizza. By contrast with this imagery of delivery, Socratic listening, or maieutics, calls for a different kind of expertise. Corradi Fiumara's take on the midwife's role refers not only to her attendance at the birth but also to her reputation for wisdom in matchmaking. The maieutic listener therefore, is able to support the delivery of newborn thoughts *and* to make connections between thoughts, guided by the experience of assisting at other 'births' and by responding to the unique features of the birth in hand, however awkward or difficult (Corradi Fiumara, 1990; Haynes and Murris, 2000).

Different cultures of education and childbirth co-exist: the institutionalised and the naturalistic. Many current constructs of teaching and learning relations and of supporting childbirth put greater emphasis on reciprocal interaction between teacher and learner, or

midwife and mother to be, and the co-construction of knowledge or partnership in giving birth. The emphasis may have shifted from teacher to learner, from midwife to mother-to-be. While the fashion in baby clothing changes, the metaphor of midwifery seems to be an enduring one.

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Writing a collaborative dissertation: some reflective considerations

Dr Ken Gale, University of Plymouth

The sense of writing into a space is inhabiting me. I am aware that as I write into this space I will inhabit this space. This space will become through my inhabitation and will change. It is a space of lived experience, a writing space and I am aware that I am a late arrival. I have had the experience of the words that have already been shared and I wonder what effect/affect this will have, I wonder how you have all written yourselves into this space; a shared space.

So I sense that I am entering this space as an autoethnographer might begin a new venture. I am entering this space aware that it is a relational space, inhabited with the multiple and interconnected dynamics of self and other, selves and others. So my autoethnographic I/eye (Ellis, 2004) is sensitised; it carries both the subjectivity of my hesitant late arrival and the objectivity of the lens with which I begin to peer into the uncertainties of what being in this group might entail. I seem to be taking anticipatory and uncertain steps; I sense my own concerns and wonder how I will write myself into this experience.

I characterise most of my writing now as performative and collaborative. In offering a tentative exposition of what these terms mean to me I can begin by saying that when I write, in some way or another, I perform my/a self and in writing to and with others I see my writing as shared writing, it is co-labour, it is, perhaps, co-constructed. I can describe my writing in this way with confidence now. I feel able to assert this as an identification of a self that has become me in important and significant ways. I have recently written elsewhere that: 'I am in the writing: the writing is in me' (Gale and Wyatt, 2008, p.375). I am writing, I am writing with a sense that I want to dissolve the binary of the writer and the writing.

I am presenting this as concept, affect and percept and my logic is one of sense not of rationality (Deleuze, 2004a). With St.Pierre (1997) I feel that I am 'circling the text'. I am unsure who I am writing to, what I am writing for, what this writing is and what will become as a consequence of entering this shared writing space. I sense, however, that writing becomes through me and that I become through the writing. I have grown into this as part of a living space; I sense the lacunae, somehow having a temporary presence of emptiness but at the same pulsing, transmutating, living with viral affects, growing membranes and always changing. There is no starting point but I have to identify one: in part this is what this writing is about.

> *Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt submitted their joint EdD dissertation (Between the Two: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing) on 11 April 2008 for examination at the University of Bristol. Successful completion would grant them access to the 'oasis' of academia. Their viva voce (with the 'gatekeepers' to the oasis[2]) was set for 25 June, eleven weeks later.*
>
> (Gale, Speedy and Wyatt: 2010, forthcoming)

So, already, writing into this space is unusual for me. I think I can say that much of my writing, most of my published/public writing has been produced within the context of my collaborative writing relationship with Jonathan Wyatt. I have grown to write with Jonathan and so, in part, writing into this new and different writing space, is different for me; as I write now I am writing with his presence in this writing

even though I am not writing here in an explicit collaborative way. So writing to the intentions, the flavours and the goals of this writing space, a space that is about the experience of writing doctoral theses, I can only write in collaboration with him, even though at this stage of the writing process this collaboration is an implied one and one which is premised upon and infected by an intuitive, sensual, aesthetic and evaluative knowing of the nature of our collaborative work.

So what is our dissertation about?

Here is a copy of our abstract giving a descriptive overview which is intended to help in answering this question:

This joint dissertation emerges out of and develops through many exchanges and responses to each other's writing as we have inquired into our subjectivities and the way in which we have written about them over the last two and a half years. Initial curiosities to do with differences in our respective writing styles have led us on an experimental, transgressive and nomadic exploration into many aspects of our lives. Gender, religion and spirituality, friendship, childhood, relationships, fathers, mothers and children are for us, perhaps, the most significant of these.

We have been influenced in our work primarily by Deleuze; both by his philosophical concepts or 'figures' – lines of flight, haecceity, rhizomes, becoming and more – and by the insights he offers into his collaborations with others, particularly with Guattari and Parnet. Indeed we feel that the continually changing but emerging conceptualisation of our dissertation is best characterised by the Deleuzian figure of a body-without-organs. We have not only been alert to the influence of

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2 The Internal and External Examiners of our Dissertation

others, our 'inhabitants', upon the individual and collaborative aspects of our work, but also of the multi-dimensional writing spaces which we inhabit as our inquiries have shifted and changed with the rhizomatic growth of this work together. Richardson's inducement to use 'writing as a method of inquiry' has encouraged us to experiment with drama, fictional writing and poetic representation, as well as to engage reflexively with these different styles and genres through our writing processes. Further, the way in which Deleuze writes of his work with others as between the two(s) has been particularly influential in the writing styles we have worked with and in the multiple and interconnected nature of the content of our dissertation: "we write to fill the spaces between us and yet sense that we never will" (Gale & Wyatt, 2007, p. 803).

So what was the experience of writing this dissertation?

I will respond to this question as one half of a collaborative writing partnership that has been writing together for approximately five years. This is a partnership that has worked toward and lived within a dissolving of separate identities and an emerging and transgressing transmutation of notions of self and other. In this respect, as a single author and for the purposes of this project, I have to acknowledge the collaborative presence of Jonathan in this writing. It is important to stress that some of the following writing has appeared in the dissertation itself and will appear again in future joint publications and is, therefore, *our* writing. So in order to convey this I have presented my answer to the above question in the form of a collaborative 'we' but in doing this I am aware that elsewhere I am also writing in a voice that only expresses the other in implicit ways. Whilst it is likely that the other of this 'between-the-two' might

express this answer differently, writing these words feels like a performative expression of our collaborative work together.

When we[3] decided to write together we were motivated to enquire into our different writing styles. As students on the Doctoral Programme at Bristol we became aware of each other's work through workshop activities, seminar presentations and so on. Somewhere there was a moment when we came together, when we decided to do this. Perhaps we were fleeing from something, following lines of flight, becoming tentative, curious researchers, eager to discover new ways of knowing and new ways of being. In our first published writing together (Gale and Wyatt, 2006, 2007) we reflect upon these different writing styles. At this time we saw Ken, the serious minded inquisitive researcher, engaged in conceptual analysis, eager to inquire and to present ideas in a dense and detailed 'academic' style. On the other hand, we found Jonathan, the sensitive story teller, exploring the subtleties and nuances of the heart, passionate to communicate through rich narrative accounts and elegies of loss.

This was our first intersection, the point at which desire was sparked, a desire that soon pushed, pulled, teased and taunted our writing in so many different directions. As we began to write to each other we began to be aware that our writing was becoming unique to us; we were writing in a different way, as Deleuze describes his work with Guattari, 'You know how we work – I repeat it because it seems to me to be important – we do not work together, we work between the two' (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 17). This passage became important as a means of describing our work together and because of this we cite it often in our work. To paraphrase a further

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3 A version of the following seven paragraphs forms part of the opening chapter of Gale and Wyatt (forthcoming, 2010).

figurative construction in the work of Deleuze, we came to characterise our work together as 'becoming-writing'. As we continued to work together our writing, on the one hand, emerged as 'a method of inquiry' (Richardson, 2000) where we found our writing in this space, our 'between-the-two', as a means of finding out and discovering and of constructing new meanings and sensitivities and, on the other hand, that we were engaged in a lived, embodied experience. In this sense we came to express the idea that writing becomes us; our work together began to dissolve the writer/writing binary. So we came to realise that we were both researching into the writing and becoming through writing.

So, what is this dissertation, what is it for?

We have observed that a dissertation is often represented as a body of knowledge or as a body of work that is the culmination of years of study, research and investigation. In this sense the dissertation can be seen to exist within a set of particular and highly recognisable organisational parameters, possessing a formal structure and constituted by a set of interrelated formal elements or parts. We found that we did not write our dissertation in this way and whilst we always intended that our dissertation would contain all that it is necessary for a dissertation of this kind to contain, it emerged in our writing together in this way that what we began to produce resisted the formal structural and organisational features that a conventional dissertation might contain. Again we drew upon the work of Deleuze to provide us with an appropriate figure that gave sense to the way way in which the form and content of our dissertation unfolded and continues to unfold. In part the forms and figures created by Deleuze reject the aborescent structural form of the conventional academic narrative, of the tree with its branches and leaves reaching out for light and its system of roots, around the central tap

root probing down into the earth, searching for stability, working to establish strong foundations. In place of this traditonal model, with its central core and firm trunk-like body, Deleuze proposes, through the application of principles of multiplicity, connection and heterogeneity, a model of the rhizome form.

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialised languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogenous linguistic community. Language is… "an essentially heterogeneous reality". There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity. Language stabilises around a parish, a bishopric, and a capital. It forms a bulb. It evolves by subterranean stems and flows, along river valleys or train tracks; it spreads like a patch of oil. It is always possible to break a language down into internal structural elements, an undertaking not fundamentally different from a search for roots...a method of the rhizome type… can analyse language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence.' (Deleuze, 1988, pp.7-8)

The figure of the rhizome is central and recurrent in the work of Deleuze and can be seen to provide a valuable means of understanding the synthesis of form and content to be found in his work. The influence of this upon the creative evolution of our work together was immense. Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is an example of a book of the rhizome form, where, instead of a series of chapters delineating the logical progression of the book from its introduction to its conclusion, this book takes the

form of an open system of 'plateaus'. 'It does not pretend to have the final word. The author's hope, however, is that elements of it will stay with a certain number of its readers and will weave into the melody of their everyday lives.' (Massumi, 1988: xiv) It is possible to enter and leave the book at will and not follow an enforced linearity. Reading *A Thousand Plateaus* became of great significance for us as both the form and content of our dissertation began to emerge in the process of our writing. The spirit of the rhizome and its structural implications can be found in another important Deleuzian figure and this figure also became a major influence upon the structure and form of this dissertation.

In drawing upon Artaud's 'body without organs' Deleuze (1988, 2004b) evokes a figure that began to infect our thinking, working on us like a virus as the writing gradually began to grow and take shape. 'The body is the body/it stands alone/it has no need of organs/the body is never an organism/organisms are the enemies of bodies' (2004b: 44). Deleuze uses the 'body without organs' (BwO) as a means of rhizomatically expressing freedom, of releasing the potential of the body from the constraints of habit, character and affect. In this respect the BwO involves an active experimentation with the unrealised potential of the body, perhaps through the destabilisation and transgression of traits, features and ways of doing that have tended to construct the body in particular ways, limiting its potential within a recognised organisational form. The BwO exists beyond the organism,

(w)e come to the realisation that the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organisation of the organs called the organism. (Deleuze,1988, p. 158)

What became crucial to us in using the BwO as a figurative representation of the way in which we began to see our dissertation working was that in his writing Deleuze clearly sees the potential of the body as being realised through multiplicity and connection. As we follow lines of flight and flee from the forces that might be seen to constrain us, we engage in nomadic inquiry, we are becoming 'nomadic subjects', (Braidotti, 1994) territorialising spaces and allowing 'the BwO to reveal itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines' (1988, p.161). In this way we came to understand the BwO as not rejecting the organs that might be seen to constitute it, rather the type of organisation that encourages it to exist in particularly narrow, fixed and stable ways.

So, we began to work with the idea that our dissertation was experimental, transgressive, working to express a desire to be curious, to destabilise and to trouble the givens of accepted discourses, knowledge constructions and ways of thinking and doing. In this sense our desire was productive. We were encouraged by the multiple, connected, social nature of the BwO; it seemed that the becomings of our 'between-the-two's' had begun to work in this way and we became encouraged to think about our dissertation as a BwO, an inquiry in, into and through writing, following a logic of sense, working with sensation as a means of inquiry, transgression and creativity. Unlike the organism which establishes concepts and ideas as organs in fixed and established ways, we began to see the writing in our dissertation as both creating and containing multiple, interconnected assemblages, haecceities, within a logic of sense and sensation, as the basic units of our work.

We began to use the work of Deleuze as a way of first thinking about, then problematising and eventually attempting to dissolve the traditional binary of form and content. As a consequence we began to experiment with different tropes and genres and to ask questions about our writing together and about how to best to represent our selves in the work. Whilst the collaborative nature of our work had always been its driving force it was when we began to encounter the work of Pelias, Spry and others that we began to see the need to write to the performative nature of what our dissertation was about.

Pelias describes a 'methodology of the heart' as a means of displaying the

> *researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings himself (sic) forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study.*
> (Pelias, 2004, p.1)

We became influenced by the embodied nature of Pelias' approach that seeks to 'foster connections, opens spaces for dialogue, and heals.' (ibid, p.2). Consequently we felt that the 'body' we were beginning to present as the culmination of our work together up to this time, was not simply a 'body of knowledge' but an expression of our lived experience of writing the dissertation, involving not simply our ideas but also the complex assemblage of our

emotions, feelings and values as our writing together began to grow. We began to see corroborative connections between Pelias' 'methodology of the heart' and Deleuze's BwO. In his argument Pelias builds up a picture of the multiple and inter-connected dimensions of the body and integrates these into his inquiry. In this respect he offers a powerful deconstruction of the formal conception and organisation of the body and in so doing provides a clearly illuminated representation of the 'body-without-organs'. It also suggested to us a way of thinking about creating our dissertation; increasingly this became the way we wanted it to be it to be.

It only makes sense to talk about this dissertation in relation to our supervisor. In so many respects this piece of work would not have been possible without the crucially important role played by Dr. Jane Speedy who took on the task of supervising our work. Jane sets the scene:

> *It was a seminar on auto-ethnography. I didn't realise it at the time, but introducing Jonathan as one half of 'Gale and Wyatt' somehow sealed their fate. After that there was no going back. And when the request came from them to produce a joint dissertation I was somehow expecting it, even though I hadn't thought about it at all. This narrative programme[5] I had started seemed to just keep writing itself into the next space along... I definitely wanted to be*

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4 The Narrative and Life Story strand of the university's Doctor of Education programme.

in on this. I remember thinking that I'd be really pissed off if they chose another supervisor.

Before we all got carried away I decided to check with the guardians[5] and discovered, like much of my experience of setting up this programme, that I was pushing at an open door. The requirements and criteria were to be the same, but this dissertation needed to be twice the length and the authorship of each aspect needed to be clearly identifiable. This all seemed straightforward although the latter criterion came to seem more and more absurd as time, space and identities passed and by-passed each other and folded in on themselves.

I was off with two nomads, or, at least, they were off and I was watching from an open door. I was standing on the threshold and could see both ways – down the dark corridors behind, lined with shelves of scholarly texts and manuscripts, and out into the sand and wind beyond – brightly lit, but hazy and uncharted.

(Gale, Speedy and Wyatt: 2010, forthcoming)

In many respects what Jane writes here severely understates the importance of her role in contributing to this dissertation, both in terms of its process and its product. Whilst so many aspects of this collaborative work deconstruct and challenge the traditional academic conception of the dissertation it is not an over-statement to say that it would not have been possible, certainly not in the successfully completed form that it now takes, without Jane's role. Paradoxically, in many ways Jane's work supports the traditional conception of the supervisor's role, in terms of unflinching and continuous academic and pastoral support, sustained intellectual rigour and a willingness to work with the ideas that we were putting forward in a continually supportive but always challenging kind of way.

Coda

On the 25th June 2008 Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt successfully defended their Joint Dissertation, *Between the Two: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing and Subjectivity* at a *viva voce* at the University of Bristol. The Examiners made no recommendations for change in passing the work.

At the 5th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry at the University of Illinois Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt received an Honourable Mention (Experimental) at the 2009 Illinois Distinguished Qualitative Dissertation Award for *Between the Two: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing and Subjectivity*.

In March 2009 Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt submitted a book proposal entitled *Between the Two: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing and Subjectivity* to Cambridge Scholars; the proposal was accepted and the book is due for publication in the early part of 2010.

5 The University Administration

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Creating an authentic intellectual position

Rachel Segal, Higher Education Academy

My professional role – my academic day job, epistemologically and conceptually far removed from the arena of my doctoral work – often leads me to ask colleagues to identify and articulate the central pedagogic 'problem' or issue with which their work is concerned. In attempting to answer the same question of my PhD work and my approach to it, I have found that the notion of integrity – in fact, a tripartite construction consisting of the academic, professional and personal as inextricably linked – to be crucial to understanding my own identity formation and the implications of that.

I was, a few months ago, afforded the luxury of a safe place (metaphorically and physically) to discuss candidly and explore, in an invigoratingly freeform way, my personal experience of 'doing' a part-time PhD and these unformed and meandering reflections flow from that. Without that opportunity, I am not sure that I would have found the time to untangle my

thoughts and experience around how it has been for me to 'do' my PhD (which has been transferred between a number of institutions for various reasons, and which has remained a research degree, always at a Russell Group institution).

When I first registered as a part-time doctoral student, the impulse derived mostly from my passion for the subject (for passion read love but also frustration), the fact that I had the brain power to do it, the desire to do a really good job of it, and the idea that it would be essential for the kind of academic path that I felt I wanted to pursue in life. This all made perfect sense and I felt that I had chosen the ideal supervisor – a scholar well known to me and someone I respected and trusted greatly (as is still the case). He got a readership to an institution that didn't offer part-time doctorates in the discipline – a great achievement for him but a real spanner in the works for me – and not so long afterwards began a string of

compromises around supervision while mentally I put my PhD on the backburner. In hindsight, I think this was probably an uncharacteristically cowardly move.

I also applied for a lectureship on the grounds that the application process would be a good experience for me. I was surprised to be offered the job – again an exciting development for me but another spanner in the works. My research is in the field of film musicology and at the time I was also a professional performer, so there was no room for proper PhD work and the work was again placed on the backburner.

My career has continued to take an academic direction and higher education is still at the heart of what I do but the route and the end goal have shifted. I don't see myself returning to a full-time departmental teaching and research post and I no longer need a doctorate for my current career path. Now, aside from an urge to wear the floppy hat, I want to complete my doctorate because not having it doesn't represent who I am and what I know about my subject. I want to do it for me and for an important part of my own identity.

At the heart of my work, whether musicological or otherwise, has remained a strong desire to contribute to the discipline or, perhaps more explicitly, to a better understanding of and engagement with music together with the desire (and, to some extent, responsibility) to share the jouissance of intellectual endeavour *per se*. This has always driven my approach to working with students and other colleagues. My journey is current and pretty raw right now: as I write this, I am struggling to find uncluttered time and motivation, the brain space and permission, both internal (emotional/intellectual) and external (genuine leave from the day job) to make real progress on writing-up my thesis.

I shared my thoughts about this piece with a colleague in another university who is in the writing-up stage of a (very) part-time PhD. She is also in a responsible and demanding full-time role in which she is stimulated, challenged and faced with frustrations on a daily basis. We were able to empathise with each other's stories across a range of experiences: of recalcitrant and resentful employers, the system of strategies by supervisors or departmental politics that attempted to shoehorn us into a particular academic orthodoxy and our resistance to being drawn into areas of study that might better suit the interests of our employers than our own intellectual needs and interests. These are pretty common issues for people choosing to engage in doctoral research on a part-time basis. For both of us, our day jobs, while in the realm of academe, do not have any direct connection with the subject matter or the discipline area of our doctoral research and this has brought its own challenges in relation to academic identity.

My confidence in my ability to claim authority about my particular expertise has developed most strikingly over the past two years This is something that dawned on me really quite forcefully when I had a proposal accepted for a series of radio programmes to be broadcast nationally and on the web by the BBC, about my area of expertise. When I made the proposal I felt I had more than enough material and understanding to have something useful to say to a national Radio 3 audience. My work to date is substantial enough to warrant this opportunity and was recognised as such by programme commissioners at the BBC. Nevertheless it was a jolt when the producer asked me how I would like to be introduced on air, prompting me to make a clear decision about my primary identity when recording the programmes. My 'day job' is unrelated to this expertise but does define me in professional academic terms. Being described as a PhD student

didn't feel right – it didn't represent my work or achievements – so I opted to be called 'a musicologist', locating my academic identity firmly within my discipline – something I hadn't really done for several years.

I have come to realise that the key issue for me is the tripartite notion of personal, academic and professional integrity and how each strand serves to construct one's identity. Engagement in doctoral research is, I think, a process through which one is led to question and at times struggle to maintain each of these three elements. I guess that what I have been trying to negotiate is my own trajectory across and around *reproduction* on one side and *originality* on the other: something that could easily become framed simplistically in terms of polarisation. I want to steer a course between dire, arid, reproduction (in its most technical sense) and originality, so that I come to be recognised, from my own and other people's perspectives, as having created an authentic intellectual position in regard to my specialism and my passion: one which has avoided the inauthentic by avoiding activities around posturing, ego inflation or

the creation of legacy. In essence it's about the emergence of an integrated and authentic personal, academic, and professional identity, which has engaged fully and genuinely with the need to contribute.

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The desert of academia: the trials and tribulations of balancing supervisory contact and input with the necessary isolation of doctoral research

Dr Raymond Cummings, St Mary's University Belfast

Writing an account of the technical and supervisory practices involved in the composition of a doctoral thesis perhaps gains an added dimension of self-consciousness when the study in question was on *Discourses of Anxiety in Later Medieval Literary Traditions*. Professional self-awareness adopts a further fraught aspect when the literary texts and traditions that I tentatively deconstructed involved narrators beset by the anxieties tied to their physical and intellectual confinements. Characters that were unable to abandon their books, that struggled with the textual and spiritual complexities of theological doctrine and religious practices were, and continue to be, the focus for my investigations and theories. The endeavours of desert eremites to stave off visions conjured by the noonday demon became intertwined with the struggles of Chaucer's quasi-autobiographical narrators of dream visions such as *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*. Such narrators, initially burdened by insomnia or unrelenting interpretative curiosity, struggled under the illusion of being unable to direct their thoughts into textual form. Their literary misdirection takes us on a narrative journey in which one trick merely distracts us from another, drawing us further into the maelstrom of their textually layered rhetorical strategies. Throughout the process we are continually offered the simple truth that the journey they are on is the same as the one that they have ushered us into, and so their texts, products of medieval culture and the vestiges of earlier classical traditions, pre-empt the later works of literary theorists and philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. At the centre of all of these ideas, there also exists the notion of the individual mystic, scholar, reader or writer, working alone and self-reflexively attempting to make sense out of the work that they are examining and producing and the culture and environment within which they are critically composing it.

A doctoral thesis develops organically. It does not simply spring into being, a product of a fully formed hypothesis and interconnected ideas. Often when the writer looks back upon what they have created after the research process, their textual Frankenstein's monster can seem less monstrous than it did through the course of its tentative composition. However, the time that this impression can take to build in the author's mind is testament to how difficult the experience can be. In all of this the role of the supervisor can more than simply tip the scales between invention and crisis; it is in itself perhaps more important than the ill-formed prototypical idea with which the student begins.

Herein lies the dichotomy of any postgraduate course of study, the difficult balance between a perceived taught element and the need for independent thought and academic exploration. The idea of teaching in itself can be the point from which confusion can first spring. After all, when all is said and done, a PhD is a research endeavour, the title and aims of which are derived from the scholastic interests of the individual postgraduate candidate. The applications to pursue such a course are made towards the end of either a Master's or Bachelor's degree, and should identify the candidate's recognition of the responsibilities that they are taking upon him or herself. The ideas that they wish to study, that they shall seek to confirm, refute, deny, champion or even be amazed at are proffered by them. After all, a PhD is an independent research project. When it is first begun, reference is made to the support of the department within which the research is being pursued, and to the available resources of the overarching institution. Ultimately, however, and this is particularly the case for some supervisors, it is the student who needs to recognise that s/he is the one who has to do the work: the supervisor will not do it, nor will they perhaps more feasibly guide their student almost every step of the arduous way.

This of course, brings us into direct contact, or perhaps a more appropriate term would be conflict, when we consider the pedagogy that any PhD supervisor individually maintains. Does he maintain a controlling, or guiding approach? Is she focused upon developing the thesis that her candidate is working upon, or is she attempting to develop the individual critical skills and methodological sensitivities of the postgraduate? Despite the surface veracity of Murphy *et al.*'s (2007) proffered categories and classifications, no single supervisor can be located easily into just one of these fields. Ultimately each supervisor is either a successful or unsuccessful tapestry of each of these elements, a factor that is further complicated by the role that the student derives, or believes that they should derive, from the weft of this weave.

From my own personal experience of doing a PhD, it certainly helps if the supervisor establishes from the very start what it is exactly that they expect from you. A variety of studies have established that 'problems in supervision arise because candidates and supervisors proceed on different assumptions and have different and unclear expectations' (Murphy *et al.* 2007, p. 210). My own first meeting involved a discussion of suitable tasks that I could be going about, the first of which was the rewriting of my initial application abstract before then proceeding to the library to begin compiling a suitable bibliography for my research topic. From our first meeting, my previous experiences with my supervisor, who had been a lecturer and tutor at various points throughout both my undergraduate career and during my Master of the Arts degree, were broadly reaffirmed. Necessary boundaries were re-established, as by this stage in our careers we had become friends, and I was left with little doubt as to how important it was for both of our careers that I pursue my research topic to the best of my ability.

Always, the importance of writing was established. This point was hammered home to me time after time. I could not expect to gain advice or guidance on work if my supervisor was unable to read it. Of further importance, however, was the then unvoiced concern that my supervisor had regarding the fact that I had taken a year out of my academic career. After finishing my Master of the Arts degree I had decided to take a year out to rest before applying for funding to pursue my doctorate. Although I had read extensively in that time, and had taken a job as a proofreader for a publishing company that maintained several newspapers, when I returned neither I nor my supervisor were in any doubt that my critical skills might have dulled somewhat, and I feel no shame now in admitting that it took longer than I had expected to rediscover the vestiges of my scholastic instincts. Furthermore, it was an issue that ultimately led my supervisor to confront me about the work I was doing. In the first few months he had taken the stance of allowing me to do my research without becoming too involved. In the context of a PhD conducted within the forum of the Arts and Humanities, where the theses are often largely philosophically and conceptually driven fusions of textual, anthropological, historical and political analyses, the student cannot be told what to do. The idea has to be gleaned from the interests that develop during their earlier academic research. At the beginning guidance is definitely necessary, but it should be guidance that is aimed at challenging the theories that they begin to develop and at honing the work that they being to produce.

Of course, related difficulties have emerged. For instance a particularly difficult issue concerning the developments and innovations that are occurring in doctoral projects due to increasing pressures upon academic institutions and their departments to attain greater levels of research funding has become more widely recognised (Adkins, 2009). Barbara Adkins has observed that:

> *In the context of intensified strategies to accredit and professionalise postgraduate supervision in the academic field, there is an attendant increasing requirement for supervisors to be strategic, reflective and to prioritise timely completions.* (ibid, p.165)

Adkins' research recognises an extremely practical consequence of this increasing pressure on departments and individuals to be more innovative and to diversify more widely. Some students and supervisors find themselves in the hazardous position of the supervisor lacking sufficient knowledge to guide the doctoral candidate appropriately on a particular topic. Adkins maintains that:

> *Students need to be able to trust their supervisor to understand the nature of the journey involved in work across disciplines to help them make judgements about the scope, difficulty and timing of their work. When faced with these issues, students can often feel insecure about the project and, at these points, demand a significant amount of reassurance and support.* (ibid, p.174)

There is certainly an element of truth here regarding the responsibility of a supervisor to remain both aware and to be able to comment suitably on a subject that may test the bounds of their scholastic expertise and professional knowledge. Furthermore,

such moments undoubtedly offer an opportunity for the student's own pedagogical development via their ability to express, comment upon and critically dissect ideas. A practical point which must also be raised is the simple fact that supervisors are not omniscient: a research topic which is deemed suitable for any mode of doctoral research is, after all, supposed to maintain its own individually innovative qualities. Ultimately, my experience of PhD supervision as the supervised was exceptional. It is a difficult process to achieve, a balance between teaching and direct guidance, and 'hands off' observation and developmental discourse. On the part of both the supervisor and the supervised it is also important that each recognises the strains and responsibilities that the other labours under. As I have already said, a PhD is at its heart an isolated and isolating programme of investigative research, a fact which both the student and the supervisor should ultimately recognise.

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Publishing papers from your PhD

Dr Geraldine Magennis, St Mary's University Belfast

''I won't leave without what I came for!'' I can clearly recall uttering this outburst as I challenged the opinions of a temporary replacement supervisor who had kindly offered to guide me while my main supervisor was on sick leave. Looking back I am a little shocked at my impertinence and forwardness. However, I had not given up a full-time, permanent teaching post, the opportunity of purchasing my own home and financial security to achieve anything other than a PhD. It had been a long-held ambition of mine and one that involved many personal and professional sacrifices. I did not take the more traditional (and perhaps sane) route of completing a Master's degree part-time and then transferring to a doctoral programme. I jumped straight in to studying a PhD from primary school teaching, not having studied since leaving college eight years previously. I was thirsting for an academic challenge but one that I could give my full attention and time to and dare I say it – enjoy. I had heard so many horror stories from friends and colleagues who had struggled and stressed their way through higher degrees while working full-time and in many instances raising

families, running businesses and providing elder-care while trying to maintain happy, harmonious marriages. Although I had the shared responsibility of helping to care for elderly and infirm parents, it seemed like a worthy risk to take. Besides, is there ever a 'right time' to embark on such a huge undertaking?

Shortly after commencing the course, it came time to meet with my supervisor and although we had not yet spoken, I was acutely aware of 'Jude's' reputation. She was considered a formidable and well-respected academic who was not shy and retiring about giving her opinions. This image was borne out when we had our first meeting in a local coffee shop which was to become our regular meeting place. As we drank coffee and exchanged pleasantries the conversation turned to the business of supervision. I recall telling her that I would find it very difficult to receive heavy criticism since I really did not know where or how to begin this mammoth task of writing a thesis. The thought of having a sea of perhaps harsh annotations across my work in red pen really unnerved me. Obviously I knew this was part and parcel of the deal

but I wanted to alert her to the fragility of my ego as I embarked on this exciting but somewhat terrifying journey. The meeting concluded with her explicitly requesting one thing from me above all else – honesty. She asked that I always be truthful about how I was progressing even if the news was not good. Having been a little taken aback by this, I found to my surprise that I was about to be bluntly honest with her right there and then. Her personality was similar to that of one of my siblings and my deep-seated fear was that we would not get along. She was visibly struck by this comment but I think nonetheless grateful for my candour. From that day forward, we did not exchange hostile words nor did we have any grave differences of opinion.

I embraced my new academic life immediately and relished the avenues and opportunities it created for me. I thrived on the academic debates that I now was able to observe and take part in through the university school's lunchtime research seminar programme. It was liberating to have time to read what interested me and to attend national and international conferences. More importantly, my desire to write, even if it was not academically sound, was being satisfied. On the social side, I cherished the close-knit friendships that were beginning to form with other doctoral students and research assistants within the university. The feelings of isolation that can often be associated with teaching in the early years were dissipating. I knew that I had made the right choice.

'Jude' and I met regularly over the next three years, except on those occasions when she was unavoidably ill which was quite often and for prolonged periods. Her advice to me had always been 'just write!' and so I would normally send her a chapter ahead of time and then she would discuss her deliberations with me at the meeting. Relations

were always cordial and the feedback welcomed. Since my research study was to have an international component to it, 'Jude' strongly advised that I should not write papers or give presentations during the process but rather spend my time and energy preparing for my data collection phase half-way across the world. I duly complied. The pattern of supervision continued along these lines throughout the duration of my PhD studies. On many occasions I felt fortunate to have been assigned such a person since I began to feel that our professional relationship was friendly rather than cold and clinical. This element injected a degree of warmth and humanity into the process which in my view was vital for survival and enjoyment of the journey. We often talked about our lives, families and hobbies which signalled a necessary break from the world and workings of academia.

Although we had no major disagreements I did feel that I was getting tangled up in my thoughts and seemed to be recurrently saying the same thing in a variety of different ways. I alerted 'Jude' on a number of occasions that I was not going to make the deadline but perhaps she felt it was the standard line most students use as the end approaches. Not having experience of writing at PhD level nor indeed collaborating on academic papers, I assumed that the situation was not beyond redemption otherwise she would have identified that the study was derailing. However, no such remarks were made so ironically I continued to write, in the vain hope of rectifying the situation. With three weeks until my submission date I can clearly recall my feelings of bewilderment turning to panic as I hit the 154,000 word mark and rising….

I called 'Jude' on the telephone and asked that she did not speak until I had finished saying my piece. If that involved breaking down in tears – so be it. It was only

after I told her that I did not think that she was *hearing* me and the gravity of my situation that she realised how serious I was. I told her that my thesis was in an indefensible state and that if I was forced to submit it as planned I would not turn up for the viva. Not only that, but I would not return to finish it. This final statement frightened me the most since I could potentially see my initial fears of not achieving my PhD coming to fruition. It felt so unfair since it was not due to a lack of work on my part that I had reached this impasse, quite the opposite in fact. I acted on all of the advice given but did not know how to write succinctly at this level. As a consequence, she advised me to seek a late extension. The next seven months were literally spent editing this meandering, formless document I had created. Our meetings continued with the focus being on distilling the substance within the thesis and bringing shape to the final product. On May 1st of the following year I submitted two edited but nonetheless very substantial volumes for examination. Six weeks later came the viva which I found to be tough but extremely enjoyable – I finally got to say my piece, to justify to myself as well as others that this study was worth doing on a number of levels. I felt that I had vindicated my decision to leave a well-paid and secure job to pursue my academic dream.

Looking back on my experience of studying at PhD level, I began to realise that 'giving birth' so to speak to this 'baby' I had longed for was the easy part of the journey. Despite days when I felt despondent and inadequate I still felt excited and exhilarated by the challenge I had set myself. With hindsight and increased distance I began to realise that my relationship with my supervisor had played a much more significant and emotional part in my journey than maybe I had appreciated. In retrospect I feel as though I had been the leading adult in the relationship. Perhaps I had assumed too much responsibility for my work. I was acutely aware that this was 'my baby' and so I had to solve all problems connected with the 'birthing process.' By nature, I strive to be independent and proactive in my life and so the possibility of sharing responsibility with another or getting into confrontations with my supervisor did not appear to be options. The last thing I wanted to do was to hand any control over to someone else since I had fought strongly never to return to my initial undergraduate days which were characterised by naïvety and vulnerability.

In a sense, it felt as though 'Jude' had been my 'mother figure' who was there to guide me through a momentous period in my life. It resonated with my own expectations as a teenager who yearned for closer direction and nurture as I grew into adulthood. As a child looks to their parent for gentle guidance and protection I too turned to my supervisor for advice and counsel about a world I did not yet know. At the time, I presumed that since there was no monumental break-down or fracture in relations that I was just experiencing the inherent doubts and pitfalls that any other doctoral student does.

However, with the luxury of hindsight, I realise that some of my most basic needs had not been met, yet I was just so grateful to be given help while always remaining mindful of 'Jude's' limited time and heavy work schedule. Nonetheless, it seems incredible that the sheer volume of the work I was producing did not alarm her especially as the deadline loomed.

I hasten to add that I do not think that this was a case of wilful neglect on 'Jude's' part. In fairness to her, she may well have felt that she was given the job of supervising without any choice or consultation on the matter. After all, our professional experiences and expertise were poles apart. I am an early years' practitioner with a strong interest in literacy and in particular reading acquisition while she is an authority on school governance and leadership and has spent her career teaching in post-primary and third-level institutions. In addition, she was given the task of supervising a process which she had not been through herself. Despite her many publications she did not hold a PhD at this time. Writing a doctoral thesis involves quite a unique form of writing which is embedded in a very personal and emotionally-charged process and so to expect 'Jude' to guide and manage me through this was a tall order from the institution. Still, I cannot help wondering why my writing veered out of control so much despite there being regulations around the supervision of a PhD. Granted, each study is unique in its content but surely there are universal procedures that dictate the parameters around a piece of work at this level so that individual supervisors are scaffolded in guiding their students.

Despite acknowledging the arduous task of supervision, it is as though I had 'protected' my supervisor much in the same way as a neglected child does in the face of Social Services personnel. I did not air my feelings early in our student-supervisor relationship because as already mentioned I did not feel the full impact of what I was saying was being heard. Likewise, I did not bring my reservations to the notice of other academics at a higher level. I was very reluctant to 'betray' 'Jude' since we were not at loggerheads and besides this – I like and respect her. In this instance the authorities of the university school did not visit or monitor the 'at-risk' child. How can the vulnerable child view her situation and alert the establishment, especially without having the language and lacking the confidence, knowledge and insight to recognise and articulate its position? Added to this is the suspicion that 'the powers that be' may not actually do anything to protect and nurture them.

As time went by and I re-entered 'civilian life' I secured employment within an initial teacher education college. As is usually the case, I worked on papers and presentations from my PhD thesis. Again, these endeavours were solitary and carried out against a backdrop of little experience. It is difficult to hand your 'baby' into the care of someone else as it begins to grow and develop. The assumption is that no-one can truly understand its every detail and mould it into what you know it should be. It felt best to work alone on the growth part but naturally I contacted 'Jude' to let her know what I was working on. I thought that perhaps now we could collaborate on papers that would allow us leverage unlike when producing a thesis. I also asked if she would provide me with constructive criticism on the articles I intended to submit to peer-reviewed journals. I assumed out of courtesy that her name would be placed on any papers emanating from my thesis; therefore I felt that she should at least have the chance to comment on any article that would potentially bear her name. It is so difficult to know the protocol about such things when you are not well-versed in academic culture and its norms.

She did acknowledge receipt of my work but due to family commitments and workload she was unable to

reply immediately. I understood and so assumed that within a few weeks or months some form of minimal feedback would be forthcoming. This was not the case. However, we did meet up again on another occasion after I had endured a number of harsh rejections from reviewers. I expected her to help me strive to get at least one paper published and to understand the protocol involved for future submissions. Instead, at the end of this encounter she asked that I furnish her with notification of any papers, articles or presentations I might submit with her name as joint author, without the offer of co-writing. Again I felt thrust into the lead or 'carer' role unwillingly, a role that was cast upon me in my personal life. Such a situation where enforced role reversal occurs can and does stir up deep and distressing issues concerning your expectations of the 'rightful mother figure'. Maybe this is why I preface my own supervision of Master's students with an initial discussion on what they expect and need from me as a supervisor. Transparency about the process and relationship we wish to cultivate is central to my understanding of the role and ability to operate as a dissertation tutor. The students also appear to be satisfied with this aspect of their studies. Continuing to support and 'care' for my supervisor was difficult since I was really struggling to get started. Yet I was not only expected to do all the work but also to offer a cut of any resultant academic profits to someone who had a plethora of publications to her name already.

Five years after graduation and more rejections from academic referees, I still yearn to be a published author in a peer-reviewed journal. I continue to make strides to get involved in other projects that demonstrate interesting research activity and the

potential for publication but these collaborations tend to be short-lived. It is as though this 'baby' I gave birth to so long ago has ceased to exist in everyone's mind except mine. I still feel that my thesis is a worthwhile study with valuable insights that I would like to share with interested parties. Unfortunately I also feel that due to the considerable lapse of time since my data collection, the academic community is even less likely to accept any offerings that might possibly arise from its ashes. However, I cannot seem to let it go, a bit like the parents who reluctantly send their child to university knowing there will be a gaping void left to fill.

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The loneliness of the long distance doctoral student: a personal reflection on process and outcomes

Paula Young, Glyndŵr University

This paper examines the literature of doctoral study and the experiences of the part-time researcher. The author reflects her personal motivation for part-time PhD study and discusses whether her experience of part-time study reflects literature describing factors which inhibit successful completion of the part-time researcher's work.

I am a senior lecturer in business, in a higher education institute (HEI) seeking teaching degree awarding powers (TDAPs) and I might be described as one of those who "cling doggedly on, despite being academically outclassed by the new intake of junior lecturers" (Boone, 2004, p.32). I have taught for thirty years, starting immediately after my first degree. After two years in secondary schools, during which I gained qualified teacher status, I began part-time Further Education (FE) lecturing to accommodate my parenting duties. At the age of 29 I became a single parent and so had to find full time lecturing in FE. I later became a 'Lecturer 2', and in 1990 gained a senior lecturer post in a Higher Education Institute (HEI). My move into higher education (HE) began my educational development, initially by taking Training and Development Lead Body qualifications. Later, I gained membership of the Institute of Learning and Teaching, and afterwards, took a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development in Higher Education, enabling me to start an MA in Education. I gained this with distinction in 2004, and published a paper on my research in a peer-reviewed journal. It was this which gave me the self-belief to start, with trepidation, on the daunting road to a PhD.

A beginning

Although the archetypical PhD student is a science 'boffin' working full time in a research team; the majority of PhD students are part-time, mature, female, and working in social sciences (Deem and Brehony, 2000; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Prospects.ac.uk, 2007) and I belonged to this group.

Motives for beginning a PhD can be varied and may include some of the following: seeking higher degrees to stand out from the mass of graduates; the suggestion of tutors; securing employment; a desire for career progression (87.2% PhD holders in work after six months, HECSU, 2006); as a means of promotion; to provide credibility to the lecturer's teaching; carrying out an in-depth study of a topic; a challenge or opportunity at a particular juncture in their lives; or a search for personal benefits such as a sense of achievement, affirmation or transformation (Crawford, 2003; UK GRAD, 2004, p.10; Purcell *et al.* 2006, p.11).

The main focus of those starting doctorates immediately following first degrees tends to be their research; often seen as high flyers with a long career in research ahead, the motivation for these researchers is their academic career, powerful intellectual drives and fascination with their subjects, or improvement of later career prospects (Wellcome Trust, 2000).

By contrast, a second group comes to research later, and is likely to be mature, with family responsibilities and working alongside studying. Pure research is less likely to be their main focus, they may have instrumental career enhancement in mind; and the PhD may be closely linked to their work (Deem and Brehony, 2000). For some, employers may instigate their study; whilst for others it may be a self-planned learning project, possibly in the face of employers' opposition.

Often, for the part-timer, their study concerns dilemmas within their experience as practitioners, and the hope that something meaningful will be revealed, coupled with a sense of outrage or zeal. This desire to bring to light what others take for granted can be the catalyst that leads a student to begin her PhD journey (Piantanida and Garman, 1999, pp.20-21).

Gatrell (2000, p.86), too, underlines the importance for a part-time researcher of choosing a subject that "burns you up", so that one has the impetus and persistence to pursue the research to the end; however, Bassey (1999) notes that the part-time researchers' single case study is often their *opus magnum*, taking all their time and discipline over a number of years but rarely finding output in the public domain and I wonder if that will be my fate?

A personal reflection
Untangling the threads of my motives for my study is hard, since several wove together to lead me to my decision to take a PhD. The first impetus was that my MA produced material for a publication, and the peer reviewing process seemed to provide a stamp of approval: saying I was 'good enough' to go further. Since I had low confidence in my abilities the realisation that apparently I could 'do it' was an important factor.

More prosaically *continued* employment, rather than career ambitions also played a part. During my employment in HE I have been required to be a generalist, turning my hand to whatever needed covering, thus, recent emphases on research and specialisation coupled with job insecurity and redundancies had left me feeling vulnerable; and led to my seeking ways of becoming more attractive to my employers. The PhD route 'ticked several boxes' related to research underpinning teaching, scholarly activities, and increasing the number of doctoral students for the institute.

Another, less noble, motive was sibling rivalry! I have a brother who is a professor with an international reputation and another is a well-qualified dentist. My

life choices of marriage and children took me off the career ladder, and subsequent employment decisions were pragmatic responses to the demands of single parenthood. I felt undervalued and intellectually outclassed by my brothers, and part of the lure of doctoral study is the rather childish desire to 'show them': not very high minded, but true; and, I suspect, one that does not figure in many research findings!

However, such relatively negative motivations would have been insufficient to sustain me through these four years without more positive reasons and I also saw undertaking a PhD as a developmental journey, which I hoped would produce shifts in conceptualisation and thinking, and would facilitating transfer of new skills to new contexts for me.

My MA work had shown me that in-depth studies provided enjoyment in thinking and writing and the pleasure of grasping new concepts. Thus the stimulus and interest of ideas, the realisation that there is so much to learn, the hunger for this new knowledge and the fulfilment it provided were also part of my motives at the beginning. Moreover, my work had had positive feedback from my supervisor and, in a role where one only ever received brickbats, I valued this affirmation. So, although I regret I had not started much earlier, I feel I am finally fulfilling my potential; and perhaps it is only now that the conjunction of conditions is right for me.

A final filament in the weave of my motives is the subject of my study. My research topic concerns the management of the public sector and of my workplace, and I have huge concerns about certain 'management' practices and their potentially dysfunctional effects. This could remain at the level of my personal anxieties, however, by facing them, and finding out what is really happening, my negative feelings can be turned to positive advantage by converting my 'outrage' and 'zeal' into the

''deliberative curiosity needed to provide intellectual and emotional fuel to sustain an inquiry'' (Piantanida and Garman, 1999, p.22). For me the personal has become the political and I hope this will sustain me.

Thus, my motives for study mirror some of those identified: career enhancement, strengthening credibility, affirmation, transformation, choice of a powerful subject and enjoyment of intellectual achievement (Gatrell, 2000; Crawford, 2003; UK GRAD, 2004). However, the literature has little to say about personal insecurities, which are not widely acknowledged as motives for PhD study.

The journey

As a part-time student I am not a member of a research team; those who are benefit from conversations within their team and gradual engagement with their community of practice through conference presentations, and writing papers, often with their team (Finlay, 2007). But part-timers are more likely to be isolated and to have less access to a common research community and to have difficulty accessing their wider community of practice, lacking the 'protection' of a peer group (Deem and Brehony, 2000; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Prospects.ac.uk, 2007) and such lack of support is a contributory factor in dropout (Dinham and Scott, 1999).

A key issue for me, even within an HEI, is isolation from the community I wish to join (Kerlin, 1988; Wareing, 2000; Park, 2005), I need to gain a foothold in the community of practice that is research, entering its outer fringes as a legitimate, if peripheral participant, to benefit from feedback and comments. I should gradually develop my understanding of its discourses but to do this it is necessary to participate (Wenger, 1998). Wareing (2000) identifies time constraints, difficulties in attending training because of commitments and personal and financial costs as

barriers to success and the practical issues of lack of time and funding to attend researchers' training sessions and conferences are significant impediments to my progress, yet to be overcome.

The language of researchers often seems designed to perpetuate 'tribal territory' (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and 'superiority' as an 'in-group' at the expense of this aspiring researcher. At times I cannot decide if the esoteric offerings I come across are deliberately baffling, (à la Sokal and Bricmont, 1998) or if this confirms that I am not up to the job. A recent conference I attended was an intimidating experience, where everyone seemed cleverer, younger and considerably more au fait with the research world than me. I felt I was a fraud: a country cousin, without the intellectual skills necessary for success.

Notwithstanding the genuine pleasure I get from the work, as an older researcher I have concerns about my ability to absorb the large amounts of material I generate, I envisage my 'senior moments' rendering my viva a farce, as I fail to remember what I wrote. The intermittent nature of the study leaves me, like Taylor Coleridge after his 'person from Porlock' called, losing inspiration and insight between one week and the next: so being unable to concentrate on my work leads to frustration and fears that someone else will 'get in first'. The combination of isolation with slow progress, and the set backs that everyone experiences, leads me, at times, to question whether I should not just 'cut my losses' and get my life back.

Dropout is a very real danger for the part-time PhD student and Leonard et al. (2006, p.36) suggest it is a function of the personal qualities; personal problems and problems inherent in the research, thus, completion is a function of more than simply academic ability. Kerlin (1998) argues that low

academic self-concept, lack of peer support networks, workload and stress, and gender itself are likely to reduce chances of completion.

As a full time lecturer in an HEI, I have a high and varied teaching load, involvement in school activities, administration and committee memberships. Thus my week is filled with students, preparation, teaching, marking and administration from early in the morning. I teach two evenings a week, and seem to be permanently preparing for curriculum changes and teaching new module content. My biggest problem is lack of time, confirming Becher and Trowler's (2001, p.153) observation that women academics have difficulty in finding "large uninterrupted batches of time free of their responsibilities". I would seem to be a prime candidate for dropout if one applies Park's (2005, p.199) factors of: family issues, cultural difficulties, isolation, poor supervision, part-time status, and problems with university administration and "intellectual solitariness, professional and social isolation, new work organisation requirements, anxiety concerning time and productivity, intellectual life and supervision".

Accounts describe the pressures of working, studying and clashes with domestic responsibilities (de Block, 2001, Glaze, 2002; Leonard et al. 2006). Difficulties in finding time for combining work, motherhood and study can result in personal costs of guilt and anxiety (Gatrell, 2000). Wakeford (2001, p.1) outlines the difficulties in balancing "academic requirements, employment demands, and personal obligations", and feelings of lack of support and encouragement and being left alone to grapple with acquisition of technical, research and critical thinking skills, whilst Macleod (2000) describes isolation, limited contact with tutors and peers, and the strain that doing a PhD places on students who have to juggle job, family and study demands.

Younger researchers feel guilty about losing time with their children (Gatrell, 2000; de Block, 2001), but as an older researcher I have dual responsibilities: parents and young adult children. Since I started my research I have dealt with supporting my father through my mother's long final illness and helping him cope with widowhood and increasing ill-health; Kerlin (1998) indicates how pivotal such events can be in doctoral dropout, as are the accumulated effects of isolation and exhaustion in diminishing the quality of women's doctoral experience. I am aware that some colleagues seem to have little need for sleep, but I cannot manage on any less. There are the usual domestic chores, and I would like to spend time with my husband and children. Realistically, I have just one day a week, at the weekend, to spend on my work, and if marking comes up, that day is lost. My research progresses slowly and constant juggling of responsibilities leads to pressure in all spheres and I often have little sense of achievement.

Houghton (2001) notes that much literature on student experience concerns full time students, but argues that part-timers' lack of time for courses, conferences, and study; and the demands of home, partners, caring duties and work make it unlikely that these students are prepared for the sheer drudgery of the PhD journey, with its constant fatigue and need for endurance and stamina (Glaze, 2002).

Nevertheless, it is not all bad news: I have experienced the satisfaction of 'learning leaps' (Wisker, 2006) to working at a more original and creative conceptual level. I really enjoy the work and gain considerable satisfaction from absorbing new ideas and finding my work valued by those with academic prestige, with the positive feedback from my supervisor, offering me validation.

My critical thinking, development of theoretical concepts and abilities to critically analyse and evaluate findings began to mature during my master's study but have progressed as I have worked on my literature. The process of thinking, writing and justifying is polishing my critical thinking skills, and feedback from my supervisor indicates I am becoming more adept in demonstrating a personal critical voice.

I have identified a growing confidence in my own teaching and supervising at masters' level. I feel more able to comment on students' work, to advise them on assessments and counsel on their dissertations. Additionally, I have found my political views maturing as I scrutinise government policies, discovering them to be vehicles for political dogma rather than balanced discussions of practice and thus I am gaining personally from the pleasure of new learning and growing political maturity. So, although I regret not starting years before, I feel I am fulfilling my potential and, perhaps, it is only now that the conjunction of my stars is right for this venture.

However, is the process of getting there easy? Not at all and many would argue that the achievement would be worth nothing if it were. Nevertheless, the question remains: will I be able to complete my PhD?

My progress is impeded by insufficient time and high workload, leading to a poor life-work balance and I experience concerns about my responsibilities, isolation from the research community and lack of support which feeds fears that I lack the intellectual skills to acquit myself successfully; reflecting the experience of those before me. If I had more time available for research, then most other problems would be reduced, progress would be quicker, frustration less, guilt possibly assuaged and I would have time to engage in joining the alluring community of researchers (de Block, 2001; Deem and Brehony, 2000; Dinham and Scott, 1999; Houghton, 2001; Kerlin, 1988; Leonard *et al.* 2006; Macleod, 2000; Park, 2005; Phillips and Pugh, 2000; Wakeford, 2001; Wareing 2000).

On the other hand, if the process becomes too daunting, I may never reach the end of the PhD journey. The factor, underlying all others is lack of time. So, to return to Piantanida and Garman (1999) are the zeal and outrage still there? I can answer "Yes", but there has been a price to pay, to bring the issues I care about into the light; a price paid by me, personally, and my family, and at this point I still remain to be convinced that it is worth paying.

Author details (taken from Glyndwr University website 7.10.09)

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