What constitutes doctoral knowledge?

Exploring issues of power and subjectivity in doctoral examination

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Globalisation has brought increasing diversity in student populations and therefore the potential for different sorts of knowledges to enter the academy. At the same time there is heightened surveillance brought about in response to the pressures of global competition, including increasing standardisation, marketisation and performativity measures. A corollary of these larger processes is the increasing surveillance and control of knowledge and knowledge production in universities, to ensure the position of nation states in global economic competition. This paper considers how these tensions are enacted at the site of doctoral examination with the potential for opening up or closing down the possibilities of new knowledge being generated through doctoral research. This is a significant issue for universities, for future graduates, and for the nation's economic competitiveness, because new and diverse forms of knowledge are critical for the future.

In the article, we explore how doctoral knowledge and subjectivities are constituted in the doctoral examination process, with reference to a recent thesis examination in our Faculty. We draw on the Adjudicator's report produced in the case, and the experiences of the second author as the candidate's supervisor, in an effort to make explicit the invisible pedagogies of doctoral examination. In the process we raise issues of the relations of power exercised through the intersection of different epistemologies and ontologies, and the inevitable negotiation and production of knowledge-making subjectivities of those involved. We conclude that doctoral knowledges and knowledge subjectivities are constituted within this power/knowledge assemblage, and challenge the boundaries of institutional knowledge production. We propose generative ways of understanding the possibilities for the production of alternative forms of knowledge in doctoral work that may confront and extend conventional notions of (doctoral) knowledge production, and what it means to make 'an original contribution to knowledge'.

Introduction

Doctoral education is increasingly being driven by perceptions of what counts as worthwhile in knowledge economy discourses. The recurring themes in the doctoral education research literature reinforce an assumed shared global narrative of the need for change in doctoral education towards the closer alignment of doctoral graduates with the needs of the economy (see Australian Government, 2011; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). In the context of government and institutional investments in particular kinds of doctoral education it is timely to consider what counts as worthwhile knowledge and to whom, and how that knowledge might be produced and represented.

In order to do this we examine the processes of knowledge production by reviewing a recent doctoral exami-

nation case in which a thesis by a Cambodian candidate received two divergent examination results. Under our University's policy, an Adjudicator was appointed to read the examiners' reports and the candidate's written defence of her thesis, to assess the merits of the examiners' reports, and to recommend a result. The adjudicator recommended the candidate be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor amendments being made to the satisfaction of the Faculty's research degrees administrator. The stakeholders directly involved in this process included the candidate, the supervisor, the examiners, the adjudicator, and the research degrees administrator. In this paper we examine how doctoral knowledge, and the knowledge subjectivities of these actors were constituted within the examination process examination, in particular the role of the adjudicator's reports in accommodating the respective actors' subjectivities.

We begin the paper with an outline of the case following which we discuss the examination process as a technology for disciplining the parties involved (see Foucault, 1983, 1991). We then analyse the adjudicator's report produced in the case, reflecting on our own stories and positioning within this assemblage of actors and administrative procedures. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ways in which the examination process, as a feature of doctoral pedagogies, shapes practices that direct what counts as worthwhile doctoral knowledge.

We note that issues associated with thesis examination were not considered explicitly in the 1995 Special Issue of *Australian Universities' Review* to which this current issue relates, yet thesis examination is a critical juncture in the doctoral education process, with serious implications for candidate, supervisor and institution, and for how we understand the fields in which we work. Our article takes up key issues raised by this case, to do with the nature of knowledge in doctoral education; how doctoral knowledges and researcher subjectivities are constituted in the supervision and examination process; of what constitutes an original contribution to knowledge; and why we should encompass the necessity to produce alternative forms of knowledge and knowledge subjectivities. In this process we resist the temptation to make more of the thesis at the heart of our case. Its subject matter is indeed compelling yet to elaborate further on the thesis and its contribution to new knowledge, distracts us from our core focus here on the pedagogical dimensions of the examination process.

As authors we represent the roles of supervisor (Somerville) and research degrees administrator (Devos). The issues presented are framed conceptually by Somerville's theorisation of alternative methodologies and knowledges in doctoral research (Somerville, 2007, 2008), which is underpinned by feminist psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory. The role of the examination process is considered through the lens of Foucault's theorisation of the subject and power (Devos, 2008; Foucault, 1983). We ask how were doctoral knowledge and knowledge subjectivities negotiated in this process? And what are the implications for how we supervise, examine and administer research degrees?

The case study

In 2009, a doctoral candidate in education submitted her PhD for examination. It was an unusual thesis in the form of a memoir by a member of the Cambodian Royal Family, deposed and exiled during the Pol Pot regime in the 1970s. The memoir itself is unconventional and does not fit within the usual methodologies of memoir and life history writing because it is in fact the memoir of the candidate's grandmother, memorised in Cambodian language before the candidate left Cambodia in exile. During the Pol Pot regime, the candidate lost everything, including her two children, so the act of writing her thesis represented a highly emotionally charged commitment to intergenerational and transcontinental identity work. Piphal arrived in Australia in 1975 in exile. Now an Australian citizen she continues the work of her grandmother in practising and teaching Cambodian cultural traditions, particularly from the perspective of the Cambodian Royal Family. While the candidate's story is unique, in the larger context of global social processes and mobilities, conflicts and refugee movements, the knowledge problem presented here is not uncommon.

The candidate's story

The following is quoted from the candidate's thesis (Engly, 2010), selected for its relevance to the focus of this paper.

> On the 27th of March, I packed up every beautiful and expensive souvenir that was given to me since I was young by Prince Sihanouk, Princess Monique, the Queen Mother and King Suramarith (the father of Prince Sihanouk). I passed them to be under the care of the Samdech Preah Sangha Niyaka Huot Tat, a top ranking Buddhist monk then who stayed at the Ohnalom Pagoda which was located by the Mekong River near the public market Phsar Kandal. Samdech Preah Sangha Niyaka Huot Tat advised me to bring other rare objects to him if I wanted to when there was still time.
>
> After we came back from the temple, my husband and I started burning every other priceless thing while an army helicopter hovered and patrolled above our

house. Among all the rare and expensive gifts, my favourites were huge Chinese silk paintings. These were given to me by my late father who received them as presents from the former Prime Minster Zhou En Lai while he was in China during the 1950s. I understood the serious circumstance well enough that I had to burn those rare collections. I could not take them to the Samdech Huot Tat because he would not have enough room for those special souvenirs and the lives of my family were obviously in grave danger if they were found.

Our families were then placed under house arrest for eight months. Two soldiers always guarded our front and back doors and watched every single movement. A soldier drove my children to school every day while another checked the shopping baskets when my cook returned from the market every morning. They took everything out of the basket and spread them out on the floor because they wanted to find if there was any paper or message meant for our family that could have been hidden among the cakes and vegetables. We were not allowed to see our parents, our siblings or anyone else and we lived in hell during those eight months. Whatever we did or spoke, we took extreme care of our actions and choice of words.

In the lounge room, I saw everyone still in their hiding places under an armchair or in the corner of a big cupboard display. I took a pair of thongs from my maid and struggled to return to my bedroom because my little niece was still trapped inside and was crying out for help. I held her under my left arm tightly and found my way back outside to be with the others. As soon as I was out of my bedroom, a door and a wall which were burning down suddenly collapsed behind my back. 'All of you go to the last car', I shouted, and everyone quickly packed up into a single small car which was one of the four cars parked in the garage. We did not take anything with us except my handbag, which was on a chair in the lounge, because the house had already burnt and fell down in pieces. I drove to my mother's house and dropped the children off there.

After that tragic event, we moved into my mother's house. On the same day at 5 o'clock, after dinner, I sat quietly near my mother who was lying down on the sofa. I listened to the news on the television that reported the 'destruction of a house by a large rocket which was launched from the other side of the Mekong River, across Island Chruoy Changva, and the Cambodian Army could not find launch sites'. After the news, the children went to bed. My dear mother went into her room and came back with a large brown thick envelope in her hands. She then handed it to me and said:

'Arlette (my nickname at home), this is a book that I have kept so many years with extreme care. I have read it thoroughly but some parts have now worn out. You will find it very important. I know you like reading and you like books but for this one, you have to take extra care as it is not just any ordinary book.'

She suggested me to read it several times, even hundreds of times, until I have memorised the memoir by heart since our country could not warn us of any danger or doom. She sighed and said that she could not keep that memoir with her anymore. Some writing was faded away because they were almost a hundred years old and the quality of paper was poor because they were produced by an ancient technical procedure back in the old days. Wherever she has moved with my father, she had always kept it close to her heart.

When I came to Australia, I came to a medical conference and it was during my time in Australia that I lost my two children and everything I owned in the Pol Pot regime. I never saw those memoirs again. I recall the memoirs as I memorised them and write them down in Cambodian and then translate them into English. The English translation is sometimes difficult because the ideas are difficult to communicate in English so there is another layer of editing required to help to make sense of the cultural meanings of this record of Cambodian history. I have used my inherited knowledge of royal custom and dress, and of traditional Cambodian cultural practices and meanings, to assist in the communication of the sense of the preservation of Cambodian history and culture that occurred through the Nationalist Movement. Such techniques as dressing contemporary Australians in aspects of royal dress, and then photographing them, assists to communicate the lost meanings of Cambodian cultural practice.

The supervisor's story

Towards the end of Piphal's candidature, the supervisor organised for a colleague in Piphal's home city to meet with Piphal on a regular basis to discuss her work in progress. The supervisor felt that this face-to-face support would be beneficial for the progress of the PhD. The following is an excerpt from the supervisor's correspondence with this colleague at the time of making this arrangement.

4/10/2008
It is the voice of Piphal as the narrator that will hold the whole story together and will be a continuing thread throughout. It is the story of her resilience and the qualities that have given her that resilience, how 'the memoir' is a symbol of continuity to a past that has now gone irretrievably from her life because of her migration and the events of Pol Pot. There is such a lot of violence and it also seems to be about this tension between the violence of personal and cultural erasure and the persistence of cultural story and embodied cultural practice (like gesture, dress, fabric).

There were some beautiful instances of storytelling from Piphal at our residential school. In one related to a free writing exercise she talked about seeing the patterns in the clouds as like lace flowers and the lace flowers became the gestures of the hands in the dances of the royal ballet. Her chapter about the royal ballet starts with some of the memoir and that is where the ritual of the dressing comes in to the

story. Madame Doumer was taught the meaning of the gestures, bodily comportment and so on. So that free writing might be a good way to begin that chapter.

Piphal dressed me as Madame Doumer who was in the memoir dressed in Cambodian Royal dress by Bophaphuong, Piphal's grandmother so she could take photos for her thesis. A kind of doubled identity transformation from French to Cambodian in 19th century Cambodia to Australian to French to Cambodian in 21st century Australia. Piphal brought the royal clothes along to a doctoral school and the other candidates helped to dress me once Piphal and I had privately donned the under and most of the outer garments. Her care and gentility in the dressing was as of a maid to royalty but with Piphal's position reversed; Piphal as handmaiden. It was the Wednesday morning dress for a Cambodian princess – a cream lace silk blouse, emerald green silk wrap-around skirt held in place by an ornate gold belt, a green silk shoulder sash and then layers of ritual jewellery. There were several heavy gold bangles around my wrists and ankles, a large gold broach on my shoulder to hold the sash in place and rings that did not fit my fingers. Each item of gold jewellery had ornate patterns of ritual significance in Cambodian Buddhist culture and each was placed in the correct order on my body.

I felt weighed down by the gold jewellery and how it constrained my body movements. Once dressed I was instructed in how to walk, sit, hold my head, my hands, where my eyes should be directed, that is in how to become the body of a Cambodian royal princess. I was photographed by Piphal. She included the photograph in her thesis as a form of mimesis. At the time I felt extremely uncomfortable in all of the sense of bodily comportment, as if my body was tightly held in place and I failed miserably to reproduce the body of a Cambodian princess. In the photos, however, I can see a remarkable translation and I understood so much more of Piphal's subjectivity.

The memoir is such an elusive object. Is it one object or several? Does it exist as an object or only in Piphal's mind? Was it taught to her orally, or shown to her in writing, or both? What is the process through which the memoir comes into being as a piece of writing and what are the constraints around that - political, language, personal, etc. For example, I have suggested to Piphal at times that the language is too slanderous (against the French), but for Piphal it is a literal translation of her Grandfather's (and Grandmother's) memoir and how can one change a memoir quote? On the other hand it is already translated from written to oral and back to written, from Cambodian script to English language and script, so it is already changed. What is the relation to Piphal's own stories and storytelling and to the continuity of traditions? There is also the sense that Piphal believes that the writing, and indeed all that happens around it, is directed by the hands of the ancestors, so in that sense too it is a record beyond the person who carries it.

Piphal tells me about how she carried the memoir in her head for over 20 years and during all this time she was in 'the abyss' because she did not know how to get the story out. When she met me, she says, I 'hooked her from the depths of the abyss so that she could bring the story to light'. She believes that she was guided to meet me by her grandmother – I cannot for the life of me work out how it happened – why or how did a person from another city who had connections to both universities in that city end up enrolling in a PhD at my University? By what process did she come to choose me who has no experience or knowledge of Cambodian history or cultural practice?

Piphal acquired all of the artefacts involved in this ritual of dressing after her arrival in Australia. The dressing in traditional clothing acts as a metaphor for the complex and varied subjectivities Piphal's supervisor negotiates in this supervision, as she assumes one or other position within the relationship. The heavy jewellery symbolises too the mantle she assumes in taking on responsibility for assisting Piphal to bring her grandmother's story to light through the doctorate.

The research degrees administrator

One of my roles in the Faculty is to participate in advisory panels convened when there is a significant discrepancy between thesis examiners' reports. From time to time, new academic staff are invited to attend these panels as part of their supervisor training. I first became aware of the sensitivity surrounding Piphal's examination in the lead up to the panel meeting, when I was told that the supervisor was concerned about the advisory panel being opened to new supervisors. Her wishes for a closed panel meeting, in light of the unusual nature of the thesis and the risks inherent in its production, were not respected, and three to four new supervisors attended the confidential proceedings in addition to the official panel members. The incident made explicit the investments of supervisors in the examination of their students' theses, and the challenge to supervisor subjectivities in this particular case.

The issues raised by this thesis were clear on reading the examiners' reports, each appearing well founded, but clearly written from such different standpoints. How were we to make sense of them? The Supervisor was asked by the panel to recommend an Adjudicator to assess the case. The panel in doing this 'outsourced' the intellectual work needed to resolve the case. At this stage I was worried, as the reports seemed irreconcilable, speaking from such different positions about how knowledge is produced, what constitutes acceptable doctoral work, and how it might be represented in a thesis.

The adjudicator's report received, the advisory panel was reconvened to consider and make a recommendation for a result. The adjudicator's report 'resolved'

the examination process and the candidate asked to make minor amendments. My role then was to sign off on the amendments once made. In carrying out this role, I am mindful of the power invested in determining what constitutes acceptable amendments as the changes recommended by examiners and panels in contested cases are usually subject to interpretation. Given the diversity of disciplines and thesis work in our Faculty, this kind of flexibility is necessary for the candidate and supervisor to act in any meaningful way to develop the work. When I 'check' the amendments made, my practice is guided by the advisory panel's analysis of the combined reports, together with my own, and the supervisor's interpretation of those reports and panel's recommendations.

The case highlighted my problematic position as gatekeeper, an agent in a series of pedagogical moves designed, from an institutional perspective, to license new doctorate holders. This case in particular was significant, as it was apparent that the challenges the thesis posed sat outside the bounds of the panel members' experiences. Who judges what makes new knowledge? What language do we use to speak about things we don't understand? The case had particular meanings for me given my commitment to developing a dialogue amongst colleagues about alternative forms of thesis work, as a means to extend our thinking about how we support innovation in doctoral work.

The production of knowledge and knowledge subjectivities

In doctoral supervision, supervisor and candidate are co-implicated in knowledge production. Both will enter and be changed through the process. Piphal, steeped in a different set of understandings and interpretation of the teacher-student relationship, believed that the Supervisor was sent by the candidate's long deceased grandmother to achieve the release of her knowledge into the world. Despite the supervisor's gentle protests, discussion, explanation and resistance this did not change at any point during the supervision or afterwards. On one hand, the Candidate was in a position of upper class superiority as a member of the Royal family in relation to the supervisor's non-royal class positioning. On the other, the supervisor was revered as a knowledgeable teacher with great power in relation to the publication of the memoirs. This complex set of embodied beliefs framed the pedagogical relationship enacted through the identity translation work and symbolised by the inclusion of photographs of the supervisor dressed as Madame Doumer.

This act of dressing in a mimetic performance of her grandmother's relationship with Madame Doumer, and then adding the photo to the thesis, illustrates the incorporation of the supervisor('s) body in the process of knowledge production. It materialised an aspect of the supervisor's role as it existed in the candidate's imagination and made evident the different way the supervisory relationship was constituted in the space between eastern and western epistemologies, language, ethnicities, and class. In articulating a methodology of 'postmodern emergence' as the nature of such radical alternative methodologies, Somerville writes about an ontology of becoming-other-to-ourselves through our research (2007, 2008). In this paper we identify the process of becoming-other-to-oneself as a characteristic of the necessarily relational and intersubjective pedagogical processes of producing knowledge through doctoral supervision.

The thesis represents ten years of close engagement between candidate and supervisor with several intermissions for major upheavals in the candidate's life. When the thesis was finally completed the task of finding examiners was difficult, due to increasing pressures of academic work for potential examiners, the unusual nature of the thesis, and the challenge of specifying 'a field' for this research.

Thesis examination as a technology of disciplining

The point at which claims to make 'a contribution to new knowledge' are tested is in the thesis examination process. At our university, two examiners are asked to comment on whether a thesis:

1. 'Constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding of the field concerned;
2. Contains material worthy of publication; and whether
3. The format and literary presentation of the thesis are satisfactory'.

Examiner A agreed with all three, while examiner B ticked no for the first two, and yes for the third (presentation). Examiner A described the thesis as an 'impressive and unique contribution to knowledge', and 'a remarkable work of personal and academic scholarship'. Examiner B pointed out 'the strength of the work [lies] in its detailed and fascinating primary research' but went on to recommend substantial further work mainly to develop the historical and political contexts of the narrative, with a view to resubmission and re-examination. A Faculty Advisory Panel was convened and an adjudicator appointed .

From time to time, examiners recommend very different grades for a thesis. What distinguishes this case is the challenge this thesis posed to conceptions of what constitutes an original contribution to knowledge and how that knowledge might be produced and represented. As Somerville points out (2007), many candidates do not choose alterna-

tive methodologies but take them up because '…there are no other ways for that research to be undertaken or represented' (240). These may include methodologies not yet developed that will evolve through the work of the candidate, meaning that there will be no examiner experienced in the particular methodology of the thesis. At best it may be possible to locate examiners who are open to new and emergent forms of knowledge representation.

In their study of 'consistency' in examiner recommendations on the same thesis, Holbrook *et al* (2008) found that only 33 of the 804 theses they studied (4 per cent) had one or more discrepant reports, and only 37 examiners (less than 2 per cent) showed a marked discrepancy from the other examiners and committees (45). They suggest that despite the highly subjective nature of thesis examination, their findings point to 'the 'innate robustness' of the 'invisible' doctoral curriculum and evidence of consistently applied standards' (45). Alternatively, the evidence of high levels of consistency can indicate the highly effective disciplining and normalising role of doctoral pedagogies. Citing Kwiram (2006,142) writing in a Carnegie volume on the future of the doctorate in the US, Holbrook *et al* (2008) note that 'while there are differences in expectations, quality and performance across candidates, disciplines, departments and nations 'there seems to be a tacit understanding of what constitutes a well-prepared PhD student' and that in the complete absence of any central repository or rules or a cosmic accrediting agency there is 'extraordinary stability" (46). Holbrook *et al* take heart from their study results, suggesting the same applies in Australia. Yet these results raise questions about the inherent worthiness of standardisation (see Devos, 2010), and about the relationship between 'a well-prepared PhD candidate' and the production of new knowledge, pointing to different understandings of the purpose of the doctorate. The issue presented in our paper turns on how we articulate those invisible pedagogies of the doctorate that lead to such high levels of consistency in examination. Our intention in doing this is to promote debate about the implications of this 'invisible curriculum' for innovation in doctoral work leading to the production of new knowledge.

Our account of the thesis examination process illustrates the disciplining role performed in the production of new knowledge in doctoral education. Thesis examination is the final stage of the roll out of a suite of doctoral pedagogies, its power effects in shaping new knowledge rendered invisible within a discourse of standards (see Devos, 2010). It shows the ways in which technologies of examination discipline those involved and construct particular sorts of subjectivities and dispositions towards what counts as new and worthwhile knowledge. This is indeed paradoxical if we are to view doctoral education as about expanding the fields of knowledge and knowledge making in ways we cannot at this point imagine. The disciplinary apparatus creates a web of constraints over which we may feel we have no choice. Academics may experience what McWilliam refers to as a heightened 'risk consciousness' (2007) whereby they become focused on risk management, and averse to risk-taking. Within contemporary universities, the pedagogies of the doctorate, in this case analysed at the point of thesis examination, and framed through distinct disciplinary traditions and wider performative pressures, may steer us towards safe options and away from the goals of the doctorate to make an original and significant contribution to new knowledge.

The adjudicator's report

The adjudicator's report was a concise document that operates at the level of meta-narrative, viewing the two examiners' reports from the perspective of what they each reflect about the nature of scholarship and of disciplines. Of her role as an arbiter, *requested to pronounce on the relative soundness, correctness or appropriateness of the two examiners recommendations,* the adjudicator commented that both examiners were *competent and fair* from the perspectives of the disciplinary and research spaces in which they were each located. Because of its unique qualities, the thesis, she argued, could not be judged in the usual ways *following normalised academic procedures of text productions.* She went on to argue that when examiner B asked for the work to be connected to other research projects and studies, s/he was missing the point that the thesis is *enough on its own*. In other words, the thesis should be judged on its own terms; *the work stands alone, in its own genre.*

New and inexperienced examiners approach the marking of doctoral theses with some trepidation, often because they have little to go on other than their own experience of having been examined. Yet there is an implied discourse that we know and agree on what a PhD is, what it might look like, and what constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge. While Holbrook *et al*'s research (2008) reports on remarkable consistency amongst examiners, a scan of education theses in our libraries points to quite different understandings across sub-fields, or at least that different sorts of evidence may be acceptable for demonstrating the same achievements amongst candidates. How and from where is our episte-

mology of the doctorate derived? Is it a private epistemology or a collectively held one, perhaps acquired through induction into a sub disciplinary field? How does it acquire its normalising powers?

The kind of scholarship examiner B recommended be conducted in order to be awarded a Pass, the adjudicator suggested, was *not mandatory* for the form of innovative scholarship the candidate was undertaking in the work. The adjudicator argued the thesis *is the constitution of an outstanding documentation of an epistemology and ontology.*

The adjudicator observed the difficulties facing PhD examiners, in so doing refraining from casting judgment on one or other examiner, *because universities are not set up to produce PhD examiners who can move across disciplinary fields, see possibilities of excellence in difference and be open to research innovations they themselves have never seen and never imagined.* How then, we ask, does important new knowledge enter the system?

The adjudicator alludes to the failure of a whole system, a failure of both innovation and imagination, which limits our capacities and inclinations to make assessments of merit for which we have no benchmarks. When asked to report on possible bias in the reports, she commented that *there is no evidence of bias in the reports of the two examiners, although one must wonder how much we as senior academics colonise others and want new scholarship to be like ours.* In this she draws attention to our inclinations towards reproduction in scholarship rather than innovation, emphasising her overall commentary on the nature of knowledge and of knowledge making in doctoral research. The adjudicator defined the issue not as *a question of a level appropriate to that of a doctoral candidate; rather it is about a thesis of difference and innovation.* In closing she concurred with examiner B's assessment of the thesis as *a remarkable piece of personal and academic scholarship.*

This report closed the examination effectively and opened a discourse of 'difference and innovation' in regard to doctoral research and pedagogies, theorised by Somerville as founded on a methodology of postmodern emergence (2007, 2008). In this context, the term suggests a capacity and preparedness to work outside of 'normalised' frameworks for evaluating merit in doctoral research in order to recognise what is 'the other' in the creation

of new and generative ways of expressing difference. The adjudicator's report is remarkable because it encapsulates the issues at stake in working across different domains of knowledge, theory and text. It is the space within which the subjectivities of the actors came together, not in an effort or act of reconciliation, as the positions are 'irreconcilable', but as a space within which those subjectivities could be respected and managed.

Concluding comments: What counts as doctoral knowledge?

A Doctor of Philosophy is underpinned by ontology and epistemology (which are in turn related to methodology) because it primarily addresses the philosophy of knowledge production. This means it is necessarily framed in relation to knowledge in a particular field. In this case, the object of the candidate's inquiry was her grandmother's memoirs, which are located within a Cambodian ontology and epistemology. The work of *her* doctorate was to preserve her sense of the integrity of a Cambodian epistemology while simultaneously translating that into English within an Australian location. Her relationship to her supervisor, as supervisor and as collaborator in that knowledge production, was understood through that lens.

While most supervisions demand the negotiation of boundaries – of class, gender, epistemology, researcher subjectivities, priorities – this case raised a particular set of issues due to the non-traditional forms of inquiry and representation. These issues must be understood and theorised not as an isolated and specific example, but as an instance on a continuum of all knowledge production.

The risk here was that the thesis would fail – a potentially huge risk, of death to the knowledge and to the identity of the producer of that knowledge. For the candidate who had lost so much, that was the ultimate risk, but it was her choice and not one the supervisor could choose not to take. The risk to the supervisor was a risk to reputation, of subjectivity as co-producer of knowledge, and of many years of hard work going unrecognised. The risk for the administrator concerned the challenge to her researcher and administrator subjectivities: what does it mean when a highly original thesis fails – for students coming along behind, for supervision quality, for institutional reputation?

> **Thesis examination is the final stage of the roll out of a suite of doctoral pedagogies, its power effects in shaping new knowledge rendered invisible within a discourse of standards.**

It is in some respects strange to be suggesting we must encompass the necessity to produce alternative forms of knowledge and knowledge subjectivities in our doctoral pedagogies, as this is really asking why should we produce new knowledge at all. New knowledge constitutes difference and without difference new knowledge cannot exist. The question then becomes how much difference we can embrace without risking the erasure of the boundaries that define us. The case challenges us to think about how, while providing form, structure and guidance to all of the parties in this process (or, a frame on the chaos of the world {Grosz, 2008}) which makes knowledge production possible, we also need to be mindful of the dangers of those structures.

In making this case the subject of an academic paper, we seek to make explicit the invisible pedagogies of doctoral examination, offering a different theorisation of that process to other researchers in this field. Thesis examination is regarded as a private matter; it has conventions and practices that exercise normalising effects producing high levels of consistency in marking as others have noted; and governed by protocols of which we may only be vaguely aware. Making explicit these protocols or conventions allows us to examine their foundation in the context of a wider debate about doctoral work and its place in contemporary universities and in society, and provides a platform to consider the ways in which pedagogical power is exercised at the point of entry into the disciplinary field. It further provides a platform for engaging new academics in these debates.

In conclusion, we note how candidate, supervisor and administrator subjectivities are constituted within complex webs of institutional and discipline-based regimes of power. Through our elaboration of these webs we begin to articulate their constraining and productive capacities. Beginning with the ethical issues of who owns the text of the reports, who owns the knowledge produced in supervision, and how we can articulate these issues, we understand this as fraught territory. Relations in this territory tend to remain invisible to the different players and to others who need to learn, and the operations of power and relational production of knowledge not well explored or theorised in the literature.

While this case may represent an extremity of difference, doctoral education must make room for the messy, unfolding, emergent nature of doctoral knowledges and subjectivities that are produced within this space. Making these relations of power and production visible will enable those involved to take the risks necessary to name and learn.

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