

# **Defining the (research) Professional Doctorate: Can the notion of the creative arts portfolio contribute?**

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## ***Abstract***

Maxwell and Shanahan (2001, and others) found that the early doctorates were essentially a PhD plus course work (with important exceptions). These early (first generation) Professional Doctorates began to give way to second generation Professional Doctorates (see Green, Maxwell and Shanahan 2001; Maxwell 2003) yet the impact upon industry appears still to be limited (McWilliam et al 2002). The Doctoral 'gold standard' is the PhD dissertation and it is argued that the dissertation's strength is also its weakness. The portfolio has been the main means for assessing the quality of work produced in the creative arts. It is argued that the portfolio notion provides potential for Professional Doctoral 'students' to explore questions of interest to their professional lives through the opportunity to research a range of professional concerns. This potential is discussed along with some of the limitations of the approach. Issues will be raised such as the 'balance' of the portfolio and its coherence, portfolio supervision, and examination. Some practical quality assurance mechanisms to ensure doctoral standards are more likely achieved are addressed through a case study.

## ***Background***

The CDDGS (1998, 1) document defines a Professional Doctorate as:

a program of research, scholarship and advanced study which enables candidates to make a *significant contribution to knowledge and practice in their professional context*. In doing so, a candidate may also contribute more generally to scholarship within the discipline or field study.

Professional doctorate students should be required to apply their research and study to problems, issues or other matters of substance which produce *significant benefits in professional practice*. (My emphasis)

This working definition will likely be refined over time, but for the moment it is useful for our purposes. It situates the Professional Doctoral and allocates significant benefits as central.

The early first generation forms of Professional Doctorate have given way to second generational forms (Green, Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001; Maxwell 2003). First generation Professional Doctorates were first established as structurally different from the PhD by virtue of their course work. As such first generation Professional Doctorates were also discipline oriented and dominated by academe (Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001), but this gatekeeper role of academe has allowed some universities to develop second generation Professional Doctorates. These latter Professional Doctorates are evidentially more professional focussed and centred more on the realities of the workplace (Maxwell & Shanahan 2001). They are also likely more transdisciplinary in nature and here there are some parallels between Mode 1 (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott & Trow 1994) (first generation) and Mode 2 knowledge production (second generation, see Maxwell 2003). This might be exemplified by the EdD at Deakin, which was conceptualised as 'contributing to the development of professional practice rather than research conducted primarily as a contribution to academic knowledge' (Walker 1998, 94). Here the research is a professional practice. In Professional Doctoral research, action is implied. Professional Doctorates have improvement (making a positive impact) as a key criterion.

The development of Professional Doctorates has been rapid in Australia (Maxwell & Shanahan 2001) and in England (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2001). In Australia the great stimulus was the NBEET (1989) challenge to universities to diversify. The reasons for the success for the success of Professional Doctorates in England parallel those in Australia:

- Accelerating pace of change in the professions;
- Concern about the limited impact of research on professional practice;

- The move towards evidence-based practice;
- The move to Continuing Professional Development ;
- Criticisms of the traditional PhD;
- The reflective practitioner and related ideas;
- The rise of post-modernism;
- From 'subject development' towards 'student development';
- The narrow career-focus of the traditional PhD;
- Alternative sources of the production of knowledge;
- Growth and legitimisation of practitioner research;
- From an elite to a mass system of higher education;
- The development of work-based learning within higher education;
- The breakdown of the distinction between 'taught' and 'research' courses;
- New forms of knowledge;
- The shift towards vocationalism and professionalism;
- Growing dominance of positivist methodology within PhDs;
- Increasing rate of accumulation of knowledge; and
- The climate of change (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2001).

What is not so evident in this list is the dominance of academe mentioned above, especially in terms of the lack of professional collegial input into the nature of the separate Professional Doctoral awards. May and Maxwell (1998) noticed this and the lack of industry input was a major finding of an important study by McWilliam, Taylor, Thomson, Green, Maxwell, Wildy & Simmons (2002). The focus of this particular study was what might be termed macro analyses; the linkages between universities and peak bodies of industry. What is needed in Australia is a study or series of studies to parallel that of Lunt and colleagues (Lunt, Brown, Scott & Thorne 2002) in the UK in which the impact of Professional Doctoral programs on individuals were identified via case studies in engineering, business administration and education) or of life history studies in the Professional Doctorates such as Sue Middleton's (2001) education PhD research in New Zealand. Via these kinds of studies the question of impact is on professional practice better addressed, especially in the early stages of programs such as the Professional

Doctorates at the professional workplace level or, alternatively, in the life histories of individuals. What is evident in the Lunt et al study and others is the way that the portfolio rather than the dissertation is the preferred outcome.

### ***Dissertation***

The dissertation is well known as a form of research product to the academic community. The key criticism of the PhD dissertation includes its narrowness, but this is also its strength. It requires the researcher to create a coherent, in-depth form of academic prose that encompasses the level of award in question. However, this assumes that the PhD is uniformly narrow because of its depth, but this is clearly not necessarily the case. However, there is a structural dimension to the PhD which makes it likely to be so and this is in the nature of the final product, the dissertation. Consider these criticisms of PhD programs which, when enunciated, had significant impact nationally:

- Lack of consistency or quality assurance across programs;
- Programs are driven by the philosophy of science 'in isolation' from other key criteria (*such as reality checks*);
- An ageing and inwardly-focussing academy;
- A 'tamer' graduate product whose quality is poorer than a decade ago;
- Failure to inculcate teamwork skills, good workplace practices, creativity and lateral thinking in graduates; over specialisation at the expense of risk-taking and frontier breaking activity; and
- The gap that is maintained between knowledge and skill (Clark 1996, 4-6) [my addition].

Not all of these criticisms can be sheeted home to the dissertation but the nature of the PhD dissertation in which the examination process is by academic peers almost exclusively demands the kind of isolated pursuit of disciplinary knowledge about which Clark is critical. There are quite a few Professional Doctoral programs which have turned to the portfolio as an alternate to the dissertation.

**Portfolio - definition and uses**

The portfolio is not put up as a panacea for these problems but it has potential and, of course, its own draw backs. The work from Deakin University is a good starting point (Walker 1998). Let us begin with this definition of a portfolio in EdD at Deakin University:

(A portfolio) consists of (a) selection of products of research which best establish(es) the candidate's claim to have carried out research of a doctoral standard (Walker 1998, 94).

As Walker goes on to establish, this definition is akin to the use of the term in the creative arts in which the artist constructs a portfolio, a selection from amongst possible items for a certain purpose and a certain audience. Walker (1998, 96) illustrates

The portfolio is much more focussed around a purpose and a specified audience. ...a photographer might put (it) together for a potential client, with exhibits selected to show what you can do in the face of commissions like those you might expect. And intended to impress.

The key concepts are *purpose* and *audience* when it comes to portfolio construction. These are complicated by the understanding that there are more than one audience for the research (a number of discourse communities (Lee 1998, in Maxwell 2002, 92)) who are interested in the outcomes and yet the primary audience for the portfolio as a whole is the examiners. The practical way forward is presented in the artists' concept of medium.

In portfolio construction, the work of artists is a useful beginning point: medium and style are useful concepts. Just as an artist might reasonably be able to use a medium to portray particular skills (in oil, water colour, crayon or pencil), so too might the researcher be able use graphic, prose, video and audio to show the degree of mastery, as could be reasonably expected of a well-rounded professional. A Professional Doctoral candidate has greater potential to show a breadth of capacity in communication in a portfolio. This is not usual in a (PhD) dissertation. Such variety in medium facilitates research presentation to be made to different audiences (cf Maxwell 2002) on the same research project. For example, the same project might be reported to an academic audience as a published paper, a professional audience at a conference and a community audience at a meeting. Within the same medium of prose a professional researcher might

portray the research using different genres. Artists' work is of different styles (eg portrait, landscape, still life and abstract). In similar fashion the professional researcher might select different research questions out of the professional workplace. For example, a researcher principal might choose questions related to staff development, school community relations, and student learning in mathematics. Professionals' work is transdisciplinary and so the research questions are likely to be able to be drawn from a broad range of possible areas.

Especially because of its potential variety, the Professional Doctoral portfolio is likely to have a degree of coherence that an artist's portfolio might not (want to) achieve, although an artist might be able to argue a certain coherence (eg Picasso's blue period). Walker (1998) makes the point that the portfolio will have a thesis, or, an overriding line of argument. For Walker (1998, 94) the thesis is the 'argument made, the intellectual and conceptual glue that holds the (port)folio together' (Maxwell and Vine 1998). In the tertiary sector the coherence of the portfolio might gain particular importance because coherence is a marker for quality scholarship.

The use of the portfolio in the creative arts is well known. It has also been used in the secondary sector, for example, stage six (final year) syllabi in the NSW Board of Studies identifies a portfolio as a means of presentation of outcomes in such diverse areas as business services, information processes and technology, design and technology as well as in a number of the creative arts subjects (<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>, accessed 30/9/03). The use of the portfolio is also evident worldwide in the tertiary sector. A Google search using the terms 'portfolio' and 'tertiary education' found that its use in (for example):

- psychiatric nursing in a Professional Doctoral program in the UK (<http://www.nursing-standard.co.uk/archives/vol17-36/pdfs/c17n36p104.pdf>, sourced 8/8/03);
- the PhD at ANU in the creative Arts (ANU web page sourced 8/8/03);
- DEng. at Brunel University (BU web page sourced 8/8/03);
- PhD by publication or portfolio at University of Glamorgan (UG web page sourced 28/8/03);

- University of Western Sydney Professional Doctorates (UWS web page sourced 8/8/03);
- University of Surrey's Professional Doctorates as an alternative form to the dissertation for examination (US web page sourced 8/8/03).
- Uni. of Texas in Mexican Studies where the portfolio was separate from the dissertation (UT web page sourced 8/8/03);
- Uni. of Hertfordshire in a DBA for 2004 where the portfolio is a record of learning experiences at the workplace site and separate from the research piece (UH web page sourced 8/8/03); and
- At Southwest Missouri State University, the Doctorate of Audiology may contain undergraduate as well as postgraduate work (SMSU web page sourced 8/8/03).

Higher doctoral awards (eg at UNE) as well as some PhDs (eg Griffith University) are awarded on the basis of a portfolio.

Moving from the now common use of the portfolio in the secondary and tertiary sector to the teaching professional sector, Dinham and Scott (after Retallick 2000, 2, in Dinham & Scott, 2003) indicate that the teaching portfolio is a construction of what has been *learned* in the professional workplace. As such it 'performs the function of demonstrating one's capabilities and accomplishments, achieved through documents, artefacts and empirical evidence, judiciously selected and linked together in a theoretically sound and coherent fashion'. There are similarities here with the Professional Doctoral portfolio. The purpose of the latter is to present research projects and of the former as a device for presenting professional learning. The question of the standard of each is addressed through the concept of audience and the criteria that the audience addresses.

### ***Potential of the portfolio***

The potential of the portfolio is largely determined by its structure and this is attractive to the busy, senior professional. As shown above, portfolio items can vary in subject. The portfolio is flexible enough to allow different forms of scholarship in the Boyer (1990) senses. Busy professionals need answers to research questions within a reasonable period of time. A portfolio presented for a Professional Doctorate encourages

a number of scholarly studies of this kind. Busy professionals simply do not have time to read a dissertation and they are more likely to read shortened quality research pieces. Thus the portfolio is more accessible. Senior professional people undertake work that covers a wide range of possibilities for research. The portfolio allows a number of studies which recognises the breadth of expertise that a professional requires. A series of short studies encouraged by the portfolio structure enables the professional to change employment while in the middle of a doctoral program, a situation less likely in the long-haul dissertation. Finally, and as mentioned above, the portfolio allows the presentation of different forms of the same research studies. This allows the professional to show a breadth of professional expertise not possible with the academic genre of the dissertation (Maxwell 2002) by using a variety of genres (media).

### ***Limitations of the portfolio***

The limitations are derived from the structure of the portfolio. Clearly the portfolio will have its conservative critics. For those who demand depth in their doctoral studies then the PhD dissertation may suit best. Additionally, the separate items in the portfolio may be of variable quality and this may cause its examination to be problematic. The demands upon the portfolio researcher may be too much because a series of studies are required. For example, the conceptual demands of several projects may overload researchers who are, at the same time, often full-time workers. Much will depend upon the choice of research projects for inclusion. This is not unproblematic - the conceptualisation of each will necessarily be carefully done especially in terms of their size. Nevertheless the challenge is to present the portfolio as a quality form of product at the doctoral level.

The temptation is to think of the PhD as unproblematic. The PhD dissertation is the 'gold standard' as far as many, including perhaps most academics, are concerned. However, almost any PhD dissertation will vary in quality from chapter to chapter. But for the reasons given above the portfolio has potential.

### ***Issues around the use of the Portfolio***

Issues raised here include the 'balance' of the portfolio, its coherence, examination and supervision. In terms of the first issue, balance refers to the relative

weights of the several pieces in the portfolio. Should there be relatively equal sizes for each piece or can size vary greatly? Should it be varied in its methodology? Is a Professional Doctoral portfolio stronger if it portrays a range of methodologies?

What might 'coherence' mean in a Professional Doctoral portfolio? Coherence is often a criterion for a product created for a particular purpose. Deakin University required a thesis for the portfolio thus attaining a form of coherence. Is a smorgasbord form of portfolio appropriate where there are no apparent links between, say, any of the several pieces? Or, do the connections need to be explicitly made in the portfolio itself? Maxwell and Vine (1998) argued that it should.

McWilliam et al (2002) make the point that present academics almost exclusively have the PhD as their doctoral qualification. By implication, their experience of the portfolio is limited. However, academics are familiar with the shorter Masters form of dissertation as a quality piece of academic work. Hence it is likely that the problems of supervision will emanate not so much from size but from the variety of forms of presentation and genre that are possible within the portfolio format. A related issue is that of doctoral quality in these shorter pieces.

Such shorter pieces of research are arranged in time. Are they done in series or in parallel? How do universities that demand a proposal cope with realities, not experienced by the dissertation researcher, of a change in research piece brought on by evolving circumstances?

Lastly, supervision and examination of the portfolio it would appear are in the process of development. Examination will be fraught with difficulties simply because the nature and form of the portfolio will be unfamiliar. Published criteria are likely to assist this process. Logically highly regarded, experienced professionals are likely to be examiners. Students would be well advised to be wary and 'gung-ho' course co-ordinators may be doing their students a dis-service by not pointing out the potential pitfalls.

### ***Case study of portfolio in 'the new EdD at UNE'***

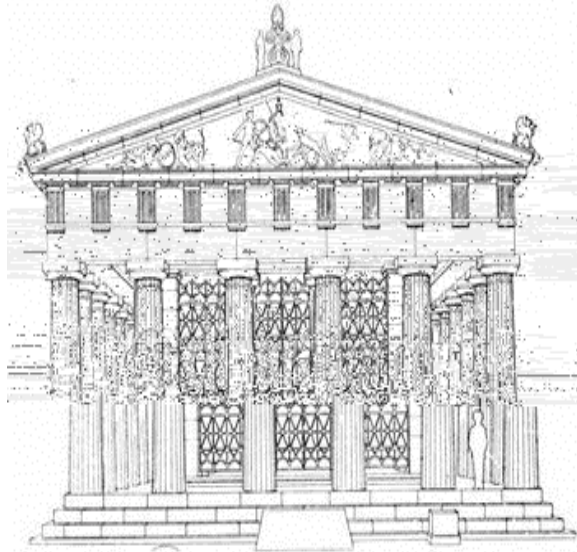
The 'new EdD at UNE' is a part-time award to enable busy professionals to re-conceptualise professional work and workplaces and to enable research to have an impact. The portfolio is the preferred product, but the dissertation is an alternative.

The decision to move to the portfolio in many ways symbolises the move from first to record generation Professional Doctorate (Maxwell 2003). The reasons are given above but these took some time to articulate and gain acceptance. An important process just completed is the alteration of the criteria for examination to encompass the portfolio, including the possibility of different genre/media (see Appendix 1). For example the addition of the phrase 'for relevant audiences' in ' quality and clarity of writing and presentation for relevant audiences' gives permission for the researcher to write in different genres. These criteria are published for researchers' and supervisors' interest. They are essential as they guide the examiners (primary audience).

The 'new EdD at the UNE' has a unit that addresses epistemological and design issues. It also encourages use of the researcher's own voice (Maxwell 2002). It does, both in text and at the residential school, point out the problematics of the portfolio in this early period of the development of Professional Doctoral awards.

One way that has assisted us in our discussions about the portfolio in the 'new EdD at UNE' has been to use the model of a Greek temple (Figure 1). The 'new EdD at UNE' requires coherence via a 'linking paper' (theoretical and professional argument and coherence) and this is represented by the pediment (roof). The pediment might extend beyond the peristyle (columns) below, and probably will, either as a developed introduction or as a developed final concluding section. The pediment is supported by the peristyle in which individual columns represent the different pieces of research in the portfolio. In the model depicted the columns are of similar weight but in the portfolio the research pieces are likely to have different weightings (width of column?). The model perspective view of the columns in Figure 1 well presents the possibility of different genre representations of the same piece of research. The solid base of the model represents the foundation of the portfolio and might be represented in some tangible form in the portfolio. The figure is important since it represents the positioning (researcher's own voice) of the professional researcher, especially in terms of the authority of the research as a professional and hence the credibility that is brought to bear upon the analyses. It is appropriate that the figure stands on the foundational aspects of the portfolio.

Figure 1: Model for 'new EdD at UNE' portfolio



The 'new EdD at UNE' took its first students in 2002, whereas students first joined the program. Consequently UNE has not had any EdD 'students' present a portfolio and we are not experienced in their supervision. We are progressing carefully.

A selection of portfolio proposals follows:

- A series of theoretical papers which develop the underpinning of a new continuing professional education program and a testing of these ideas against personal practice;
- A case study of a university's attempt to align Faculty plans with resource provision; and
- Three case studies of the relationship between tertiary indigenous centres and their respective universities.

### **Conclusions**

The notion of the creative arts portfolio has considerable potential for the Professional Doctorate. Portfolios vary in purpose and audience. These ideas are useful since the professional has a variety of discourse communities that are interested in the research. The Professional Doctoral research is intended to have ' *significant benefits in professional practice* '. Consequently the portfolio items may vary in their medium (means of communication). Furthermore, items in the portfolio might vary in style and

size (research questions). This is again useful since the range of competence required of a professional is itself quite varied. Since they have an accreditation purpose in the tertiary sector, Professional Doctoral portfolios will have a coherence about them, perhaps expressed as a linking paper in which the separate items are brought together in a coherent whole. Structurally, the dissertation is inclined to depth of treatment whereas the portfolio to breadth. In the latter case the quality needs to be retained and in these early days of their use in higher education potential problems exist in the lack of experience (knowledge about) supervision and examination. In this kind of scenario the potential portfolio constructor needs to be wary. A minimal condition would appear to be the publication of the criteria for examination.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND**

### **DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

### **INFORMATION FOR EXAMINERS**

#### **1. EdD RULES**

A copy of the rules governing the degree is attached.

The attention of examiners is drawn especially to Rule 12.1 which provides that, on completion of the course of advanced study and research, the candidate shall

submit a portfolio/dissertation embodying the results of his or her work which shall be substantially an original contribution to the subject concerned.

The work embodied in the portfolio/dissertation represents 75% of the requirements for the degree. (Candidates have already satisfied requirements for the remaining 25% of the award.)

## **2. STANDARD OF EXAMINATION**

Overseas examiners who are unfamiliar with the standards applicable in Australian universities, are advised it is the University's intention that the standard of its EdD degree be equivalent to the standard of the corresponding degree in the leading universities of Great Britain and North America.

A portfolio/dissertation may be regarded as acceptable for the award of the degree if it: reflects international standards of academic rigour; is oriented to applied research in education; and, makes a contribution to the profession and/or professional practice. *The criteria, against which the portfolio/dissertation is to be examined, include:*

- significance of the research to the practice of education and the clarity with which it is stated;
- competence in identifying and reviewing relevant literature(s);
- adequacy of developing research question(s);
- Quality of basic research design(s): plausibility, parsimony and elegance;
- appropriateness of identification, collection and analysis of relevant evidence;
- expertise with which findings are interpreted in terms of theory, implications for policy and practice, and needs for further research; and
- quality and clarity of writing and presentation for relevant audiences.

## **3. EXAMINER'S REPORT**

Each examiner is asked to submit an independent report, together with a completed summary recommendation form. In their detailed comments, examiners are requested to include comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolio/dissertation. Where changes are recommended, these should be clearly specified.

Copies of examiners' reports are made available to the candidate and the supervisor(s) after they have been considered by the UNE Research Doctoral Committee and a decision has been made. An examiner may ask that his or her identity not be revealed to the candidate.

Reports should be addressed to the "Secretary, UNE Research Doctoral Committee" marked "Confidential". They must not be sent to any other person.

## **4. TIME FOR EXAMINATION**

The Research Doctoral Committee is anxious to ensure that the examination process be completed as quickly as possible. The Committee regards two months as being a sufficient period for an examiner to complete a report and asks particularly that examiners who feel

unable to complete their examination within this period write as soon as possible after appointment, to the Secretary of the Research Doctoral Committee to provide an estimate of when they expect to be able to do so. Where a lengthy delay is envisaged, the Committee may prefer to appoint an alternative examiner.

## **5. ORAL, WRITTEN OR PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS**

### **(a) ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

Unlike many universities where oral examinations are common, the University of New England will require a candidate to take such an examination only in those cases where it is absolutely essential. Many candidates will have left Australia after submitting their portfolio/dissertation for examination and, in many cases, examiners will be widely separated.

### **(b) WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS**

An examiner who is not satisfied with any aspect of the portfolio/dissertation may request that the candidate furnish written answers to specific questions. Copies of any such questions and of the candidate's answers may be sent to other examiners.

### **(c) PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS**

Examiners who recommend that the candidate should be required to complete a practical examination should provide an exact specification of the examination required.

## **6. CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE TO EXAMINERS**

Edd Rule 13.7 provides that, in cases where an examiner or examiners report unfavourably upon a portfolio/dissertation, the Research Doctoral Committee may invite the candidate to respond to the examiner's comments. The Committee may refer a candidate's response to any of the examiners for comment.

## **7. DISAGREEMENT AMONG EXAMINERS**

In the event that there is a disagreement among examiners, the UNE Research Doctoral Committee may exchange reports among the examiners with a request that they consult with a view to their exploring the possibility that they might make an agreed recommendation. It is appreciated, however, that even if they do consult, the examiners may be unable to reach agreement on a recommendation and, in such an event, the Committee has a number of options open to it.

On the basis of the reports as submitted, the Committee may feel able to make a decision to award or not award the degree or to permit the candidate to revise the portfolio/dissertation for further examination; it may decide to appoint a further examiner; or it may decide, in terms of Rule 13.6 (c), to appoint an external adjudicator. It should be noted that, if an external adjudicator is appointed, the reports of the examiners will be forwarded to the adjudicator, together with, possibly, any response by the candidate to an unfavourable examiner's report and any examiner's comment on that response.

**8. REVISED PORTFOLIOS/DISSERTATIONS**

In cases where a candidate is permitted to revise his or her portfolio/dissertation for further examination, the Committee *would like the examiners of the original version to examine the revised portfolio/dissertation*. In such cases, each examiner will be provided with copies of all examiner's reports on the original version of the portfolio/dissertation so that they will be aware of all criticisms considered by the candidate when revising the work.

**9. COPY OF PORTFOLIO/DISSERTATION**

Examiners may retain the copy of the portfolio/dissertation upon completion of the examination process. If examiners wish to annotate the portfolio/dissertation for the information of the candidate they should return it to Research Services by air mail with their examination report and summary recommendation form. The University will be pleased to reimburse the cost of return postage, on receipt of a statement of the cost. Where an embargo has been placed on access to the portfolio/dissertation the examiners will be advised of the period of restriction and will be requested to observe the embargo in keeping with University policy and Australian copyright law.

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