Chapter 1
The Consequential Relationship between Doctoral Course Design and Capstone Design

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers how doctoral programs are designed; the different types of courses available; and the relationship between program design and capstone in the U.K. and U.S.A. We will explore the variety of ways in which professional doctorate programs prepare candidates for their research study in the U.K. and the U.S.A. by drawing on quantitative data obtained from a survey of 150 higher education institutions in the two identified countries. We examine the diversity of program design; courses taken by doctoral candidates; and capstone artefact i.e. thesis/dissertation model. The global research community thrives by recognising diversity. It is therefore necessary to emphasise and promote the various doctoral models currently being designed while at the same time increase our understanding between the program design and delivery, the nature of the research produced, and methods for disseminating this new knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades in response to societal and global needs, there has been a large growth internationally in the range and type of doctorate awards resulting in varied doctorate models with a range of specific characteristics. On either side of the Atlantic higher education institutions are diversifying their doctoral education curricula and many new kinds of doctoral programs are emerging. Similarities and differences between the various models are at times difficult to discern particularly on an international stage. This issue is further compounded by the diversity of capstone models being developed grounded by the new curricula. Many readers will be familiar with the discussion between the nature of the Ph.D.

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program and Professional Practice Doctorates (PPD) and the criticism of professional practice doctorates being Ph.D. lite (Shulman et al., 2006, p.27). But they may be less familiar with discussions focussed on the differences between Ph.D. programs and PPD programs. The development of trans disciplinary doctorates, collaborative institution doctorates, online doctorates, part time doctorates and work place based doctorates further compound issues of doctoral program confusion. The opaque nature of doctoral programs impacts the production of knowledge, program quality consistency, and has the potential to confuse society in general. Is society well served by current doctoral program design or are we in fact limiting knowledge production by the nature of the courses that candidates take and the design of the capstone completed by the candidate?

This chapter considers how doctoral programs are designed; the different types of courses available; and the relationship between program design and capstone in the U.K. and U.S.A.

We will explore the variety of ways in which professional doctorate programs prepare candidates for their research study in the U.K. and the U.S.A. by drawing on quantitative data obtained from a survey of 150 higher education institutions in the two identified countries. We examine the diversity of program design; courses taken by doctoral candidates; and capstone artefact i.e. thesis/dissertation model. The professional orientated nature of the professional doctorate, in comparison to the traditional Ph.D. requires an underpinning methodical approach, which familiarise the students with a range of methods appropriate for the development of practice. One approach is for the professional doctorate to adopt an overarching methodology, such as social constructionist research where the traditional approaches to validity and reliability are more accurately replaced with trustworthiness and authenticity. Doctoral program candidates can then incorporate their reflections into the research study through a variety of methodologies such as action research, and autoethnography. This approach can be facilitated by candidates deliberately and consciously embedding themselves within theoretical perspectives and apply these perspectives to practice.

International dialogue about doctoral programs is mostly focused on the relationship between the functions of doctoral education in enhancing economic growth and competitiveness in the global economy, and program design. There are also notable debates concerned with global patterns of change in doctoral education and on-going agendas for innovation and research in doctoral pedagogies and education to further improve the relevance and creativity of the degree. Doctoral graduates are regarded as agents of change, innovation and diversification in the ‘knowledge economy’.

The global research community recognizes that:

*Growth in the number of doctoral candidates worldwide is a positive development. This growth has been accompanied by an increasing diversity in the doctoral population and the development of different types of doctorates, including those linked to professional practice. Key to successfully supporting such diversity is to ensure the complementarity of research and …flexibility for individual candidates.*

– Oxford Statement, 2015

It is therefore necessary to emphasise and promote the various doctoral models currently being designed while at the same time increase our understanding between the program design and delivery, the nature of the research produced, and methods for disseminating this new knowledge. Whilst continually asking the following questions: Are innovative capstone models facilitating the development of new knowledge? Is the development of new knowledge inhibited by the research methods courses included in the program design and the capstone artefact? Does the program drive the capstone design or the research focus?
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