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Ph.D. by Publication or Monograph Thesis? Supervisors and Candidates Negotiating the Purpose of the Thesis when Choosing Between Formats

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Abstract: In this chapter, I investigate how the Ph.D. by publication has become more and more prevalent within the humanities and the social sciences over the last couple of decades in Denmark. Based on interviews with Ph.D. supervisors and doctoral candidates at two Danish universities, I analyze how they articulate, construct, and imagine the thesis when they legitimize their choice of and preference for thesis format, be it the monograph thesis or the Ph.D. by publication. This analysis shows how the choice of thesis format is most often legitimized through instrumental discourses, emphasizing what it does for individuals or institutions rather than what it does for disciplines and knowledge. Terms like completion, results, competency, career, status, statistics, and return on investment are common—foregrounding how the thesis contributes to individual or institutional performance. Interestingly, within this instrumental way of talking and thinking about the thesis, the monograph thesis is beginning to be seen as a less ideal or legitimate format and the Ph.D. by publication is being seen as a more obvious choice. Alongside these instrumental ideas and imaginings, there are other discourses at work imagining the thesis in terms of being an intellectual endeavor, a process of inquiry and knowledge transformation, and a contributor to knowledge and disciplines. Nevertheless, in this chapter I show how drawing on intellectual discourses alone is insufficient when it comes to arguing for participants' choice of thesis format regardless if it is the monograph thesis or the Ph.D. by publication.

Over the last couple of decades, we have witnessed significant changes within doctoral education in the Nordic countries as well as internationally. These changes include a growth in enrollment rates and increasingly diverse candidates; an increased focus on quality assurance, accountability, and completion times; growing pressure to publish during candidature; and increased international competition (Aitchison et al., 2012; Burford, 2017; Manathunga, 2019). These changes have often been discussed in the literature as related to the global knowledge economy, neoliberal ideologies, and new practices of managerialism that focus on efficiency, accountability, and performance (Boud & Lee, 2009; Davies & Petersen, 2005; Shore & Wright, 2016). Among these shifts, we also find changes in the final text for examination: the dissertation or thesis. More recently, the Ph.D. by publication has become an increasingly common format, appearing alongside the monograph thesis within the humanities and social sciences, particularly in Denmark and other Nordic countries (de Lange, 2013; Herrmann et al., 2013; Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017a). The rise of the Ph.D. by publication is, in the international literature on doctoral writing, often described as a response to the global knowledge economy within which scientific articles are conceptualized as the result of an investment (Aitchison et al., 2012; Barnacle, 2005; Kamler & Thomson, 2014). In this vein, David Boud and Alison Lee (2009) discussed how the growth in Ph.D.s by publication can be seen as a consequence of a neoliberal ideology, among other things, which brings forward a tendency to focus on performance-based metrics; as they put it, the rapid expansion of “doctorates by publication . . . are a visible response to policy-led pressures for research productivity within the ‘performative’ university” (p. 7).

In Danish legislation, both the monograph thesis and the Ph.D. by publication are considered equals (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2013). However, the Ph.D. by publication is becoming more and more prevalent. In this chapter, I explore how choices of thesis formats are negotiated among doctoral candidates and supervisors at two universities in Denmark. I am curious about the specific ways in which speakers talk about and legitimize their decisions regarding their chosen thesis format. I am interested in the ideas—the imaginings of the thesis—held by local stakeholders, making one thesis format more “relevant” than the other.

I begin by first unpacking my theoretical perspectives and the specific study that this chapter builds on. I follow this with an analysis of my interviews with Ph.D. supervisors and doctoral candidates—I focus particularly on the discourses used to legitimize choices of thesis format. I am interested in how language choices shape the format of the thesis in certain ways, especially through the use of two discourses that I have found to be particularly

dominant in my study. I refer to these discourses as *instrumental discourses* and *intellectual discourses*. I describe both discourses briefly before showing the two discourses at work via excerpts from my interviews. Finally, I discuss which of the discourses seem to be the most powerful in imagining the thesis and the implications of this for doctoral thesis writing¹.

Theoretical Perspectives

Much of the current research about doctoral thesis writing takes a social practice approach to writing. Within this framework, writing is conceived as a social action, as opposed to an individual or isolated activity, and as an act—something performed rather than a transparent tool for representing and reflecting reality. Furthermore, writing is conceived of as a practice bound up with, embedded in, and shaped by social structures. There is an emerging body of work that has sought to take up questions about what to write and how to write as tied up with broader social interests (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Badenhorst et al., 2015; Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2014; Burford, 2017; Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Frick, 2019; Grant, 2005; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Guerin, 2016; Kamler & Thomson, 2008, 2014; Lillis, 2001; Starke-Meyerring, 2011; Starke-Meyerring et al., 2014). In this chapter, I extend work that approaches doctoral writing as a social and discursive practice that is politically implicated (Burford, 2017). In particular, I wish to pay more attention to the discourses surrounding the doctoral dissertation, prompted by the rise of Ph.D.s by publication, particularly within the humanities and social sciences.

My theoretical framework relies on a critical discourse analytical approach that investigates language in use in specific contexts—in this case, language around the thesis (Gee, 2011, 2014a). This language around the thesis genre might also be understood as an example of what Jane Giltrow (2002) has called *metagenre*—“situated language about situated language” (p. 190). Despite a widespread and increasing interest in new materialist research methodologies within educational research, which are explicitly anti-discourse (Kelly, 2017; Petersen, 2018; see also Ingram, Chapter 13, this collection), I argue that discourse analysis still has an important role to play in acknowledging language as a performative practice that defines and frames social reality in certain ways. When language is understood not just as a description of reality but also as an act that frames and offers some ways of doing, being, and saying—but not others—it matters (Biesta, 2004). In this chapter, I analyze the language used to describe and legitimize the thesis and how Ph.D. super-

1 Throughout this chapter, I will use the terms thesis and dissertation interchangeably.

visors and doctoral candidates use language to communicate certain perspectives that define and frame what is a right, good, or relevant choice of thesis format. Within a critical discourse analytical approach, the term *discourse* is used to describe discourses as “socially accepted associations” or “ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the ‘right’ places and at the ‘right’ times with the ‘right’ object” (Gee, 2014a, pp. 51–52).

This Study

The analysis undertaken in this chapter is based on a larger research project I undertook for my Ph.D. project between 2014 and 2019. It took place at two research universities in Denmark. Data were generated from thirteen qualitative semi-structured interviews with Ph.D. supervisors and doctoral candidates in the social sciences and humanities, each lasting approximately 90 minutes (Skov, 2019). Although supervisors and candidates were not related to each other in a supervisory relationship, this suited my purposes because it was not the supervisor relationship I wished to investigate. Instead, I was interested in the perspectives Ph.D. supervisors and doctoral candidates held regarding the thesis and saw the supervisors and candidates as important stakeholders whose views ought to be consulted. Using contact information gleaned from institutional websites, I emailed and recruited supervisors and doctoral candidates of different ages and genders, supervisors with varying degrees of experience, and doctoral candidates at various stages in their doctoral studies. A total of seven candidates and six supervisors participated. Of the candidates, four were female and three were male. Of the supervisors, three were female and three were male. The findings of this exploratory qualitative study were not intended to be generalizable. Rather, the aim of this study and participant selection was to elicit multiple emic perspectives in order to better access complex and nuanced decision-making processes regarding thesis formats. I intentionally recruited participants from two different universities (seven from one and six from the other) because I wanted to explore whether there might be patterns in the ways thesis writing was imagined by various stakeholders. Both universities had the same policy framework for thesis formats and examination.

I used a sociolinguistic approach to aid me with my analysis. Such an approach gives researchers the tools and permission to focus not only on *what* is said but also on *how* and *by whom* it is said (Gee, 2014b; Lee, 1994). In the next section, I unfold the two dominant discourses (instrumental and intellectual) I found were heavily drawn on by supervisors and doctoral candidates to argue for and legitimize their choices with regards to thesis formats (Skov, 2019).

An Intellectual Discourse and an Instrumental Discourse

In this section, I discuss what characterizes instrumental and intellectual discourses. Within an *instrumental discourse*, the thesis is constructed primarily as a product, detached from the specific practice of research. The thesis is described alongside words like number, excellence, relevance, competency, completion, status, return on investment, and visibility. In addition, the thesis is described in relationship to how it contributes to the performance of either the individual doctoral candidate or the institution. Conversely, within an *intellectual discourse* the thesis is constructed as a specific practice of research meaningful in itself and as both a process and a product. The thesis is described alongside words like scholarship, depth, knowledge production, and intellectual enterprise. In addition, within intellectual discourse the thesis is described in relationship to how it develops and contributes to knowledge and discourse communities. It is important to clarify that these discourses are not to be understood as opposites on a continuum—even though to a large extent they are constituted and defined by how they exclude or other each other—because they also overlap in some areas. For instance, both are oriented towards thesis writing as a product and as a means that can help researchers gain status or even enhance their career.

In the following sections I share my analysis of interview excerpts, paying particular attention to the complex and varying ways that language is used to argue for and legitimize choice of thesis format.² I show how the two dominant discourses, the intellectual discourse and the instrumental discourse, work to construct the thesis in somewhat contradictory ways.

Thesis Writing as Fulfilling Standards

The following excerpt is from an interview with a doctoral candidate studying in the humanities. In it, he shares his thoughts regarding the multiple decision points he faced when deciding which thesis format to use. At first, he wanted to write a monograph, but he later decided to write a Ph.D. by publication. Here, I asked him whose idea it was to write a monograph in the first place:

Well, it wasn't my idea. It was my supervisor who thought that the monograph-way of writing would be a good idea,

² As mentioned, my data collection took place within a Danish context and consisted of interviews with Danish supervisors and doctoral candidates; therefore, the analysis presented in this chapter is an analysis of Danish language. In the quotations from participants, words written in brackets are my additions in order to make the statements and formulations understandable in English.

because this was the way she usually did her writing. I don't remember us having a talk about which format to choose, what the pros and cons were. I don't think it was because she didn't want to have this talk.

In this explanation, the student rationalized the choice of the monograph with regard to tradition, with the supervisor as a stand-in for a tradition. This tradition was not articulated in specifics or connected to specific research practices; instead, the candidate talked about it in general terms as being "a good idea" and legitimized it by referring to it as something that the supervisor was used to.

The candidate was very confused about what was expected of him with regards to writing a thesis, and in trying to make things easier for himself, he chose to write a Ph.D. by publication instead of a monograph, feeling that the Ph.D. by publication provided explicit criteria and standards that he could identify and fulfill. He described these criteria as follows:

For instance, in relation to [lowering] my ambitions, there is the question of the number of articles (in the Ph.D. by publication) and whether I should choose to write four or only three. [Then] there is the question of looking at journals figuring out in which of these it will be possible for me to get my article published with in a specific time frame. . . . There are many different quality criteria that one can put forward. My approach is, well, if the article gets accepted [by the journal], then it is cool, or then I am like "home free" in some way. Whereas my supervisor perhaps has some ambitions that go a little bit further—if I can put it like this.

In the absence of explicit criteria, this doctoral candidate turned towards the requirements of the Ph.D. by publication, for instance towards the number of articles. Furthermore, he turned towards more general and decontextualized criteria regarding articles as being "good enough," based solely on acceptance in a journal. As evidenced in the above quotation, the supervisor was not a part of the candidate's process of finding out and understanding the requirements of different thesis formats. The candidate constructed the "supervisor" as a somewhat disappointed expert with ambitions that "go a little bit further" than just getting published, but these ambitions were not made explicit or discussed. Apparently, for this supervisor there were some more substantial ideas about quality of work that frame article writing, hence the Ph.D. by publication. I will return to explore these ideas more fully in just a moment.

This Ph.D. candidate drew strategically on instrumental discourses in his talk about the thesis, knowing that there were also other discourses available in the construction of the thesis. Thesis writing became, within this instrumental universe, a question of numbers (“four or only three” articles), a question of fulfilling standards (“if the article gets accepted . . . then I am, like, ‘home free’”), and, as he expressed earlier in the interview, a question of saving time (“writing three instead for four articles will save me a lot of time”) as well as a question of career and the exchange of goods (“the more you publish, the more attractive you are within this system”). In my data, participants who used instrumental discourses to justify their choices tended to frame the Ph.D. by publication in instrumental ways. As I will show next, they used terms like completion, results, competency, career, status, and statistics to describe this thesis format, constructing the thesis primarily as a means to an end. The Ph.D. by publication was also often described as a product and in terms of its benefits. Phrases such as “return on investment” were used to foreground how the Ph.D. by publication “benefited” doctoral writers and institutions, which led me to wonder whether the monograph format may be having difficulties in being considered relevant, beneficial, and legitimate. I elaborate on this further in the following section.

The Monograph Thesis: Difficulties in Recognizing It as a Legitimate Format

The next excerpt from a social science doctoral candidate shows how considering the way in which the thesis will be used outside of academia was used to justify proceeding with a manuscript-based thesis format. Right before this excerpt, the candidate had been speaking about his Ph.D. project and how he thought it was a shame that it had to be written in a Ph.D. by publication format—with no place for “context,” “nuance,” or “history,” as he put it—instead of a monograph, which, although he originally preferred it, was not a tradition within his field. To legitimize not writing a monograph after all, the candidate recounted one of his priorities: the broader dissemination of his research, suggesting that this is something doctoral candidates are obliged to do given the fact that the Ph.D. is “expensive”:³

This is also about the result; it is about the Ph.D. project being utilized outside, because I think in justifying spend-

3 The Ph.D. candidature in Denmark is a three-year fully-funded position with conditions equivalent to a full-time academic position (paid vacation, superannuation, etc.) and currently costs around 150.000 EUROS (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017b).

ing a lot of money on getting doctoral candidates through these systems, then I think we should have some discussion of what it is that we are doing.

In our discussion, the candidate spoke about the thesis as something that ought to be a return on an investment, and he discussed writing articles (as part of the Ph.D. by publication) as something that makes this possible. At the same time, he described the monograph thesis as a less relevant format in a context where the Ph.D. is understood in terms of costs and benefits. Similarly, he positioned himself as a subject who needed to get “through these systems” in order to be cost efficient or as needing to repay a debt of sorts. He also introduced the “inside versus outside” the academy dichotomy. This candidate expressed the assumption that the results and outcomes of a given research project are worth more if they target audiences and structures outside the academy.

Besides being mentioned together with words like context, nuance, or history, in my study the monograph thesis was also articulated together with words like depth, substance, consistency, and argumentation. One supervisor within social science described the monograph as characterized by “requiring scientific consistency” and “an opportunity for working in-depth.” Another supervisor within the humanities talked about writing a monograph as a certain way of knowing, stating, “I think you are being forced to do certain kinds of cognitive processes. To do a coherent piece of work pushes you to places where you can reconsider stuff.” Though the monograph thesis in my data was most often represented using an intellectual discourse among both supervisors and candidates, the following excerpt from a Ph.D. supervisor within the social sciences highlights how an instrumental discourse is activated when arguing for the relevance of the format:

It is highly impressive if the candidate can show that she or he also are [*sic*] capable of working in depth. If the candidate only has produced articles, then one could ask: Is the candidate also capable of more comprehensive [work]? These tendencies [of prioritizing an ability to work in depth] are somehow coming from the United States . . . [where] it counts for something if you can produce the big narrative as well. . . . If over time the candidate is expected to write monographs with major publishers, then he or she must also be able to show the capacity to write something that is coherent.

The supervisor referred to ability, labour market needs, and employer interests as well as to the United States and major publishers as convincing evidence

for pursuing the book-length (monograph) format. In other words, the supervisor legitimized the monograph format by drawing on an instrumental discourse that constructed the thesis as a means to an end—that is, as a means for developing certain competencies, particularly with regards to an ability to work in-depth and produce “big narratives.” Furthermore, the supervisor legitimized monograph-competencies by referring to them as “coming from the United States” and in the interests of the “major publishers.” It seemed difficult for the supervisor to argue for the legitimacy of the monograph thesis without drawing on an instrumental discourse.

The instrumental context shown and articulated in my material indicates the monograph thesis is something that candidates write in opposition—the monograph is something candidates do “in spite of.” A supervisor within the humanities articulated this very point by referring to one of his own candidates who had chosen to write a monograph. He paraphrased this candidate as saying: “No, damn, I am doing it anyway.” In this case, writing a monograph was something the candidate chose to do “anyway,” as if it were a format that took courage and determination to choose—traits which, interestingly, also happen to be regarded as important attributes for researchers to have. Similarly, a candidate within the social sciences shared the following comments regarding her decision for choosing the monograph format:

So, in the end, I decided to put away all those expectations [about getting published], and said to myself: First and foremost, I am supposed to produce an excellent Ph.D. and my masterpiece is the monograph. If afterwards, I will be able to write some articles on the basis of that, it would be super. So, it is myself who has had to come to this decision, that this was the way things worked the best for me.

In general, the monograph thesis is, as constructed here, a format that is difficult to find legitimate intellectual arguments for—thus, it is a format that candidates need determination to pursue. The Ph.D. candidate in this example turned inward to argue for her decision to write a monograph, saying that “this was the way things worked best for me.”

Thesis Writing as Research or as Performance

In the next example, taken from an interview with a doctoral candidate in the humanities, the speaker reflected on one of the pros of writing a Ph.D. by publication—that it gives the doctoral candidate some publications to include on a resume. Despite this, she decided to pursue a monograph format.

When asked whether she thought it was a problem she had not written any articles, she replied,

Yes and no. If I want to apply for a post-doc, that is, if I want to stay in academia, then I think it would be better if I had some publications that I could write on my resume. . . . And also, I am thinking about the community, that I would like to contribute to the metrics that my department is measured by. I would like this feeling of all us collectively doing something good for the department, for instance if it helps that I appear in *Deadline* [a Danish television program] three times . . . and the same goes for those articles. When my head of department is negotiating with whomever he is negotiating with, if there are some statistics of how many articles that are published here and there, then I would have liked if I had been able to contribute to those statistics. If I had just been able to, but then again, this was not how things went.

In this example, she imagined the Ph.D. by publication using an instrumental discourse, a discourse in which the thesis is seen as having potential to boost resumes, careers, and the performance of the institution. In addition, in this interview, other traditional academic values and practices gained new meanings. For instance, this candidate understood “the community” not only in its more traditional sense as a community of researchers but also as a community of performers, that is, people working together to enhance this community’s performance. And by extension, she understood the “contribution” traditionally associated with the thesis not solely as a contribution to knowledge or to the disciplines but also as a contribution to the performance of a particular department. This candidate, then, imbued the monograph thesis with guilt because she did not associate it with a sense of contributing to her department.

This candidate decided to write a monograph—a selfish decision she perhaps felt guilty about because contributing to departmental metrics was, for her, something for which Ph.D. candidates and researchers ought to be responsible. It seems for her it was impossible for doctoral candidates to address or honor both discourses in their writing: writing in the interest of producing knowledge (the intellectual discourse) or writing in the interest of contributing to institutional research performance (the instrumental discourse). It seems for her there was a gap between instrumental discourses, which imagine thesis writing in terms of products, deliveries, numbers, research metrics, and visibility, and intellectual discourses, which imagine thesis writing

in terms of transformation and production of knowledge, contribution to the discipline, discourse communities, and society.

As mentioned, among doctoral candidates, the Ph.D. by publication was, to a large extent, articulated using instrumental rationales. This does not mean that candidates did not sense an intellectual discourse—indeed, they seemed very aware of their supervisors' inclination to represent both the monograph and the Ph.D. by publication in terms of their epistemological potentials and different capacities as ways of knowing. This was thematised in the following quotation from a supervisor within the humanities who talked about “the book” as an important format as compared to the article as a format:

When writing a book, you are confronted with a problem which you don't meet when you are writing an article—and that is the fundamental architectural problem: How to build up an argument, a substantial argument. And this problem brings you one step further down in the substance of the subject matter. . . . When you build up a book, there are some basic choices you have to make which are substantial and important, and this hurts.

In this rationalization, the supervisor drew on intellectual understandings in the sense that he talked about the book format as a specific research practice, not only as a means to achieve something else. For him, writing a book was a specific way of producing knowledge, a specific way of knowing, and it “hurts.” Furthermore, he repeated the word “problem” three times, constructing research writing also around this feature. When I asked him if, in his opinion, it was better to write a monograph rather than a Ph.D. by publication, he confirmed, but then afterwards he talked about how articles “might offer and enable other ways of knowing,” for instance in “addressing an international audience.” In this sense, he also constructed the Ph.D. by publication (not only the monograph thesis) within an intellectual discourse, putting epistemological concerns in the center when talking about research writing. However, besides drawing on an intellectual discourse when talking about the thesis (in both formats), supervisors in this project also drew on and activated instrumental rationales when legitimating their own writing practices. This is what the next section is about.

It's Difficult Not to Become Instrumental

In the following excerpt, a humanities supervisor discussed his own research writing. He mentioned writing a book and how he was enjoying it—but, he

added, he also wrote articles, “of course”:

As a researcher you can't write a book without reconsidering stuff. There was something—uh—it was important for me to write a book. And the next thing I will be doing, is that I will write—I write a lot of articles of course, I write articles all the time—but I am working towards another book, I think it is fun to write books.

This supervisor mentioned writing in long formats, together with the terms “reconsidering,” “important,” and “fun”—and this type of writing was articulated as a personal matter, something “I” found important or “I” thought was fun. This was different from how he discussed his writing of articles, which was in terms of number and frequency (“a lot,” “all the time”) and with the use of the adverb “of course,” which builds on an agreed assumption that being a researcher means writing articles. In such articulation, the supervisor constructed a reality where writing a book was not in itself sufficiently valuable—even though he also constructed it as plural (“another book”). Writing was only legitimate when producing articles as well—measured numerically.

Another supervisor, this time in the social sciences, described having difficulties with not relying on instrumental discourses when advising doctoral candidates:

If the candidates choose to write a monograph, then I regularly talk with them about which writing tasks can be parked [returned to after completion]. I tell them that they have a whole life afterwards for writing articles. And I talk to them about which writing tasks could easily be done now, or which make sense writing together with others or me.

This supervisor talked about writing articles as a task that could be “parked,” completed fairly “easily,” or achieved by “writing together with others.” This supervisor seemed to suggest that it was not possible for candidates to engage in both writing articles and writing a monograph during their candidature.

The same instrumental way of talking about research writing, detached from substance, was displayed when a supervisor within the humanities mentioned how he himself only wrote books to be published at “the major publishers.” In highlighting this, he constructed a reality where quality was articulated together with size and status. Similarly, a social sciences supervisor told me how he only read articles from “the best journals.” These examples display how the instrumental discourse is an important meaning making resource within research environments.

Thesis Writing Imagined Through an Instrumental Discourse

In this study, I have investigated how the Ph.D. by publication has become more prevalent within the humanities and social sciences during the last couple of decades by analyzing how local stakeholders within doctoral education legitimize their choice of format. As such, I have extended extant conversations about the Ph.D. by publication by offering a description of how the thesis is imagined most often using an instrumental discourse that emphasizes what it does for individuals or institutions rather than what it does for disciplines and knowledge, as older conceptions of the Ph.D. emphasized (Barnacle, 2018; Kelly, 2017). In this instrumental context, my analysis indicates the Ph.D. by publication is frequently articulated by doctoral candidates as the most relevant format, and by “relevant,” the doctoral candidates seem to mean that the format contributes to their performance by helping them, for instance, increase numbers of published articles, improve their resumes, enhance career opportunities, and ease the way to degree completion. Within this context, the monograph thesis seems to be taking a backseat to the manuscript format, possibly because it can not compete in the same instrumental terms (e.g., in terms of numbers, productivity, resumes, etc.).

Although the Ph.D. by publication as a format may not in itself contribute to the instrumentalizing of writing within doctoral education, my research shows that this format is articulated together with instrumental ideas and understandings of research writing more often than the monograph thesis. Frances Kelly wrote, with reference to Charles Taylor, that “new practices only make sense according to the new ‘outlook’ or idea —this idea then provides the context in which the practices make sense” (2017, p. 9). My research shows that the Ph.D. by publication, as a practice, makes it possible to talk about research writing in terms of products, numbers, visibility, productivity, and the fulfilling of certain standards in ways the monograph format does not seem to. Instrumental discourse is not especially concerned about research writing as a specific practice but only as a means to something else, decontextualized from the specific knowledge-producing activity to which it relates. Intellectual discourse, on the other hand, imagines and constructs thesis writing as an intellectual endeavor, as a process of inquiry, and as knowledge transformation, and it constructs the value of the thesis in terms of how it contributes to knowledge and disciplines. Portraying the thesis in somewhat contradictory terms reveals what Robyn Barnacle (2018), with reference to William Clark (2006), described as “an underlying tension in contemporary discourse on the Ph.D. between an

instrumental conception, in which the Ph.D. is seen primarily in the service of knowledge societies and economic and social prosperity, and an older conception in which the value of the Ph.D. is located in the service of the disciplines, truth and knowledge” (p. 78).

What this all seems to suggest is that language, in this case language around the thesis, is a productive and performative practice that opens up and closes down certain possibilities when it comes to making a decision regarding the format for the thesis (Lee & Green, 2009). This suggestion has implications for doctoral candidates. With instrumental and intellectual discourses at work, thesis writing is filled with contradictory expectations for doctoral candidates; should they write for the sake of knowledge production in its own right or for the sake of performing productivity, competencies, and value for future employers? My study shows doctoral candidates caught between these expectations and sometimes feeling guilty that they cannot meet both expectations. It also shows that it is difficult for both candidates and supervisors not to become instrumental, legitimizing their research writing by referring to what it does for their career development, personal and institutional research performance, etc. As shown, the intellectual way of talking and making sense does not seem to be sufficiently convincing when candidates and supervisors argue for and legitimize their research writing.

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