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Borders and Tensions in the Context of Doctoral Writing

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Abstract: Writing is fundamental to the doctoral journey. It is the means through which the doctoral student demonstrates the extent to which the work that has been undertaken has merit. Navigating the journey towards doctorateness is characterized by a process of identity development as the student transitions into a chosen disciplinary community—a community that is defined by a set of norms and values and by what constitutes knowledge within it. The notion of border crossing provides a lens through which the transition can be explored. Doctoral writing represents a specific border that students encounter as they seek to inscribe their work and look to become powerful writers in their field. Borders are important as they play a role in maintaining the integrity of the discipline, but they can also serve as sites of tension between student and supervisor. In this chapter, we explore the concepts of borders and tensions in the context of re-imagining doctoral writing, offering a voice “from the South.” Building on the work in the field of new literacy studies and more recent academic literacies research, we foreground writing as a social practice, emphasising how writing in academic disciplines has a tacit dimension that needs to be made overt. We argue that collaborative approaches to supervision and the adoption of a cohort model, both of which foster a social practices approach to learning, might facilitate border crossing while alleviating sites of tension.

The journey towards “doctorateness” can be associated with the notion of border crossing. Conceptually, border crossing speaks to the idea of political frontiers, whether material or perceptual, and focusses on the identity work that occurs at these frontiers (Prokkola, 2009; van Schalkwyk & McMillan, 2016), echoing thoughts of the doctoral experience as being a rite of passage (Andresen, 2000). As doctoral students navigate their academic journeys and seek to cross into their chosen disciplinary communities, they are engaged in a process of identity development within these communities (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). Borders are important for disciplines, as they maintain the

integrity of what is within the discipline and define what constitutes knowledge within the field. They can, however, also be sites of tension, contestation, and resistance, not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of communities, professions, science, and knowledge (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; see Cox et al., Chapter 7, this collection). They can exclude and alienate, creating insiders and outsiders. They define not only who belongs but also who does not.

Doctoral writing represents a specific border that students have to negotiate as they seek to inscribe the body of work emerging from their academic endeavours and ultimately become powerful writers themselves. The doctoral student becomes a powerful writer by developing an argument, having an opinion, taking a stand, and, ultimately, by contributing to a body of knowledge. Having an opinion in an academic context “is constructed out of scholarship, which involves examining the work of authorities and building a case that is personally meaningful out of their work and one’s own research” (Bouhey, 2005, p. 645). Such scholarship is demonstrated, most typically, in the doctoral thesis. Writing is therefore an important medium through which meaning is made, ultimately enabling the doctoral writer to contribute to a body of knowledge in the field. The written text also serves as evidence of the intricacies of the student’s thinking, the criticality of their reasoning, and the rigour of their research, which experts, such as supervisors or examiners, are required to review.

In this chapter, we explore borders and tensions in the context of doctoral writing, specifically seeking to articulate a voice “from the South” that takes into account the contextual issues of the South and that draws on research in the South for the South. We seek to bring research from the South into dialogue with research from the North, as the uncritical appropriation of knowledge bases emanating from the North into a context such as South Africa might be quite limiting. Brenda Leibowitz (2012) has advocated for such work, emphasising that in the South, “conditions are different and the particular experience of struggle against injustice and for equality and human flourishing takes on forms which may differ in terms of both content and intensity, from forms in the developed world” (p. xviii). We explore these issues by drawing on our South African roots, our shared background in academic literacies studies (see Jacobs, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2015; van Schalkwyk, 2007, 2016; van Schalkwyk et al., 2009), and recent work around the question of knowledge (Jacobs, 2013, 2019). We further argue that the process of supervision involves border crossing for doctoral students and “border maintenance” for supervisors, setting up sites of tension *for* the student writer and *between* the student writer and the supervisor. We offer the idea of a “cohort approach” to supervision as an alternative to apprenticeship models of supervision and suggest that the cohort approach is one way supervisors can facilitate doctoral border crossings. In addition, we

describe some of the theoretical positions that help us to understand these sites of tension and highlight work that offers approaches to address them as we join the call for the re-imagining of doctoral writing.

Thoughts on the South African Context

Before we foreground some of the tensions that manifest in the doctoral writing space, some contextualisation is required. The space within which doctoral work occurs is multi-faceted and, as alluded to in the introduction to this book, under pressure. Doctoral students the world over are highly sought after, particularly in countries where funding models incentivise increased numbers of enrolments in these programmes. The doctorate not only stands as a marker for significant academic achievement, it is also often claimed as an indicator of economic progress at national and international levels (Maistry, 2017). In South Africa, given its colonial and apartheid history that saw the implementation of an oppressive political and social system of structural inequality, the pressure mentioned above has manifested in different ways. The higher education sector is characterized by considerable unevenness across its 23 public institutions, and few private institutions exist to offer degrees at the doctoral level. Many of South Africa's public institutions lack research infrastructure, often as a result of being restricted in terms of their postgraduate offerings during the apartheid era (McKenna, 2019a). At the same time, according to South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training ([DHET] 2019), national targets and incentives saw the numbers of doctoral graduates more than double between 2010 and 2018 (from approximately 1420 to over 3300). Supervisory capacity, however, did not keep pace with the resultant growing numbers of doctoral students entering the system. In addition, the DHET report showed more than 35 percent of doctoral candidates were themselves academics, with fewer than 50 percent of all full-time academic staff holding Ph.D.s. In many environments, this has led to significant pressure being placed on academic staff to take on students irrespective of the extent of their experience or readiness for the role (Maistry, 2017). The weight of this responsibility is exacerbated by the adoption of the resource-intensive apprenticeship model of supervision—which could be regarded as a colonial legacy—that still dominates in the country (McKenna, 2019b). An alternative to this apprenticeship model of supervision is the notion of a cohort approach, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. In a review of the state of doctoral studies in South Africa, Yusef Waghid (2015) cautioned that the current pressure being placed on institutions and, therefore, supervisors to increase throughput rates represents an “epistemological threat” to the field that could see doctoral education being trivialized (p. 6).

A further complexity resides in the issue of language. Language is not neutral. In South Africa, language has a powerful presence. While the country's 11 official languages pay tribute to our rich diversity, they sit uncomfortably alongside one another in our unequal society “representing both freedom and oppression depending on which language and who is speaking . . . language becomes a weapon of powerful knowledge, and can serve to subjugate and exclude” (van Schalkwyk, 2016, p.148) —much like borders. It is in this contested and uneven space, with often limited resources and sometimes even inadequate supervision, that the doctoral writer seeks to make her mark.

Crossing Borders and Seeking to “Belong”

Crossing borders can be difficult. It requires negotiation —the identity work noted previously. Graduate students, including doctoral students, come to university with established identities that can have both stature and value in their communities but that may or may not prove to be enabling when they seek entry into a chosen disciplinary community (Canagarajah, 2002). Entry often hinges on the expectation that these students adopt the discourse that dominates the field as well as the entrenched canon that characterises it and that this adoption be represented in their writing. The process is tantamount to learning a new language, one that extends far beyond a lexicon or a set of technical and grammatical rules to define the way in which meaning is made within a particularly disciplinary space and, therefore, the way through which doctoral writers, and indeed their supervisors, contribute to the body of knowledge. Its practices are socially embedded—a concept we will come back to later—and implies a new way of being within the particular field. This field is recognized through having its “own key concepts, truth criteria and forms of life, . . . modes of reason and judgement” (Barnett, 2009, p. 239). As a collective, these many dimensions of doctoral writing have been described as a threshold concept—one requiring the *learning leap* that sees the student making an academic contribution, critically and creatively, through their writing (Wisker & Savin-Baden, 2009). Learning the requisite language and understanding the values, norms, and conventions that are embedded within is key for emerging doctoral identities, for crossing borders and thresholds, and for doctoral writers (Kamler & Thompson, 2014; Wisker & Savin-Baden, 2009). The choices that students make regarding the words they use and the ways in which they use them are influenced by the conventions of the group or community they align themselves with, which will in turn also inform the extent to which they are seen to “belong.”

What does it mean to belong in academia and how does one get to belong? In his work on social learning systems, Etienne Wenger (2000) intro-

duced the notion of a community of practice, defined by what it regards as competence and where members adopt a *joint enterprise* or have shared sets of norms, conventions, and ways of interaction. Members of these communities also share a language—much like disciplinary communities. Competence in a community requires understanding the community “well enough to be able to contribute” and engage with it as a “trusted partner,” which includes gaining access to a shared “repertoire” and the means to “be able to use it appropriately” (Wenger, 2000, p. 229). Belonging is enabled in three ways: through *engagement*, *imagination*, and *alignment*. These are exciting concepts, as they offer insight into how academia could move forward, which includes considering how novices such as doctoral writers can obtain membership in a disciplinary space and, importantly, how they might potentially influence that space. In essence, these concepts provide an opportunity to re-imagine doctoral writing. *Engagement* in this context is seen as doing things with others within that community of practice. *Imagination* refers to a cognitive act of seeing oneself as a member of that community (a reconstruction of an existing identity or the construction of a new identity or identities). *Alignment* speaks to facilitating a synergy between the new ways of thinking and doing that a newcomer may introduce and the more established practices within the community. Wenger’s idea of alignment is central, as in defining it he emphasised that *legitimate participation* in the community will not exist if newcomers simply adopt an entrenched canon. Former identities need not be shed; rather, “our ability to deal productively with boundaries depends on our ability to engage and suspend our identities . . . opening up our identities to other ways of being in the world” (Wenger, 2000, p. 239). It is important to note that the journey towards belonging in the context of doctoral studies is neither seamless nor linear. Instead, as Jazvac-Martek (2009) posited, the progression is incremental, as doctoral students oscillate between being a student and becoming an academic. We would argue that recognising these moments as learning leaps, of increments and of oscillation, has relevance for the supervision of students, particularly in terms of their writing.

Re-imagining Borders

But who maintains the borders or boundaries Wenger referred to? Who might be, whether intentionally or unintentionally, acting as a gatekeeper; and to what extent is there room for the novice or newcomer to move beyond alignment to a place where they might disrupt or challenge entrenched understandings? What is the potential of a more collaborative cohort approach for enabling “leaky boundaries” and facilitating border crossings? Sue

Starfield (2004) has suggested that the identity of the student writer often becomes lost in the skewed power relationship that exists between supervisor and student, between expert and novice. The written work of the student becomes “a dialogue between unequal participants” (Starfield, 2004, p. 67), as the discipline—represented by the supervisor, postgraduate review panels, examiners and so forth—determines the boundaries and sets out the borders. “What space is there in this tightly bounded sequence for students to challenge or respond asserting their authority?” asked Starfield (2004, p. 67). The doctoral writer is often trapped into making compromises in their writing in an attempt to sound scholarly and secure entry into the disciplinary community. Lucia Thesen (2013) agreed, highlighting how, in the process of revision, the student’s own voice can be erased and therefore silenced, and she described this as a “deeply political issue” asking, what “forms and knowledges are being erased? Why? Who benefits, and who remains silent?” (p. 67)

Given South Africa’s history, it is impossible to ignore the powerful socio-political context that informs the debates about doctoral writing and supervision. Supervisors cannot distance themselves from the experience of alienation and exclusion that is very real for many students, particularly doctoral students. Nor can they ignore the hierarchical position that characterises supervisory relationships and how this hierarchy can entrench powerful knowledge boundaries, often in intricate and layered ways. And even if there is opportunity for engagement, even when the supervisory relationship shifts to one that is more collegial and collaborative (Benmore, 2016), few doctoral students will challenge the disciplinary hegemony that dominates. Few will attempt to “rock the boat” in their doctoral writing. Postgraduate studies, especially at the level of the Ph.D., can be “a very high stakes space to do such ‘rocking’” (McKenna, 2017a). Picking up on the notion of gatekeeping, Christine Tardy and Paul Kei Matsuda (2009), writing in the context of academic publishing, suggested that “although readers may find certain breaks from convention to be refreshing and thus rhetorically effective, those ruptures generally still have to occur within particular parameters” (p. 45). As large numbers of graduate students drop out or remain “stuck” in the system, the question is to what extent we, whether as supervisors or as post-graduate writing consultants,¹ are complicit. In focussing our endeavours on strengthening the internal coherence of our disciplines and professions, there is little space for the sort of engagement, imagination, and alignment that Wenger has argued for

1 Writing consultants is a term used in South Africa to refer to practitioners who provide writing support for students. At the doctoral level, such consultants are usually senior writing specialists employed as writing center staff.

or for the contestation that Starfield referred to. Equally ironic is that even our well-meant efforts to intentionally make overt our expectations with regard to academic writing and the tenets of what scholarship looks like in that field could serve to entrench the power differential between students and supervisors rather than close the gap. In their efforts to hold the integrity of their disciplines and set the boundaries of what constitutes knowledge within their fields, supervisors might inadvertently be silencing students' voices and tightening up the borders rather than respecting their students by creating spaces for a diversity of voices (Doyle et al., 2018).

Thus far we have explored two broad areas within the context of doctoral writing that could become sites of tension. One area involves the identity of the doctoral student and the border crossing involved in transitioning into their chosen disciplinary community and knowledge domain. The other area involves the supervisor, who traditionally represents the discipline, and her role in maintaining the integrity of the discipline. We have argued that the doctoral journey, which is often defined by the experience of doctoral writing, can be likened to crossing a border and that this metaphor has potential for offering insight into doctoral writers' experiences. We have pointed to the integrity of disciplines and discussed how border maintenance by supervisors could lead to exclusion and alienation for doctoral students as well as contestation between "insiders" and "outsiders." Carolyn Williams and Alison Lee (1999) argued that feelings such as exclusion and alienation should be recognized as dimensions of the Ph.D. experience and are "both a necessary condition *and* an effect of the production of the subject of doctoral study—the licensed independent scholar" (p. 8).

What, however, does this mean for supervisory practice, and how can the re-imagining of doctoral writing offer a way forward in terms of addressing these tensions? We believe that writing never occurs in a vacuum and that understanding writing as a socially embedded practice, as mentioned earlier, can be of value to this discussion. Michael Samuel and Renuka Vithal (2011) offered as an alternative to the traditional apprenticeship model of supervision a cohort-based model that "draws on the experiences of supervisors, staff, and students as co-producers of knowledge," and they argued that the Ph.D. is not about individualistic learning but rather is about "responsiveness to knowledge production in community" (p. 76). This speaks to a social practices approach to learning that, we would argue, is supported by a collaborative cohort supervision approach. While studies that focus on the experience of doctoral writing at an individual level have provided useful insights into challenges experienced by student writers, they do not shed light on writing as a social practice. Such foregrounding is important (Burford 2017; Inouye &

McAlpine, 2019). Work conducted several years ago in the field of new literacy studies and more recent academic literacies work from South Africa offer some frameworks with which we can begin to interrogate writing as a social practice and then to consider what this could mean for adopting a cohort approach to supervision.

Writing as a Social Practice

James Paul Gee (1990), whose work has been seminal in the field of new literacy studies, described socially embedded activities as Discourses and, as we have discussed, disciplinary experts value these Discourses and therefore set a premium on them. Understanding Discourses is crucial for doctoral writers, because this understanding contributes to their development of the sort of disciplinary identity that can inform their thinking and their writing. Access to the Discourse requires successfully crossing borders, as doctoral students never *just write*; rather, they always write *something for someone* and always for a specific purpose (Gee, 2008).

Brian Street (1984) had earlier offered two sets of ideas regarding academic literacies: *autonomous* and *ideological* literacies. His *ideological model* of literacy posited that literacy practices, such as writing, are deeply embedded in the ideologies that prevail in society, the paradigms of individual writers, and power relations, such as those that exist between a doctoral student and supervisor. Street strongly opposed the *autonomous model*, which sees writing as a generic skill, easily transferable from one writing context to another, and often taught independent of a social context. Building on the work of Ron and Suzanne Scollon (1981) and Shirley Brice Heath (1983), he expanded on the notion of multiple literacies, examining how literacies, such as writing, vary across contexts. Relatedly, we've framed this chapter using the ideological model of literacy. In other words, we see writing practices as variable, differing from one social context to another, and from one academic discipline to another.

One of the basic tenets of this theoretical orientation is that writing is always situated within specific social practices and, in the case of higher education, within specific disciplines—thus linking back to our earlier discussion. Accordingly, we would argue that the teaching of doctoral writing should be embedded within the contexts of particular academic disciplines and that doctoral student writers should be developed within the ways in which their particular disciplines use language. This would imply that doctoral students are best inducted into the writing practices of their various disciplines of study by modeling themselves on disciplinary “insiders,” such as their supervisors, who ought to have mastered these practices and be a part of these

disciplinary communities themselves. Gee (1990) argued that supervisors are best placed to induct doctoral students into the writing practices of their disciplines rather than *writing courses*, which often teach writing practices that exist only in such courses and do not exist anywhere else, either inside or outside of the university. He posited that such writing courses often construct *pseudo-Discourses* of their own. While we agree with this critique of separate writing courses, one needs to confront the challenges facing supervisors, namely that of making what they already know tacitly about writing in their disciplines available to their doctoral students. We would argue that a more collaborative cohort approach might address this challenge better than the traditional apprenticeship model of supervision.

Making the Tacit Overt

Theorists in the rhetorical studies tradition (Bazerman, 1994; Bazerman et al., 2009; Geisler, 1994; Segal et al., 1998) also proposed a theory of literacy that sees writing as socially constructed and argue that the linguistic resources individuals draw on to produce text are shaped by a lifetime of interaction with others. This proposition is closely aligned to the way that New Literacy Studies scholars understand literacies. However, these theorists from the rhetorical studies tradition went further, arguing that writing in academic disciplines has a tacit dimension, which makes it difficult for supervisors to articulate and therefore difficult for doctoral students to learn. They argued that while disciplinary specialists, such as supervisors, “know” the rhetorical processes through which their disciplines communicate meaning (albeit tacitly), post-graduate writing consultants (who usually come from a language studies background) are better positioned to “see” this largely invisible process because they view writing as *opaque* since the disciplinary content is often foreign to them—they do not get caught up in the meaning of the work they’re interacting with. This makes the generic structures and discursive patterns clearer than when they are obscured by meaning, as is the case with supervisors who tend to view writing as *transparent*, and *look through* the generic structures and discursive patterns in order to engage with the disciplinary content.

Supervisors, however, bring a tacit knowledge of their disciplinary genres and Discourses and the purposes they serve in meaning-making. Cheryl Geisler (1994) described this as the “rhetorical dimension” of knowledge, which entails knowing when, where, to whom, and how to communicate the content knowledge in writing (p. 37)—similar to Gee’s ideas around Discourse. This knowledge is gained over years of study and participation in disciplinary communities and is a knowledge base that post-graduate writing consultants

do not have. On the other hand, writing consultants are often better able to see the rhetorical processes underpinning writing. This has led them to take increasing responsibility for making this dimension of doctoral writing explicit for students, which assumes that the consultants have the requisite knowledge of the rhetorical processes underpinning doctoral writing as well. Findings from South African research (Jacobs, 2007), however, have shown that this assumption is flawed and often leads to a pedagogical position that assumes writing consultants know the “rhetorical dimension” (Geisler, 1994, p. 37) of doctoral writing better than the supervisors know it themselves. A solution could be a collaborative approach to the development of doctoral writing, one that understands the central role writing plays in how disciplines structure their knowledge bases and how they produce text. There is variability across disciplines, and therefore the approach to the supervision of doctoral writing being advocated by this literature is a collaborative effort between doctoral writing consultants and supervisors (see also Padmanabhan & Rossetto, 2017), along with a cohort of doctoral students (Samuel & Vithal, 2011). However, we would caution against an approach that requires post-graduate writing consultants to deal with subject matter about which they know little by venturing out into disciplinary territory with which they may be unfamiliar or in which they themselves are still novices.

It is through the interaction of supervisors and post-graduate writing consultants that the generic structures and discursive patterns of writing, as well as the purposes they serve in meaning-making, can be critically deconstructed for doctoral students. This collaborative cohort approach has the potential to facilitate the process of border crossing for both doctoral students and their supervisors. However, it is incumbent on supervisors to be deliberate about making overt their expectations regarding academic writing as well as the tenets of what scholarship looks like in their field. This comes with a caveat, as alluded to earlier, that supervisors’ well-intentioned efforts at making overt the nature of scholarship in their field could serve to entrench the power differential between supervisors and doctoral students rather than close the gap. We turn to the more recent work of Chrissie Boughey (2013) and Boughey and Sioux McKenna (2016) to theorise this dilemma.

Powerful Knowledge

Building on the work of Street (1984) and his autonomous and ideological models, Boughey (2013) and Boughey & McKenna (2016) have offered two related sets of ideas that are also relevant to understandings of writing as a social practice—*individual* and *social*. Boughey (2013) has argued that indi-

vidualized views of learning (and we would argue “writing”) are dominant in South Africa and that such views construct students as independent or autonomous of the social contexts in which they were raised, in which they live, and in which they learn (and write). These understandings have implications for doctoral writing, leading to writing practices that are decontextualized from the disciplinary contexts surrounding doctoral writing. In contrast to this, in a social view of learning (and again we would argue “writing”), supervisors would see students as being shaped by the very contexts in which they were raised, in which they live, and in which they learn (and write). A social view of learning sees doctoral writing as context-dependent, socially constructed, and power ridden—drawing together many of the ideas we have already introduced. This view then calls on us to interrogate the bounded social space surrounding the student-supervisor relationship and examine how the borders and boundaries could serve to include or exclude doctoral students from access to powerful knowledge and from becoming powerful writers themselves.

The relationship between a supervisor and a doctoral student is not neutral or equal. As previously mentioned, supervisors are part of disciplinary communities who have access to powerful knowledge, who understand what scholarship looks like in their disciplines, and who have mastered the writing practices of their fields. Geisler (1994) claimed that the “rhetorical process” underpinning knowledge in disciplines remains hidden for most undergraduate students because they are taught to view texts as “repositories of knowledge, completely explicit in their content but utterly opaque in their rhetorical construction” (p. 39). This claim has implications for doctoral students and their relationships with their supervisors. Since doctoral students are being apprenticed into what Geisler (1994) termed the “rhetorical dimension” (p. 37) of disciplinary knowledge by their supervisors, and since supervisors are focussed on strengthening this aspect in an attempt to produce successfully written doctoral dissertations, the possibility for doctoral students to cross disciplinary borders and challenge or disrupt entrenched rhetorical practices might be diminished. Studies from the *sociology of knowledge* offer some thoughts on negotiating this tension that doctoral supervisors face.

Negotiating the Tension

We have previously argued that as experts in their respective fields, supervisors have a role in preserving the established rhetorical practices (or boundaries) of their disciplines. However, doctoral supervisors may also encourage doctoral students to critique these established rhetorical practices and chal-

lenge the disciplinary hegemony. Herein lies the tension. While a social view of writing calls on us to examine how the student-supervisor relationship might serve to include or exclude doctoral students, studies from the *sociology of knowledge* suggest ways supervisors can provide access to how powerful knowledge works—its organising principles and the logics around what is considered legitimate knowledge-making practices (Maton & Moore, 2010). Karl Maton's (2014) Legitimation Code Theory offers supervisors a practical toolkit that allows them to make explicit to doctoral students the organising principles, procedures, and practices underpinning how knowledge is produced in their fields, the disciplinary “rules of the academic game,” (p. 11) as he termed it. Maton also argued that these rules are tacit and that academics (and supervisors) need to make explicit to their students the values, principles, procedures, and practices underpinning how knowledge is produced in their disciplines and how knowledge claims are made—thus echoing what we have already described.

Scholars in rhetorical studies have argued that in order for doctoral students to challenge and disrupt entrenched rhetorical practices, they first need to understand how these practices manifest in doctoral writing. This offers useful insights into the invisible mechanisms that give rise to the different forms of disciplinary knowledge. Legitimation Code Theory takes such insights further by offering practical tools, such as *specialization*, which examines the underpinning organising principles of disciplines (Clarence & McKenna, 2017)—tools that can be applied to the writing of doctoral students. More recently, Kirstin Wilmot (2020) has extended legitimation code theory by applying conceptual tools, such as the *clausing tool*, for analysing exemplary knowledge practices in doctoral writing. She used the clausing tool to demonstrate how, in their writing, doctoral students move between raw data and their interpretations of that data by linking to existing knowledge in the field. This work addresses a gap in both the fields of new literacy studies (which focuses on writing practices) and rhetorical studies (which focuses on the linguistic features of texts) and offers both supervisors and post-graduate writing consultants a set of strategies to produce exemplary doctoral writing. These strategies, *establishing*, *characterizing*, *coordinating*, and *taxonomizing*, which create a bridge between empirical data and theory, can be used by doctoral students to write better dissertations and also by supervisors as pedagogic resources to make doctoral writing practices more explicit. Such a knowledge-based approach to doctoral writing pedagogy might negotiate the border-crossing tension that supervisors face as they try to preserve the established rhetorical practices of their disciplines while also producing doctoral students who are able to critique these established rhetorical practices.

However, South Africa faces huge resource challenges, as alluded to earlier, and the inclusion of a post-graduate writing consultant into the resource-intensive apprenticeship model of supervision that continues to be the dominant mode in the country might not be tenable (see also Padmanabhan & Rossetto, 2017). An alternative to the apprenticeship model of supervision, and one that is being practiced in a number of universities in South Africa, is the cohort model.

A Cohort Model

The way in which the cohort model is conceptualized and implemented varies according to the particularities of the university context. To demonstrate this variety, we will conclude by briefly discussing two cohort models we've experienced at two different South African universities.

Case one was a seminar-based cohort model involving “students, supervisors and their disciplinary studies in a collaborative dialogue which produces opportunities for disruption, engagement and re-definitions of the doctoral study” (Samuel & Vithal 2011, p. 79). A feature of this model is that “a collective of supervisors who recognise both their individual strengths and their limitations collaborated, complementing and supplementing each other’s knowledge base, and providing a space for a collective of students to come together to think, learn and take risks in crossing disciplinary and methodological borders” (Samuel & Vithal, 2011, p. 79). These students, while having individual supervisors assigned to them, took part in a series of structured seminars. Participation was compulsory. Seminars took place across weekends (Friday to Sunday) every six weeks over a ten-month period for each year of study. The seminar programme involved different groupings—for example, general seminars for the entire doctoral cohort, separate seminars for year one and year two doctoral students, seminars that combined year one and year two doctoral students who were using similar research methodologies, and seminars that combined students who had similar research focus areas. The catalyst for the implementation of this model was a paucity of senior academics who could serve as supervisors. To address this, a group of “newly graduated doctoral staff used their own experience and networks to support each other and the doctoral students as a group” (Samuel & Vithal, 2011, p. 79).

Case two used a cohort model that combines traditional supervision with a community approach to doctoral education (McKenna, 2017a). The programme was designed not only to provide peer-group support but also to promote research in a particular focus area. Most of the doctoral students were studying part time, and participation was voluntary. The programme

supported the “development of the research design, implementation of the research and writing of the dissertation” (McKenna, 2014, p. 7) and included three week-long meetings a year—which consisted of guest seminars, debates, panel discussions, scholar presentations, and workshops—as well as on-line synchronous seminars, asynchronous resources, and various groupings of scholars working in project teams and drawing on shared theoretical frameworks. This cohort model provided a supportive community for the students, encouraged students to take risks and test ideas, and provided opportunities for students to articulate their work. One of the catalysts for the implementation of this model was a national drive to increase the production of doctoral graduates and a critique of the traditional apprenticeship model’s capacity to deliver this objective.

These cases offer descriptions of what cohort models may look like and insights into the debates and issues surrounding their implementation. By their nature, cohort models are collaborative, and as these cases illustrate, they facilitate border crossing and foster a social practices approach to learning. How then, could the notion of a cohort model enable the re-imagining of doctoral writing?

Re-imagining Doctoral Writing

We have argued that it is incumbent on supervisors to re-imagine doctoral writing and that their process of re-imagining might be enabled by collaborating with stakeholders involved in the doctoral enterprise, such as post-graduate writing consultants and doctoral students, as well as a knowledge-based approach to doctoral writing practice and pedagogy. Such a model spreads resources, such as supervisors and post-graduate writing consultants, across a cohort of doctoral students. This brings the added benefit of each individual student having access to the collective thinking of a group of doctoral students as well as each supervisor having access to the collective expertise of a group of doctoral supervisors. In contexts where supervisory capacity and experience is lacking, a cohort model might also go a long way in addressing this constraint to successful doctoral writing.

Earlier we identified two potential sites of tension—border crossing for students transitioning into their chosen disciplinary community and knowledge domain and border maintenance for supervisors protecting the integrity of their disciplines. For students, this tension involves three areas—negotiating the identities they bring to the doctoral journey; understanding the values, organising principles, procedures, and established practices underpinning how knowledge is produced in their discipline; as well as contesting these dis-

ciplinary norms and conventions. For supervisors, this tension involves providing access to these disciplinary norms and conventions for their students and encouraging contestation and the emergence of the doctoral voice while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of their disciplines.

Can these tensions be resolved? Disciplinary norms and conventions that have evolved over time are typically stable and involve much consensus about the existing canon within a particular field. And yet, surely, we can envision a role for doctoral work that is inscribed by emerging powerful writers in taking the field forward. This might mean supervisors will best support their students' writing by holding the tensions lightly while enabling their students' crossings of boundaries through alternative approaches to supervision.

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