



Conclusion: The Unfinished Business of Re-imagining Doctoral Writing

James Burford
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Brittany Amell
CARLETON UNIVERSITY

Cecile Badenhorst
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

What imaginings of the “doctoral writer” circulate in the talk of doctoral researchers and their supervisors? How do institutional policies and the conventions of particular disciplines shape the ways in which doctoral writing is imagined? Why, and in what ways, has doctoral writing been re-imagined in the twenty-first century? What future imaginings of doctoral writing may be hovering on the horizon? This book has gathered a diverse group of authors to consider these challenging questions. Our goal, as editors, has not been to push toward a pre-determined answer. Instead, we have sought to open up doctoral writing as an area of research that would benefit from more questions asked about what the various players involved understand the future of doctoral writing to be.

Imaginings of doctoral writing and writers are always in flux and under pressure, with calls to conserve and protect some ideas and practices and to reform, innovate, or abandon others. In recent years, questions about how we imagine doctoral writing have arisen to prominence because of significant contextual shifts within doctoral education more broadly. Access to doctoral education has expanded globally (Nerad, 2010), with increasing enrolments of “non-traditional” doctoral students “who are marginalised by the dominant academic scholarly culture” (Naidoo, 2015, p. 341). Doctoral education is also increasingly internationalized (Ryan, 2012), particularly in the Anglophone Global North, and international students bring with them diverse epistemologies, as well as expectations regarding intellectual work. At the same time, doctoral graduates have become re-positioned as future knowledge workers who have the capacity to advance national innovation and economic growth

(Cuthbert & Molla, 2015). As a result, doctoral education is a practice that is increasingly subject to audit and oversight from national and provincial governments, which arguably frame doctoral education in ways that are “increasingly narrow, utilitarian and economic” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 276). All of these shifts have re-shaped how the doctoral student has been imagined and in turn how doctoral writing and writers may be conceived.

It is in this changing context that doctoral writing has become “increasingly visible as a point of tension” (Aitchison & Lee, 2006, p. 265). Because the practice of doctoral writing is so fundamental to the production of doctoral research and researchers, it is entangled with broader doctoral education concerns, such as attrition, completion timeliness, the quality of supervision, research impact, research integrity, decolonization, and, finally, the transferability of knowledge and skills to industry settings. It is also important to emphasise that doctoral writing is not an ahistorical practice that takes place in a vacuum, nor is it an arhetorical one (Doody, Chapter 6, this volume). World events, including the COVID-19 pandemic (which is ongoing as we write this), have added greater urgency to these conversations about what doctoral writing may be and how it might be taught, learned, or materialised.

To date, a body of scholarship has emerged that has sought to experiment with various re-imaginings of doctoral education. For instance, scholars have sought to re-imagine doctoral programs in diverse disciplinary areas (e.g., Prasad, 2015; Smith, 2015), the pedagogies and temporal practices of doctoral education (Gravett, 2021), and the ways we narrate doctoral failure (De Santolo, 2021). However, the particular locus for re-imagining that we have sought to engage with in this book has been with regards to doctoral writing. We extend an existing body of scholarship that has also been re-imagining doctoral writing (e.g., Starke-Meyerring, 2014), as well as tracking such re-imaginings (e.g., Ravelli et al., 2014). Each of the chapters in this book has emphasised that how we imagine doctoral writing and the idea of the “doctoral writer” matters. As chapter authors have pointed out, how we imagine doctoral writing can constrain, enable, and regulate what is knowable, doable, and possible for writers, as well as the representational forms scholarship can take. Recently, calls to reimagine doctoral writing have intensified (Paré, 2017, 2019; Porter et al., 2018), with particular attention paid to the deconstruction of sedimented imaginings often rooted in Eurocentrism (Battiste, 1998; Coburn, 2015, foreword by LaRocque). As Paré (2017) notes, when it comes to imagining what doctoral writing can be, “many scholars and institutions are struggling to catch up with the times” (p. 416). We hope this book has helped readers by offering new pathways into imagining doctoral writing as well as opportunities to consider some of the innovative practices present across these pages.

Places, Disciplinary Spaces, and Methodologies in this Collection

As we have outlined in this chapter, doctoral education is a global practice, so any consideration of how doctoral writing may be re-imagined must consider the diverse contexts of many nations around the world. In this collection, we are pleased to have gathered the insights of contributors writing from Oceania, including Aotearoa New Zealand (Mitchell, Chapter 1; Fa'avae, Chapter 8; Kelly et al., Chapter 10; Ingram, Chapter 13) and Australia (Thurlow, Chapter 5; Kelly et al., Chapter 10; Ravelli et al., Chapter 11); Asia, including Bangladesh (Naomi, Chapter 9) and Japan (Kelly et al., Chapter 10); Africa, including South Africa (van Schalkwyk & Jacobs, Chapter 4); Europe, including Denmark (Skov, Chapter 3) and the UK (Molinari, Chapter 2; Gibson, Chapter 12); and North America, including Canada (Doody, Chapter 6) and the US (Cox et al., Chapter 7). Interested readers can dip into particular chapters in order to consider how national policy contexts may shape possible routes for re-imagining doctoral writing. Alternatively, readers can consider the book as a whole in order to compare accounts of doctoral writing across these contexts. One chapter (Kelly et al., Chapter 10) extends beyond national borders to engage a comparative perspective in a way we find innovative. Despite the diversity of the contexts represented in this book, we acknowledge that there is more work to do in order to understand imaginings of doctoral writing and writers in Global South contexts. If doctoral writing researchers are to pursue a globally democratic agenda for knowledge production, further expanding this map remains a necessity.

Doctoral writing is a practice that is inflected with significant disciplinary difference. In this collection we have gathered accounts of doctoral writing within the disciplines of education (Mitchell, Chapter 1), the arts (Thurlow, Chapter 5), interdisciplinary life sciences (Doody, Chapter 6), and the visual and performing arts (Ravelli et al., Chapter 11), among other broader surveys (e.g., Kelly et al., Chapter 10). The book is also diverse in terms of the data collection methods that authors deployed, ranging from close textual analyses of both historical (Kelly et al., Chapter 10) and contemporary (Ravelli et al., Chapter 11) theses, qualitative research with doctoral students or supervisors (Mitchell, Chapter 1; Skov, Chapter 3; Thurlow, Chapter 5), autoethnographies (Fa'avae, Chapter 8; Naomi, Chapter 9), and a collaborative autoethnographic reflection (Cox et al., Chapter 7). Many of the chapters have also emerged out of doctoral research projects (e.g., Mitchell, Chapter 1; Molinari, Chapter 2; Skov, Chapter 3; Thurlow, Chapter 5), which we suggest is a promising sign for the future of doctoral writing research.

The Contribution of Re-imagining Doctoral Writing

Doctoral writing is frequently framed as a monolithic concept. However, across this book, authors have demonstrated that “doctoral writing” takes on multiple meanings and practices, suggesting that we ought to continue to trouble its definition and avoid taking it for granted. Indeed, as Julia Molinari (Chapter 2) argues, doctoral writing may be considered a complex open and emergent social system that is capable of change. The ways in which we imagine doctoral writing practices or texts may need to change for epistemic reasons, as Ravelli and colleagues (Chapter 11) argue with regard to theses in the visual and performing arts.

The title of our book includes the word re-imagining with a hyphen quite deliberately. The hyphen between *re* and *imagining* is meaningful, acting as a bridge that encourages authors to locate dominant imaginings of doctoral writing at the same time as they may seek to construct new ones. Across this collection, the most significant current imagining we can trace is the idea of the competitive, individualised, and disembodied doctoral writer. This imagining can be seen in both historical theses (e.g., Kelly et al., Chapter 10) as well as in the present (e.g., Cox et al., Chapter 7; Skov, Chapter 3). This imagining of the doctoral writer is also connected to neoliberal subjectivities that have been articulated in Catherine Mitchell’s chapter (Chapter 1). Other dominant imaginings of doctoral writing that we see travel through the collection are images of doctoral writing texts as highly disciplined and normative. Perhaps this should not surprise us, as often, doctoral pedagogues aim to show students what the boundaries are in order to pin down writing and unpack it so that students can accomplish it. Across this book, we see accounts of normative forms (Ravelli, et al., Chapter 11), where particular ideas of knowledge and truth are preeminent (Gibson, Chapter 12) and where doctoral knowledge is written in ways that are tidy and conclusive (Ingram, Chapter 13). Another key imaginary that is clear across our collection is one that sees doctoral writing through a colonizing/colonized gaze, where writing norms and conventions associated with the Global North are almost unquestionable (Naomi, Chapter 9).

When it comes to the re-imaginings articulated throughout this book, there is a clear shift away from the idea of the autonomous and individualized author (Lee & Williams, 1999). Instead, authors offer re-imaginings of doctoral writing that configure it as an embodied, affective, and relational practice (Cox et al., Chapter 7), where the author may be de-centered and reconceived as enmeshed with an assemblage of other beings and objects (Kelly et al., Chapter 10). Not only can doctoral writing pedagogy be expanded beyond

the individual, doctoral writing pedagogy may be extended beyond notions of supervision dyads or triads via re-imaginings of communal doctoral pedagogy (van Schalkwyk & Jacobs, Chapter 4; see also Peseta et al., 2021).

Other re-imaginings that are present across the chapters of this collection are decolonial and subaltern imaginings (Fa’avae, Chapter 8; Naomi, Chapter 9; van Schalkwyk & Jacobs, Chapter 4), where authors discuss or embody examples of how doctoral writers can draw on different epistemologies and languages. For example, in Naomi’s chapter (Chapter 9) we have an example of performative doctoral writing—which includes, perhaps, a reimagining of the “academic voice,” one that can be spiritually inflected and located in a context outside of the Global North. Other scholars have offered coalitional social justice re-imaginings that connect doctoral writers to each other and to the communities they serve (Cox et al., Chapter 7). Authors in this collection have re-imagined doctoral writing as including a diversity of texts and multivalent approaches to writing them (Ravelli et al., Chapter 11), as consisting of interdisciplinary imaginings (Doody, Chapter 6), as messing with truth and playing with fiction (Gibson, Chapter 12), and as going beyond the closed systems that are often reproduced (Molinari, Chapter 2).

In order to flesh out doctoral writing re-imaginings, the authors across this collection offer new conceptual tools and paths of inquiry to think with, including queer concepts (ThurLOW, Chapter 5), feminist concepts (Naomi, Chapter 9), new materialisms (Kelly et al., Chapter 10; Ingram, Chapter 13), decolonial approaches (Fa’avae, Chapter 8; Naomi, Chapter 9), genre-based approaches (Doody, Chapter 6), legitimation code theory (Ravelli, et al., Chapter 11; van Schalkwyk & Jacobs, Chapter 4), as well as critical realism and complexity theory (Molinari, Chapter 2). By re-imagining, these chapters move us in a different direction, loosening up the boundaries of doctoral writing and embracing its fluidity. However, it is important to note that this opening up is quite risky—students might encounter consequences and dangers as they try to push beyond recognised boundaries.

Final Thoughts: The Unfinished Business of Re-imagining Doctoral Writing

In a nutshell, this book has sought to unsettle any attempt to take what we mean by doctoral writing and “the doctoral writer” for granted. Authors have revealed that imaginings of doctoral writing/writers are highly contested, and they have argued that doctoral writing matters, for doctoral students, their supervisors, institutions, and our world. It is our view that continuing to in-

terrogate the imaginaries of doctoral writing is a vital part of critical education and writing frameworks.

While this book was primarily aimed as a resource for researchers of doctoral writing, we hope the book may be useful for practitioners and students who may find in these pages some pathways forward. If you are a doctoral student who needs a lifeline to help you re-imagine your own thesis, we hope this book has offered resources to assist you to build a case for why and how it may be possible.

As Frances Kelly (2017) observes:

Writing begins (and happens) in the dark. It involves productive uncertainty—wobbling between the realms of knowing and not-knowing (and back again). It involves excitement, anxiety, risk, oscillation, and a feeling of being impelled forward with a question that might take on several ‘new and different forms’ over the journey. (p. 40)

This has certainly been our experience as editors of this collection, and we think it is a good thing! We believe this book offers several starting points for future researchers interested, as we are, in studying doctoral writing, and we extend an invitation to those of you who feel called to join us—the authors and editors—wobbling in this “productive uncertainty.”

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