PaperHeaDs

Living Doctoral Study, Developing Doctoral Identity

Liz Harrison

Doctoral study changes people. At the very least, a successful doctoral candidate changes the title before his or her name. Until now the pedagogy of doctoral learning has dealt only peripherally with the identity change that takes place during the doctoral process. How does a person come to be confident and 'expert' in a field, able to research independently and autonomously? What is the learning that needs to take place in order for an individual to claim the title Dr? How is this change experienced by the postgraduate student?

This book contains the true stories of ten women on their journeys to being awarded a doctorate. As members of a self-formed study group called PaperHeaDs, they were supported and challenged by the identity thresholds that they each crossed in their learning. Each story of an individual postgraduate student is represented by a metaphor for identity construction, which is then analysed by the author.

LIZ HARRISON received her PhD from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, with a thesis that forms the subject of this book. Her research now focuses on online teaching and learning development, particularly the development of online identity.

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The Tinker: Liz's Story: Setting the Scene[1]

> As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in
> them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them accord-
> ing as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be, so in
> imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appear-
> ance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are vari-
> ously affected by it.
>
> — COOLEY, 1902, p. 184

Positioning Myself

In my forties, I discovered the possibility of 'being an academic' after com-
pleting a Master's degree and beginning to toy with the idea of doctoral
study. I think of myself as a tinker. Specifically, as an educator, I think of
myself as a tinker-thinker. The word 'tinker' refers to an itinerant, a gypsy,
or one who enjoys experimenting with things, or a travelling repairer of
useful items. The word also refers to random unplanned work or activities.
As a teacher, I have drawn on whatever theory seems to concisely suit the
message or behaviour I want my learners to learn. Yet it seems that the
more I engage with what makes learning possible, the further away from
a well-defined professional identity I seem to travel. This chapter is the
introduction to an account of my construction of a doctoral identity that
aligns with a story of my life lived to date, and the contribution made to

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1   This story is presented as a brief introduction to the study – introducing themes that
     will be developed more completely in the text which follows. It is a modified version
     of an essay to be published in 'Making Connections: Self-Study and Social Action'
     (Pithouse, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2009).

it by the doctoral study group to which I belong. It explores the contribution of knowledge construction to the potential selves that are available to me and vice versa. Knowledge construction is considered in several senses: in the way being knowledgeable, as a characteristic, is put together and meaning made by an individual, a family, a social group, and institution, and a country, over time and space, in order to make sense of a lived world. In another sense, I am attempting to look at what processes occur as the valuing, judicial-political-economic-academic eye reconsiders and reconstructs the knowledge creation process. What does a Doctorate in Philosophy mean and what social value does it hold?

Learning 'Doctoralness'

At the beginning of this doctoral study about the acquisition of a doctorate from a learner's point of view, I attempted to consider what the end was. Following the injunctions of management training that I have experienced in my life I thought I had to 'begin with the end in mind' (Covey, 1989, p. 187). Yet Judith Butler says that the problem of an individual giving an account of becoming something else or becoming something more, as is suggested by constructivist education, is a 'temporal paradox' (1990, p. 30). To give an account of myself in the process of becoming, I have had to lose or reshape what I am in order to become something different (Butler, 2005). The temporal paradox is that as soon as I begin to say who I am, I am already changed. I have lost the perspective of that person who asked the question about who I am and taken on the (larger?) view of the person who is answering it. In this study, I began asking the question: what does doctoral learning involve for learners experiencing it? In answering it now, I know that learning to be more knowledgeable, or a better thinker, as suggested in the metanarrative of doctoral education (for example indicated by level descriptors in the South African Qualification framework (South African Qualifications Authority, 2006)), I have had to rethink everything that I thought I knew about knowledge and knowing. Butler's work was a foreshadowing that this was not a simple, straightforward or linear process, but rather 'an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete' (Butler, 1990, p. 30).

A good educator,[2] I have come to believe, is the ultimate salesperson: she sells notions, aspirations, and ideas. She uncovers the need, sources a solution – maximising the benefits and minimising the costs. She negotiates. She persuades her customers to believe that she knows and is right about what is right for them. And they leave without any physical artefact to show for the transaction. Thinking about a teacher as a salesperson seems appropriate in the current context of globalisation and the increasingly managerialist policy discourses around governance in higher education.

Today I, as a tinker-thinker, am selling mirrors in the sense that I am offering a view of myself that will encourage others to look at their own knowledge history. Yesterday I sold cosmetics, in the sense that what I taught was aimed at enabling learners to represent themselves attractively. Tomorrow, perhaps, I will sell snake oil[3] again. The mirrors I sell today represent ideas of self – stock that I have acquired on my thought-journey towards completing my doctorate: an autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis, 2004; Tedlock, 2005; Chang, 2008) about acquiring a doctoral identity. This investigation considered the nodal moments of challenge and resistance, the 'uneasy repetitions' that are marking my doctoral journey.

A doctorate gives an individual a 'right of way' in most social contexts and 'such people assume their privileged position, not realising that other identities might be silenced in their presence' (Burkitt, 2008, p. 4). When I started thinking about 'my doctorate', I had to deal with the question of why it would be a valuable and worthy thing to do. I was already wrestling with the notion of the value of being an academic in South Africa and, in the process, confronting ideas that had not even crossed my mind at the

2   Although all the PaperHeaDs work in higher education, I use the term educator throughout, rather than the more status-laden term 'lecturer'. I have an inbuilt resistance to status symbols and find the distinction between types of educators pretentious, perhaps because I have always known myself to be a good teacher. The term teacher has been reserved in this thesis for educators who work with young people in the school sector.

3   'Snake oil' is an American term referring to substances sold by pedlars on the frontiers of the Mid-West in the nineteenth century. Snake oil was claimed to have supposed medicinal properties, but did not. The term has become synonymous with fraud and misrepresentation. I learned about it watching Westerns as a child.

simplest level in ten years of teaching in a higher education institution: Why is it important to read, critique, evaluate, and persuade in academic forms? Why is it important to teach others to do this and in this particular form? Who cares? In addition, more suspiciously, why do They care?

I have chosen autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997, Ellis, 2004, Tedlock, 2005, Chang, 2008) as the methodology through which I will try to answer my own questions about how a doctoral identity is constructed and why I have constructed it in the ways I have. Through this methodology, I will raise questions about what having a doctorate might mean in South Africa in the twenty-first century. I see autoethnography as a subset of self-study, in the same way that autobiography might be. Both self-study and autoethnography make lived experience central to analysis. Both require the researcher to be reflexively oriented towards improvement, personal or social, through a more realistic and nuanced understanding of a phenomenon. Whereas much of the current work on self-study has come out of the field of education and is 'related to the idea of studying the 'self' of teaching as a specific activity of teachers focusing on their own teaching practices' (Mitchell, Weber & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005, p. 2), autoethnography has its roots in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Tedlock (2005) suggests that autoethnography emerged as researchers attempted to 'reflect on and engage with their own participation within an ethnographic frame' in an 'attempt to heal the split between the public and private realms by connecting the autobiographical impulse (the gaze inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward)' (p. 467). I am reflecting on the process and the meaning of doctoral learning from my own 'insider' perspective as a learner in the PhD process.

Simply put, '[a]utoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to the culture' (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). I am questioning the role of my culture in education and vice versa through my own narrative (the primary data), using ethnographic 'texts' such as journals (which I started keeping in 2002 when I felt that I could possibly start exploring the idea of a 'doing a doctorate'), photographs, the accounts of others, and emails. These texts are used as 'triggers' to enable me to 'story' my educational experiences and the context in which they occurred and are occurring. Methodologically, it is in my writing and self-analysis that I am

able to reveal culture at work and to question implicit assumptions. My storying of the texts and artefacts of the daily life of a doctoral learner gives expression to the discourses at play in doctoral education and insight into the cultural structures that sustain and collide with these discourses.

My account is one of learning to be a PhD graduate, and therefore, of learning 'doctoralness', or that level of knowledge and work currently accepted as worthy of a doctorate. It marries 'private and the public realms' (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467) through the inquiry space of 'interaction (personal/social), continuity (past, present, future), and situation (place)' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) in my experience of doctoral learning. The 'auto' part of autoethnography, my story of becoming, provides access to a view of a culture (English and white), which at face value continues to dominate the operation of higher education in South Africa. This investigation includes an interrogation of linguistic and discursive agency (Butler, 1990) and also highlights class barriers to epistemological access to graduate status that may be compounded by other challenges. I believe my social position as linguistically and economically privileged whilst being part of a political minority in South Africa places me in a border space that makes it possible for me to make overt some implicit assumptions about doctoral education. I hope in this way to sketch a place for the interrogation of doctoral learning processes that will enable others from groups with less epistemological access (Edmunds & Warburton, 2007; Soudien et al., 2008) to describe, and acknowledge their knowledge-constructions in ways that are appropriate to them.

A Tinker-Thinker's Tale

I am a member of a doctoral (PhD) support group called PaperHeaDs,[4] established in 2001. The group has no direct institutional affiliation and its members range in age from the early thirties to the early sixties, all women

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4   While the group was named PaperHeaDs (not The PaperHeaDs), as group members we referred to ourselves as being PaperHeaDs and might say 'I am a PaperHeaD'.

academics. All of us could be considered 'insiders' to the academic discourses (Gee, 1996) of higher education in South Africa because our work experience is so closely related to our doctoral studies. Our unique positions as both learners and educators within higher education offer a lens through which to look at how academic learning might be constructed.

Through my conversations with my fellow PaperHeaDs, I have come to see that the title of 'Doctor' is valuable to me as providing weight to my voice and the opportunity to speak for change. In order to do that, to see myself as one who deserves the public acknowledgement of my ability to know, I have to tell a different story about myself. My discovery of my Tinker-Thinker self has come in the process of re-storying myself (Richardson, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2002). The trigger for this chapter was a phenomenological interview in which one of my fellow PaperHeaDs interviewed me (Appendix 1). A phenomenological interview is a conversation that explores the meaning of a phenomenon by continually asking questions about its meaning as experienced.

Sophia[5] started by asking me what I thought a doctoral identity should mean:

> LIZ: ... I would think that, for me, part of it is an idea of wisdom, which is not the same as knowing. And for me that seems to be more aligned with kind of Afrocentric ways of looking at the world. That people are honored for their experience and their ...

> SOPHIA: Okay

> LIZ: ... wisdom and hearing. I mean the latest stuff about [Nelson] Mandela's birthday and the reflection on his life and the sort of interrogation of that is almost making – highlighting that for me. And I'm wondering why, given Africa and its problems and its brilliances, why our notion of a doctorate is not more aligned with that notion of a wise person, somebody who knows and who can mediate and arbitrate and strategise and do what's necessary for the common good. Whereas the sort of stuff that I'm really quite comfortable with is an almost Eurocentric view of 'look after the individual', 'go for yourself'. It's all about achievement. It's a status. It's the next rung on the ladder, that kind of discourse. So I'm wondering why we don't go there.

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5   Names have been changed to protect participants' identities as much as possible.

> ... Part of that is also then why – if I reject the Eurocentric view of what a doctorate represents as somebody who knows a lot ... Pretty much an expert and therefore has the voice from what's known and their ability to apply a critical – particular critical frame to things. Why – if – how I can take that notion and say it's valid in Africa, given the cultural basis of leadership and wisdom and so on and, in that case where does identity focus because identity is about individuality – one would think – in some interpretations of identity, so ... does that answer the question? [giggles] – yadda, yadda yadda [self-deprecating].

> SOPHIA: It's about what you're beginning to construct as what a doctoral identity should be about, or the purpose of a doctorate and maybe what a doctoral identity should look like and the purpose of a doctorate – are they two different things?

My desire to be seen as clever or wise was an important revelation to me. The conversation continued. Having had this two hour-long exploration with Sophia, I needed to go back in my history to find out how, where and why I had come to the positions I articulated in our deconstruction of the meaning of doctoral identity and what a doctorate might represent.

What Counts as Knowing?

My mistrust of 'the academic' is genealogical. My family roots itself in the Cockneys of the East End of London – butchers and bakers – and the stolid artisans of Yorkshire. My mother was the first of her family to get a post-secondary education and to enter a profession, as a nurse. My father had seven years of schooling before joining the army with the ambition of being a truck driver. He became one of the first computer systems engineers with IBM. When I went to university, an option that would not have existed without a bursary from IBM, I was the first ever 'academic' student in my family. To this, my grandfather, a recently retired CEO ('by the sweat of his brow') of a heavy engineering company, rolled his eyes, leaned back in his LazyBoy armchair and made the gesture of pulling a toilet chain. 'Students', he pronounced, 'ticks on the public ox.'

　　Doing well at school was praised in my family but individual initiative, hard work, and practical results drew the rewards of true regard and

boasting within earshot. The mistrust of scholarly things and scholars haunts my work today. 'What practical value lies in this idea?' I ask myself as I scrabble to find a cognitive tool to justify the hours of reading and writing. 'Call a spade a spade, Liz', the voice of my family says, 'You just have to look to see that such and such is true.' (The 'such and such' category contains politics, the nature of human beings, gender roles, capacities, recipes, and health advice to live by.) I miss the blissful ignorance of the matrices of power and knowledge that governs their view of normality and what is real (Foucault, 1980).

My family understands teaching. 'A teacher, eh?' they said as I announced my intention to study for a teaching diploma. 'Nice job if you can get it – no heavy lifting'. (For me this was an illustration of an unawareness of the physicality of teaching: of carrying stacks of books, of the irritation of chalk dust under one's contact lenses, of rearranging furniture for group work.) Something is done, activity takes place, products are created, and the 'truth' of things is passed along. An email from a close female relative, in response to my attempt to explain my excitement about Judith Butler's theorising of gender performativity (1990), testifies to this:

> I suspect I'm being blinded by science, there is no way I would even attempt to read those books, I can barely manage three pages of a bodice ripper, before drifting into the arms of Morpheus. However, my English teacher would be spinning in her grave; you are reading stuff of the Y generation, where due to their poor English grammar and vocabulary they make stuff up. Not that I'm so great, but you got a degree and are supposed to know these things! Expertness – try expertise. Performability – try performance, i.e. acting! Way back in the mists of time when I attempted to learn some Psychology we had a lecture about integrity and congruence and getting them to blend into a whole that resulted in better mental health. Which I understood to mean that if you try to put on performances that are not how you really are you will go bonkers! After all the study and working in academia you have done I can't see that you need to 'perform' anything, you just are. (private email communication used with permission, name withheld, 2008)

The ironic tone of the communication makes me laugh now: 'blinded by science', 'teacher spinning in her grave' (the voice of a long-dead authority, one who knew the truth?). How about the notion that I am 'supposed to know', on the strength of a degree (or several) or even on the basis of

my experience in academia? It seems that the more that I am supposed to know, the less I can claim 'knowingness'. What is interesting is that there is no questioning of the idea that people who *know* do exist. My relative's easy access to the world of words and text, albeit 'bodice-rippers', to the idea of people who think for a living (however mysterious the work might be), to the ability to play with genres in English – from the colloquial to the analytic – are symptomatic of middle-class access to the printed word.

Why Know?

Along the way, family cynicism has turned to the content of what I teach. When I was teaching in a programme that trained child and youth care workers; my family felt it ironic, that I – who had chosen not to have children – was educating young people in how to take care of children at risk. My own sense of the irony, or possibly a sense of fraud, led me to move into academic development work, specifically, inducting new lecturers into their teaching roles in a higher education institution. These were bright young people, successful in their studies, who to a person claimed that their biggest achievement to that date was being selected to teach at our institution. My job was to introduce them to the often arcane ways in which higher education operates, to flag the path through the micropolitical dynamics to the place of satisfaction in teaching well. I was selling snake oil: 'Do it this way and you will thrive in the system. Set up your networks of collegial support, give to each other in order to get back and you will not regret the emotional credit you will derive.'

It was comfortable for me to be giving practical support to new staff members, experienced and skilled in their occupations, in how to teach in a technikon.[6] The intention was to teach high-level skills and knowledge to add on to the more practical training offered in technical colleges. As such, we technikon educators did not engage or feel the need to engage

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6   Technikons were South African institutions oriented to occupationally directed higher education.

with the philosophical frameworks that shape the way university disciplines construct themselves (Becher & Trowler, 2001). As a young academic (in career terms if not years, as I was then in my late twenties) I rarely if ever encountered questions about the nature of knowledge and what it means to know.

The unvoiced justification for the technikon approach was the demand for the training of highly practically skilled 'technologists'. Indeed this discourse persists in the field of engineering, where graduates of the three-year diploma, the four-year degree, and university BSc Engineering graduates are registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa as 'technicians', 'technologists', and engineers respectively. We boasted that technikon graduates would 'hit the ground running' while university graduates would have to do a lot of site-work to catch up. Science and technology obviously, then – despite Thomas Kuhn's (1970) work on the philosophy of science – had no space for perspectives or anything beyond facts and proven theory.

This presented a problem for me, because my formal education beyond my undergraduate studies had been multi-disciplinary in the sense that my Master's degree in Education Management had not been specifically discipline-based. In South Africa, the descriptors that talk to the quality of knowledge required for a PhD are as follows.

'The candidate is required to demonstrate *high-level research capability* and make a *significant and original academic contribution* at the *frontiers* of a discipline or field. The work must be of a quality to satisfy peer review and merit publication. A graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others in the area of specialisation concerned' [italics added] (Department of Education, 2004a). I had no 'field' and I had no 'discipline' outside my identity as an educator.

Looking back at the time when I first started thinking about doctoral study, I see how my adoption of my family belief in 'knowers' and the technikon orientation to indisputable facts and practices led me to believe that a doctorate – the proof of having created an 'original academic contribution at the frontiers' – meant discovering a single truth that would potentially change the way people thought about a phenomenon. I constructed 'high level research capability' as related to complex machinery like photon canons and mysterious glassware in pristine laboratories – in

terms of expense and responsibility, rather than in terms of complexity and clarity of thought. I did not understand how these criteria related to what I knew about, teaching: devising learning activities, questioning techniques, building and sustaining relationships with learners, advising, counselling, and transmitting facts.

I was then looking at 'doing a PhD' – the next step on the job ladder. I thrashed around looking for a topic that would meet these criteria, having read several handbooks on how to get a PhD (for example Phillips & Pugh, 2000b; Mouton, 2002). These recommended a subject that would sustain my interest in the long term and suggested that my environment was the source of a suitable research question. I believed in facts and 'the right way to do things as a teacher' and so, what was left to research? What questions might I ask, the answers to which would change the way the world thought about teaching? The technikon I taught at was historically advantaged, having been constructed for white students by the apartheid[7] government. As part of the transformation of higher education in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001) this formerly 'white' institution was merging with the historically disadvantaged Indian technikon next door (physically separated by a wire mesh fence but psychologically by decades of apartness). I thought a case study of the processes of this first merger of higher education institutions would be the first of its kind in South Africa, and therefore, a useful topic to study. I abandoned this topic after a year of watching, reading, and thinking – it was too painful to write about the way my assumptions were clashing hourly with those of my future colleagues.

My Stock in Trade

The 'stock' that my tinker-self carried into my new enterprise of doctoral learning seemed insubstantial; I did not know myself as a knower or a thinker, let alone a wise person. It is not possible to think about my potential

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7   Apartheid was an official policy of racial segregation enforced by the National Party government in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s.

'doctoralness' *now* without thinking of who I was as a teacher *then*. Thus, I think back to what it was like in my first teaching job. It was the 1980s in South Africa, when, under apartheid laws, teaching in a government school meant signing an oath of allegiance to The South African Teachers Council for Whites. For a woman, getting married meant losing one's permanent appointment and becoming 'temporary'. And if you were a married woman, you needed your husband's signature on every application and bank withdrawal form. Becoming pregnant while unmarried was a dismissible offence. White, Christian, and heterosexual were the 'default' identities in the segment of the South African school system in which I worked; other races, religions, and sexualities did not exist. The same attitudes ruled the technikon structures when I started working there in 1990. The wearing of trousers by women was frowned upon. Closed shoes and ties were a requirement for males, while skirts (preferably floral prints), blouses, and pantyhose were the requisite 'respectful' dress for women. I attributed these rules to the activity of the National Party government of the time, which I believe to this day (possibly erroneously) set up technikons in opposition to the liberal universities that were questioning and resisting apartheid on every level. Perhaps my paranoia attributes more strategic thought to that circumstance than is necessary; I wonder now whether the institutions we had were more a product of philosophical blindness and deafness.

As institutions of higher education, technikons were understood as being hierarchically above community or technical colleges (as they are known in South Africa and which offered the academic elements of trade apprenticeships) but below the universities. (I think we South Africans are strongly historically and culturally driven by hierarchies and taxonomies. Watching myself write, I recognise my predisposition to engage every subject with assumptions about status/ power. I often wonder whose hierarchies I have embraced.) Utilitarian rationales were the justification for everything enacted in apartheid South Africa; the practical ends (for whites) justified the means.

I started at the technikon as a locum in the Education Department, teaching future teachers of 'practical subjects'. In the school curriculum of the time, pupils were able to pursue one of four streams of learning in their senior secondary curriculum: Sciences, Humanities, Commercial,

or Practical. In addition to English and Afrikaans, pupils selected four other subjects which they would pursue to senior certificate level. The stream with the most status was the Sciences, which included Physical Science, Mathematics, and Biology. Humanities included languages as well as History, Geography, Music, and Art. Lying last in the hierarchy were the Commercial and Practical options such as (supposedly in declining order of intellectual challenge) Economics, Accountancy, Business Economics, Typing, and Home Economics (for girls) and Technical Drawing (for boys). Those less 'academically inclined' and more practically oriented were encouraged to take these subjects. The students we were teaching at the technikon were learning to teach Home Economics, Technical Drawing and Accountancy to the 'less bright' pupils in South Africa's high schools. The technikon taught the four-year Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) under contract to the university. As such, they and we, their lecturers, were positioned as intellectually inferior to the teachers in more traditional academic areas, who were trained in the universities.

My own teaching diploma qualified me to teach English and Guidance (typically this involved pupil counselling and career guidance) by virtue of three years of undergraduate English Literature and Psychology. This, in addition to my two-year stint as an English teacher, was enough to land me the locum position of teaching Audio-visual Education to the undergraduates and post-diploma students who were seeking an add-on qualification which would enable them to teach in technical colleges.

I found that the curriculum had not changed, as far as I could see, since I had spent two brief years teaching English in the high school from which I had matriculated. The young people who were allowed to study to be teachers of Technical Drawing, Home Economics, Typing, and Business Studies were predominantly white, although I think I had three students of colour in my first tutorial group. A quota system existed which allowed a certain percentage of 'non-white' students to be admitted to historically white higher education institutions. From this experience I learned that certain forms of knowledge were more highly prized than others and that certain students of certain forms of knowledge were more valuable.

What's in a Name?

Labels were important. I struggled with the notion that at the technikon I
had to be known as Miss Harrison, not Ms or Liz as I would have preferred
(I never dreamed of the possibility of Dr Harrison – I did not see myself
as academically inclined.) I could not understand why we (the technikon's
Department of Education) did not treat aspiring teachers as young adults
and potential colleagues, but as if they were like the children they were
going to be teaching. Even more puzzling to me was why we never reflected
on issues like this as part of the curriculum. My department head and dean
battled to control his amusement at the first (and only) reflective report
that I submitted about the teaching I had done in my first year – everyone
else submitted a list of courses and topics 'covered'. Apparently, this was
not the space to reflect on learner development and what might be needed
in future offerings. I was puzzled: Why should reflexive practice not be
encouraged in teacher education? The large stationery retailer with which
I had worked as a training manager, in the interim years between teach-
ing in high school and joining the technikon, used first names. I knew the
chairman of the group, one of the largest listed on the Johannesburg Stock
Exchange, as Doug. This business-like approach suited my democratic
ideals, but they did not hold in the technikon, which inculcated the hier-
archies and cultures of the schools at that time. Unlike at the technikon,
part of the routine business in our training programme at the retailer was
reflecting on our practice, and trying to improve in it (Argyris, 1976). How
could 'good' ways of knowing not be common practice, particularly in an
'academic' institution?

My title as 'Miss' was problematic in other ways. When the time for
the Education Ball[8] came around, I was required to attend. The department
would find me a date, they said, with understanding and pity for my obvi-
ously single status. I could not tell them that I was in a perfectly satisfactory
relationship with a lovely woman. Her gorgeous brother offered to attend

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8   The Education Ball was an annual dance for all education students. It had the same
      kind of importance attached to it as South African Matric dances – equivalent to
      the Prom in North America.

with me, as I agonised about blowing my chances at a permanent post. In the end, I contracted a convenient 'blue flu' to get out of going. Being seen to be the right person doing the right things was important, more important than dealing with the issues of diversity, privilege, disinheritance, and the legacy of forty years of apartheid in South African schools. I call this my time of selling cosmetics. I did not consciously participate in the cover-up. Despite my liberal education at Wits University and my feelings of discomfort, I was positioned in a discourse that allowed me to do no other and I did not have the cognitive tools or the confidence to challenge it.

Mapping New Territory

I have gladly watched conservativism become subverted as university-trained academics have more recently moved into the technikons (now known as universities of technology), with their questioning minds and refusal to accept the status quo as good enough, with their visions of a better and brighter democratic future. The flip side of the coin of university-trained educators coming into the technikon zone is that now I worry that qualifications are becoming more important than skills gained from practice. As an academic developer, I am actively involved in providing 'curriculum development support'. Part of my job has been to help staff come to terms with the new national policy of outcomes-based education. My clients – the people I serve – are no longer students and yet perhaps they learn indirectly from our relationship. As groups of educators and I examine curricula to identify the 'exit level outcomes' and assessment criteria that are the goal of each diploma, I stand in the position of a 'professional ignoramus'; my task, I think, is to ask the stupid and naïve questions about what occupationally-directed higher educators are doing. I do this to help them articulate what it is that they value about the work they do. I am a stranger in a strange land, but I can speak enough of each language to translate and get by. In real life, it pays to be a tinker, yet, how does this mesh with the doctoral identity I am trying to acquire? How do I testify to the reality of my work and the contribution of thought I might make?

What to Sell in this New Territory?

The curricula of technikons were traditionally non-discipline specific in the sense of the disciplines acknowledged in more traditional universities. The Social Science that I taught to Environmental Health, Residential Child Care, Public Relations, Homoeopathy, and Food Service Management diploma students was an eclectic mix of what is known as Applied Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology in more Oxbridge[9]-style universities (Becher & Trowler, 2001). My choice of what to include depended on my assessment of what would be useful for the students. The only guidance was a list of phrases that constituted the 'syllabus', for example: Introduction, Types of Personalities, Motivation, Cognition, Groups. I aimed at theories and stories that I thought would help students understand people better, with no thought that the theory that worked for me might not make any sense to my students and their lives.

The most enchanting time I have spent in academia was the three months' leave that I was able to spend reading into the subject of graduate education internationally as part of 'doing my PhD'. For the first time in my life since I was twelve years old, I could legitimately spend days reading and being charmed by ideas. I wonder how many South African students ever have the luxury of access to libraries and time for reading for fun. During my study leave, I fought panic continually: What was I producing? How would I remember all this? Knowledge surely is a product, something you own and share. I concluded that the disciplinary frame provides a bounded area of operation, a safe space where the routine structures of thought allow for certain assumptions to be accepted. I realised that I would not be arguing for 'the truth', but I would be taking a position and trying to convince others of its validity. Yet I find myself again on another boundary in my position on knowing – another irresolvable dilemma – that between thinking and practice.

9   Oxbridge is a term derived from the combination of the words Oxford and Cambridge, two prestigious English universities, which are similar in organisation (structured into colleges by discipline, tutorial-based teaching), levels of academic excellence and status.

As I sit with programme teams to fill in the required forms to meet policy requirements, I am aware of the tension between the young, enthusiastic university-trained scientists/ engineers, and the experienced practitioners. The voices of the youth ring with confidence in the theory of their fields and excitement of sharing it. The voices of the experienced practitioners: the environmental health inspectors with their tough-tanned faces and crude stories of rat-infestations and salmonella; the crinkle-eyed land surveyors who can remember how to survey land using a ball of string and pegs; and the grey-haired street photographer[10] with his stories of celebration and pain in the townships, are defensive.

This tension is playing out at a policy level in South Africa with the recent formation of 'universities of technology' as contrasted with the established 'universities'. Someone noticed that technikon graduates did indeed start their working careers with confidence but seemed to hit a ceiling after about ten years and that, in the end, university graduates held all the top jobs. Thus, technikons have recently taken on the name 'University of Technology' and my institution now battles with constructing this new identity. I too battle with this new identity. The easy solution to the problem would be for my institution to take on wholesale the conventions of successful South African universities (in terms of world rankings) specifically related to science and technology. This would erase the craft and contribution of those who work with words and cultural symbols, in subject areas such as Journalism, Jewelry, and Graphic Design, and those who work with relationships, for example, in Community Nursing, Environmental Health, and Child and Youth Care – people like me. I prefer Chris Winberg's (2005) notion that the core of the work of South African universities of technology is technological criticality – understanding the epistemologies and assumptions that underpin the mechanisms we invent and use to solve problems in our society.

I see my role in this is to become critical of my own assumptions about knowledge and knowing, to think deeply about the potential consequences of how I construct and sell knowledge, and to gain an empathic

10   Not Peter Magubane.

understanding of the work that has gone into creating the knowings that I will critique as a paid thinker. Through questioning and answering myself, I can apply the same standard with integrity to the complex work of others.

Motivation for an Academic Life

> I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour, that I can drink with any tinker in his own language during my life.
> — WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry IV*, Part I, Act II, Scene IV

Is a spade a spade or is it earth-moving equipment? I can sell both. The work in progress remains: what is this 'doctoral' knowledge that is so prized that the lack of it can silence some and privilege others? My joy in autoethnography as a method of inquiry lies in the realisation that my reality is not the only reality. I can look at my life, as the discipline I know best, and in theorising my judgements and positions, I am able to inquire into the knowledges that I accept and those that I resist. In doing so I can make overt the rationale and the story behind them, opening up spaces for a sharing of experience that will make possible the joint construction of knowledge that is both clear-headed and useful. The tension in South African academia between knowing for the moment (the economic imperative) and education for the future (social transformation) that Boughey (2007) describes on a macro level is enacted daily in my construction of something original. I am coming to value the ability to move between borders and to speak to the moment, to sell something different.

A Dialogue with the Canon

> The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics;
> rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity
> is articulated.
>
> — BUTLER, 1990, p. 148

Where it Began

This study investigates the process and meaning of doctoral learning from a learner's perspective. Specifically, I set out to understand how I and others in PaperHeaDs constructed ourselves in the process of learning to be a doctor. The individual experiences and the influence of the group as a collective seemed to offer insights that could be used in service of a more effective doctoral pedagogy. I have belonged to the group since 2001, yet it was only in 2006 that I felt confident enough in my academic abilities to apply for entry into a doctoral programme. I was the last member of the group to do so. I attribute this growth in confidence to my membership of the PaperHeaDs and the learning I have derived through interaction with my peers. In watching my friends' struggles and transitions, I recognised that learning was happening at multiple levels in multiple spaces and directions. I grew curious as I saw the potential value to postgraduate students and their supervisors of giving an account of how and why PaperHeaDs worked and works.

Each of us is or was working towards a PhD in one of four South African universities. The intention for establishing PaperHeaDs in 2001 was to support each member in the process of getting a PhD. At the time we

thought that this would be a matter of sharing resources and acquiring the skills and attitudes of doctoral learning. As Manathunga, Lant & Mellick (2007, p. 21) point out, we may have been reductionist in our beliefs about what doctoral learning entails – the process requires more than access to resources, as my thesis argues.

As experienced teachers in higher education, each member of the group has access to the discourses of academia, and it is assumed, access to the literacies required for academic work (Gee, 2000). However, the group has a combined experience of academia which seems to be different from, if overlapping with, discourse related to research work. This is borne out by my account of teaching in higher education without understanding research (see Chapter 1). While 'research learning' (Jansen, Herman & Pillay, 2004) appears to constitute an element of the learning process for individuals in the group, this investigation into how doctoral subjectivities develop, including performativity (Butler, 1990), suggests that an account of doctoral learning from the learner's perspective is at least as ontological as it is epistemological. The unifying concept of this study is that of identity and specifically how doctoral learners negotiate their developing agency as doctors of philosophy within a peer group.

This chapter provides the background and theoretical framework for my research questions, which in turn provides the basis for the adoption of my research methodology (Chapter 3). Starting with a survey of the research into doctoral education, I move into a consideration of identity theory before positing a conceptualisation of doctoral identity that becomes the analytical framework for my study.

The Doctorate: Research Process or Product or Process of Learning?

The longstanding international debate in higher education (Jobbins, Sharma & MacGregor, 2009) as to whether its purpose is that of 'public good' or 'public service' has direct implications for doctoral education. Neoliberal discourses around globalising Higher Education construct it as a tradable commodity ('public service' to the knowledge-economy) as opposed to an expression of local learning in service of the public good. This translates into questioning whether the doctorate should be a qualification that expresses advanced levels of research skill in service of the economy through the creation of tradable knowledge, or a qualification that expresses the individual's ability to operate as an autonomous scholar and thinker. Out of this thinking have developed the notions of the Professional Doctorate as opposed to the Doctor of Philosophy respectively (Evans, 2002; Usher, 2002; Cooper & Love, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Neumann, 2005; Boud & Tennant, 2006; Lee, Brennan & Green, 2009).

The debates about Higher Education's role in the development of human capital and the knowledge economy, and the particular attention granted to it in recent years, seem to derive from a 2001 report of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), of which South Africa is not a member. The report described the impact of the development of human capital on economic and social development and wellbeing and tends to be cited as the source of initiatives towards increasing the production of doctoral graduates. The report uses this definition of human capital: 'The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being' (2001, p. 18). It reported that '[f]or OECD countries as a whole, the implication is that each extra year of full-time education (corresponding to a rise in human capital by about 10 per cent), is associated with an increase in output per capita of about 6 per cent' (2001, p. 31). The assumption is that the highest level of education will have the most desirable economic implications.