

Introduction to ‘The EdD at 20: Lessons learned from professional doctorates’ – a special feature for the *London Review of Education*

Ingrid Lunt*
University of Oxford, UK

The arrival of the EdD in the UK in the late 1990s contributed significantly to the transformation of doctoral education that has taken place over the past 20 years or so. The Institute of Education (IOE) – now a faculty of UCL – was one of the earlier universities to launch its EdD (in 1996), and was followed quickly by a large number of universities developing their own professional doctorates in education. This occurred at the same time as the development of a growing number of professional doctorates (PD) in other professional fields, driven by a range of factors within the higher education (HE) sector, the wider professional and political environment, and the motivations and aspirations of individual professionals. The history of the emergence of professional doctorates and their characteristics and variety have been captured in a number of the papers in this special feature and will not be rehearsed here.

In this brief introduction, I would like to focus on three themes: (1) opportunities and strength of the EdD and professional doctorates; (2) challenges and tensions for the EdD and professional doctorates; and (3) the professional doctorate and the PhD. Although the number of PD fields and titles carries on expanding, the EdD continues as the majority professional doctorate in this and other countries, which is understandable, given the size and diversity of the professional education sector.

Opportunities and strength of the professional doctorate

Drawing the distinction many years ago between the PhD as preparing ‘professional researchers’, possibly aspiring to work in the academy, and the PD as preparing ‘researching professionals’, who wish to enhance their professional work and understanding, Bourner and his colleagues (2001: 81) suggested that the professional doctorate aims to produce ‘critical thinking and critical thinkers that will seek to surpass and transform current conceptions of practice in these professions’. This ‘criticality’, developed by experienced professionals who have the opportunity to step back outside their professional context (becoming insider, outsider and ‘in-betweeners’ researcher: see Burnard *et al.* in this special feature), provides an almost unique opportunity to consider the relationship between professional and academic knowledge, and to foster the reflexivity created where ‘the researcher is the instrument’ (Burnard *et al.*, this feature).

Experienced professionals who wish to develop and reflect on their own practice, to deepen their understanding, enhance their critical and analytical abilities, and to turn a research lens to their professional context in order to enhance it, require a format that emphasizes

* Email: ingrid.lunt@education.ox.ac.uk

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the interrelationship between practice and research, and between professional and academic knowledge, and that develops what we may call 'research-mindedness'. The professional doctorate provides the means for these experienced professionals to bring together theory and practice, indeed to theorize their practice, and to take a step back and look through the 'research lens' at the increasingly complex problems, issues and dilemmas of their professional situations, and to address Barnett's (2000) 'supercomplexity' and the unpredictability of professional life.

Professional doctorates developed in the UK in the wake of the publication of the seminal volume of Gibbons *et al.* (1994), which drew the distinction between Mode 1 knowledge, understood as linear, reductionist, causal and cumulative, contrasted with the transdisciplinary, synoptic, organizationally non-hierarchical, socially accountable, reflexive and transient Mode 2 knowledge. Crucially, Mode 2 knowledge was seen as 'contextual' or situated, and as demonstrating a reflexive relationship between knowledge and society, important for the growing realization of the significance of the 'knowledge society' and 'knowledge economy'. A number of the papers in this volume make reference to the study undertaken by a team at the Institute of Education, which included focus on the pedagogies and epistemologies of the EdD, EngD and DBA professional doctorates, and identified four different modes of professional knowledge developed on professional doctorate courses (Scott *et al.*, 2004). I highlight here Mode 4, which we referred to as 'critical knowledge' and which enables the practitioner to reflect critically on the ways of working in the institution of which they are a member, with a view to changing the way that it works.

Linked with this way of thinking about different forms of knowledge, and in particular thinking about the nature of professional knowledge, we emphasize the importance of experience and of reflection on and in action. As suggested by Donald Schön:

... reflection in action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action. We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems (Schön, 1987: 28–9).

As Cunningham describes in this special feature of the journal, the process and value of reflection and reflective writing constitute a central element of the EdD at the Institute of Education (see also Klenowski and Lunt, 2008). Cunningham uses the phrase 'pensive professionalism' to emphasize the ways in which this kind of reflection and writing promote 'engaged scholarship' and transformative learning. Similarly, in the study by Klenowski and Lunt, two senior professionals stand out:

Undertaking the EdD has radically altered my professional practice and has provided me with the rationale for doing so. I hope that this transformation will continue, and the theoretical and practical insights will enhance my professional life (Klenowski and Lunt, 2008: 212).

By commencing the EdD I had decided I was willing and able to question both the purpose of my own professional role and to interrogate more critically the policies that I was responsible for implementing ... the thesis became a fundamental and transforming process in my life, both professional and personal (Klenowski and Lunt, 2008: 212).

The nature of the professional doctorate (its form, pedagogies, epistemologies and innovative doctoral practices) and the diversity of the experienced professionals participating in the programmes have led to the development of a radically different form of doctoral education, involving criticality, rigorous reflection in and on practice, creative reflexivity and the powerful integration of 'insider', 'outsider' and 'in-between' research. These constitute a real strength and a major opportunity for the professional doctorate.

Challenges and tensions for the professional doctorate

On the other hand, the PD faces significant challenges. In this feature, Robinson identifies a number of tensions that might threaten its sustainability. The success and the consequent proliferation of professional doctorates leads to the first of her tensions: the lack of a common understanding of the purpose and value of PDs due to the range of titles and diversity in structure of programmes. This is a major challenge for the PD. Professional doctorates have evolved in very different forms, both within and across professions (see Hawkes and Yerrabati, this feature), with no national (or international) template or shared understanding of the form of the doctorate. The variety of forms, structures, purposes and processes of the PD is considerable. Taking a different perspective, this is also a challenge identified by Bamberger in this feature, as she describes the problems of recognition of the EdD in a country such as Israel, where the EdD does not exist as a degree and where graduates who have gained the EdD in other countries are seeking recognition of their qualification. The question of parity or equivalence with the PhD looms large: is the EdD Dr equivalent to the PhD Dr? (And what is the meaning and significance of this question?) This question acquires an interesting twist in the paper by Burnard *et al.*, co-authored by two EdD students who have already been ‘doctored’ with PhDs, and whose ‘EdD journeys opened new spaces and opportunities for creating a complex and active identity of a researching professional’.

The past 20 years or so have seen major changes in the conceptualization of the doctorate and a significant increase in policy intervention in the form of quality assurance (QA). This has led to a proliferation of policy pronouncements on the doctorate, both PhD and PD, and, crucially, to attempts to define ‘doctorateness’. A number of papers in this special feature refer to the different ways in which authors have defined the PD, many choosing the definition provided by the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) report in 2002:

A programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying university criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the university, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context (UKCGE, 2002: 62).

More recently, the Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement issued by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in 2015 suggests that:

All UK doctorates, regardless of their form, require the main focus of the candidate’s work to be their *original contribution to knowledge* in their subject, field or profession, through *original research or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding*. In professional and practice-based doctorates the research may be undertaken in the workplace and so *have a direct effect on organisational policy and change, as well as improving personal practice* (QAA, 2015: 3; my emphasis).

The statement is closely linked to the Level 8 (doctoral level) descriptor provided by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), which states that:

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- the general ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems

- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry (QAA, 2008: 23–4).

The FHEQ continue with ‘holders will have: the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments’ (QAA, 2008: 24).

The implications of this guidance are clear. The PhD and the PD exemplify different (and equivalent) forms of doctorateness, although up to now there has been a much greater consensus, both nationally and internationally, as to the nature of the PhD than as to that of the PD. As Robinson points out in this special feature, ‘the wide range of PD titles and variety in structure of PD programmes leads to a lack of common understanding of the purpose and value of PDs’, which may ‘threaten the future sustainability of PD programmes’.

The professional doctorate and the PhD

Prior to the introduction of the EdD at the Institute of Education, there was serious debate and discussion between the alternatives of: (1) adapting and broadening the PhD degree (to serve the needs of ‘researching professionals’ better) and (2) introducing the EdD. At the time, significant numbers of those enrolled on the PhD were experienced education professionals, often studying part-time, and not infrequently researching their own professional contexts for their PhD.

Despite the fundamental questions raised by the University of London, which at the time had responsibility for our degrees, the innovative EdD was introduced by a collaborative team from Goldsmiths College, King’s College London and the Institute of Education.

The IOE’s EdD has now ‘come of age’: its 20-year history has also witnessed a transformation of the PhD, both in the UK and internationally, undoubtedly influenced in part by the innovative features of doctoral education developed through professional doctorates. The PD provided the challenge of thinking through the broader pedagogical and epistemological issues of doctorateness, and how the rigour and originality of doctoral research could be sustained through a fundamentally different mode of intellectual enquiry. The PD also demonstrated clearly the benefits of the ‘cohort effect’ and the ways in which ‘researching professionals’ could stimulate and enhance understanding through collaborative activity, discussion and peer learning. No more the lonely doctoral candidate stuck in the ivory tower.

As a result, the PhD has become increasingly structured, and indeed in many universities the PhD and the professional doctorate have become increasingly similar in shape. A major driver for this has been the Research Councils, and, for the ESRC at least, the 1+3 structure for the PhD, ensuring a year of coursework and research skills preparation. A further driver was the perceived dissatisfaction of employers with the mismatch between the knowledge and skills of PhD graduates and the demands of the labour market and the competitive ‘knowledge economy’. This means that the outcomes of the doctorate, and the skills, attributes, dispositions, knowledges and capabilities of doctoral graduates, have become a growing focus: it is not sufficient to have specialist knowledge and to make an original contribution to one narrow field; rather, the doctoral graduate is required to develop a range of research and other skills during the course of their doctorate, an issue already addressed by those involved in PD programmes.

This wider concern for relevance to employment and the knowledge economy has driven the requirement for PhD students to gain transferable and employment-related skills through so-called generic skills programmes, while the focus by the QAA on qualification descriptors and

intended learning outcomes for all doctoral graduates brings PhD and PD programmes closer together.

The greater use of the cohort model for the PhD, used extensively for major parts of the PD, supports different forms of learning and timely completions. A more formalized expression of this development has been the move to create Doctoral Schools, either as part of, or in addition to, Graduate Schools. These are increasingly common, both across the UK and more widely internationally. In the UK, they provide a broad forum or space that brings together doctoral candidates of both PhD and PD, fostering collaboration, learning from each other, and the mutual influence across faculty, candidates, resources and practices.

In this way, the changed context, structure and nature of the PhD is demanding a greater integration of different forms of knowledge, and different pedagogies and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. It can also be argued that the PhD has benefited significantly from the developments of, and debates and literature on, doctoral education inspired by the professional doctorate. A major question for the future of the professional doctorate, and its challenge for export and recognition, remains the issue of parity and equivalence. The professional doctorate has encouraged innovative practices, new structures and formats, and created novel ways of thinking about doctorateness. Its future success and sustainability depends on its continued interaction with, and serious inclusion in, debates on the doctorate at all levels: faculty, university, policymakers, government agencies and employers.

This special feature is a welcome addition to the literature on professional doctorates and a fitting celebration of 20 years of the IOE EdD. A number of the papers make specific reference to the dynamic development of the EdD at the IOE, reflecting the continuing efforts to create a doctoral degree fit for the various purposes and aspirations of its wide range of participants. In her paper, Taylor discusses some of the tensions inherent in the EdD as an apprenticeship for a particular leadership role, while Burnard *et al.* present in their paper some of the challenges faced by two senior professionals immersed in their 'EdD journey'. Particularly welcome is the international participation of writers for this special feature in the *London Review of Education*, including India (Misra), Ireland (Moran), Israel (Bamberger) and Singapore (Chua).

Notes on the contributor

Ingrid Lunt is an emeritus professor in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. Prior to moving to the University of Oxford in 2005, she worked at the Institute of Education for 20 years, taking on the leadership of the EdD from 1997, as the head of the Doctoral School from 1998 and Dean of the Doctoral School from 2002 to 2005. She enjoyed teaching on the IOE EdD every year from its launch in 1996 until 2007.

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This is the introduction to a *London Review of Education* special feature: 'The EdD at 20: Lessons learned from professional doctorates', edited by Denise Hawkes, Sridevi Yerrabati and Susan Taylor.

The articles included in the 'EdD at 20' feature are:

- Bamberger, A. (2018) 'Academic degree recognition in a global era: The case of the doctorate of education (EdD) in Israel'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 28–39.
- Burnard, P., Dragovic, T., Ottewell, K. and Lim, W.M. (2018) 'Voicing the professional doctorate and the researching professional's identity: Theorizing the EdD's uniqueness'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 40–55.
- Chua, S.M.J. (2018) 'Being written: Thinking the normative in the EdD'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 56–62.
- Cunningham, B. (2018) 'Pensive professionalism: The role of "required reflection" on a professional doctorate'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 63–74.
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- Taylor, S. (2018) 'The UCL EdD: An apprenticeship for the future educational professional?' *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 104–21.