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Chapter 10

Rethinking doctoral writing as text work and identity work

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Universities play a key role in the new knowledge-based economies through the provision of research and research education, and the production of highly skilled graduates through doctoral programs of many kinds. This role is more significant than ever given the dramatic expansion in higher degree enrolments in recent years. As Neumann (2002) notes, between 1991 and 2000 doctoral enrolments in Australian universities virtually doubled from 19,000 to over 37,000 (DETYA 2001).

This expansion has been accompanied by an increase in the diversity of students in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and discipline area (Pearson 1999; Johnson et al. 2000). The number of international students has increased rapidly, as many universities in Western countries now actively seek large numbers of students from developing countries for income generation, rather than aid, purposes. Part-time candidature has grown (Evans 2002) and increasing numbers study at a distance (Evans and Pearson 1999; McWilliam et al. 2002).

Doctoral candidates in the social sciences are now equally likely to be mid-career professionals, as young students straight from undergraduate work. They are joined by increasing numbers of older candidates who may be seeking a career change, a post-retirement option, or simply to further an area of interest (Leonard et al. 2005). Doctoral researchers also have more diverse motivations for undertaking study. They arrive at university with a wider range of work and life experiences and include numbers of university staff in both academic and administrative positions seeking to increase their qualifications.

This increasing diversity and the addition of students with various English language demands, histories of under- and postgraduate experience and different cultural norms and expectations, creates new pressures on supervision. While many universities recognise the need to support supervisors in their work, this concern is generally couched in terms of quality assurance and training, rather than pedagogy. Universities require supervisors to keep detailed audit trails of their interactions with students, but this is primarily to avoid student complaints and litigation. The inclusion of PhD completion rates in government measures of research performance has placed a new emphasis, in countries such as Australia and the UK, on ‘getting students through’. But the press by universities
for documentation and smooth passage from enrolment to graduation does not necessarily enhance what actually happens in pedagogical practice.

While most universities in Australia now target completion rates and supervisor efficacy as key arenas for institutional improvement, such measures tend to bypass complex questions of knowledge production; of pedagogy; of scholarly identity formation and writing. Many scholars are arguing for new kinds of research and thinking on doctoral education that attend to this complexity (see for example, special issues of the *Australian Universities' Review* (38, 2) in 1995 and (43, 2) in 2000; *Higher Education Research and Development* (21, 2) in 2002 and (24, 2) in 2005; *Australian Educational Researcher* (29, 3) in 2002). Pearson highlights the need to develop

a research-based conceptual framework of doctoral education to guide quality management, improvement, and innovation. It is timely to consider that the (necessary) stress on institutional quality assurance on the one hand, and individual supervision, on the other, has led to insufficient attention to the way doctoral education proceeds within particular contexts and settings, and insufficient attention to the lived experiences and perceptions of participants in specific research and learning environments.

(Pearson 1999: 270)

Boud and Lee (2005) similarly interrogate recent policy-driven preoccupations with doctoral completions, funding and contributions to the economy. They argue that current emphases on supervision and the training of supervisors are inadequate and they make the case for a new focus on pedagogy. They theorise the research education environment as before pedagogical space and foreground the importance of peer learning to facilitate student entry into communities of research practice.

It is in this context of increasing diversity of students, increasing pressures on supervisors, and increasing policy imperatives to improve the quality of research, that we situate our discussion of doctoral writing. Like Boud and Lee (2005), our concerns are pedagogical. Like Pearson (1999), we think it is crucial to attend to the lived experiences of doctoral students. Thus we ask: To what extent have the intensified pressures to improve performance in research education actually improved the doctoral student's experience of writing and research? What has been done to build pedagogies of supervision that address the central work of dissertation writing?

From our perspective, research *is* a practice of writing. Writing shapes a text – the dissertation – the object which is examined and judged as the basis of awarding the degree. But it also shapes a scholar, the person who is judged in and through the text. And for the most part, the relationship between writing and research and writing and identity is overlooked, misunderstood, or ignored in universities – to the peril of the quality of research and the production of buoyant academic writers who know the game and can play it with confidence.
A recent experience at the ICARE forum in September 2005 suggests how fragile doctoral identities can be, and how at risk in the current climate. The occasion was the presentation of a version of this chapter at ICARE. The response was positive — nothing controversial or heated. Some senior academics commented on the utility of our text-work identity-work framework; others discussed their own practices of supervision in relation to questions of doctoral writing. But the silences of that conversation were not evident until afterwards, when Barbara entered the ladies room. She was approached there by three early-career researchers, all recent or current doctoral candidates in their institutions in the UK, who wanted to talk about the paper.

One by one, they talked with great intensity about their own experiences of writing the doctorate, their struggles, their passions, their fears. They resonated with the identity struggles Barbara had spoken about. But they said they were too frightened to admit their struggles in the company of ‘expert’ scholars. The conversations with these young women were engaged and invigorating, more lively than those in the forum proper, but Barbara was struck by the fact that such concerns could only be spoken in the space where women carry out their intimate and private business. These diffident and emerging scholars were ashamed of not writing well enough. The senior scholars in the room had no idea of their younger colleagues’ unspoken concerns — which had they been articulated, would have enlivened the ICARE conversation. Instead they remained private, uttered in confidence in a private space, construed as personal failing, as a problem of isolated individuals.

Our aim then, as now, is to bring the textual practices of scholarship into the public arena — to discuss pedagogy — to imagine a writing-centred supervision. We want to relocate the problems doctoral writers face and reconnect them to the complexities of dissertation writing and broader threats to the preparation of educational researchers. In this chapter we rethink doctoral writing as text work and identity work, foregrounding the anxieties that both students and supervisors experience in relation to writing the dissertation.

The invisibility of doctoral writing

Writing the dissertation lies at the centre of doctoral education. It is through writing that students make their findings known to the public and develop a sense of themselves as authorised scholars. Yet, in many universities, writing is treated as ancillary to the real work of research — as the invisible and taken-for-granted labour of the doctorate (Kamler and Thomson 2001). While failure to successfully complete the doctorate has been linked to student writing problems (e.g. Torrance and Thomas 1994), even this obvious connection with matters of efficiency has failed to put doctoral writing on the map.

Nevertheless, writing the dissertation remains a major site of anxiety for students and often, for their supervisors. It is not uncommon to hear frustrated conversations at conferences and faculty meetings about turgid prose, badly
structured arguments and laboured literature reviews. Yet graduate students are rarely offered systematic instruction in high-level academic writing (Rose and McClafferty 2001); and when writing support is given, it often misunderstands the profound interrelationships between writing and identity (Lee 1998; Richardson 1994), treating academic writing rather as a discrete set of add-on skills that are effectively context free.

There is a burgeoning literature on doctoral pedagogies, supervision and examination (e.g. Delamont et al. 1997; Bartlett and Mercer 2001; Dias and Paré 2000; Green et al. 2001). But little attention has been given in this work to the processes of writing the thesis, through which professional identities are formed and reconfigured. There is also a rich research tradition that examines academic writing as discipline-specific practice: studies that explore rhetorical differences across academic disciplines (Bazerman 1988; Myers 1985); and the way graduate students learn to appropriate discourse conventions in disciplinary communities (Paré 2002; Prior 1998; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Kamler and Maclean 1997). But this research rarely addresses the doctoral arena. Unfortunately, those texts that most directly address questions of doctoral writing are written in the pedestrian self-help, advice genre: the how-to-write-your-dissertation manual. Such manuals reduce writing to a set of procedures and rules that can be learned in a mechanical way.

For a number of years we have been addressing this gap in scholarship by examining questions of doctoral writing, pedagogy and identity. In our recent book Helping doctoral students write: pedagogies for supervision (Kamler and Thomson 2006) we examine thesis writing in the pedagogical space of supervision, treating doctoral writing as research (Richardson 1994) — a complex, institutionally-constrained social practice. We pay attention to the genres and conventions of scholarly writing. We examine an array of doctoral writing practices that seek to support the production of both scholarly writing and the scholar.

In this chapter, we explore a central tenet of our pedagogy: our conceptualisation of doctoral writing as text work and identity work. We explicate this framework by examining the work of reviewing literatures, one of the most anxiety-provoking tasks doctoral writers face. We consider the issue of criticality, the difficult task of helping students take an evaluative stance in writing about literatures. We examine an interactive text-work strategy to illustrate how supervisors might better support doctoral researchers to produce more authoritative writing and a more authoritative scholar.

**Reviewing literatures as text work and identity work**

Work with literatures is vital to doctoral research. When students sketch out the nature of the field or fields relevant to their inquiry; when they identify major debates and define contentious terms, they are not simply conducting an
'academic exercise'. They are mapping a field of knowledge production (Kamler and Thomson 2006). They are establishing which studies, ideas and/or methods are most pertinent to their own study in order to create the warrant for the study in question, and identify the contribution the study will make. As such, it is not something that they can ignore, no matter how badly they feel about it. Nor is it something that doctoral education can ignore in preparing researchers.

In a recent review of dissertation literature reviews, Boote and Beile (2005) deplore both the poor quality of student reviews and the lack of serious pedagogical attention given to this act of scholarship in doctoral education. A thorough, substantive literature review, is they argue, 'a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research' (Boote and Beile 2005: 3). Yet, many of the doctoral candidates they survey espoused naïve conceptions of literature reviewing or seemed to perceive it as of relatively low importance.

Our work in Australia and the UK suggests that doctoral candidates understand its pivotal importance, but are plagued by an excess of anxiety and expectation about literature work. There are many reasons for this angst. There are writing myths which complicate and make writing about literatures a task to be endured, rather than enjoyed. And there is a lack of recognition of the intensity of identity work involved at this site of text production. We would go so far as to say that literature reviews are the quintessential site of identity work – where the novice researcher enters what we call occupied territory – with all the immanent danger and quiet dread that this metaphor implies, including possible ambushes, barbed-wire fences, unknown academics who patrol the boundaries of already occupied territories.

It is difficult to write confidently in dangerous territory. It is difficult to be a 'novice' seeking entry to a community of 'expert' scholars, and at the same time 'critically review' these experts. Unfocused reviews, slavish mechanical summaries, clumsy attempts at creating links to the work of expert scholars are rarely just 'writing problems'. What often looks like poor writing, we suggest, is also a textual struggle to take on a scholarly identity and become authoritative.

It is our argument that there are two sides to reviewing literatures: knowing the genres, conventions and textual practices; and assuming what we call a 'hands on hips' subject position. When doctoral researchers write about literatures, they are constructing a representation of the scholar and her scholarly practice. The struggle with writing occurs because of the difficulty of negotiating text work and identity work simultaneously. The challenge is to learn to speak and write with authority, to critically survey and categorise texts and the field with 'hands on hips'. In the remainder of this chapter we outline some strategies we’ve used with students in order to illustrate our larger argument – that doctoral education needs to take up a more complex view of dissertation writing as text work and identity work in order to facilitate not only thesis production, but the production of more confident, enabled scholars.
Adopting a critical stance

Most supervisors, advice books and university websites suggest that the literature review needs to be critical. On the surface, the term critical positions the doctoral researcher powerfully, as judge and evaluator of the research that has preceded her. But this is where many students come undone. They take critical to mean critique, to find what is wrong. They feel intimidated, sometimes paralysed by the prospect of critiquing (esteemed, elevated) scholars who are senior, more powerful and acknowledged experts in their fields.

The seemingly innocuous and common-place phrase a critical review of the literature carries with it a set of presuppositions that create a difficult subject position for the doctoral writer, which makes the task of writing more difficult. Doctoral researchers often revert to writing summaries, we believe, because they are nervous about taking on the subject position of ‘critic’. They may be cautioned a hundred times that the literature review is not a summary, that it involves making a case for their work and finding which research literatures are like/unlike/connected to what they are doing. But such advice is often not sufficient.

We can capture the dilemma by considering a text written by a doctoral researcher who has difficulty achieving a critical stance. The writer Gina (a pseudonym) is a senior school administrator who is researching what is ‘known’ about school reform. She writes:

Fullan (1993) proposes some paradoxes about change that would help one to understand and deal with the complexities of change. He claims that you can’t mandate what matters since the more complex the change, the less you can force it. He also explains that change is a journey, not a blue print and that we will encounter problems. However, we should see problems as our friends. Can one ever regard problems as good? This could be the most feared thing and could become an obstacle for some, knowing the stress and headaches that problems can cause. Nevertheless, the author is of the view that because they are inevitable, we can’t learn without them. In this light, I share the author’s view because the old adage goes ‘experiences are our greatest teacher’.

There are many things we can say about this text. Certainly it is characteristic of diffident scholars who lack authority and feel somewhat overwhelmed by the work of ‘experts’. Here Gina shows a grasp of the issues and debates about school change, but has difficulty positioning herself in relation to the writer Fullan, a senior scholar in the field of educational reform. She talks of herself as ‘one’ and ‘I’ and addresses the audience somewhat awkwardly as ‘you’ and ‘we’. She is critical of the proposition Fullan is making, but in order to make the critique she resorts to rhetorical questions. She then absents herself from the text to make a critical comment based on her own considerable professional experience, but which she is reluctant to assert, saying ‘knowing the stress and headaches that
problems can cause’. She does not produce counters from other literature. She reasserts herself, as the ‘I’, only when in agreement with the author.

It would be easy to respond to this text as a piece of ‘bad writing’, but a closer reading shows the problem is not primarily about style and expression. Some of the tongue-tied-ness and lack of inter-textuality derive from Gina’s inability to find a comfortable ‘hands on hips’ stance. To move forward, she needs strategies that can help her connect with and evaluate the work of ‘expert scholars’ in relation to their own. She requires an expanded notion of what it is to be critical – beyond praise and blame – and the adoption of a stance we might characterise as appreciative.

**Becoming critical**

To be critical is not just about praising and demolishing the work of others. Being critical involves making judgments and decisions about which literatures to engage with, and which to ignore, which aspects of texts to stress and which to omit or downplay. Adopting a critical stance to a text means paying attention to: definitions; underpinning assumptions; theoretical resources mobilised; epistemology and methodology; method (who, what, where, how); and findings. These perspectives can be brought together to establish points of similarity and points of difference. It is through such focused interrogation and inter-textual work that students come to identify major debates in the field.

But to be critical is also to be respectful of what others have done, to look at what they have contributed, rather than going on the attack. A key question to ask is: what does this work contribute? rather than: what does it fail to do? This creates an evaluative frame which helps developing scholars enact ‘criticism’ as more than negative or destructive behaviour.

Some students arrive at a generous and generative criticality by themselves. Others benefit from a more direct pedagogical strategy. We have found the work of Wagner (1993) useful in establishing an analytic framework for criticality that moves beyond liking or disliking, agreeing or disagreeing. Wagner distinguishes between what he calls the ‘blind spots’ and ‘blank spots’ in others’ research. What we ‘know enough to question but not answer’ are our blank spots; what we ‘don’t know well enough to even ask about or care about’ are our blind spots, ‘areas in which existing theories, methods, and perceptions actually keep us from seeing phenomena as clearly as we might’ (1993: 16).

So, for example, surveys typically give a broad snapshot of a phenomena using respondent’s perceptions. What they cannot do is to provide in-depth reasons about why those particular answers are the way they are. This requires a different kind of investigation. These in-depth reasons are a blind spot of this type of research (and indeed, are typically why mixed methods are seen as preferable to single surveys). To identify the blind spots in others’ research, students need to focus on the things a particular methodology or method does not do, that is, areas that have been overlooked because of theoretical or methodological reasons. Identifying
blank spots, by contrast, involves asking what this research could have seen or done that it does not. That is, what are the shortcomings of the research? So, if a survey omitted questions or failed to take up opportunities for informative cross-tabulations, these are arguably blank spots. This distinction clarifies the difference between research that is poorly executed, and research that can only provide a limited data set.

Combining the notion of blind spots and blank spots with an appreciative stance allows doctoral researchers to focus on what the research contributes and how/where/why more might be required. The combination also provides evaluative detail beyond summarising content and themes. In workshops we encourage doctoral researchers to assess the individual texts of other scholars by asking such questions as:

- what is the argument?
- what kind/aspect of x is spoken about in this article?
- from what position?
- using what evidence?
- what claims are made?
- how adequate are these (blank spots and blind spots)?

Working with blank and blind spots across many texts provides important understandings about the gaps and spaces in the field, one of which the doctoral researcher will occupy. This is analytic text work that can build students' sense of place in a field of scholarship. But we suggest a more ‘hands on’ textual approach is also required to help students develop criticality in reviewing literatures. We conclude by illustrating one such strategy which we call joint texting.

**Joint texting**

Joint texting is one of several textwork strategies we've developed (Kamler and Thomson 2006) to foster more authoritative doctoral identities. The term joint texting signals that this is not correcting writing, but working with doctoral researchers at the computer to revise their draft writing. Remaking text and manipulating it until it speaks more assertively is a tangible activity. It makes the process of knowledge production more ‘hands on’. The supervisor takes the lead and models revision-in-action, often with powerful effects on doctoral researcher identities.

To illustrate, we consider an interaction between doctoral researcher Mia and her supervisor Andrew (pseudonyms). Mia is reviewing literatures for her dissertation proposal. She has summarised trends in the field of homework research as a foundation for her own qualitative study on the effects of homework on families in diverse sociocultural contexts. She consolidates a large number of studies into a short space, but starts most sentences by naming previous studies
and reviewers of homework. We highlight this syntactic pattern in bold type and number her sentences to facilitate our analysis of the text.

*Mia LR 1*

(1) All reviewers of the homework literature agree that much research into homework has been poorly designed, short term, experimental and narrowly focused on academic achievement (Cooper, 1989; Coulter, 1979; Paschal, 1984). (2) Further, studies have been premised on partial or commonsense definitions which either assume an understanding of homework or narrowly define homework as time spent in completion of school assignments (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995). (3) Many studies have been based on self-reported quantitative data alone; such data is inevitably limited in its potential to provide insights into the relationship between homework and achievement.

(4) Several scholars who have reviewed the academic literature on homework (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995; Coulter, 1979) suggest that the equivocal nature of the findings into the effects of homework, despite a century of research, reveals more about the methodological challenges of researching this complex subject than can be stated conclusively about the relationship between homework and achievement. (5) Apart from the quantitative studies previously discussed, many studies have used evidence from interviews with children, parents and teachers. (6) There has also been little research evidence derived from classrooms which explores teachers’ framing of homework or children’s understandings of their tasks. (7) Further, the majority of studies have concentrated on homework practices of adolescent secondary students. (8) Scholars who have reviewed the academic literature on homework (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995) have directed little research attention to primary school students’ homework, with the exception of the role of parents in the development of child literacy. (9) Few observational studies have examined the webs of social interaction between children and their parents, siblings, friends and schools within which homework is constructed (Coulter, 1979: 27). (10) A few influential studies have looked at the family interactions around homework in diverse sociocultural contexts (Breen et al., 1994; Freebody et al., 1995; Lareau, 1987) and will be discussed in a later section of this review.

Mia’s writing is competent in terms of fluency, syntax and clarity. She is neither drowning in the literature nor overwhelmed by it. But she is absent from the text. She succinctly summarises the equivocal findings of the homework research, but her own opinions and evaluations are backgrounded or attributed to other researchers. As a result, a critical and authoritative stance is missing.

To interrupt this way of writing, her supervisor Andrew put Mia’s text on the computer screen. His aim was to model how Mia might foreground her own point of view. It is important that this text work occurred in her presence, rather than
as red-pen corrections in her absence. She was part of the process, not simply a recipient of teacher judgement. Andrew talked out loud about what he was attempting. His manner was tentative, exploratory. He tried things on the screen and deleted them. Mia was both witness and participant, making suggestions and seeing the text change before her eyes. The interaction was punctuated by Andrew asking Mia questions about the text.

His first move was to make visible how Mia attributed everything (every idea, trend, opinion) to other researchers. So, for example, he looked at sentence 1 where Mia begins *All the reviewers of homework agree.* He asked whether *she* agreed. When she said yes, he shifted her sentence structure so that the assertion came first, and the citation last.

In sum, it appears that much research into homework has been poorly designed, short term, experimental and narrowly focused on academic achievement.

( Cooper, 1989; Coulter, 1979; Paschal, 1984)

This is a subtle shift, but one that lets Mia assert *with* this community of scholars, rather than exclude herself. Andrew used a similar strategy in the second paragraph. He looked, for example, at sentence 4 where Mia begins: *Several scholars who have reviewed the academic literature on homework suggest.* He again shifted the pattern of attribution from the start of the sentence to the end, so Mia owns the claim.

It seems, then, that despite a century of research, the equivocal nature of the findings say more about the methodological challenges of researching this complex subject than about any definitive relationship between homework and achievement itself.

( Hoover-Dempsey, 1995; Coulter, 1979)

He then created a third paragraph, missing altogether from the first draft. His aim was to model how Mia might highlight the gap her own research was addressing. He looked, in particular, at sentence 10, where she refers to *a few influential studies* without making any link to her own work. He asked: What is the link between this work and what you will do? How do you plan to use these influential studies?

On the basis of this conversation, he started adding phrases and sentences, asking: What will you say here? How do we mark your contribution? Gradually he inserted Mia’s words, acting as her scribe and text-worker. This conversation provided a scaffold for Mia to learn syntactic conventions for staking a claim. Mia worked *with* Andrew to make textual connections between her work and the wider scholarly community, thus locating her place more firmly in the field of knowledge production. Her revised literature review constructs a more authoritative stance for Mia as doctoral researcher. We use bold print to highlight the new syntactic pattern at the beginning of sentences and the change in writer stance it achieves.
Mia's Revised LR 2

(1) In sum, it appears that much research into homework has been poorly designed, short term, experimental and narrowly focused on academic achievement (Cooper, 1989; Coulter, 1979; Paschal, 1984). (2) Studies have been premised on partial or commonsense definitions which either assume an understanding of homework or narrowly define homework as time spent in completion of school assignments (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995). (3) The over-reliance on self-reported quantitative data alone has lead to limited insights into the relationship between homework and achievement.

(4) It seems, then, that despite a century of research, the equivocal nature of the findings say more about the methodological challenges of researching this complex subject than about any definitive relationship between homework and achievement itself (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995; Coulter, 1979). (5) The qualitative research evidence to date has relied heavily on interviews with children, parents and teachers, that is, on what people say they do. (6) There has been little attention given to the practice of school homework as it occurs in the family context. (7) There has been little classroom-based research evidence which explores teachers' framing of homework or children's understandings of their tasks. (8) Further, little research attention has focused on primary school students' homework, with the exception of the role of parents in the development of child literacy.

(9) In this proposal I attempt to address these methodological gaps by designing an observational and interview-based study which examines the webs of social interaction between children and their parents, siblings, friends and schools within which homework is constructed (Coulter, 1979: 27). (10) I focus on the primary secondary school nexus and work with a more complex understanding of homework as a social practice. (11) A number of influential studies which have examined family interactions around homework in diverse socio-cultural contexts (Breen 1994; Freebody 1995; Hill 2002) provide a foundation for my study and will be discussed in Section 3.3 of this review.

In this revision, Mia takes a 'critical' stand on the trends she identifies. She incorporates evaluative comments at the start of sentences: The over-reliance on self-reported quantitative data alone has lead to limited insights (3). She identifies gaps: There has been little attention given to (6); There has been little classroom-based research (7); Further, little research attention has focused on (8). And she acknowledges her debt to previous scholarship: A number of influential studies... provide a foundation for my study (11).

The textual outcome is a more assertive, less descriptive construction of the field of knowledge production. Importantly, the identity work was profound. Mia was not only pleased with the revision, but astounded at how little it took to make her sound more authoritative. The joint texting with Andrew affected her deeply and almost seemed to be written into her body as she left the supervision session.
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seemingly taller. She spoke later of the session as a pivotal event in helping her ‘get how to become critical’.

This collaborative strategy was certainly more powerful than just explaining or correcting Mia’s draft. As supervisor and student remade the text together, they also remade her identity and capacity for a textual authority she desired but was unable to create on her own – particularly at this early stage of her candidature. There was also something pleasurable about the sociality of this joint texting. It created a different subject position for the doctoral researcher, not just as novice but as text worker, working collaboratively with her supervisor to strengthen the text.

What differentiates this approach to doctoral writing is a conscious attention to both the text work and identity work. Our emphasis is on repositioning doctoral writers as text workers and using supervision as a space to make explicit how to construct the genres of scholarly writing. Our aim is to foster student agency in the process of reviewing literatures, and in writing the dissertation more broadly. Central to this work is a reconceptualisation of supervision pedagogy as a space for treating doctoral writing as both text work and identity work.

Of course, if we return to our concerns at the start of the chapter about the increasing pressures supervisors now face, it is also important to think beyond the supervisory space. The responsibility for fostering good writing and authoritative scholars cannot lie with supervisors alone. There needs to be adequate institutional support. By this we don’t mean that institutions start ‘training’ supervisors about writing. Rather, that universities themselves must take up the question of research writing. They must establish what we call institutional writing cultures (see Kamler and Thomson 2006: chapter 9 for an extended discussion).

A writing culture is one in which questions of writing are foregrounded and not confined to the realm of a pre-dissertation technical fix. It is one in which writing initiatives are linked to policy priorities and wider institutional aspirations (Lee and Boud 2003). It is one in which writing is not narrowly connected to productivity, but linked to fostering research capacities, practices and ‘know how’. It is a culture in which the hitherto private pleasures and pain of writing are made public through institutionally-resourced writing groups, courses and collectives. Such a writing culture is not remedial. It recognises that research practices are writing practices and that all university staff and students benefit from systematic attention to writing.

Such writing cultures do not simply happen. They must be consciously produced. As universities continue to monitor the quality of doctoral education and ensure that all university teaching staff are cognisant of a range of teaching and learning strategies appropriate to adult learners, it is timely for them to also consider how to provide support for writing-oriented research practices.
Note

1 The International Centres for Applied Research in Education (ICARE) is an international research and evaluation collaboration between Deakin University, the University of Illinois, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of East Anglia.

References


