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The Journal of the Education Research Group of Adelaide
ISSN 1835-6850

Volume 1, Number 3, February 2010

Contents

What does a Professional Doctorate Portfolio look like?

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Abstract

The ability to present doctoral work in a portfolio as opposed to a dissertation presents an opportunity to professional doctorate students to step outside the boundaries presented by the traditional approach to writing up research.

This paper is about the utilisation of Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's (2009) 'temple' analogy for the design of a doctoral portfolio. The portfolio was constructed within a framework adapted from a particular approach to writing up research within the author's own organisation and at the same time bounded by firm adherence to 'matrix' planning of the research project. Both the process and outcome of this approach are presented. The outcome was a collection of writings which, while varied in genre according to their purpose and audience, was given structure and coherence by the matrix, which was closely aligned to the temple architecture.

Taking the path less travelled often means choosing a journey into the unknown. The purpose of this paper is to add to Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's work through real-life exemplification of their temple model and assist future professional doctorate students map their own projects by highlighting the advantages of matrix planning and the versatility and benefits of the portfolio approach to presenting the research.

Introduction

The ability to present doctoral work in a portfolio as opposed to a dissertation presents an opportunity for professional doctorate students to step outside the boundaries presented by the traditional approach to writing up research. This can be both emancipating and terrifying.

This paper reports one experience of reflecting knowledge and constructing meaning utilising Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's (2009, 14) 'temple' analogy for the design of a professional doctoral portfolio. The portfolio was developed within a framework adapted from an approach to writing up research within the author's own organisation expounded by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) and at the same time bounded by firm adherence to 'matrix' planning of the research project (Maxwell & Smyth, in press; Smyth & Maxwell, in press). Both the process and outcome of this approach are presented. The outcome was a collection of writings which, while varied in genre according to their purpose and audience, was given structure and coherence by the matrix, which was closely aligned to the temple architecture.

Taking the path less travelled often means choosing a journey into the unknown. The purpose of this paper is to add to Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's (2009) work through real-life exemplification of their temple model and assist future professional doctorate students map their own projects by highlighting the advantages of matrix planning and the versatility and benefits of the portfolio approach to presenting the research.

Context

The very existence of professional doctorates is controversial. There are widespread concerns that professional doctorates do not adequately provide useful outcomes for commerce, industry and society (Academy of Finland, 1997; Commission of the European Communities, 2000; Kemp, 1999). There is also some discrimination within academia resulting in the professional doctorate often being viewed by the very people who provide it as a second rate alternative to the traditional PhD. Many universities remain reluctant to offer one (Park, 2005, 200). A UK based study found that many examiners of professional doctorates commented on poor presentation and lack of coherence in the final product (Winter, Griffiths and Green 2000 cited in Park, 2005). Much of the basis of these negative views could possibly be addressed by revolutionising the way professional doctorates are written up. While there has been strong growth in the notion of the portfolio as a viable alternative to the thesis (Love, 2002; Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004), there has been little written about how to put a portfolio together in a meaningful way, as opposed to the mass of literature focused on how to write a PhD thesis. This paper offers one example of how to compile an EdD portfolio based in the writer's recent experience.

My research project was an action research case study of the context, development, implementation and outcomes, during its pilot period, of a program designed to recognise and reward student development through extra-curricular activity at university. The program is called the New England Award (NEA). The three major research questions were drafted with the assistance of two people with whom I enjoyed a very brief student/advisor relationship before their departure from my university. At that stage a traditional thesis was assumed to be the mode of reporting. My supervision was then taken on by two new advisers, one of whom, Associate Professor Tom Maxwell, has contributed to the literature in the field of professional doctorates (Green, Maxwell, & Shanahan, 2001; Maxwell, 2003; Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001; Maxwell, Shanahan, & Green, 2001). He introduced me to his 'temple' analogy for the writing up of professional doctorate research and, together with Dr Jillian Boyd, the 'matrix' method of planning of the research project.

The Temple

The 'temple' model is based on the premise that professional doctorates, being more professionally focused and centred on the realities of the workplace than traditional doctorates (PhDs) (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009, 5) are more likely to be multi-disciplinary in nature and less likely to consist of a 'sustained and systematic piece of research…[reflecting] a high level of theoretical conceptualisation'(Eckerman, 2001, 14). Professional doctorates focus on the community of practice rather than the community of academia. An important aspect of professional doctorates is their usefulness to professionals in their real contexts. Few 'real life' projects utilise only information from a single discipline (Love, 2002, 5). Hence, the communication in the award should be consistent with the community of practice/ profession in which the study is based (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009, 8; Maxwell et al., 2001, 7) and not based in a particular discipline or tradition (Love, 2002, 5). It is therefore logical that an alternative to the traditional thesis is required but the usual understanding of a 'portfolio', the commonly espoused alternative (Scott et al., 2004, 150), requires more shape than a loose collection of papers as its name implies. Hence Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's Greek temple model (Figure 1).

Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's temple model is underpinned by their belief in the need for a linking paper that integrates and ties together the parts of the portfolio. This linking paper is represented by the over-arching pediment or roof of the temple as shown in Figure 1.

This pediment is supported by the peristyle or row of columns as in Figure1. These columns represent the different pieces of research or outcomes of the research and they support the pediment which represents the linking paper. The foundation of the temple represents the professional experience of the researcher (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009, 14). There is also a figure placed within the structure. This figure, standing on the foundation of the temple, represents the professional researcher thus symbolising the researcher's own voice as valid and authoritative (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009 14).

Personal Reflection: At first I struggled with the temple. Indeed I had problems with the entire notion of a portfolio. I repeatedly asked myself: 'What does a professional doctoral portfolio look like?' For some time I failed to grasp the suitability of the temple analogy to my project. This was largely because of my grounding in the more traditional approach to writing up research. One aspect of my professional work involves helping tertiary students to understand the requirements of academic writing, including writing up research. My experience to date with supporting postgraduate writers had been entirely within the traditional thesis genre. However, as my matrix planning proceeded, so did my appreciation of the versatility of the temple model.

Matrix planning

Matrix planning is described by Smyth and Maxwell as a method of conceptualisation of the research task by using key elements of research design as row and column headings. The starting point is the research questions which form the first column of the matrix. Where sub-questions are necessary, they form the second column of the matrix. The remaining columns are populated with the remaining key features of the research project as decided by the student in consultation with her supervisors (Smyth & Maxwell, in press, 14).

Typical column headings, in addition to the research questions, are: rationale; key literature; data required; data sources; data gathering techniques; data analysis techniques; timelines; and possible publications (Smyth & Maxwell, in press, 14-15). The rows are subsequently filled in with the relevant information aligned against the contents of the first column—the research questions.

My first draft matrix contained the features shown in Table 1.

Table 1: My initial draft matrix

Research questions	Sub-questions	Data source	Data analysis

Personal Reflection: I then began to consider what might be the outcomes of each row. The possible outputs included an analysis of the context, development and implementation of the program which was the subject of the study; outcomes of the study for the key stakeholders (the student participants and the University); outcomes for the stakeholders for particular components of the program (the student participants, the organisers of the extra-curricular activities, and the University); and a final report to the University about the program in its pilot period, containing recommendations for the future of the program.

At this stage of the planning process, a very real catalyst in my thinking was a chance conversation with a colleague who had completed a PhD several years previously. She

regretted that she had not made the time since completion to publish from her doctoral research. She commented that the traditional dissertation is not conducive to easy extraction of publishable pieces of work. It was at that moment that I realised that the majority of the outputs under contemplation could also form the basis of separate potential publications which reported the results of the research in pre-planned themes. My existing research questions neatly leant themselves to this approach. And so did Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's temple analogy. The next draft of my matrix contained additional columns called 'Output','Temple part' and 'Possible publication' as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: My developed matrix

Research questions	Sub-questions	Data source	Data analysis	Output	Temple part	Possible publication

Further refinement led to a temple with a pediment and three sets of columns, each set corresponding to my three research questions. The column sets each had two or three parts, based on the research sub-questions. I also added an additional temple feature—the fascia—which represented my reflection on the entire research project and a further dimension to the foundation representing supporting documents. My temple is illustrated in Figure 1.

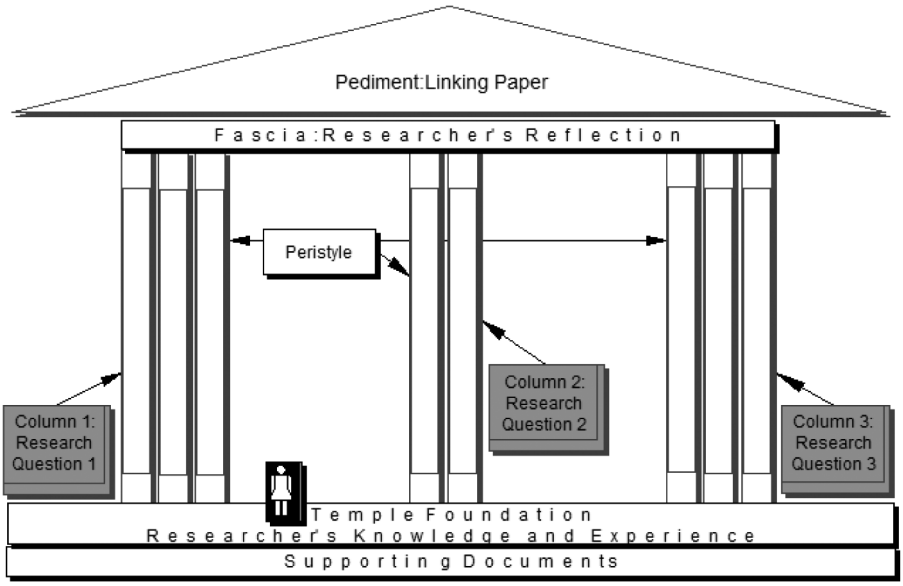

Figure 1 : The Greek temple as a model for the professional doctorate portfolio based on Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk's temple model (2009,140)

The Peristyle

The first research question was about the context, development and implementation of the NEA. These three sub-questions made up the first column set of the temple as shown in Figure 1. The second research question was about the outcomes of the NEA which were assessed generally in terms of the outcomes for the main stakeholders: the students and the University. These contributed to the second column set as shown in Figure1. The third research question was about outcomes of the NEA assessed through in-depth investigations of one example of each of the three NEA activity categories (non-accredited learning and training; professional development; community and voluntary work). These contributed to the third column set as shown in Figure 1.

Pediment

The linking paper (pediment) provided coherence to the overall portfolio and was, in Walker's (1998, 94) words, 'the intellectual and conceptual glue' that held the portfolio together. It contained the purpose and rationale of the research, the research questions, a description of the parts of the portfolio or columns of the temple, directions for how to read the portfolio, a literature review and the methodology. The conclusion to the linking paper contained a summary of the findings of the study (described in detail in the three Columns) presented within a framework based on the initial aims of the study and considerations that emerged during the study from both the action research and the literature.

The linking paper conclusion also contained my reflection on what I learned from the overall experience of the research project. It formed the fascia of the temple, as in Figure 1, because it sat below the pediment but was supported by the columns of the temple. It consisted of self-reflection on my role in the program which was the subject of the study from its inception through to the results of the final outcome of the research, i.e. the recommendation to the University about the future of the program beyond its pilot period. It comprised the meta-learning that took place in terms of premise reflection, described by Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 26) as inquiry into underlying assumptions which affected attitudes and behaviour, and their impact on the study. In this case it was my own assumptions as a participant observer in the action research. The linking paper had its own set of supporting documents which were the survey instruments, ethics information and excerpts from relevant University documents and my final report to the University on the outcome of the study. The list of references and the supporting documents were presented separately to the linking paper and the three 'columns'. My professional experience in the field of the study, which gave rise to the action research project, and work carried out prior to the commencement of the study was the foundation of the temple.

While the parts of the portfolio were designed to be read in any order, given that the relationship between the parts, as described above with the temple analogy, was understood, I did suggest an optimal reading sequence as illustrated in Figure 2.

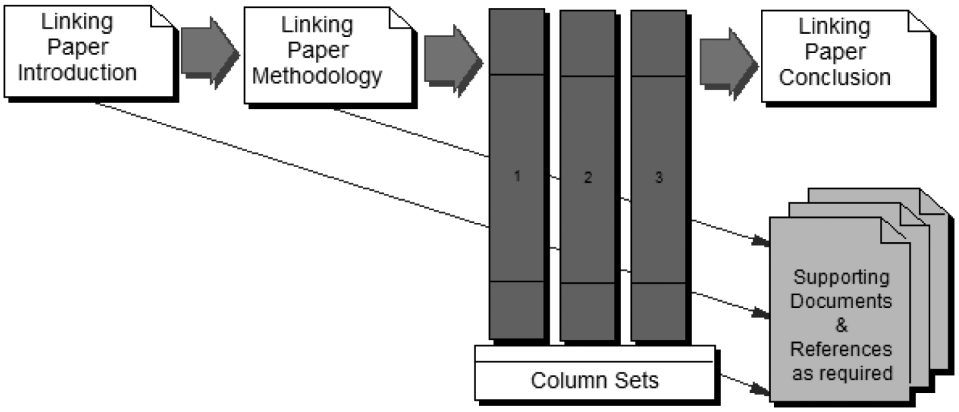

Figure 2 : Recommended order of reading of the Portfolio

The collection of writings

A distinguishing feature of the professional doctorate is that its focus is upon the community of practice rather than the community of academia. Consistent with this is that its discourses will vary accordingly (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009; Walker, 1998). Parts of my portfolio moved between traditional third person academic discourse and the first person narrative as advocated by Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 129). This is consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, 166) description of the researcher's voice in constructivism as 'passionate participant'. However, I work in a university so my community of practice, or workplace, is in fact a community of academia so many supporting documents reflected this. They and the three columns and the report varied in genre according to their intended audience and purpose within that context and within the wider community of academia which for publication purposes utilises a discourse which tends towards the 'disinterested scientist' (Lincoln & Guba 2000, 166) approach. This is not my discourse of choice for this type of study because I agree with Lee's (1998, 112) opinion that writers' views and validities can be silenced by the scientific writing model. The more formally written sections of the portfolio did, however, give voice to the research participants, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (2000, 183), by allowing them to speak for themselves. Other parts of the portfolio were loosely based on Coghlan and Brannick's (2005, 124-133) recommendations in relation to doing research in one's own organisation. I made a point of keeping the narrative and sense-making separate so that there was no sense of biased story-telling (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 128-30; Zuber-Skerritt 1992, 132). I employed a technique suggested by Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 129) in which my reflections and analyses were place in boxes so that they were clearly delineated against the account of what took place.

The 'temple' approach allowed me to produce different sets of writings aimed at different audiences, using varying genres and analytical frameworks and tools. Of the eight sets of writing based on the column sets, three contributed to my reports to the University and five formed the basis of publications and/or conference presentations (Muldoon, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009) accepted or under review by the end of my candidature. Parts of the pediment contributed to this paper and another publication (Leece and Muldoon, 2009). This outcome is not inconsistent with an emerging trend in the assessment of professional doctorates which requires a certain number of refereed publications (Love, 2002, 7; Seddon, 2001, 304); however, the emphasis in the 'temple' approach is on a coherent collection of writings with an overarching theme rather than on the individual parts of a portfolio.

An additional benefit of the combined temple/matrix approach was the ability it afforded me to structure and stage the writing process. As a tertiary learning advisor I am constantly approached by students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, who have become lost in their writing. They typically 'don't know where they are up to' or wonder where certain things they want to say or report 'fit in'. I am a proponent of mind-maps and tight structuring of writing tasks. The temple/matrix approach allowed me to pragmatically dip in and out of the writing up without losing concentration on the other parts or vice-versa. For me it was about control of all the parts and not allowing one aspect to detract or distract from another.

Apart from providing a map that prevents getting lost in the writing, it also provides a checklist that allows the student/researcher to 'tick off' boxes which represent goal posts along the way. The ability to do this is extremely satisfying, inspiring, motivational and rewarding. It reflects progress (often not visible or tangible to doctoral students at certain times); it allows effective management of digression (often disconcerting and difficult to handle); it assists efficient time management (a common problem); it affords a sense of achievement and direction (often elusive); and it assists doctoral students in their discussions with supervisors (often stressful, particularly when the student is otherwise unable to articulate achievements). Indeed the temple/matrix approach described above goes beyond providing structure to writing—it provides structure to the entire research project.

The project was successful. While one of three of my doctoral examiners stated a preference for a more conventional approach in the writing up of my research, the other two were complimentary about my approach:

> The problem, design and outcomes of the research are presented with clarity of expression and structure within the portfolio.
>
> The portfolio is well-structured and presented and easy to navigate. The writing style is very clear, and the thesis is well written, such that it is in my view accessible to the appropriate range of audiences (Doctoral examiner).
>
> Generally this paper is well constructed and conceptually sound. It successfully fulfils its primary purpose of pulling disparate elements of the portfolio together into a coherent whole.
>
> The portfolio is easy to read, logically structured….(Doctoral examiner).

Conclusion

Professional doctorates are expected to make a contribution to knowledge and/or practice in the candidate's profession, as opposed to knowledge in the field of the discipline (Evans, 2001, 291). They have been designed to meet a professional need, to focus on professional practice (Scott et al., 2004, 24) and to contribute to professional development (Seddon, 2001, 305). It makes sense then that the outcomes of professional doctorate research be written up in the genre of the profession, as opposed to the discipline. Sometimes this requires multiple discourses. When traditional modes of writing up the research are not a neat fit, alternatives are required. In my experience the temple model, described above, was a viable alternative.

Taking the path less travelled is worthwhile. There is satisfaction to be derived from striking out into unknown terrain: in this case, a whole new and untested writing genre. My 'temple' was the first proven success of its proponents, Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk. The matrix approach to the planning, execution and writing up of the research project was clearly complementary to the temple but could equally be applied to research projects undertaken

in more traditional modes. As the acceptance and popularity of doctoral education increases, as is likely in an increasingly pragmatic educational environment, it is hoped that adventurous approaches to process and outcomes such as those outlined in this paper, become more prevalent as their relevance becomes more obvious. However, such approaches demand adventurous doctoral supervision and institutional vision.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my final EdD supervisors Associate Professor Tom Maxwell and Dr Jillian Boyd, of the University of New England, who provided the genesis of this paper.

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Muldoon, R 2010, What does a Professional Doctorate Portfolio look like?, *ergo*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 35-43.

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