

Going against the grain? Exploring EdD students' engagement with arts-based research

Dr Tim Clark

tim.clark@uwe.ac.uk

Professor Tom Dobson

t.dobson@yorks.ac.uk

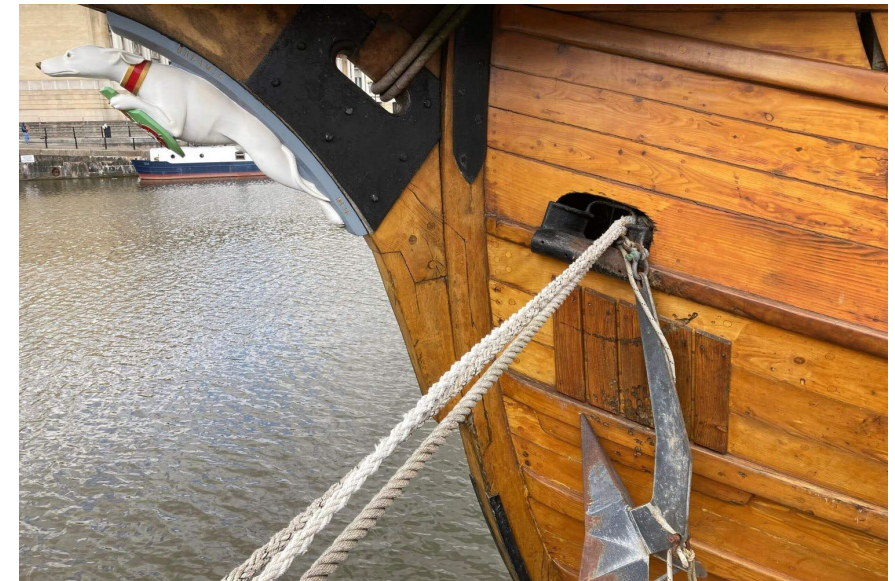
The EdD – *a bridge?*

- The most popular professional doctoral degree route in the UK (Hawkes & Yerrabati, 2018)
- Aimed at 'mid-career professionals' (Boud and Lee, 2009) from a range of educational contexts (teachers, leaders, lecturers)
- Typically, a 2-year taught phase, followed by a practice-based research project
- A 'bridge' between professional knowledge and an 'academic framework' – but also a site of 'activism, transformation and practice' (Saunders & Trotman, 2022)



Theorising the EdD – *a tension?*

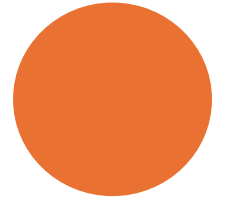
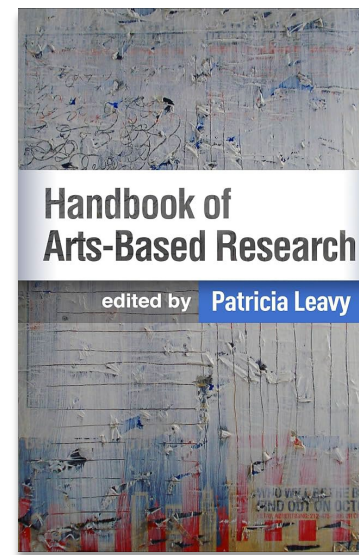
- The EdD may align more readily with 'Mode 2' knowledge' (Gibbons et al, 1994) – (*Experiential, Contextual, Interdisciplinary, Reflexive*)
- The EdD creates a need to consider the 'balance of power between the academy and the workplace' (Wildy, Peden, and Chan 2015).
- This has led to discussion of three 'generations' of doctoral models:
 1. Reminiscent of the PhD and 'structurally dominated' by the academy (Maxwell 2003)
 2. Embracing the doctorate as a partnership (Scott, Brown, and Lunt 2004)
 3. Empowering the professional learner to directly address questions of appropriateness and partnership themselves (Stephenson et al. 2004)
- However, academic regulations and expectations introduce constraints and can create 'hierarchies of legitimacy' (Vaughan 2021).



Arts-Based research (ABR) - *provocations?*

- Where arts-based practices are used as “methodological tools ... during any or all phases of research” (Leavy, 2018, p.4)
 - Data collection
 - Data analysis
 - Outputs and communication
- This can encompass the literary, the visual and the performative
- Characterised as holding potential to support work which is accessible, participatory, provocative, evocative, performative, challenging...

(Leavy, 2018; Rollings 2010)



Mapping the Theoretical Similarities



Theoretical Similarities	The EdD	Arts-Based Research
Practice	Embodied, dynamic experience (Dennis et al., 2023)	Embodied, “living enquiry” (Irwin et al., 2018)
Knowledge	Cross-disciplinary and mode 2 (Gibbons et al., 1994)	Transdisciplinary, “covering expansive terrain” (Leavy, 2018)
Relationality	Participatory, relationships in practice (Costley, 2013)	Participatory, relationship with audiences (Chilton et al., 2015)
Reflexivity	Greater self-awareness (Robinson, 2018), understanding power structures and positionality (Costley, 2013), identity development (Savva and Nygaard, 2021)	“Reflexive in character” (Irwin et al., 2018), involving “identity work” “promoting critical consciousness”, “social justice orientated” (Leavy, 2018)
Audience	Situated in practice to impact upon future actions (Boud et al., 2018)	Diverse, “public scholarship and usefulness” (Leavy, 2018)
Modes of expression	Informed by stakeholders (Stephenson et al., 2004), can be “hybrid” (Wisker and Robinson, 2014; Wisker 2017)	Embraces format freedom (McNiff, 2018) to be open to multiple interpretations (Gergen and Gergen, 2018)

EdD Students' Perspectives – *On the Journey*

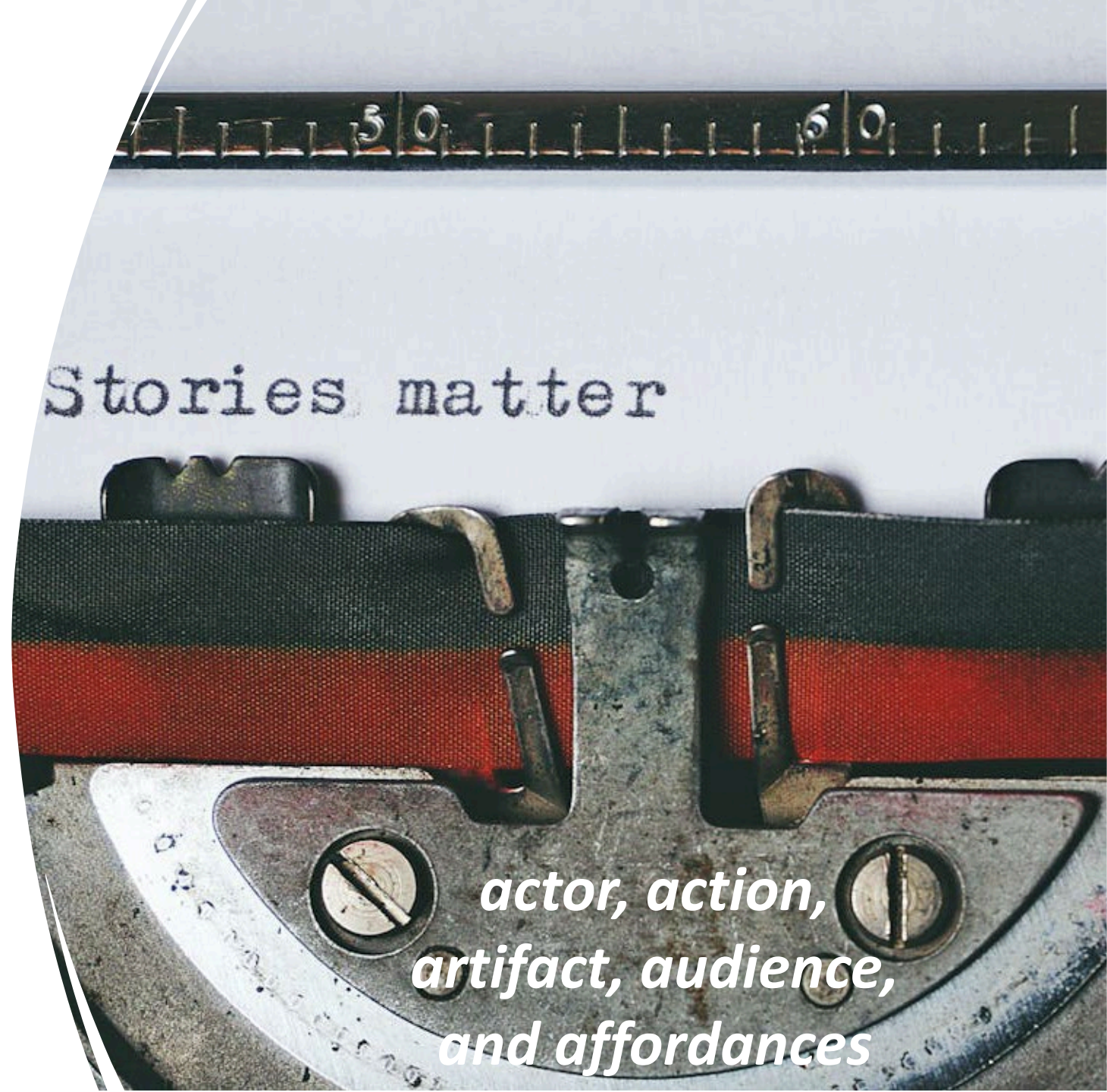
- Two EdD programmes which include consideration of ABR, but where this is not a central focus
- Students with interest in ABR, but with and without arts experiences and identities
- Students predominantly at the end of taught phase or beginning of research phase
- Students working across a range of contexts (early years, schools, FE, HE, community)



EdD Students' Perspectives –1.

What's the story?

- Phase one of study – Narrative Interviews with 9 EdD Students across 2 UK universities
- Developed into a series of vignettes
- Applied Glăveanu's 5A's creativity framework as a lens to help explore how the academic and professional 'eco-system' may 'facilitate or preclude' the adoption of ABR



*actor, action,
artifact, audience,
and affordances*

Vignette 2 - Phillip

Actor

*Phillip is an experienced secondary science teacher planning to use narrative methods and pictorial representations in his study to investigate the retention of experienced teachers. Coming from a science background, his EdD experiences represent a significant shift in methodological positioning: **'it took me a while to get away from the need to triangulate data and have numbers and graphs'**. Phillip is considering using storyboards and visual representations with teachers to support the elicitation of 'their stories and their narratives of their teaching careers'.*

Action

*Aiming at **'evocativeness'**, Phillip positions his use of ABR as **intentionally resisting the 'strict structure' of a doctoral thesis**, based on a perception that this structure risks losing aspects of important context and subjectivity. **Prioritising engaging a professional audience over an academic audience**, Phillip explains that his work is about responding to a dominant focus on teacher training and recruitment in the UK, by **giving voice to more experienced teachers**, whilst enhancing readability and interest in his work: 'it would be much better if it could intertwine the theoretical stuff with the stories... you know when you read a good book, the book flows, you want to keep going.'*

Affordance

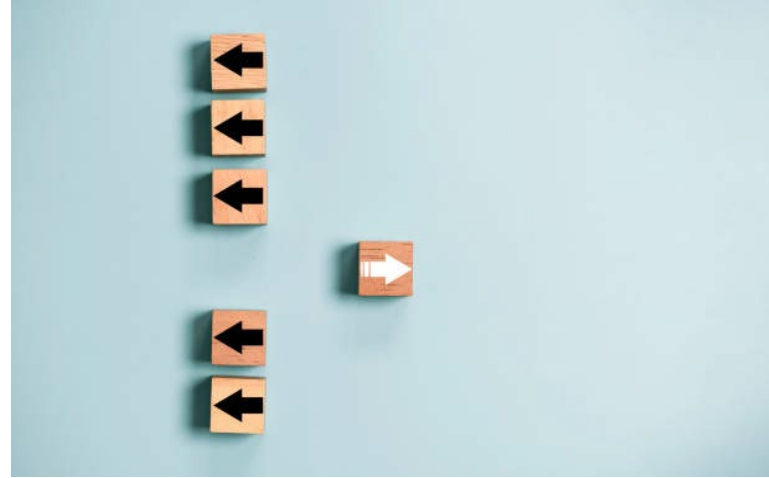
Action

Audience

Artifact

Key Areas – *Against the Grain?*

- **Audiences and Structures** – Who is my research 'for'?
 - *'Standardised paperwork' designed for 'serious research'*
 - *An ongoing 'battle' for 'justification' and 'rigour'.*
 - ***Apprehensive or Rebellious?***
- **Identities and Self** – Negotiation and Entanglement
 - *'The problem I have is because I'm professionally trained to draw in a certain way, I end up sort of just reinforcing the things that I'm concerned about.'*
 - *Alignment with 'obstructive identity' to 'push back against the education system'.*
- **Action and Agency** – Empower and Resist
 - *'I became deeply uncomfortable with the labelling... talking about people by diagnosis'.*
 - *'how can we make a difference here' by helping 'these young people to come out the other side feeling better'*



Artefacts - Why ABR?



"ABR has underpinned my practice for the past 10 years... however, **since migrating from studying Fine Art to studying an EdD, ABR has a name**, whereas before, it was just my natural method of inquiry.

My individual experience is communicated through the zine... it represents a pivotal period as I untangled my thesis, aims and ideas. **Folding the zine abstracts the notes, symbolising the complexities of employing ABR within the EdD.**"

"As a teacher, I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the effects of education on the identity of children from coastal towns. In the beginning, art was used to support the research; **over time, it has transformed both the project, emancipating children's creativity, and my own positionality.**

The photograph is taken on former mining land... this land is neglected much like... the coastal communities. In the distance, there is false hope: 'believe housing', who provide housing elsewhere, but not in this town. **The horse and the communities need emancipation from the depths of despair. Much like my research needed emancipation from the depths of despair of IMRaD"**

Analysis – Why ABR?

	Student Rationale	ABR
Practice	<p>Underpins and ‘names’ practice</p> <p>(Re)-Alignment with practice and professional values</p> <p>Space to ‘re-imagine’ practice</p>	Embodied, “living enquiry” (Irwin et al., 2018)
Knowledge	<p>Emancipation from mode 1 knowledge</p> <p>Differentiated and contextualised knowledge</p>	Transdisciplinary, “covering expansive terrain” (Leavy, 2018)
Relationality	<p>Inclusive and empowering</p> <p>Research and practice ‘with’ others</p>	Participatory, relationship with audiences (Chilton et al, 2015)
Reflexivity	<p>Reflexive metaphors (e.g. ‘sitting among the rubble of the academy’)</p> <p>Connecting the dots between professional and academic identity</p> <p>Research as activism – confronting power structures</p>	“Reflexive in character” (Irwin et al., 2018), involving “identity work” “promoting critical consciousness”, “social justice orientated” (Leavy, 2018)
Audience	<p>Considering ‘non-academic’ audiences</p> <p>Accessible – seeks to provoke and ‘speak to’</p>	Diverse, “public scholarship and usefulness” (Leavy, 2018)
Modes of expression	<p>Thesis as ‘hybrid’ – including other modes</p> <p>Expression is not limited to words</p>	Embraces format freedom (McNiff, 2018) to be open to multiple interpretations (Gergen and Gergen, 2018)

Learning and Implications

- Methodological decisions are shaped (limited?) by an entangled professional and academic eco-system
- ABR can hold significant potential for learning and contribution to knowledge/practice via the EdD
- Teaching and supervision play a role in supporting methodological decisions – including exploring affordances, rationale and context (audience, stakeholders, ethics...)



Publications and Further Information



Articles:

- Dobson, T. and Clark, T. (2024) [Embracing hybridity: the affordances of arts-based research for the professional doctorate in education](#) *Teaching in Higher Education*.
- Clark, T. and Dobson, T. (forthcoming, 2025) *Going Against the Grain: EdD students' engagement with arts-based research in the United Kingdom. Impacting Education: Journal of transformational professional practice*

Blog Posts:

- [Embracing creative approaches on the professional doctorate in education \(EdD\) | Education blog](#)
- [Arts-based research: a good fit for the professional doctorate in education – Teaching in Higher Education](#)
- [Going Against the Grain? Arts-based research and the Doctorate in Education - SRHE Blog](#)

Embracing hybridity: the affordances of arts-based research for the professional doctorate in education

Tom Dobson ^a and Timothy Clark ^b

^aSchool of Education, Language and Psychology, York St John University, York, UK; ^bEducation and Childhood, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT

Despite the growth of the professional doctorate in education (EdD), its potential for capturing practice is restricted by academic tradition. In this hybrid paper, we argue that arts-based research (ABR) can help rectify this. We bookend the paper with creative non-fiction of our own EdD experiences, where ABR is restricted and afforded. We develop our argument through a position paper mapping the theoretical similarities of the EdD and ABR. We then undertake a scoping review identifying existing research into ABR on EdD programmes. We analyse six articles using the 5A's theory of creativity [Glăveanu 2013. *Rewriting the language of creativity: The Five A's framework. Review of General Psychology* 17, no. 1: 69–81] to see how these theoretical similarities are afforded. Using ABR on the EdD promotes reflexivity and co-creation, impacting upon diverse audiences. We conclude with a challenge for further research into ABR on EdD programmes through hybrid research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 September 2023
Accepted 22 March 2024

KEYWORDS

Professional doctorate of education; arts-based research; creativity theory; practice-based inquiry; hybrid forms

Prologue



We open with a small roundtable discussion at a postgraduate educational research seminar. The talk is facilitated by Professor Russell, an experienced education researcher at an esteemed university.

Professor Russell: (laughing quietly) Right then, that was an interesting video on the use of poetry to explore the lived experiences of GCSE pupils. Personally, I'm not sure what it achieved, but now it's over to you. On each table there is a Discussant who will lead you in a discussion about the place of arts in education research.

(Professor Russell sits down at the nearest table and greets the four students)

EdD student 1: I get that it was a positive experience for the students, but does that really make it research? I mean I can't imagine our headteacher changing pedagogy based on poems.

EdD student 3: If I'm honest, I didn't know we were allowed to use approaches like that. I don't think my supervisor would even agree to me writing in first person, let alone using poetry.

CONTACT Tom Dobson  tdobson@yorksj.ac.uk  York St John University, York, UK

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

References

- Boud, D., and A. Lee. (2009). Introduction. D. Boud and A. Lee (Eds) *Changing Practices of Doctoral Education*, London and New York: Routledge. Pp.1-9.
- Clark, T. and Dobson, T.(forthcoming) Going Against the Grain: EdD students' engagement with arts-based research in the United Kingdom. *Impacting Education: Journal of transformational professional practice*
- Costley, C. (2013). Evaluation of the current status and knowledge contributions of professional doctorates. *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp.7-27.
- Dobson, T., and Clark, T. (2024) Embracing hybridity: the affordances of arts-based research for the professional doctorate in education. *Teaching in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2024.2336163>.
- Dennis, A., Chandler, K., Punthil, D. (2023). Practice and the professional doctorate: a diffractive re-reading (2023), *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 47 No.3, pp.364-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2130197>
- Gergen, K., and Gergen, M. (2018). The Performative Movement in Social Science. Leavy, P. (ed.) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gibbons, M., C. Limoges, H. Nowotny, S. Schwatzman, P. Scott, and M. Trow. (1994). *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2013). Rewriting the language of creativity: The five A's framework. *Review of General Psychology*, 17(1), 69-81.
- Hawkes, D., & Yerrabati, S. (2018). A systematic review of research on professional doctorates. *London Review of Education*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.16.1.03>
- Irwin, R., LeBlanc, N., Ryu, J., and Belliveau, G. (2018). *Artography as Living Inquiry*. In: Leavy, P. (ed.) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Guilford Press.
- Johnson, C. (2010). A framework for the ethical practice of action learning. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 7(3), 267-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2010.518373>
- Leavy, P. (2018). *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Guilford Press.
- Maxwell, T. 2003. From first to second generation professional doctorate. *Studies in Higher Education* 28, no. 3: 279–91.
- McNiff, S. (2018). Philosophical and practical foundations of artistic inquiry. In: *Handbook of arts-based research*, edited by P. Leavy, 22–36. New York: Guilford Press.
- Saunders, L., & Trotman, D. (Eds.). (2022). *The Professional Doctorate in Education: Activism, Transformation and Practice*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Savva, M., and Nygaard, L. P. (2021). *Becoming a Scholar: Cross-cultural reflections on identity and agency in an education doctorate*. London: UCL Press.
- Scott, D., Brown, A., & Lunt, I. (2004). *Professional doctorates: Integrating academic and professional knowledge: Integrating academic and professional knowledge*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Stephenson, J., M. Malloch, L. Cairns, and C. Costley. 2004, November. Towards a third generation of professional doctorates managed by the learners themselves. In *Deakin conference on professional doctorates*, 25–6. Melbourne: Deakin University.
- Vaughan, S. 2021. Practice submissions – are doctoral regulations and policies responding to the needs of creative practice? *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 26, no. 3: 333–52
- Wildy, H., S. Peden, and K. Chan. 2015. The rise of professional doctorates: Case studies of the Doctorate in Education in China, Iceland and Australia. *Studies in Higher Education* 40, no. 5: 761–74
- Wisker, G., and Robinson, G. (2014). Experiences of the Creative Doctorate: Minstrels and White Lines. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 2 No.2, pp.49-67.
- Wisker, G. (2017). *The Contemporary Research Degree: Whose Project is it Anyway? Non Traditional Research Outcomes*. Available online: <https://nitro.edu.au/edition-24>.