The power of research: An exploration of critical dialogue as a model for the development of professionals

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Abstract

Since Michel Foucault's pioneering work, the production of new forms of knowledge as a measure of doctoral research has become closely associated with the ubiquity of power practices. In more concrete terms, in the face of a seemingly ineluctable intensification of workload across all professions, some observers have identified a 'deprofessionalisation' of many within the workforce, who, almost ironically, perceive themselves to have diminished powers of control and discretion regarding their own decision making.

This paper seeks to explore and to critically examine a multi-professional research model of good practice for the professional doctorate. The model for research has been located in the space opened up for critical enquiry between power and the domination of extant power practices, including those associated with the process of research itself. It is a model which lays emphasis upon a dialogical approach to critical hermeneutics and is designed to guide students in 'making strange the familiar' in terms of what they experience being reproduced each day in the machinery of identity. Functionally, the model for research is being developed with a strong focus upon reflexivity that permeates every step of the research. Philosophically, the model creates an opening for reflexive self-determination and self-empowerment. At this stage the model is presented as a basis for reflection on both the complex dynamic interplay of power and knowledge and some of the implications for students' understandings of the production of knowledge through research.

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Materially and thematically this paper is intended to 'illustrate good practice' in the 'development' of 'transferable skills' for Professional Doctorates, which for us are located in the UK. Our own professional doctorate programme is structured for students around on-going reflection and reflexivity in their research. So, in the spirit inherited from Berthold Brecht, in being reflexive and in 'making strange the familiar'[2], we might begin by inquiring into the crucible[3] of power practices at work in the institutions of Higher Education.

In exploring practices of power and their relationship with the production of knowledge, drawing from the work of Michel Foucault[4], our paper seeks to investigate a rationale for, and to provide a critical examination of, the multi-professional structuring of our professional doctorate research programme that we use to configure student-research at one university. In so doing we hope to open further debate around issues concerning the development of multi-professional doctoral programmes, which, in the context of the ever diverse range of specialist professional doctorate programmes and economic stringencies, are likely to become more popular.

The particular programme of research for the body of professional doctorate students at one particular university was implemented with the first cohort starting just over a year ago. The induction of the second cohort is now complete. We have also just gained one extra student who has just transferred to us for the final year of his programme, specialising in an aspect of legal practice.

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2. The original term, *Verfremdungseffekt*, roughly translated as a distancing effect, is a theatrical and cinematic device coined by Berthold Brecht 'which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer' (Willett, 1964:91). *Verfremdungseffekt* is rooted in the school of the Russian Formalist, with their notion of '*priem ostraneni*e' (ibid: 99) or 'making strange', which the literary critic Viktor Schlovsky claims is the essence of all art.
3. This metaphor intentionally refers to Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, first produced in 1953. Set in Salam, Massachusetts, and ostensibly about the witch trials it is now recognised as a metaphor for McCarthyism in the USA. As a political parable the crucible illuminates the power practices of the US government in their blacklisting of communists.
4. The paper draws on Michel Foucault's writing in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002b{1972}), *Discipline and Punish*, (1975), and three volumes of *The History of Sexuality: Volume One, The Will to Knowledge* (1976), *Volume Two, The Use of Pleasure* (1984a), and *Volume Three, The Care of the Self* (1984b), together with *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, Part Three: Power* (1984c).

Initially, the fact that we have a multi-professional programme was a matter of contingency, serendipity and the forces of economics which determined that as a 'new university' we organise an economically viable course. The multi-professional structure of our programme currently incorporates three degrees: a doctor of education (Ed D), a doctor of legal practice (D Legal Prac), and a doctor of social practice (D Soc Prac). The structure had arisen from some earlier market research undertaken by Professor Patricia Higham (2005) which had identified these three areas as offering a potentially viable market. Viability in this case was considered to be largely dependent upon incorporating the three degrees together in one programme.

Contingently, in the Business School at Lake West University in the East Midland, Professor Georg[5] and his colleagues had gained a wealth of experience from running a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme, which is now in its eleventh year. It was recognised that the DBA programme for research provides a simple structure, which we interpreted as involving three big steps to a professional doctorate over three years. The first step involved an exploration of the framing of doctoral research studies. The second step we have called an apprenticeship in doctoral research. Finally, there is of course, a dissertation. What had particularly attracted us to the DBA was the way in which it was integrated as a holistic programme by on-going reflection and reflexivity that continues throughout the course of the research, and is written up and presented as an integral part of the final dissertation. But, perhaps, most significantly in terms of setting up our innovative multi-professional programme structure was the help that Professor Georg and his colleagues gave in collaborating with us during the initial stages of 'adoption' and 'implementation'[6] of our programme in practice.

One particular 'context document' (Flint and Barnard, 2008) provides an indication of the philosophy together with details of the programme administration and the curriculum for research used in this case. The justification for the multi-professional structure was based on association with the identical environment that most people outside Higher Education experience in the workplace. Serendipitously too, from the

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5 Professor Georg and Lake West University are both presented as fictions in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the individuals involved in this study.
6. The technological language of 'adoption' and 'implementation' is borrowed from Michael Fullan (2007) and David Hopkins (2001) and leaves open questions regarding the 'institutionalisation' of the professional doctorate programme.

outset of planning the programme Johan Street[7] had already gained experience from working with the Research Practice Course (RPC) run at one university in the East Midlands. The RPC gathers together PhD students from a wide range of disciplines across the university to work on two strands connected with their research centring upon methodology and philosophies that can be utilised in their studies. From this particular vein of experience it was apparent that the multi-professional environment for the RPC seemed to provide a rich and challenging milieu for most of the students. A precise explanation of the positive experiences that students had gained from working in such an environment, however, had so far eluded explanation.

In Michel Foucault's[3] writings the exploration of 'the material conditions of thought' whereby something becomes established as a particular form of knowledge, invites readers to reflect upon and to challenge the capillary power of the abstract institutional processes at work in founding such understandings. The processes at work in particular institutions are at once identified as means to particular ends; the production of knowledge. This conception perhaps has its origins in Foucault's reading of Heidegger's oeuvre[8], where after the war in deconstructing the essence of technology, Heidegger had begun from the standpoint that technology is essentially a 'a means to an end' and a 'human activity' (ibid: 4).

In conceiving such a relationship in terms of power, Foucault almost certainly aligned himself with a reading of Nietzsche 'as endorsing a quest to find the battle of wills, the subjection and domination, strategies of power, in every area of human existence' (Leithart, 2006)[9]; not least by means of various institutions. In our case, for example, such institutional means themselves are predicated on assumptions regarding the capacity *to be able* or in Latin, *posse* (the etymological root of the word power) to produce something of value, in this case knowledge. Of course, power in this sense is not something that an individual possesses: in Foucault's writings, as we can see here, power is produced only in action; that is, in his work it is the body of individuals acting in accordance with, or in reaction to, or whose actions are in unpredictable ways

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7 Johann Street is again a fiction in order to protect the anonymity of the individual.

8. In his essay, *Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault*, Professor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the University of California, Berkeley, Hubert Dreyfus (2004), records Foucault's comment on Heidegger in his last interview: 'For me Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher ... My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger'.

9. Peter J. Leithart (2006) *Nietzsche and Foucault*, http://www.leithart.com/archives/002563.php: posted on Wednesday, November 29 at 05:46 PM

mediated by, in this case, institutional norms that produce the effects of power that Foucault attempts to makes explicit.

It is of crucial importance to recognise that Foucault is not offering his readers a model of an extant category identified as 'knowledge/power' which can be applied in different contexts, but his genealogical analysis is there to open a way of thinking about this particular phenomenon and opening further critical questioning, dialogue and debate about the ways in which, in this case, institutional norms of research produce the effects of power, and, of course, how we might ameliorate, resist, shape, reflect upon such effects.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, given his reading of Heidegger, Foucault had interpreted modern institutions as social technologies which provide the very means to particular ends. Institutions he saw as a "whole series of carceral mechanisms" which all tend, like the prison, to exercise a power of normalisation' (Foucault, 1977 {1975}: 307-8) and leaving us with a 'docile body' (ibid: 135 -169). His earlier writings explore a particular form of prison called a "Panopticon" and open questioning about how a "multiplicity" (ibid: 205) of individuals become a disciplinary society; his language places a helpful emphasis upon the "strategies", "procedures" and ways of "behaving" which are associated with specific institutional contexts, including schools, universities and the work place which have tended to permeate ways of thinking and behaving more generally.

But, in reading Foucault there is a danger, perhaps, ironically that we too, as readers, might be rendered as a docile body, always in danger of falling into those familiar existing categories of our own social world; but what precisely is the significance of such a conjunction of institutions for his conception of power? In Gilles Deleuze's (1999) reading he had seen that by the end of the eighteenth century the "Panopticon[10] traverses all forms" which give it its means ends functionality – "education, care, punishment, production" (ibid: 61) – and "is applied to all the substances upon which the power functions" – "prisoners, the sick, madmen, schoolchildren, workers, soldiers

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10 In contrast the most obvious reading of Foucault's (1972) account of the 'Panopticon' in his seminal work, Discipline and Punish, is that of an efficient prison. The Panopticon is a circular building with a central tower surrounded by a number of prison cells that are arranged so that each of the cells is completely separated from each other by impenetrable walls. The actions of prisoners are all visibly on display to just one person running the prison through windows located at the end of each cell.

etc" (ibid: 61). Foucault recognised from his genealogy that "a category of power exists as a pure disciplinary function." He named this strategic function as "the diagram of the mechanism of power," "a figure of political technology," a function that "must be detached from any specific use" (Foucault, 1977: 205), and indeed, as Deleuze's (1999: 61) reading indicates, "from any specific substance."

In his later writings Foucault (1981 {1976}) also began to discuss another strategic function of power, which gives it its productive character, in *The History of Sexuality*; namely, in Deleuze's (1999 {1986}: 61) reading, "that of administering and controlling life in a particular multiplicity", such as the body of individuals involved in doctoral research.

So, in his selection of the title, *Power/Knowledge*, in one stroke Foucault (1980a) opened questions concerning the relationship between knowledge and power, which had already begun to emerge as an issue for him in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977{1975}). In his essay, entitled "Prison Talk," Foucault (1980b: 52) elaborates on this complex inter-dependent relationship in his statement that "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge and it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power." Hence, although by no means universally acknowledged as such, when viewed through a Foucauldian lens the production of new forms of knowledge as a measure of doctoral research opens questions concerning the ubiquity of power practices mediated by such forms of production. Not least, it would seem the power of writing which is already in danger of glossing power-knowledge as though it were generally accepted as an extant identity.

Here we need to move slowly in our reading of Foucault, because ordinarily within doctoral research, which is already assumed to be located within the defined corpus of knowledge (*connaissance*) of an existing discipline, the benchmark is that of an original contribution to knowledge. There is no mention of power. The benchmark for doctoral research, it would seem, is predicated on assumptions of pure knowledge in general (*savoir*)[11], which provides the basis for an articulation of the conditions that are necessary for the object of doctoral research in this particular case to be given to a defined corpus of knowledge, *connaissance;* the truthfulness of such an object being

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11. The distinction between savoir and connaissance draws from Foucault's (2002 {1972}:16-17) footnote in *The Archaeology of Knowledge.*

understood as a series of defined and ordered procedures for the "production, regulation, distribution and circulation of such object of knowledge" (Foucault, 1984c: 152). Supposedly such procedures remain uncontaminated by power. But, as Foucault observed: "perhaps we should abandon the belief …(that) the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge" (Foucault, 1977{1975}: 27). Certainly in setting up our professional doctorate as a single programme incorporating three disciplines we want to open further debate as to whether, as Foucault had suggested, we should "abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, its interests" (ibid: 27).

Of course, in conflating three disciplines within our single professional doctorate programme it was crucially important to retain a disciplinary function that would ensure the necessary rigour. Of course, we needed to retain a disciplinary function for the production of knowledge, including, ironically, producing knowledge of such a suspension of power relations. But, as Foucault's genealogy in *Discipline and Punish* has shown, such a disciplinary function, "Panopticism," cannot be identified with any one discipline of knowledge, or institution more generally. Namely, because "Panopticism" is *a social technology and a type of power that traverses every academic discipline and every institution*. In the words of Foucault,

> "the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is *the diagram* of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural or optical system: it is in fact the figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use" (ibid: 205; emphasis added).

As a mechanism of power *the diagram* or schema in question is a display of the "relations between forces which constitute power" (Deleuze, 1999: 37). In this particular case the diagram constitutes a series of overlapping maps, each mediated by the professions incorporated within the professional doctorate programme and by our developing relationships with bodies who are supporting the development of the programme, and each including points that remain relatively unbounded; as Delueze's

(1999: 37) reading of Foucault suggests; "points of creativity, change and resistance," which we are attempting to create from the pedagogy used in the programme. Structurally, such relations of power are not, as Hans Herbert Kögler (1996: 235) has noted, "causal nomological but inter-subjective-symbolic." And, without such forces of power, of course, at particular points in history there could be no production of "domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault, 1977{1975}: 194) identified as *connaissance*. On reflection, therefore, one might perhaps ask the question: is it not time, as Foucault (ibid: 28) had suggested more than thirty years ago, that one "abandons the opposition between what is interested and what is disinterested, the model of knowledge and the primacy of the subject?" We might also follow Foucault's (2002a:3-18) lead in the "*Las Meninas*," in which he brings to the attention of his readers the painter, Velazquez's, pictorial opening to *The Order of Things*, in which "the subject is elided" (ibid: 18), indeed, have we lost the time for questioning the very existence of the subject?

In structuring the professional doctorate programme around reflexivity and reflection we are attempting both to encourage our students to continue questioning the play of power in the production of knowledge. More broadly we wish to open further debate about the interplay of power–knowledge. In the context of the students' own professional practices, such conflation of knowledge–power is manifest in both the much debated phenomena of "work intensification"[12] and "deprofessionalisation"[13], which have been explained in terms of classical labour process theory[14]. At its heart such explanation and debate reflects Heidegger's understandings of the essence of power. As Heidegger, himself, realised from his own reading of Nietzsche:

> "the essence of power lies in being master over the level of power attained at any time. So, power is power only when and only so long as it remains power-enhancement and commands for itself more power" (Heidegger, 1977: 78).

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12. Burchielli, 2006; Edwards and Whitson, 1991; Easthope and Easthope, 2000; Guest, 1990; Hargreaves 1993, 1994; Mather *et al*., 2007; Nichols, 1991
13. Banks, 2004, 2001; Benyon, 1975; Braverman, 1998; Butttny, 1993; Etzioni 1969; Haug, 1973; Hugman, 1991; Illich 1977, 1976a,b, 1975a,b,c, 1971
14. Braverman, 1974; Marx, 1976; Mather *et al*., 2007

In terms of the dominant language of the professions represented by the professional doctorate at this university such phenomena can be seen to emerge from the almost insatiable appetite of institutional machineries of identity for the repetition of difference and polysemy (Flint *et al*., 2009). In another paper we have argued that such appetite arises from the social space produced by institutions, and as we have witnessed already in reading between the lines: "the thing called power is characterised by an immanence of field without transcendent unification" (Deleuze, 1999:24), which is, in fact, the very same space.

Of course the ubiquity of power itself opens further questions regarding a model of good practice for the professional doctorate, which no longer treats the production of knowledge as if it were somehow disconnected from any practices of power. The final section of this paper is an attempt to open further discussion about the application of such a model for the development of research within a professional doctorate programme.

The pedagogic model for the programme, adapted from Kögler's (1996), *The Power of Dialogue*, works essentially as a structure for the repetition of a series of hermeneutic circles mediating practice and in so doing it opens the basis for a pedagogy which is essentially reflexive and research oriented. Practice is constituted as a series of workshops designed to encourage discussion and reflection about the process of undertaking research at doctoral level. In concert with the multi-professional environment in which most professionals now operate, the programme of research that we are developing at one university currently incorporates education, legal practice and social practice within a single programme which is used to structure students' research projects. We are also currently working with the School of Art at the university to develop three more degrees in Fine Art, Digital Media and Fashion, which are planned implementation in the next academic year.

The model for research that we are using as a basis for exploring and developing our programme has been located in the space opened up for critical enquiry between power[15] and the domination of extant power practices, including those associated with the process of research itself. Schematically, and on reflection, we have, in fact, already

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15. Hans Hebert Kögler (1996: 135ff) takes up the discussion.

pointed towards a significant distinction between power and orders of domination, which deserves further elaboration.

Historically and concretely in the lives of human beings power relations mediated by *the diagram* as relations between a "force and a force" and "an action upon action," "mean strategic confrontations between more or less free agents who attempt to advance their own diverse interests over and against other agents" (Kögler, 1996: 235) by drawing upon the various resources available within the field of forces. Power in this sense of *the diagram*, as Kögler suggests, "is principally dispersed throughout, and implanted within, the social body and thus is not the product of a localisable subject of power" (ibid: 235).

But, of course, as our writing has attempted to illustrate, the social "orders in which individuals always already find themselves," situated within the traditions of research, "may appear to be ontologically fixed," and even, "irreversible" as Kögler (1996: 235) has indicated, or more likely we become secure in our own docility and domestication into accepting such identities without the need for any questioning.

Critical inquiry is our way of resisting any such possible domestication from the habitual reproduction of extant identities found in particular traditions. In other words, the research model for the development of the programme occupies that abstract space between on the one hand the capacity to be able to do something in research and, on the other, what is done in practice as reflected in the discourses brought to the table by those professions represented within the professional doctorate.

In reflecting on this paper, however, it is apparent that pedagogically our freedom has remained so far delimited, despite our aspirations to the contrary, caught up in the forces of our own familiar domestication or what Schutz (1972: 74) called our "taken for granted reality," meaning "that particular level of experience that presents itself as not in need of analysis." So, those forces at work in the space produced by the tradition for doctoral research, in which we have been situated (Heidegger[16] would say, "thrown"), have not yet encouraged any opening of dialogue with students concerning the

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16. Thrownness, *Geworfenheit*, is the language Heidegger (1962) used in *Being and Time* to describe where human being(s), which Heidegger calls *Dasein*, are continually situated; human beings are always already thrown into the midst of things.

differences and inter-connections between on the one hand the play of power, and on the other, the production of knowledge, mediating their engagement in research and practice.

In reflecting once more upon such space opened up in writing this paper between power dispersed in the body and the orders of domination mediating such a body of researchers it is easy to see how the microphysics of power relations in *the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form* (Foucault, 1977{1975}: 205; emphasis added); that un-enclosed space of the Panopticon, can so easily be rendered in terms of the relationship of the subject to the object and the formal rules that provide a basis for such relationship that we call knowledge (*connaissance*). For example, the original presentation of an extended abstract presented for this paper contains the following paragraph:

> "As a model for research used in the pedagogical development of the programme it is structured by an adaptation of Kögler's (1992) critical hermeneutics, which is based on a synthesis of discourses drawn from Hans Gadamer and Jürgen Habermass. The model privileges interest upon the 'preunderstandings' that individuals bring to any research based dialogue, including the pedagogical exchanges within the series of workshops constituting the programme. These are structured around three co-original issues of the individual's life history, the symbolic order and the power practices mediating social interaction."

In the name of writing an extended abstract, those messy and difficult to define "polymorphous and polyvalent forms of power" (Foucault, 1984c: 82-83), which are open-ended and un-enclosed, traversing every institution are at once glossed as a form of knowledge. It makes tangible the power practice of writing and producing a symbolic order in which professional doctorate students and ourselves as researchers can so easily become subject to that particular order of domination called domestication, which is always in danger of rendering the body of researchers as docile.

Pedagogically, in opening conversation with our students the paper opens the way for debate regarding the further development of a language of power mediating action in

forms which resist any such domestication. In reflecting on the argument presented in this paper, for students it would seem that we need to develop a reflexive conversation about both students' own growing understandings of power practices, including orders of domination, and their own generation of knowledge through research and of the changes that such a process has wrought upon their own lives.

Philosophically and pedagogically *the diagram* of power relations, with its superimposed layering of maps and its multiplicity of points in the production of knowledge, creates a possible opening for reflexive self-determination and self-empowerment.

In providing a structure for a circular dialogical process Kögler's (1996) model is represented to produce an agreement over the meaning of "the thing itself" or "real referent" of what has been discussed. It was developed under the rule of meaning. Yet, ironically, the first year of our programme *is* structured around the methodological framing of research in order to open ways of thinking that challenge particular orders of meaning by recourse to other possible framings.

One way of conceptualising the multiplicity of possible framings of research for the professional doctorate programme is given by the structure of bricolage presented in Joe Kincheloe's and Kathlene Berry's (2004) *Rigour and Complexity in Educational Research*. In seeking to avoid reductionism and closure in inquiry, their book can be seen to open rigorous research to a multiplicity of framings by creating what, in effect, we now regard as *the diagram* for researchers. This diagram incorporates a series of maps which gather together philosophical standpoints, theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, narrative techniques, and so on… that can be used as complementary forms of framing for social research.

Of course such a practice of power in writing opens the possibility of pulling down the walls in the crucible of research that we can see reflected in the categories used here in this conference, and in mediating practice more generally. At issue is the question of rigour; namely, the question of those law-like principles disciplining the production of identifiable points of knowledge through research within an open-ended field of power, and the application of such a form of rigour in the multiplicity of professional practice.

The question is not about the hospitality given to these ideas but the opening of critical dialogue that mobilises the transformative potential of power practice without losing the rigour of complex inquiry.

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