



A TRIBUTE TO ALISON LEE

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The first thing I read by Alison was her wonderful paper with Lesley Johnson and Bill Green (2000) 'The PhD and the autonomous self: Gender rationality and postgraduate pedagogy'. I can still remember the sheer buzz and pleasure of the experience. It leaped out for me because it took the business of theorising the PhD seriously and of putting Doctoral education into a broader context. In the paper they deconstruct the fantasy of the PhD as becoming part of a scholarly elite based on some imaginary past and they locate what they describe as a 'pedagogy of indifference' in the idea of the PhD candidate as 'always already' and I quote as 'having the capacities for which they were to be credentialled at the end of the PhD'. The figure of autonomous scholar as normatively masculine was a trope I recognised from the mismatch of my own experience supervising in a non-elite setting and working with students who were wrestling with research problems that came from their own areas of practice. These students and I did not fit the fantasy and nor did we want to – so the pleasure operated at a number of levels – the textual play and theoretical lucidity which were features of all Alison's writing – the critical edge and a willingness to speak from the margins – and the practice element of speaking to the pedagogical challenges we face and a serious intent to do something about these. I always felt that there was a person who I would recognise as a bold and committed pedagogue in the author of these texts even before I met her.

I think we cannot underestimate the impact Alison has had through her work on doctoral education and what I loved was her combination of rigour and her practical generosity to students and colleagues. Her willingness to build concrete networks that really made a difference and of course the International Doctoral Education Research Network (IDERN) is one such of these as is Doctoralnet. She combined this generous support, evident for example in her work with Malaysian colleagues and

PUSHING BOUNDARIES IN POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

Doctoral scholars with brilliantly provocative theoretical insights. In this brief tribute I'm going to concentrate on her writing and this aspect of her enduring legacy

There are at least three areas where Alison has contributed to changing the ways we think about doctoral education – the first is seeing doctoral education as pedagogy – the second is her focus on the significance of writing – and the third is her focus on practice – of course they form a whole but I want to highlight these three features as particularly significant.

PEDAGOGY

The focus on pedagogy unites all of her writing on the doctorate. It is a tribute to her that we can now take the idea of doctoral pedagogy as a given – but as she and Bill Green pointed out in their 1995 paper 'Theorising postgraduate pedagogy' it was not always thus. Indeed as they argued supervision had been understood more in terms of research than teaching. What Alison and Bill did was to challenge this and offer a sophisticated way of understanding pedagogy as coming to know and coming to be. They also moved the debate on by focusing not just on supervision but also on the seminar as the means by which 'what counts as academic work is represented and authorised'. In a quite startling theoretical move they reverse the normal locus of discipline as research and instead bring into focus the seminar, the laboratory, and the classroom as being instrumental in the formation of disciplinary power. And they prefigure their later focus on gender when they note the discursive feminisation of the teacher in contrast to the masculinised figure of the researcher.

The focus on pedagogy is clear and is also central to the book she later edited with Susan Danby (2012) on 'Reshaping Doctoral Education'. This is a wonderfully rich collection and what makes it so useful is that it gives real insight into pedagogical practices across disciplines, in different practice settings, and on different sorts of doctoral programmes. It is extraordinarily to the credit of its editors that they produced such an informative and wide ranging text. Writing about pedagogy in an accessible way is an extremely difficult task – traversing the twin perils of banality and theoreticism – but one of the hallmarks of the series of books Alison was involved with is that they produced really useful knowledge of interest not to just the specialist researcher but also the Doctoral teacher. These texts create spaces for the teacher to write herself in and to contemplate how their own practice might be amenable to change. By centring on pedagogy Alison, and the colleagues she collaborated with, produced a major shift in how the doctorate is conceived.

WRITING

The edited book on publishing pedagogies (Aitchison, Kamler & Lee 2010) was published two years earlier and is informed by the same spirit as 'Reshaping the Doctorate'. Here the focus is explicitly on writing. The collection includes a fascinating paper by Alison on practice in Sweden where the PhD is typically made up of a number of published papers, not as in the UK where the PhD by publication is a post-facto event, but as a conscious and planned strategy whereby the research is designed with separate publishable elements in mind. The doctoral curriculum as exemplified in this case study includes a structured seminar programme which Alison understands as rhetorical training grounds. Alison also wrote with Claire Aitchison about the need for greater attention to writing in a context where publication has come to be centre stage. They note that policies regarding the efficiency of the doctorate and greatly increased numbers of doctoral students, including those for whom English is not their mother tongue, have coincided with the pressures of research assessment to make writing a major issue. Unlike in North America there is no great tradition in the UK, Australia or South Africa of paying explicit attention to writing and of offering classes. Recent approaches, as Alison and Claire note, have included a shift to understanding writing as a discursive and socio-rhetorical practice. This gives weight to their notion that support for writing should be both socially understood and practiced within a social context. As with her other work on doctoral pedagogy, what we see here is both a focus on theorising practice and also a concrete concern to improve pedagogy. They suggest an approach to working with texts in hands-on ways that develop both writing skill and an understanding of the processes by which knowledge is created in and through writing.

This is extraordinarily useful. In my case it has made me articulate more clearly for my students what I think I am doing when I feedback on their writing and to reflect on how my own writing development has been largely tacit. The one exception to this which speaks directly to Alison's concerns with writing as a social practice was a writing retreat with members of the CAD collective facilitated by Barbara Grant and experiencing and understanding writing differently opens up the space to change doctoral practice. The opportunities for greater attention to doctoral writing are opening up with newer doctoral programmes including the EdD and again what the texts produced and edited by Alison do, is provide both a theoretical language and practical descriptions of what such practices might look like.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES IN POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

PRACTICE

So to turn to the third term that Alison developed and built on in her work on the doctorate, in 'Changing Practices in Doctoral Education' Alison and David Boud (2009) draw on writers such as Schatzki and begin to theorise practice as the core building block of the social – they quote Schatzki in seeing practices as 'embodied materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understanding'. Practices are purposeful and people are invested in them and they generate meanings. To think of the doctorate as a practice, therefore, turns our attention to the materiality of the activities of doctoral work, to the networks of activities at local and global levels, and to what is produced – subjects as well as objects. The Chapters in the book give multiple examples of different sorts of practice including research **for** design not just about design which challenge us to think about the nature of our different sorts of knowing.

I know that Alison was increasingly concerned with the practice turn in the social sciences more generally and the methodological implications for how we understand professional life and know-how and how these in turn relate to the role of the university in supporting knowledge production for newly challenging and changing professional contexts, particularly in her work in health related areas. This to me marks a new and exciting shift in Alison's generative and creative theorising and it leaves us with a series of challenges about its methodological implications. One of these is the need for rich ethnographies that address the materiality of practice in different sorts of doctoral settings.

The sadness is that as we research and continue our doctoral practice we won't have Alison there to provoke and challenge us. I loved her for the way she could always ask the question that made me worry away and attempt to become a better theorist and practitioner. And I loved her because we disagreed as well as agreed – our conversations were endlessly productive. But what we can all be grateful for is that we have such a rich and provocative body of published work and that in reading and re-reading her work we can celebrate her enduring contribution to doctoral education.

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A TRIBUTE TO ALISON LEE

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● INDEX

A

academic

academic becoming 140, 144, 204,
210, 215-216, 218, 220, 222, 225,
231, 233

academic boundaries 1

academic identity formation 196,
210-211, 216

academic integration 140, 146

academic integrity 196

academic isolation 138, 140, 142, 146

agency 115-116, 185, 187-192, 196, 210,
216-217

Alan Fiske 111-114, 116-118, 120

Alison Lee 12, 15, 232-236

Angela Brew 15, 178

Aotearoa/New Zealand 73, 78, 206

Appadurai 204-206, 209, 212, 230

Archer 6, 187-188, 190-192, 216-217,
219, 222, 225-226

ASSAf report 34, 45, 47, 49, 185

Australian PhD programmes 4, 124

**Australian Qualifications Framework
(AQF)** 123, 130

authoritative disciplinary voices 4, 85-86

authority-ranking relationship 112, 114,
117, 119-120

average graduating rate 45

B

backward mapping approach 44, 49

Becher 1, 19, 196

Bernstein 3, 16-20, 85, 114, 119

Bitzer's conceptual framework 5, 134,
137, 139

**boundary between undergraduate and
postgraduate** 4, 86

boundary-riding 3, 25, 28-31

C

cohort supervision 5, 133-136, 138-141,
145-146, 150-151, 231

conceptualisation of the doctorate 11,
27, 46, 55-58, 61

coursework in PhD 124, 126, 130-131

CREST 46-47, 185-186

critical realist conception 20

critical thinking 59, 160-161, 164

D

decontextualised abstract writing 91

**Department of Science and Technology
(DST)** 39, 41, 43, 47-48, 185

dialogical

dialogical contraction 94-95, 97-101

dialogical expansion 94-98

dialogue seminars 5, 162

disciplinary

disciplinary boundaries 1, 4, 25-28, 30,
32-33, 39, 45, 57, 86

disciplinary knowledge 12, 17-18, 28,
128

diverse student background 138, 143,
146, 208, 212

doctoral

doctoral experiences and identities 2, 6,
30, 215-218, 224-225, 231

doctoral graduates by field of study 42

doctoral graduates by race and
gender 42

doctoral journey 145, 216, 218-219,
221, 224-225

doctoral output 186

doctoral persistence 136

doctoral success 5, 133-135, 137-140,
145-146, 150-151

doctoral writing 2, 4, 21, 69, 73-74, 81,
230, 235

PUSHING BOUNDARIES IN POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

E

- equality-matching relationship** 112, 115-117, 119-120
- ethnographic tools** 173
- examining thinking skills** 59, 63
- expansion**
 - expansion and risk 2
 - expansion of postgraduate education 3, 16, 39
- Exploring Supervision Programme (ESP)** 170, 176, 180

F

- fast-tracking doctoral research programme** 48
- first-generation students** 6, 203-205, 207-208, 230

G

- gender in postgraduate education** 6, 39, 42, 114-115, 191
- Gibbons** 2, 17, 44
- global PhD, the** 171

H

- Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS)** 40-43

I

- identity formation** 6, 210, 215-216, 219, 225
- IDERN** 229-230, 232-233
- institutional boundaries** 4
- Integrated Bridging Program-Research (IBP-R)** 170-173, 175, 180
- intercultural competency** 5, 169-170, 172-176, 179-180
- international**
 - international competitiveness 13
 - international standing 13

intersubjective positioning 93, 95

intertextuality 92

J

- joint supervision** 135
- journeyman as a metaphor** 5, 153-154, 160-161, 230

K

- knowledge**
 - knowledge boundaries 2-3, 5, 56
 - knowledge economy 12, 16-17, 39, 48-49, 51, 185, 187
 - knowledge production 2-3, 15-21, 86, 134, 136, 160, 185, 236
- Kuhn** 1, 3, 26-27, 31, 33

L

- learning in community** 109, 111, 113, 115-118, 120

M

- market-pricing relationship** 112, 117-120
- Michael Young** 16, 20, 22
- Mikhail Bakhtin** 91-93
- Mode 1 knowledge** 1, 16-17, 44-45
- Mode 2 knowledge** 1, 16-17, 45

N

- number of doctoral graduates** 40, 185

O

- one-to-one supervision** 120, 135-136, 139, 142-143

P

- part-time status** 29, 50, 110, 127, 138, 140
- peer learning** 134, 178, 218

post-doctoral employability 13, 79

postgraduate

postgraduate journey 189

postgraduate students' associations 25

postgraduate writing 4, 85, 91, 231

practice-based doctorate 18

practices of supervision 80

precarity of academic labour 4, 78

professional doctorate 18, 123-125, 129

Q

quality of supervision 13

R

reflective practice 1, 136, 144, 147, 150

research doctorate 30

Research Training Scheme (RTS) 124

risk

risk as a reciprocal notion 62

risk in doctoral education 3, 53-54, 57, 64

role models 153-155, 158-160, 163

Royal Institute of Technology 162

Roy Bhaskar 20, 186-187

S

scientific quality 159

**Southern African Development
Community (SADC)** 41, 45

student

student colloquia 136

student selection 63

supervision

supervising across cultures 2

supervision pedagogy 134-135

supervision strategies 2, 4-5, 119

supervisory capacity 45, 47, 49

Sweden 153, 160, 162, 164, 229, 235

T

teaching intervention 90-91

team supervision 33, 135

**Tertiary Education Quality Standards
Agency (TEQSA)** 123

threshold crossing 231

throughput rate 109-110, 113, 119, 121,
143, 151

timeliness of completion 13

transdisciplinarity 17

transformative learning 121, 147

Trowler 1, 19, 196, 219

U

unreflexive view of the doctorate 11

W

**Wetherell's development of affective
practice** 70-73, 75-78, 81

Wittgenstein 5, 163

workforce 125, 169