

Implementing a New Doctor of Creative Arts Program in the Chinese Year of the Fire Monkey

Abstract

This paper explores the development and implementation of a new Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) program in a regional university. The experiences of key leadership staff and DCA candidates enrolled in the foundation year of the program are contextualised within the current landscape of practice-based arts research in the higher education sector. The process was shaped by the tension between financial imperatives and the possibilities, ambiguity, and ambivalence inherent in the arts. The implementation of the DCA in 2016, the Chinese Year of the Fire Monkey with its emphasis on intelligent, flexible and creative leadership, was one that offered the most relevant metaphorical framework within which the challenges were best articulated and explored. The findings revealed significant institutional awareness of the new program's potential to facilitate innovative, creative, and traditional research outputs, the importance of **communicating the value of creative practice-led research for artists and the university**, and leadership and support throughout planning and implementation.

Keywords

Creative arts practice, creative arts doctorate, practice-based research, practitioner-researcher, higher education, narrative

Introduction

The introduction of a Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) program, during the Chinese Year of the Fire Monkey in 2016, is indicative of an evolving understanding of creativity and innovation but one which runs counter to a number of global trends in higher education. The

qualities of the Fire Monkey which include being creative, resourceful, and competitive are required for practitioners and administrators in the higher education sector seeking to implement a new DCA program in the current performative based climate. The prevailing emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum and programs has devalued areas traditionally seen as leading creativity and innovation such as the arts and humanities (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015). The prioritising of STEM areas at the expense of the Arts and Humanities reflects an often narrow understanding of ‘measurable outcomes’. This has led to an increasing emphasis on standardised tests as a means of **measuring student achievement in schools** in a performance-based educational climate (AUTHOR; Barton et al., 2013; Ewing, 2010). **However, forms of testing and measurement on a national scale are also evident in the higher education sector through such initiatives as the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students in Australia and the Professional Skills Tests for Trainee Teachers in England** (ACER, 2017). This process continues in spite of the benefits of alternative modes of enquiry (Eisner, 1997; Pink, 2005; Robinson, 2001; Sawyer, 2006) and the significance and impact of the arts in education, which has been well documented globally (Bamford, 2006; Pascoe, et al. 2005; UNESCO, 2006).

The limitations of an approach dominated by the notion of ‘learning outcomes’ is even more surprising given that advances in technology and the rapid effects of globalisation have increased the demand for creative and lateral thinkers (Fleming, Gibson and Anderson, 2016; Pink, 2005). Although traditionally people with these skills may have been more readily associated with the arts (Gardner, 1993; Robinson, 2001), the corporate sector has arguably been quicker to see the value of creativity than some educationalists (Laurie, 2016; Lichtenberg, Woock and Wright, 2007). In Harris’ (2014) view, the corporate sector have co-opted innovation as part of a ‘creative turn’. The arts have subsequently ceded some of their

sovereignty over creativity to industry, evident in nomenclature associated with the ‘creative economy’ (Florida, 2002; O’Brien, 2015; Stock, 2013). The recent addition of the Arts to the STEM agenda, re-envisioned as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), is a response to governments seeking to produce ‘a scientifically literate, and ethically astute citizenry and workforce for the 21st century’ (Taylor, 2016: 92). Various governments are seeking to enhance their innovation agendas by recognising that different forms of knowledge and skills promote problem solving and hence foster creativity and innovation, **thereby espousing the qualities of the Fire Monkey** (Australian Government, 2017; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014; The White House, 2015; Van Vught, 2009; White, 2010; Quigley and Herro, 2016). These include the United States, which has embedded arts, design and technology with STEM (Galligan, 2014; STEAM, 2017), South Korea through science and technology-related cultural activities (Marginson, Tytler, Freeman and Roberts, 2013), and China which is focussing on innovation and entrepreneurship through the creative industries (Laurie, 2016; Phan Zhou and Abrahamson, 2010).

This article explores the complexities of introducing a DCA program at a regional Australian university in the current performative based climate. The DCA program draws on disciplines already offered in the existing degree program, in order to provide a transition pathway, including: creative writing, film, television and radio, music, theatre, and visual arts.

Candidates are encouraged to pursue hybridised or interdisciplinary projects relevant to their practice.

Context

In 2017 the regional university which is the focus of this study will celebrate fifty years of operation. **The Times Higher Education** recently ranked it as one of the world’s top 200 Young Universities (2017). As a younger university it has experienced the effects of

globalisation and rapid changes in areas such as technology in a relatively short period of time compared to universities of longer standing (Melles, 2011; Pucciarelli and Kaplan, 2016). Beginning as an Institute of Technology in the late 1960s in 1971 it became an autonomous multi-purpose college and Institute of Advanced Education. In 1990, it began the transition to full university status operating as a University College prior to achieving full university status in 1992.

Although the Doctorate in Creative Arts (known at this university as the DCAR program) is new to this university, it is by no means a recent addition to the Australian higher degree landscape. Australia's first professional doctorate was the Doctor of Creative Arts offered at the University of Wollongong in 1984, an initiative which predated professional doctorates in law (1989) and education (1990) in Australia. The university distinguishes its DCAR program as a research-based doctorate for contemporary creative artists rather than a professional doctorate identified and branded as being workplace centric. The question of whether a professional doctorate can meet the same or equivalent requirements of a 'conventional' PhD or whether it instead demands a reimagining of the nature of knowledge and the now pervasive demand for 'measurable research outcomes' is still problematic. The desire to make such a clear distinction between the DCA and the professional doctorate reflects the ongoing discussion that this issue generates (Boud and Lee, 2009; Neumann, 2005).

Theoretical background

Increasing accountability in the higher education sector has resulted in a commensurate emphasis on research which explores the link between the arts and creative and lateral thinking (Livingstone, 2010; Sawyer, 2006). Educationalists have increasingly sought to

reclaim some of the leadership in creative fields, as is evident in the staggered global introduction of the creative arts doctorate in the higher education sector over the past four decades ‘subject to varying processes and regulatory norms’ (ELIA, 2016: 2). Barrett (2007: 1) describes this form of practice-led research as one which utilises generative enquiry that ‘draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies’. She argues that the strengths of artistic practice-led research are sometimes difficult to quantify in relation to traditional research and scholarship which has led to a ‘devaluing of studio-based enquiry and research activities in relation to the more familiar practices of other disciplines’ (2).

This tension can be traced to the increasing pressure felt by universities that have become ‘engines of innovation’ (Florida et al., 2006: 1), compelled to seek competitive advantage through creative and innovative approaches to structural reforms and new management practices (Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016). This shift represents a grass roots alteration in both thinking and practice. For many centuries universities have been measured by their capacity to enrich the ‘commonweal’ but as Livingstone (2010) argues, they are now far removed from this construct. This has in turn placed increasing pressure on all forms of research, including practice-led arts doctorates to contribute to a global research agenda informed by government innovation priorities (Arnold, 2012; Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Gattenhof, 2017).

The initial response to the advent of creative arts doctorates in the Australian higher education sector was one which challenged the premise that they were both creative arts and research doctorates:

The evolution of the exegesis as a research tool in Australian creative arts disciplines begins with the difficulty of acceptance of creative arts practice as

research *at all* in the university context – by administrators especially, and perhaps by academics in science and humanities fields – but it significantly involves the fact that creative artists teaching at tertiary level *themselves* strongly opposed the notion that what they did was ‘research’. (Krauth, 2011, n.d.)

This reticence on the part of both creative artists and/or tertiary educators reflects the fact that researchers in the creative fields still lack a ‘properly developed language’ to describe what they are doing (Corbyn, 2008: 8; Lansing, 1976). The impact of this absence of a shared rhetoric is exacerbated by the existence of a number of doctoral program types and the ensuing discussion, much of it not reflected in policy but instead forming part of widely held informal assumptions, about which is ‘pre-eminent’. Hoddell, et al., (2002) and Brabazon and Dagli (2010) identified four distinct types of doctoral programs: the traditional PhD comprised of 80 000-100 000 words of text, a practice-led qualification, the PhD by publication and an array of professional doctorates. The debate over the function and form of the exegesis is hardly surprising. Practice led research locates creative practice as the central component of the research process and as such ‘is a unique research paradigm’ with the exegesis viewed as a ‘new form of academic writing’ (Hamilton and Jaaniste, 2009: 1). Stock (2013) recognises the difficulties which some practice-led researchers face when creating a language that authentically conveys the complex process of their practice which is often embedded in the work itself:

Experimenting with allusion, metaphor and the poetics of language to capture what is often ineffable and unnameable, these researchers strive to find effective written means of communicating the deep tacit knowledge in which findings reside. Such ‘findings’ are likely to be open-ended; evoking experiences, insights

and challenging us with new ways of seeing the world, which often seem to resist textual interpretation. (8)

The real world, as Laing and Brabazon (2007) characterise it, has imposed its own vision on these first forays into creative doctorates. A traditional thesis model was clearly inappropriate for a practice-led research project ‘because it does not reflect the way that such research unfolds in practice where creative work is both the impetus for, and the outcome of, the research process’ (Hamilton and Jaaniste, 2009: 5). The choice of an exegesis instead of coursework or formal workshops is a better fit, but as Krauth (2011) observed, it has sometimes been driven by administrative concerns rather than philosophical ones. With fewer candidates in Australia than in the United States, for example, the format of the creative arts doctorate was also a cheaper option. This set the scene for a framework much copied and one which the university has adopted – a creative product ‘rounded out’ by an artist’s reflective and analytical journal or commentary (Krauth, 2011; McGrath, 2002). Interestingly, the choice of reflective text was a conservative one that reflects a sensitivity to the view of some academics that the exegesis confers academic legitimacy in a way that a creative output does not. The choice at the university of the reflective text for the exegesis component was informed by one of the two inaugural team members being from a very strong visual arts background.

However, more important than even the broader context and site specific issues of funding, is the reality that implementing a new program in the current and highly competitive higher education environment requires a supportive administration. As Lehman (2013) observed in two United States case studies, during the launch, growth and maintenance phases of new programs, an institutional champion must emerge to ‘get the ball rolling’ and ‘provide momentum’ (1892). There are tensions, nevertheless, concerning the quality of these

programs, how to evaluate the creative component, and the extent to which a written component which can be between 8000-30 000 words constitutes an 'authentic' doctorate (Candlin, 2000; Paltridge et al., 2011). Researchers such as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007 cited in Stock, 2013: 4) argue that 'the exclusive, immediate goal of all research is, and must remain, the production of knowledge'. They nevertheless concede that 'disagreement still arises around what constitutes 'validity' or 'rigour' in the forms that production of knowledge may take and the methods employed' (4). This is a common thread in the literature, one that positions the creative doctorate challenged by traditional understandings of research outputs.

Even though in its fourth decade, it is clear that even the creative arts doctorate most vocal defenders betray their underlying fear that they are waging a war for credibility. Stock (2013), who is quite clear in her advocacy for the doctorate's paradigm-altering impact, nevertheless concedes there is a perceived lack of academic rigour *compared with a traditional PhD* [Author's emphasis]. A statement of what a DCA entails is so often characterised by an equally overt statement about what it is not. This is also informed by the reality that professional doctorates are not the preferred track for candidates pursuing an academic career at university level, although in Australia this perception is gradually changing (Stock, 2013). The incorporation of Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs) as part of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) national assessment exercise recognises creative arts outputs. The Australian Research Council (ARC) describes NTROs as outputs that differ in their form and mode of production from traditional research outputs such as journal articles, and are classified differently for administrative and reporting purposes. They include original creative works, live performance of creative works, recorded/rendered creative works, curated or produced substantial public exhibitions and events, and research reports for an external body (ARC, 2015), with research defined in the same way as for traditional outputs. An online platform called DDCA/NiTRO, instituted in

February 2016 with the support of the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA), provides a space for creative artists in academia to discuss the complexities around demonstrating the research contribution of NTROs and ‘issues and activities relating to practice, research and teaching taking place within the university sector’ (DDCA/NiTRO, 2016). However, despite this recognition, candidates and academics in programs such as a DCA often feel as if they operate at the periphery, forever called upon to justify their creative work as legitimate research, compared to other disciplines whose longer history in the academy have conferred credibility (Baker et al., 2009; Ravelli et al., 2013).

Research design

Given the integral role of the arts in this study a qualitative approach was utilised which reflected the researchers’ values and beliefs as educators (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Knowles and Cole, 2008). This approach was informed by Eisner’s (1991) concept of educational connoisseurship which emphasises the importance of educational knowledge whilst foregrounding the art of appreciation. The researchers have used narrative methodology as part of their collaborative effort to produce shared understandings of the DCAR program (Medeiros, 2015). They were drawn to narrative methodology because well-crafted and presented narratives contain many elements of artistic practice including ‘layers of complexity, intellectual richness, purpose/meaning and attention to performance/presentation’ (AUTHOR). As educators themselves and from an ontological position that posits experience as ‘both the essence of being and the source of knowing’ (Barrett and Stauffer, 2012: 4) they agree with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000: 19) contention that because experience occurs in a narrative way ‘educational experience should be studied narratively’.

The research questions underpinning this study were developed from the researchers' observations of, and involvement in the implementation of the first year of the DCA program. They also drew from current research exploring increased interest in the STEAM agenda by governments globally (Marginson, Tytler, Freeman and Roberts, 2013; Quigley and Herro, 2016; White, 2010), commensurate with increased pressure on the tertiary sector to creatively respond to the global innovation agenda (Florida, 2006; Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016).

The insights this research could provide regarding the implementation of a new creative arts doctoral program in the current neo-liberal climate and recommendations arising from this was seen as an important contribution to knowledge. The research questions underpinning this study were as follows:

- What factors contributed to the implementation of a DCA Arts program in the current competitive performance based climate?
- How is the university communicating the value of the DCA program in the context of the innovation and research agenda?
- What type of leadership and support has been provided during the implementation of the DCA program?

Interviews were chosen as an important primary source of data and as a form of contemporary storytelling which complemented the narrative methodology being used (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). Semi-structured face to face interviews of 30 – 60 minutes were conducted with eight participants chosen through purposive sampling. The respondents were key stakeholders within the DCAR program located in the School of Arts and Communication at the university.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and returned to participants for member-checking in order to ensure accuracy of the responses and provide opportunity for further feedback or

clarification. The interviews were viewed as active interactions ‘leading to negotiated, contextually based results’ (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 698). After feedback was incorporated the interview transcripts were read by the researchers who constructed written narratives utilising the direct voices of the participants (denoted in italics) where possible. To address criticisms related to the narrative approach including that it ‘both contests and reproduces positivistic notions of power, knowledge and subjectivity’ (Munro, 1998: 12), that it is self-indulgent (Josselson et al., 2003), and that stories are reduced to objects without an appropriate theoretical structure for analysis (Bal, 1997; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), the researchers sought to create a ‘virtual reality’ and ‘reader identification’ (Leavy, 2009: 28) utilising Huberman’s (1995) measures of access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy. Huberman contends these elements most likely provide trustworthiness by ensuring the research is ‘well- grounded and supportable by the data that has been collected’ (Webster and Mertova, 2007: 90).

The narratives were further refined by the researchers in order ‘to reveal multidimensional meanings and present an authentic and compelling rendering of the data’ (Leavy, 2009: 27). From these polished narratives a meta-narrative was constructed which merged the views of the researchers and the respondents in addition to ‘interpretive observations, and existential knowledge of the study topic’ (Medeiros, 2015: 366). Utilising Huberman’s measures, access has been granted to the reader by including first-hand accounts of the experience being explored. Honesty has been achieved through processes such as member-checking and cross-checking through constant clarification during the writing of the narratives. The common experience amongst the respondents of the DCAR program ensured verisimilitude with the narratives allowing the reader to identify personal relevance. Authenticity has been sought by ensuring the narratives are coherently written and with integrity through constant reflection. The researchers’ familiarity with the context enabled them to provide important insights

through the writing of the narratives. Transferability has been considered by providing enough detail in order to facilitate a similar study in another setting. Economy has been achieved by carefully selecting and interweaving the eight polished narratives into a carefully crafted meta-narrative contextualised with relevant literature and insights from the researchers. Waterhouse (2007: 273) contends that ‘telling the story of an event and the act of remembering as a narrative is associated with the act of coming to know and is linked in this way to the making of knowledge.’ The process of telling and listening to stories enables people to narratively construct, and continually re-construct who they are (Bruner, 2002; Mishler, 2004; Søreide, 2006). The meta-narrative enabled the presentation of a coherent, structured and rich narrative which brings together a multiplicity of interacting views, perceptions and insights to the implementation of a new DCAR program in the current performance-based climate.

In order to obtain a multi-perspective view the research team included a key administrative leader in the DCA program, an academic who has taught into the program, an inaugural DCA candidate, and an academic critical friend from the School of Education. During the interview process the researchers kept field notes in order to note personal interpretations or queries for discussion with the team. Utilising these field notes and engaging in discussion during the analysis of the transcripts provided an important opportunity to ensure personal bias was reduced (Fontana and Frey, 2005). This enabled the team to discuss and collaboratively identify the major themes emerging from the interviews. Through this process they sequentially ordered the final metanarrative using interview extracts to ensure the accuracy of interpretation and to ‘avoid reframing the narrative voice’ (Medeiros, 2015: 365)

Ethical approval for this study was sought and granted through the university’s human research ethics committee – Approval No: H16REA167.

Findings

The following section presents the meta-narrative which has been crafted from sections of the polished narratives of each participant interwoven with the researchers' critical insights and contextualised through relevant literature including documentation associated with the DCAR program. The direct voices of the participants are denoted in italics as the use of ordinary language in narrative methodology is ideologically motivated to make research more inclusive (Leahy, 2009). The meta-narrative captures emergent themes from the initial interviews which have been drawn through the polished narratives. These include: Innovation and the Research Agenda; Communicating the Value of Creative Practice-led Research for Artists and the University; and Leadership and Support. Through the act of storying the researchers have sought to feature 'people, values, intentions, and actions' (Bowman, 2006: 13).

The eight key participants who have contributed to the meta-narrative include the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (DVC R&I), the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) (AD R&RT), the School Coordinator (Research and Research Training) (SC R&RT) in the School of Arts and Communication, the two DCAR Program Coordinators (DCAR PC), the School Discipline Coordinator – Creative Arts (SDC-CA) (and Acting Head of School during the time of data collection), and two foundation DCAR candidates.

The meta-narrative

Innovation and the research agenda

The introduction of the DCAR program at the university was the result of a range of complex factors which precipitated its endorsement by the Education Management Committee (EMC)

in November 2014 for delivery in 2016 – the Chinese Year of the Fire Monkey. The Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) characterised the decision to go ahead as one that originated *from above* in an institutional sense, gaining momentum by staff looking *at what could and perhaps should be done* (Florida et al., 2006; Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016). It was, as he observed, *an alignment of the planets*. Also in keeping with the broader literature, he recognised that it was not merely a new ‘product’, it represented a developing of *new ways of supervising students and developing knowledge ... that is disciplinary appropriate*. The program which developed from a core group of institutional champions (Hills, 1988; Lehman, 2013) is one which the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) describes as *distinctive, that is responsive to the identified context, opportunities and needs of this profession ... a really innovative, creative program*. His observations reflect the university’s intention to seek a competitive business advantage by building on available resources that could be creatively re-aligned to provide an inaugural DCA program (Arnold, 2012; Barrett and Bolt, 2007).

Though there was a concerted effort to look at what other institutions were doing, the School Discipline Coordinator – Creative Arts, was conscious that this needed to inform the process rather than drive it: *I think the big challenge has been to not replicate what other universities do but to take the best of what they do and apply it for our context*. Similarly to the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training), the School Coordinator (Research and Research Training) understands that the creation of a new program required what he characterised as *a coalescence of a couple of different interests*. He concedes that for all of the philosophical justification for the DCAR, at some level it is also a decision informed by *the dollars and cents* (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Arnold, 2012). He sees it as a balancing of the twin tensions of financial considerations and the desire to *enable students to come into a program that offers them the space to be able to enact their practice as they would, in a way that the PhD doesn't*.

Ewing (2010: 5) contends that ‘the Arts enables an immensely rewarding way of human knowing and being – of imagination, aesthetic knowledge and translation and expression of ideas ... [and] must never be viewed largely as ‘instrumental’ servants in the achievement of other outcomes’. The perception of the arts becoming a ‘handmaiden’ to other areas is one which arts educators and practitioners actively oppose in order to prevent a devaluing of their transformative potential and impact (Barton, et al., 2013; Bamford, 2006; Ewing, 2010). However, the School Coordinator’s (Research and Research Training) discussion of authentic practice-led research occurs concurrently with references to the ‘bottom line’ and ‘the market’. His specialisation of the Humanities is located in the same school as the Creative Arts and in his role he is committed to ensuring both disciplines are represented. He acknowledges that *building a program that responds to both masters is not an easy thing to do. I think that we have found a market niche, we have a tradition at this university of doing good quality research and scholarship*. He also emphasised that, there is more at stake than just the stakeholders *being happy*. The School Discipline Coordinator – Creative Arts discussed the prosaic issues of finance, noting that decisions are driven by *what we think the market wants based on our market strategies and our market discussions*.

One of the joint DCAR Program Coordinator’s revealed that in order to make the program innovative in the competitive climate of higher education it was intended that people from *both professional and academic backgrounds* could apply *provided they had capacity to do the research*. Her statement revealed the high level of expertise required to entwine artistic processes within a theoretical framework (Barrett, 2007; Lansing, 1976). She revealed that in conjunction with the other DCAR Program Coordinator they *looked at programs that other universities do, Australia in particular, a little bit internationally*. This due diligence found that *creative practice doctorates internationally are very, very different* (Brabazon and Dagli, 2010; Hoddell, et al., 2002). The DCAR program has been informed by analysis of other

similar programs, but importantly is seen as relevant to the university's context. Interestingly, the administrators appeared more comfortable engaging with issues pertaining to creativity, innovation and the wider value of the arts than the artist/practitioners are when adopting the rhetoric of financial accountability and institutional aims (Corbyn, 2008; Stock, 2013).

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) believes that there is valuable potential in articulating and implementing skills and characteristics inherent to the arts to other areas. *The buzzword which is used a lot at the moment is innovation. Innovation is looking at a problem from a different perspective and then coming up with a framework to drive it. It's seeing things which people usually don't see ... One of the things that we're trying to do a lot in higher education is really change the paradigm. People used to go to university and if they were doing a course they would just go and do it. Whereas now on top of that it's a case of 'well shouldn't we be teaching people business skills, innovation, entrepreneurial skills and that type of thing.'* The question is, what role then, can something like creative arts play in that process? His support of the DCAR program aligns with a global agenda which sees words such as 'innovation', 'creativity', 'life-long learning' and the 'knowledge economy' contributing to an environment in which research is increasingly linked with economic benefits and commercialisation (O'Brien, 2015; Olmos-Penuela et al., 2015; Stock, 2013). For example, the creation of an institute focussed on resilient regions at the university, where the majority of creative arts research is located, is motivated by a desire to highlight research strengths and provide a focussed approach, but is also a calculated and creative response to the competitive climate. For all the stakeholders involved this requires emulating the Fire Monkey's creative, lateral and strategic thinking in order to maximise the value of the arts and their unique contribution to the global innovation and research agenda.

Communicating the Value of Creative Practice-led Research for Artists and the University

Programs such as the DCAR require artists to describe their meaning-making through an iterative process using arts-based methodologies. This approach can be challenging for artists who can find it difficult to clearly articulate the ‘magic’ of their artistic process. Artists’ traditional suspicion of theory can exacerbate this situation, leading to reticence in discussing their work (Barrett, 2007) and doing so in an articulate and lucid way (Lansing, 1976). The arts value both process and product therefore the requirement in arts schools to document the artistic process through a visual diary recognises the valuable phase of ‘intellectual chaos’ which occurs and ‘is given lip service but isn’t actually legitimized as a distinct phase of the research process’ (Hunter et al., 2002: 389).

As members of the first cohort of eight students in the DCAR program, one of the visual artists and one of the musicians revealed the importance of effectively communicating their practice-led research. The visual artist explained *I think it has [DCAR program] definitely helped me understand research methodologies and helped my research through practice and being intentional about that and about documenting the way I research ... There's a name for the way I do things ... Interestingly, she has, consciously or not, chosen not to bend her writing to her creative practice but has instead done the reverse: I've actually found that the process of writing - I mean I've always had those moments of creative, not creative writing, but you're crafting a paper really. You're finding different things in people's research that resonate with your project. So yes, I'm finding more and more that, that process is creative in itself.*

The musician seeks to link his art and his lifestyle choices with an appropriate methodological framework: *I'm working on a lit[erature] review at the moment and that's pretty intense and I'm learning how much I don't know.* When comparing the DCAR program to a PhD he emphasises the benefits of the practice-led approach: *I definitely think it's a good model. I've made a couple of friends who are doing PhD's, a couple with creative work, I*

mean personally I think it looks way better to do it this way than the PhD model. Without classes they are kind of alone and - well not alone, but just making work in solitude. The interviews with both DCAR Candidates highlighted the research model operating within the program which one of the DCAR PC's described as being underpinned by creative and critical thinking. That's what practice-led rigorous research is. It's a serious form of research but it's also applied research [that is shaped by] informed experience, and that's why it's so powerful and it can resonate within the broader community.

However, the rigor of practice-led research is as McGrath (2002, n.d.) reveals, 'a consuming, intense and exciting activity requiring a well-structured, clearly thought through plan actioned by a creative mind prepared to critique and be critiqued every step of the way'. The importance of articulating the narrative underpinning creative arts research and the difficulty of doing so given its eclectic nature, was emphasised by one of the DCAR Program Coordinator's who argued that *if there's no coherent agreed kind of way to talk about it back to the Office of Research or the Vice Chancellor, then perhaps they end up with a perception that there is nothing there or nothing robust or rigorous.* This observation was serendipitously highlighted by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) who stated *the challenge in implementing a program is how well you can articulate the narrative behind it.* Perhaps the most clichéd criticism of someone perceived as a bureaucrat is that they value ends over means. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) does not fit that profile. The end product of the arts does not interest him as much as the story behind it: *It's the person's emotion or their story, their journey and how that has been translated into the creative art, whether that's a poem, or a visual artwork, or a musical score.* He does, however, continue to place the DCAR in the wider research environment and it is perhaps this 'bigger picture' thinking that challenges those engaged in the creative arts: *Every aspect*

of research is dynamic, it will continue to evolve and programs such as this and the roles that they play will continue to be part of the evolution of the research environment.

Leadership and support

The School Coordinator (Research and Research Training) acknowledged the importance of the support provided by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) *who understands that research manifests in multiple forms, not just in the Quartile 1 or Quartile 2 journal article. I can't say enough for that; it's a valuable thing for us.* Yet for all his gratitude for an institutional understanding of the DCAR, the School Coordinator (Research and Research Training) contends that at times the arts have been celebrated rather than fully understood: *It's been my prevailing hunch that I don't think the full impact and significance of the arts has been understood at this university, however they have been celebrated.*

One of the DCAR Program Coordinator's revealed that the university's creative arts department originated from *a teaching model, so the idea of research and practice-led research is a very new thing for this context.* The legacy of the traditional connoisseurship or master/apprentice model still informs creative arts educators in the higher education sector and is one which has featured strongly at this university (Shippers, 2007). The creative arts department at the university is not a separate entity or school unlike several metropolitan universities operating in Australia. The creative arts are included under the umbrella of Humanities which creates an inherent tension in discussions of what constitutes 'real' research (Baker et al., 2009; Ravelli et al., 2013). A major restructure of the university has seen substantial progress in the last three years in 'formalising' ways of reporting creative arts outcomes in a visible way (ARC, 2015). This has involved dialogue with creative arts staff around what constitutes creative research and how to most effectively communicate its impact and significance in a manner that recognises the diversity of the discipline areas. One

of the DCAR Program Coordinator's revealed that *I understand you have to play that research game and how to do it, but my understanding of some of my fellow arts teaching staff is that they really disengage from the research process [and] are happier teaching and practising than they are in the research space.* The School Discipline Coordinator – Creative Arts also sees a growing trend among staff to be interested either in their practice or their research but not both. It strikes at the heart of her conception of the theoretical requirements of an authentic DCA program. As Schippers (2007) reveals, the traditional conservatoire [or studio] model has been a point of contention in many countries because of the clash of institutional cultures between the intensive and individualised studio approach as opposed to the traditional instruction offered through lectures and tutorials. However, the individually intensive nature of the conservatoire model requires 'monumental efforts to justify and secure appropriate levels of funding to maintain quality teaching and learning' (Schippers, 2007, p. 34). The School Discipline Coordinator – Creative Arts acknowledges the critical importance of the individualised studio interactions with students which she sees as *our biggest strength* but highlights the inherent tensions with *(a) marketing programs that do not market the best things that we do and (b) this constant negation I feel of the way in which we innovatively do a lot of our learning and teaching online and on campus* which she believes *gets lost in the absolute hysteria of gaining research dollars and churning out publications.* However, she also recognises the financial investment of the university to the creative arts program and the commitment of the staff. *The staff who are working in the DCAR are very, very invested and know what it's like to really have creative projects that just change lives and change their own lives. But I guess, an issue is that if we were to have larger numbers then some of those experiences would be a little bit diffused perhaps because we're going to run out of staff - and there are some staff who insist that the PhD is still a better, somehow better, degree than the DCAR.* The tension between providing quality supervision to a

smaller cohort, suspicion regarding the ‘authenticity’ of the DCAR compared to the PhD, and the pressure to increase numbers to make the DCAR program financially viable is evident in the School Coordinator’s (Research and Research Training) advice to the DCAR Program Coordinators to *just quell things for the moment so it [DCAR program] doesn’t grow too quickly too soon.*

When the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) articulates his future hopes for the DCAR, he does betray the different ‘hats’ that he must wear (Ponnuswamy and Manohar, 2016). Some have a decidedly business tone, while others are indicative of a desire to innovate and to push the boundaries of accepted practice: *Point one, for it to be a successful program you want to see an increase in the number of students. Point two is that you’d want to be able to within the next five years or so is have the narratives around where those students have gone or alternatively, if they’re already in a work environment, how their study and what they’ve learnt through the DCAR is improving or driving the organisation that they’re in.* The Associate Dean’s (Research and Research Training) ambitions for the DCAR are a mix of the abstract creation of new knowledges and the very human element of such an endeavour: *It is my hope that the course is successful at generating a whole host of knowledges and understandings about the world, about our places in the world, perhaps where our places should be or should not be in the world, about communities; a lot of those so-called hot topics or ‘wicked problems’ that beset us today - homelessness, refugees, community, alienation treatment of older people, young people.* This insight hearkens back to the mandate of universities to enrich the ‘commonweal’ (Livingstone, 2010) which appears to be resonating through to the next national research assessment exercise (ERA) to measure the impact and engagement of university research within the community in 2018 (Australian Government, 2016).

Both DCAR Program Coordinators who are experienced practitioners and advocates for the Arts, revealed that as leaders in the program they also have to engage with the DCAR as a business initiative, even to the extent of discussing brand development, with one noting: *Manageable but sustained growth would be good ... letting the program develop an identity but also helping it to [have an identity]. So helping it develop its brand if you like through excellent graduates ... I think that two to three new students a year would be enough to sustain the program but I think we'll probably get more than that as it goes on as other disciplines engage more strongly.* The desire to bring through the best aspects of this approach is commendable and will need to be carefully managed as numbers in the DCAR program increase, although at the end of the first year of the program there appears to be competing views on what constitutes viable numbers. There is undoubtedly passion and commitment from the key stakeholders to continue to develop a DCAR program which nurtures excellent artists and researchers within a model that also generates financial viability and recognition of the arts as a valuable and important asset to the university. The importance of ensuring a common language however is essential in developing a research culture that can challenge and speak to the national and international agenda of practice-based research.

Interestingly, though creative arts people are traditionally quite vehement in their criticism of modern university structures, **the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) states that he is committed** to finding them a place in this process. 'The neo-liberal' agenda is a remarkably useful insult, relevant in a surprising number of contexts, yet the arts are not dismissed, in fact far from it. **Instead a place at the table has been reserved for them, it is now a question of whether they are prepared to move beyond their historic suspicion of organisational structures which do not appear to value the Fire Monkey's qualities of creativity, innovation and imagination.**

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations arising from this research which may provide important insights for higher education institutions considering the implementation of a DCAR program in the current competitive and performance based climate. Although these recommendations are based on the experiences of key participants in one institution they have also been informed by relevant literature and may have applicability to other institutions considering this approach.

Recommendation 1: Ensuring key stakeholders have a common understanding of Non Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs) and their contribution to the research agenda of the university and more broadly

It is essential that there is a clear understanding of Non Traditional Research Outputs (NTRO) and their unique contribution to enhancing creativity and innovation agendas. These discussions need to include practitioner-researchers who have currency in their own practice and experience and expertise in the submission of NTROs for assessment. These practitioner-researchers need to be closely aligned with university panels assessing the viability of introducing programs such as a DCA. This will ensure all stakeholders attain an understanding of the value of NTROs and how they can provide a competitive edge to the current global innovation agenda (Quigley and Herro, 2016; White, 2010). This will also result in the careful management of processes to recognise the potential of such programs.

Recommendation 2: Establishing networking and mentoring programs which acknowledges the hybrid identity of practitioner-researchers

An audit of existing resources and personnel for the implementation of new programs is critical to their success. This is even more important for programs such as a DCA which relies on intensive and individualised mentoring from practitioner-researchers. However, there can be tensions with colleagues who view themselves as primarily practitioners, which

can also occur in areas such as teaching or nursing (AUTHOR; Krauth, 2011). This view can undermine a program such as a DCA which incorporates both creative arts and research. The establishment of mentoring and networking programs, which includes critical external friends, concurrently with the preparation for and implementation of a new program may assist in alleviating potential concerns.

Recommendation 3: To publically disseminate NTROs to the university and wider community to demonstrate their engagement and impact

Access to and engagement with a range of NTROs both within the university and wider community will result in exemplars of good practice, beyond traditional text formats, and also provide important insights into how artistic practice can alter the quality of people's lives (Brown and Trimboli cited in Gattenhof, 2017). This approach will provide evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals and communities by utilising performative art methods and processes such as video narratives, participatory photography, and/or storytelling for example to report on arts engagement (Gattenhof, 2017). It may also provide assistance in showing how the narratives behind practitioners creative outputs can be utilised to further strengthen the standing of the arts in the university's research agenda and more broadly.

Conclusion

The paper has provided important insights into the implementation of a new DCAR program at a regional university which has received strong support from the highest levels of the research division in the university. However, what also emerges is variance amongst key stakeholders in understanding the very nature of the arts and their value. The core principle underpinning arts education informs the introduction of new programs such as a DCAR which inextricably links practice and theory in holistic and engaged ways (Leavy, 2009).

The DCAR program has been informed by analysis of other similar programs, both in Australia and overseas, but importantly is seen as relevant to the university's context. The fire phase which typifies the 2016 Chinese calendar describes the 'fire monkey' as smart, passionate, adventurous and business-minded (Travel China Guide, 2017). The participants in this study, including the two DCAR candidates, have demonstrated these qualities as part of their engagement with the program which has recently attracted the enrolment of two existing staff members and notably its first international candidate. The challenge for the program to grow and prosper relies on the university's understanding and promotion of NTROs, the commitment and dedication of staff, and recognition of the philosophy underpinning a studio-based intensive mentoring approach.

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