Writing Issues in Designing Doctoral Research: Interpretation, Representation, Legitimation and Desiring in Investigating the Education of Australian Show People

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Abstract

This paper deploys Denzin's (1994) four "Writing Issues" as an interrogative lens for evaluating the appropriateness and utility of the design of a recent doctoral study of the educational aspirations and opportunities of Australian mobile show people (Danaher, 2001a). The deployment of that lens highlights a number of dilemmas and tensions that the researcher encountered in writing about a community traditionally subject to exoticisation and marginalisation in ways that were as 'true' as possible to the participants and that also fulfilled the taken-for-granted assumptions about doctoral research. The paper presents the argument that Denzin's "Writing Issues" constitute one among several potentially useful frameworks for reflecting on the planning and conduct of an educational research project, as well as for navigating the specific challenges and opportunities involved in designing doctoral educational research.

Introduction

It is a privilege – or perhaps a curse – that having completed one's Doctor of Philosophy thesis one can return to it subsequently with hopefully renewed enthusiasm and heightened understanding of the issues with which one was seeking to grapple in writing that large and seemingly endless text. Inevitably feelings are mixed in this process: relief that what one agonised over was considered satisfactory by supervisors and examiners, embarrassment at the *naiveté* of some of one's assertions, regret at the material that had to be excluded at the time owing to a lack of space and that has not since then been turned into other publications, despite one's best intentions and new year's resolutions. Perhaps after all it is better to leave the thesis undisturbed, in order to avoid this potentially disturbing amalgam of emotions.

Yet not so – it is surely a crucial element of the design of one's doctoral study to return to it seven years later with the benefit of hindsight and a fresh perspective, gleaned from subsequent researching and publishing, sometimes in very different fields of study. That return enables a kind of *ex post facto* interrogation of the effectiveness and utility of one's research design and by implication of one's development as a researcher.

Three caveats are important at this point, for all of which I am grateful to one of the anonymous peer referees of this paper. Firstly, I acknowledge that claims about one's research design being effective and useful need to be set beside an awareness of the

complex messiness of research quality (Denzin, 1997). Secondly, I do not see this kind of retrospective introspection as linear, straightforward or uncomplicatedly rational; instead it is as diffuse and messy as the rest of the phenomenon of doctoral research design. Thirdly, I am implicated in writing this reflective and reflexive text (Moss, 2005; Regelski, 2003; Shacklock & Smyth, 1998), not least because writing it necessarily involves a (re)construction of both the past and myself; while it might have some characteristics of a confessional tale (Lather, 1991), I have exercised authorial authority in the topics canvassed and in the degree to which I have engaged in confession. My voice is certainly the performer of this particular text.

Those caveats having been noted, this paper takes up what was intended to be a longer text that turned into no more than four paragraphs in the final, submitted version of my Doctor of Philosophy thesis (Danaher, 2001a). The paragraphs in question presented a necessarily selective reflection on the extent to which the design of the thesis had conformed with four "Writing Issues" identified by the qualitative researcher Norman Denzin (1994) as crucial to the process "of moving from field to text to reader" (p. 503): interpretation, representation, legitimation and desiring (see Holt [2003] for a somewhat different application of representation and legitimation). These issues can be understood as encapsulating the myriad complexities of designing educational research that various stakeholders might wish to be effective, efficient and/or equitable; certainly they require an ongoing attentiveness to the shifting and situated relationship between 'researcher' and 'researched' as that relationship frames iterative decision-making about research questions, methods of data gathering and analysis and design evaluation. More broadly, given that all doctoral designers must engage with the deceptively straightforward craft and techniques of writing, Denzin's framework is seen as one among several potentially fruitful lenses for exploring in somewhat greater depth the writing dimension of being such a designer.

After presenting a brief overview of the research project underpinning the thesis, the paper engages in turn with each of Denzin's (1994) "Writing Issues" as a conceptual lens for examining what was stated at the time as being intended, as well as what emerged subsequently, in relation to the design and writing of the doctoral research. The paper concludes by eliciting some of the particular challenges and opportunities entailed in designing doctoral educational research and links them with broader contemporary pressures and possibilities attending such research.

Researching the Education of Australian Show People

Since 1992, a research team of which I am a foundation member has conducted research into the educational aspirations and experiences of occupational Travellers – of those people whose occupations require them to travel for part or all of the working year, often over extensive distances. The research began with Australian show or fairground people – the people who operate the 'joints' and 'rides' that constitute 'sideshow alley' in metropolitan and regional cities and small country towns. This resulted in the publication of an edited book (Danaher, 1998) and a number of journal articles (see for example Danaher & Danaher, 2000; Danaher, 1995, 2001b) as well as the submission of my Doctor of Philosophy thesis (Danaher, 2001a). Subsequent phases of the research included a focus on Australian circus people and links with international researchers in Traveller and nomadic education, including in western Europe and Venezuela (see for example Anteliz, Danaher & Danaher, 2001, 2004; Danaher & Danaher, 1999, 2000; Danaher, 2000b; Danaher, Moriarty & Hallinan,

2000). Most recently the research team returned to interact with the show people after a gap of seven years, resulting in further publications, some of them co-authored with the principal of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (see for example Danaher, Danaher & Moriarty, 2007; Danaher, Moriarty & Danaher, 2004, 2006; Fullerton, Danaher, Moriarty & Danaher, 2004).

While my colleagues and I have deployed numerous conceptual and methodological resources to examine the education of Australian show people and other mobile communities, each of us has developed a specific set of lenses derived from that person's autobiography as person, learner, educator and researcher (see also Danaher, Moriarty & Danaher, 2006; Hallinan, Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher, 2001; Moriarty, Hallinan, Danaher & Danaher, 2000). In my case, I have been particularly interested in how the education of show people encapsulates education's simultaneous capacity for transforming and replicating sociocultural marginalisation. Indeed, the three research questions, and hence the three data analysis chapters, organising the Doctor of Philosophy thesis explored respectively the show people's marginalisation, their resistance to that marginalisation (through the operation of a specialised program within the Brisbane School of Distance Education) and the transformation of that marginalisation and resistance (by means of the establishment of their own Queensland School for Travelling Show Children). The principal concepts framing this account were 'strategies of marginalisation' and 'tactics of resistance' (de Certeau, 1984) and 'outsidedness' and 'creative understanding' (Bakhtin, 1986).

That focus on educational marginalisation, resistance and transformation had a direct and continuing impact on the research design of my doctoral study. There were significant ethical and political issues arising from the construction of the show people as educationally and socioculturally marginalised, resulting in a number of potential dilemmas and uneasy tensions for them and for me. On the one hand, I needed to engage with the centuries-old stereotypes that have othered people who are itinerant (McVeigh, 1997) and with which educational systems have been complicit in constructing such people as 'deficit' and 'different' (see also Danaher, Coombes & Kiddle, 2007). On the other hand, I had to design the study in ways that avoided exoticising, essentialising and homogenising the show people, thereby replicating that same othering and marginalisation. This was by no means an easy task.

As the rest of the paper elaborates, one key site – or battleground – on which these dilemmas and tensions were played out was in the technologies and texts of the writing of the thesis. This is hardly surprising: after all, the final version of the thesis, in my case bound in two volumes in black with gold lettering, constitutes a publicly recognised and scholarly tome that sometimes elides the discursive dissonances (Harreveld, 2002) that competed for attention in the often torturous and tortured process of creating the thesis. As I explore below, this writing battleground revealed allies and combatants from unexpected quarters and led to a process for producing the 'provisionally final' thesis text that was also aligned with the design of the study framing that text. Thus both challenges and opportunities presented themselves and were engaged with – some more comprehensively and effectively than others.

Interpretation

According to Denzin (1994), "sense making" denotes "making decisions about what will be written about, what will be included, how it will be presented, and so on" (p.

503). Perhaps the most obvious basis for making these and related decisions is the study's research questions or hypothesis (depending on the paradigm in which the study is located), which function both to operationalise the research problem or topic under investigation and to underpin the processes of data collection and analysis. This is partly why refining the research questions is so crucial to the success of any educational study and why I encourage postgraduate students with whom I work to return regularly to their questions to see whether they still provide the most effective vehicle for planning and conducting the research.

In my case, guided by my supervisors, I structured the thesis so that each research question formed the basis of a single data analysis chapter. I also went through a couple of iterations of the study's research questions that constituted what at the time seemed to be a major shift in thinking but that in retrospect appears instead to have been a refining of the questions in the light of a sharpening of the focus of that thinking. The first set of questions was as follows:

- How do the show people construct their identities and those of others?
- How do the show people experience education?
- How do the show people's constructions of identity and educational experiences change and contribute to change?

The logic underpinning this list of questions was centred on the assumed and perceived relationships among the three underpinning core concepts framing the study:

- identity
- education
- change.

These questions also derived from and sought to operationalise the study's research problem, which had been articulated as "…what does the operation of a specialised education program developed by the Brisbane School of Distance Education for the travelling show children on the coastal and western Queensland circuits of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia reveal about broader current issues in Australian [T]raveller education?".

By the time of the submitted thesis, this research problem had been reformulated as follows:

> This thesis is concerned with marginalisation, and with the possibilities of resistance and transformation of that marginalisation, in the lives of the children of itinerant show families whose travels take them through coastal and western Queensland. More specifically, the problem with which the thesis engages is the ways in which educational provision for these children has been complicit with that marginalisation as well as being the site of alternative understandings about how Travellers can and should be educated. (Danaher, 2001a, p. 2)

The identification of the three core concepts framing the thesis had been altered to become:

- marginalisation
- resistance
- transformation. (Danaher, 2001a, p. 3)

Likewise the statement of the research questions had been revised and now read as:

- How do the show people experience marginalisation?
- How do the show people resist their marginalised status?
- How do the show people transform their marginalising experiences and resistant practices? (Danaher, 2001a, pp. 9-10)

Returning to these two sets of questions at least seven years later in the case of the second set and longer in the case of the first set, I see the first set as somewhat generalised and immature in the context of the doctoral journey and the second set as much more tightly focused and integrated. One factor in moving from the first to the second set was that in the interim I had written a lot more of the subsequent chapters, particularly the conceptual framework (which centred on marginalisation, resistance and transformation) and the early drafts of the data analysis chapters. Some researchers from the positivist paradigm would no doubt frown at the idea that data analysis would influence the statement of research questions, presumably believing that this might in some way sully the purity of the questions and/or the validity and reliability of the data. By contrast, my supervisors and I saw the relationship among the various elements of the thesis – including research problem, research questions, research method/s and data collection and analysis – as integrated and iterative.

This is a major issue in designing doctoral educational research that links with Denzin's (1994) identification of interpretation or "sense making" as the first key element "of moving from field to text to reader" (p. 503). To put it baldly, my engagement with this element is concentrated on justifying how I avoided the risk that positivists might ascribe to this situation of feeling compelled to collect and analyse the data in my study in ways that found evidence of marginalisation, resistance and transformation, given that these three concepts were so clearly evident in my articulation of the study's research problem, research questions and data analysis chapters.

Such a justification is both central and crucial to ensuring that the study conformed to appropriate standards of doctoral research on the one hand and to the ethical and political requirements of writing about a community that is positioned by many as a 'marginal group' on the other. In terms of the appropriate standards, my supervisors and I worked hard to ensure that the final version of the research questions provided a framework for analysing and reporting selected data and for ensuring that those data were as comprehensive and representative as possible of the data set collected for the study. The data analysis chapters were focused on establishing and demonstrating links among the participants' words, the research questions and the literature review and conceptual framework chapters in the thesis. My approach to interpretation was therefore directed at reflecting on these links, testing them for their relevance and resilience and locating them squarely in the *mélange* or melting pot that was the thesis writing.

With regard to the ethical and political requirements, I was acutely conscious that there are significant conceptual and methodological risks associated with conducting research with, and writing about, communities that consider themselves and/or are positioned by others as 'marginal' or 'marginalised' (Danaher, 2000a). Indeed, the point that none of the respondents used the words 'marginalisation', 'resistance' and 'transformation' of their own accord in talking about living and learning on the show

circuits should give educational researchers – myself included – pause. On the one hand, researchers who use concepts gleaned from the relevant literature to interpret the worlds and worldviews of the groups with whom they conduct research might be accused of putting words in those people's mouths. On the other hand, and by contrast, applying theory effectively can be very powerful in making the invisible visible and in holding up to scrutiny and critique social forces that are not necessarily tangible but that are nevertheless often enduringly influential (Coombes & Danaher, 2001, p. 117).

From the discussion in this section it emerges that my response to Denzin's (1994) focus on interpretation as "sense making" and as "making decisions about what will be written about, what will be included, how it will be presented, and so on" (p. 503) is therefore that the research questions – in their final version and functioning simultaneously to operationalise the research problem and to provide a bridge among key elements of the research design – provided the framework for that decision-making. At the same time, I have sought to highlight the provisional and at times tentative character of the posing of those questions and hence of the decision-making related to interpretation deployed in the study. As one of Denzin's "Writing Issues", interpretation is subject to ongoing reflection and review – both at the time and subsequently.

Representation

Denzin's (1994) assertions that "representation, of course, is always self-representation" and that "the Other who is presented in the text is always a version of the researcher's self" (p. 503) are important considerations for most doctoral designers. Likewise "representation is always interpretation" (Robyn Henderson, personal communication, 3 September 2007), suggesting that the distinction between Denzin's first two "Writing Issues" of interpretation and representation is not necessarily easy to make in practice. Far from enhancing my authorial ego, these considerations remind me of the restrictions on me in representing both myself and others and of my limitations as a writer. In the particular case of writing about a community traditionally positioned as "the Other" in relation to settled residents, this potential crisis of representation is exacerbated. In this context, the United States feminist researcher Patti Lather's (1992) call for "…the creation of a more humble scholarship capable of helping us to tell better stories about a world marked by the elusiveness with which it greets our efforts to know it" (p. 95) functions as both a reminder of the potential crisis and a possible means of engaging with it. Perhaps even more evocative are the African-American feminist bell hooks's (1990, p. 343) assertion that "I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'other,' to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference" and her articulation of the representational trap awaiting (un)wary educational researchers, whereby "Often this speech about the 'other' annihilates, erases":

> *No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority, I am still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk.* (*emphasis in original*)

I provide here two specific instances of how this representational trap revealed itself in my doctoral thesis. The first of these was the pervasive recourse to that homogenising and totalising phrase "the show people" when describing this community's educational experiences and aspirations. There were several, probably legitimate, methodological reasons for this recourse, including the textual convenience of this form of representational shorthand, my interest as a qualitative researcher in identifying patterns linking common elements of individuals' worldviews and my commitment to minimising the prospect of individual interviewees being identifiable on the basis of my presentation of their data. Nevertheless the ubiquitous repetition of "the show people" constituted a disturbing parallel with settled residents assigning to the community the epithet "showies", which was often used (sometimes consciously) as a vehicle for marginalisation and othering.

The second instance of the representational trap identified by hooks (1990) occurred in the period after the examiners' reports about the thesis had been received and when I was revising the text for binding and formal submission. I had become concerned that one potential implication of ethical concerns not to identify participants was a (presumably unintended) silencing of their voices through a process of de-identification or not naming them. One or two colleagues expressed disquiet when I told them of my intention to list every participant's name in the acknowledgments section of the final version of the thesis. After considerable thought and consultation with my supervisors, I elected to list the participants' names. Partly I made this decision on the basis that if I had been interviewed for a study the first page that I would look at in the published report of the study would be the acknowledgments page to see if my name had been included. More importantly, listing the participants' names was intended to thank them for their participation and to acknowledge their separate and shared commitment to enhancing their community's educational access and prospects. At the same time, I recognise that some community members might prefer their names not to be listed at all, while others might not share my concern about their potential textual anonymisation. I listed the participants' names without contacting them and seeking their explicit approval to do so, owing largely to the difficulty of contacting people from a mobile community who in some cases had been interviewed by me several years previously. I realise the ethical risk in this action but on balance consider that it was the appropriate way of dealing with the situation.

Denzin's (1994) other point about representation was that "…even when we allow the other to speak, where we talk about or for them, we are talking over their voice" (p. 503). His recommended solution to this representational problem was that "a multivoiced as opposed to a single-voiced text can partially overcome this issue…" (p. 503). Ironically this recommendation was based on an appeal to Bakhtin (1986) – ironically because an earlier version of the thesis had used Bakhtin's distinction between monological and dialogical texts as a basis for data analysis until one of my supervisors pointed out that I lacked sufficient evidence to support that particular argument. More broadly, while I remain committed to the texts that I write opening up rather than closing down discussion and dialogue, I am aware of the textual difficulties in doing so – partly through my own writing style (which others and I often find complex and potentially disengaging) and partly through the generic structures of academic writing. Like interpretation, then, representation emerges as

simultaneously a goal and a trap, with significant influence on but no easy answers for designing doctoral research.

Legitimation

The legitimation of the work of doctoral designers is framed by the research paradigm/s within which they operate. Thus, while Denzin (1994) referred to "legitimation" in the context of "traditional foundationalist topics such as reliability, validity, and generalizability" (p. 503), I preferred to appeal to the term 'trustworthiness' as a criterion for evaluating the study's credibility and rigour and its intended contribution to methodological knowledge. See Harreveld (2002, pp. 193-199) for what I regard as an exemplary application to her doctoral research design of the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability that are more commonly associated with qualitative educational research located within interpretivist and poststructuralist paradigms.

An important methodological and temperamental implication of that stance is that I need to feel comfortable with the proposition that a different researcher conducting a similar investigation would collect and analyse data in potentially very different ways, with different outcomes and effects from those of my thesis. One of the several benefits arising from that thesis's location in a broader, long running research project has been numerous unplanned opportunities for informal, even implicit, testing out of my analysis against the mostly convergent but sometimes divergent views of my fellow researchers. Since the project began in 1991, this informal approach to legitimation has extended to the collaborations noted above with other researchers into educational mobility working in Australia and several other countries, ensuring that my ideas about the character and significance of that mobility are open to continuing challenge and hopefully refinement and development.

Of course the criteria liable to be applied to legitimation vary according to the interests and concerns of those conducting the legitimation. For example, for fellow researchers, claims to trustworthiness will probably depend on establishing and referring to audit trails, or records of how the researcher collected data and then identified, tested and applied categories to analyse those data. By contrast, participants in the study and other members of the show community are much more likely to be interested in whether the claims made by the researcher 'make sense' in relation to their understandings of their own lived experiences. Even if the findings challenge those understandings, they have a greater prospect of being accepted if they are believed to derive from the researcher's fundamental empathy with the community. In the case of the wider project of which this thesis formed a part, my colleagues and I know that our publications have been read by the principal of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (who has co-authored some of our most recent publications) and by our chief contact person with the circus community. On the other hand, the show community trusted us sufficiently to invite me as a member of the research team to attend a key meeting with Education Queensland to contribute to lobbying for the show school's establishment. On this basis I find it easier to assert that my thesis was written principally 'about' and to a lesser extent 'for' the show people than that it was written 'to' or 'on behalf of' them. This position seeks to adhere to an ethically defensible position in relation to the writing while setting some hopefully sensible boundaries around the claims that I make and do not make with regard to that writing.

This intersection between legitimation and interests highlights the researcher's dual role. From one perspective, researchers must work hard to maximise the credibility, rigour and trustworthiness of their research on their own terms, operating according to the generally accepted mores of their respective disciplines and paradigms. From a very different perspective, researchers need to understand that their work is subject to adoption – even appropriation – by different stakeholders for varied purposes. Thus legitimation is both contextualised and contested, opening up the research to ongoing examination and critique. This is potentially uncomfortable for the researcher; at the same time, it helps to enhance the relevance and potential utility of the research.

Desiring

It is worthwhile citing in full the paragraph in my thesis related to desiring, not least because the ambivalence that I articulated then largely remains:

> Of the four *"Writing Issues"* identified by Denzin (1994), I am most ambivalent about *"Desire"*, which *"refers to the writing practices that field-workers deploy"* and that constitute *"The topic...*[of] *the pleasure of the text"* (p. 504). I agree that *"A vital text is not boring"*, that *"It grips the reader (and the writer)"* and that *"A vital text invites readers to engage the author's subject matter"* (p. 504). However, I disagree with the implicit reduction of *"The postmodern sensibility* [that] *encourages writers to put themselves into their texts"* (p. 504) to whether the writer writes engaging or boring text. Surely *"desire"* transcends this rather banal indicator to go to the heart of the writer's and the reader's subjectivities as informed and stimulated by the text's subject matter. This is why attending to the ethics and politics of conducting and reporting research is so vitally important: to use the juxtaposition of pronouns that I seek to disrupt, this study is intended to engage with how 'I', 'you' and 'they' understand the world, our respective places in it and our aspirations for strengthening and/or changing those places. (Danaher, 2001a, p. 206; *emphasis in original*)

Seven years later I acknowledge that this position reads rather defensively, as though I felt that my thesis was more likely to be considered "boring" than "vital". Assuredly I continue to adhere to the position of writing as an ethical and political activity and as being inseparable from the ethics and politics of the study's research design as a whole. Yet perhaps I gave rather shorter shrift to "desire" then than if I were writing this section of the thesis now. Certainly I have become more interested in academic writing as a craft and in its capacity both to convey and to conceal multiple meanings. While I do not find the experience of writing easy, I find it enjoyable, for example at the same time delighting in and deploring the alliterative addiction displayed in this and the preceding sentences. Likewise as an editor I am sometimes critical of authors' writing styles, particularly if they are anodyne, obfuscatory and/or pretentious (while recognising that those same temptations lurk within my own writing). Yet there is a risk here of enjoying writing for its own sake, thereby downplaying one's responsibility to contribute to several different types of forms of knowledge.

Similarly, I see a potential contradiction between this interest in academic writing and working on other fronts to disseminate one's research findings as widely as possible. I respect and envy those academics who demonstrate facility at writing across multiple genres, from academic journals to professional publications to policy reports to

submissions to government and other decision-making bodies to informal texts presented at meetings of stakeholders. For most of us, it takes considerable time to hone these writing skills across these multiple fronts and formats, time that is less likely to be expended in a context where pressures on academics in relation to publishing are more likely to be concentrated on academic journals and research books. From this perspective, desiring as a writing issue emerges as a key element in the motivations and aspirations framing academics' subjectivities and influencing how they wish to position themselves and the extent to which they are enabled and/or restricted to do so.

More broadly, desiring is potentially much more than enjoyment of the pleasures of the text and can intersect with the researcher's multiple subjectivities (Robyn Henderson, personal communication, 3 September 2007). Desiring can also be seen as an axiological position, as a perspective on what is valuable and valued (Jennifer Parker, personal communication, 3 September 2007). This suggests that desiring encapsulates the researcher's stance as interested participant in the research. This stance can include an intellectual curiosity fuelling the research project, an aesthetic sensibility driving the writing about that project, an ethical standpoint in relation to using the research to 'make a difference' and the self-interested ambition to employ the research as part of the researcher's career progression and scholarly reputation. These are all legitimate aspirations that can also potentially be pathologised in different ways; they therefore pay careful and ongoing attention and reflexivity.

Conclusion: Implications for Designing and Writing Doctoral Research

This paper has used Denzin's (1994) identification of four "Writing Issues" to interrogate the process "of moving from field to text to reader" (p. 503) in the author's designing, conducting and writing about a research project focused on the educational experiences and aspirations of Australian show people. Those four issues – interpretation, representation, legitimation and desiring – are important in their own right. They are also useful guides for designing doctoral educational research in ways that maximise the legitimacy, trustworthiness and utility of that research.

In particular, three challenges and opportunities have emerged from the research project discussed here that also resonate with wider contemporary pressures and possibilities attending doctoral research in education. Firstly, academic writing is far more than a technical skill; it is underpinned by ethical decision-making about inclusion and exclusion, representation and meaning-making, and it also has considerable potential power in constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing the meanings ascribed to research participants' and researchers' actions and utterances.

Secondly, and relatedly, it is not appropriate to conceive of academic writing as being conducted in a relational vacuum or in a privileged space for the author. On the contrary, the writing of an academic text bears the traces of the relationships forged before, during and sometimes after the research, and those relationships bring with them several commitments and responsibilities. Or to return to the metaphor evoked earlier in the paper, textual writing highlights the struggles for meaning and understanding and the conflicts occasioned by competing pressures from multiple

stakeholders and gatekeepers that constitute the battleground of the research project, of which writing the doctoral thesis is one corner or field.

Thirdly, it follows that writing the doctoral thesis should be as subject to design – to careful planning, to considered decision-making, to ongoing reflection and evaluation about its power and utility – as any other part of the research process. Accordingly doctoral designers need to be writing craftspersons, using textual creation and shaping to communicate and contest meanings and to challenge and contribute to existing knowledge.

Denzin's (1994) four "Writing Issues" therefore exhibit considerable merit in framing interrogations of the effects and effectiveness of academic writing for doctoral designers. Each issue encapsulates a number of potentially significant challenges and opportunities that link with broader pressures and possibilities in contemporary doctoral educational research. Or, as I noted seven years ago:

> If the primary impressions conveyed by my discussion of the issues associated with writing about my research project are ambivalence and tentativeness, I shall have succeeded in my aim of emphasising the ethical and political dimensions of this crucial element of the study….At the same time, these principles underpinning the design of this study clearly resonate with broader issues in contemporary theorising around the conduct of research, as well as with more traditional debates in educational research. (Danaher, 2001a, pp. 206-207)

Acknowledgments

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