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The Failure of Dissertation Advice Books: Toward Alternative Pedagogies for Doctoral Writing

Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson

Anxious doctoral researchers can now call on a proliferation of advice books telling them how to produce their dissertations. This article analyzes some characteristics of this self-help genre, including the ways it produces an expert–novice relationship with readers, reduces dissertation writing to a series of linear steps, reveals hidden rules, and asserts a mix of certainty and fear to position readers “correctly.” The authors argue for a more complex view of doctoral writing both as text work/identity work and as a discursive social practice. They reject transmission pedagogies that normalize the power-saturated relations of protégé and master and point to alternate pedagogical approaches that position doctoral researchers as colleagues engaged in a shared, unequal, and changing practice.

Keywords: higher education; supervision; writing

Doctoral researchers can now call on a range of books that offer advice on each and every stage of their research—“from the moment you type your first word to when you walk into the viva voce examination to defend the completed work” (Oliver, 2004, p. 3). The proliferation of such books not only reflects the astute marketing strategies of publishers that have been quick to see profit in do-it-yourself (DIY) supervision materials, but also taps into the real anxieties of doctoral students.

There is no doubt that doctoral research is a complex and challenging undertaking and that students do need support and guidance throughout the process. It is also true that input from doctoral advisors and committees¹ can be usefully supplemented through formal courses; informal peer practices; and well-written, well-theorized books. Our concern, however, is about some of the advice that is on offer and the possible negative effects it may have on students and on the broader scholarly enterprise.

As part of ongoing work on doctoral education (Kamler & Thomson, 2004, 2006, 2007), we surveyed advice books. We initially looked at what was available for purchase from one online bookseller. Most titles were directly addressed to students. We then went to a university library and found 10 shelves devoted to aspects of university teaching and learning, the vast majority of which were in the form of DIY guides and advice books, again for

students. Although reading these apparently helpful volumes has not been a uniformly rewarding experience, we were struck by a number of common patterns that emerged across texts.

In this article, we examine the doctoral dissertation advice books as a genre with patterned characteristics and recognizable textual features. We argue that, regardless of the utility of the advice given, the discourse of the novice and the expert through which these texts are written works to position the doctoral researcher as a diminished scholar and to constitute a transmission pedagogy that normalizes the power-saturated relations of protégé and master. The texts also offer a rigid model of the dissertation that follows a set format and style. We question the pedagogical and political implications of such advice and point to alternate texts that make important moves away from the pervasive advice genre. We see our analysis as part of an ongoing conversation about doctoral writing that moves beyond a focus on tools and techniques to the discursive practices of becoming a scholar (cf. Klingner, Scanlon, & Pressley, 2005; Rose & McClafferty, 2001).

A Conceptual Framework for Doctoral Writing

Writing the dissertation lies at the center of doctoral education. It is through writing that students make their findings known to the public and develop a sense of themselves as authorized scholars in their fields of practice (Wisker, 2008). Yet too often doctoral writing is treated as separate from and ancillary to the real work of research (Murray & Moore, 2006). Graduate students are rarely offered systematic instruction in high-level academic writing (Rose & McClafferty, 2001), and when support is given, the profound interrelationships between writing and identity are often misunderstood (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). Academic writing is treated as a discrete set of technical skills that are effectively context free.

There is a burgeoning literature on doctoral pedagogies, supervision, and examination (e.g., Bartlett & Mercer, 2001; Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 1997), but little attention has been given in this work to the processes of writing the thesis, through which scholarly identities are formed and reconfigured. There is also a rich research tradition that examines academic writing as a discipline-specific practice: studies that explore rhetorical differences across academic disciplines (e.g., Bazerman, 1988) and the way graduate students learn to appropriate discourse conventions in disciplinary communities (Berkenkotter &

Huckin, 1995; Paré, 2002; Prior, 1998). However, this research rarely addresses the doctoral arena. Unfortunately, many of the texts that most directly address questions of doctoral writing are written in the untheorized self-help, advice genre.

The lack of scholarly attention given to doctoral writing has been a concern of ours for some time. In 2006 and 2007, we led two international symposia at the American Educational Research Association annual conferences to promote conversation about the practices and pedagogies of doctoral writing. Our approach has been to examine thesis writing in the pedagogical space of supervision, treating doctoral writing as research (Richardson, 1994) and as a complex, institutionally constrained social practice. We pay attention to the genres and conventions of scholarly writing and to creating more sophisticated pedagogies to support writing.

Unlike the advice genre, we argue that, rather than a set of rules and default structures, doctoral writing is best understood as *text work/identity work*. By this we mean that texts and identities are formed together, in, and through writing. The practices of doctoral writing simultaneously produce not only a dissertation but also a doctoral scholar.

In the academic world, texts and their authors are inseparable. Research as a public and documented inquiry is communicated through texts that are an extension of the scholar and her or his scholarship. Texts literally put the self and the work in the public domain to be judged by expert others, and this can be high-stakes, high-anxiety text work. Doctoral students fret about whether they are interesting or persuasive; they fear that they will not make a contribution to knowledge. They carry the weight of that expectation with them most of the time.

Not surprisingly, these stressors often surface in student writing but are frequently misunderstood as *poor writing* when what is at stake is the difficulty of writing as an authority when one does not feel authoritative. So, for example, when students write literature reviews, they may describe, rather than evaluate, the work of expert scholars; they mask their own opinions and arguments with layers of *who said what about what and with what effects*, because they lack confidence and are afraid of taking a stand. Giving them advice and rules will not help in such situations because writing the dissertation involves the mutual tasks of both becoming and belonging (cf Mcleod & Yates, 2006).

We also argue that scholarly writing can be productively understood as a discursive social practice embedded in a tangle of cultural, historical practices that are both institutional and disciplinary. We adopt Fairclough's (1992) three-tiered model of discourse to develop a model of thesis writing that is shaped "not only by the local circumstances in which students are writing, but by the social, cultural and political climate within which the thesis is produced" (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p. 11). This model makes visible the complex ways in which student writing is shaped by discipline-specific conventions and protocols; by conversations with advisors who literally embody the discipline and institution; and by prevailing higher education policy regimes that shape university cultures and delimit what can be researched, discussed, and written about in doctoral texts.

Such discursive constraints take time for doctoral writers to understand. Explicit attention to constraints can be very helpful,

but this is quite different from suggesting, as the advice genre does, that the task of doctoral writing is simply a matter of individual students controlling the dissertation structure and acquiring the mechanics of writing a proposal, reviewing literature, and plodding mechanistically through a default menu of chapters.

The Doctoral Advice Book as Genre

In conducting a genre analysis of the doctoral advice book, we adopted two approaches: The first is to mobilize the broader work on the DIY genre, the self-help manual, that is ubiquitous in high modernity, and the second is to utilize theories of genre that attend more closely to the textual dynamics of scholarly communities. We target the advice texts (rather than the writers who produce them) in a collegial spirit,² to reveal the power of genre to shape ways of making meaning, often with unintended effects on doctoral researchers.

Giddens (1991) has argued that, as traditional forms of authority are undermined, all of us must become self-managing and reflexive. He suggests that this requirement has been serviced by the growth of self-help organizations and the production of self-help manuals. Although some self-help organizations have a political intent and work to change the social structures, organizations, policies, and procedures that fail particular groups of people, many of these organizations do not have this same intent. Rather, they offer support groups and 12-step programs that are individual in their foci and thus limited in their social and cultural effects. They ameliorate symptoms rather than change causalities (Fraser, 1997).

What such advice books offer, according to Hochschild (2003), is motivational rhetoric that hitches personal "investment strategies to inspirational ideas and images" (p. 15). Her examination of the cultural reception of women's advice books in the United States and Japan identifies four discrete moves in women's advice books, where the author

1. establishes a "tone of voice" and "relationship to the reader";
2. didactically describes a moral/social reality and reveals its hidden "rules";
3. describes concrete practices that help the reader follow the rules; and
4. tells exemplary and cautionary stories that offer emotionally charged, metaphorically rich moments. (Hochschild, 2003, adapted from pp. 15–16)

Recent advice books, Hochschild (2003) suggests, show a "cooling" (p. 16) of the genre; they are more open and equal in their communications, but in their profoundly individualist focus, they undermine rich social bonds and solidarities. Simonds (1992) makes a similar case, suggesting that advice texts deflect attention away from problems in the public sphere and thus privatize problems.

These arguments present food for thought in relation to the doctoral texts that are purchased in increasing numbers by students. Are they *just* advice, as they suggest, or are they part of the broader self-help movement that masks the ways in which doctoral education has been subject to the work intensification and performativity regimes of universities?³ Are our students now buying

books because their advisors have less time and are more focused on doctoral completion rates? And do these books bolster taken-for-granted forms of writing and pedagogical relationships?

Our analysis also calls on genre theories that understand *genre* as a recognizable form of text that is shaped by social and cultural processes. Genres are formed out of the dynamics of social interaction; they are the result of processes of social production that attain a degree of stability and persistence over time (Kress, 1993). Thus when we analyze texts in their generic forms, we are not simply looking at isolated instances of text but also at broader social practices that form and maintain them. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) argue that, as people use genres, they both constitute and reproduce particular social structures. Furthermore, a genre's conventions reveal much about the norms and ideologies of a discourse community.

From this perspective, genres, such as the advice book, are never simply neutral texts that can be separated from the social processes of how we educate doctoral scholars. They can tell us much about dominant understandings of academic writing, and they are important to deconstruct if we wish to develop well-theorized pedagogies of writing that benefit our doctoral students. In what follows, we clarify our sampling procedure and the questions that guided our analysis before identifying four recognizable patterns that characterize the doctoral advice genre.

An Analysis of DIY Doctorate Texts

Our analysis focused on texts that are directed toward doctoral candidates and how they might construct the dissertation text. We made a selection of 25 titles that appeared as bestsellers in listings from a popular online bookseller and were also available to students in our two university libraries; we subjected these texts to a content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Nueuendorf, 2002). We developed a variation of the well-known formulation *who says what, to whom, about what, to what extent, and with what possible effects?* (Kamler, 2001; Silverman, 1993). This is a comparatively straightforward approach but sufficient for our purposes in showing dominant discourses operating in the advice book genre.

We asked the following questions:

- What message does the external appearance convey?
- What meanings are highlighted in titles and tables of contents?
- What are the textual moves, and how are these staged across the text?
- What substantive meanings are foregrounded?
- Which meanings are backgrounded or omitted?
- How are metaphors used to frame doctoral writing?
- How are interpersonal meanings developed (e.g., through modality, use of personal pronouns, verbs, and mood)?

Our analytic procedure was to divide the corpus of 25 texts in two. We each examined titles, subheadings, and general themes in each chapter. These were compiled to conduct an analysis of their meanings. We then plotted these analyses onto a mutually agreed-on table that was constructed using the questions listed above. We then exchanged texts and reanalyzed the data. Together, we then grouped and categorized our analyses, debating the

patterns and inconsistencies. This process allowed us to examine how the identified structural and linguistic characteristics positioned the doctoral reader. We then compared these with the four moves (outlined earlier) described by Hochschild (2003). It is these patterns we discuss here.

We found that most of the texts feature traditional covers with solid colors and sensible lettering, but a handful convert their rhetoric into dramatic visual metaphors, for example, a redemptive prophet surveying the world from a mountain top (Roberts, 2004) or a beckoning rope boardwalk suspended through jungle treetops (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Titles almost always hold out the hope of success, employment, or quick and painless approaches to writing. They also profess winning tactics in the doctoral game that are comprehensive, universal, and fail-safe (see Table 1 for examples).

A common metaphor is survival, together with the metaphor of a journey. The repeated use of the term *survival* (Gosling & Noordam, 2006; Rudestam & Newton, 2001; Sternberg, 1981), with its connotations of Darwinian jungles and adaptation or death, is often combined with the notion of the wise and knowing guide who will ensure safe passage through the wilds of academe. One title offers reassurance to the point where the text itself can be seen to replace the sentient advisor altogether, as in the *portable* advisor (Bryant, 2003) that is available on call every day and every night, unlike its human equivalent.

Inside the covers, we found four recognizable textual moves that parallel the moves in the women's advice texts analyzed by Hochschild (2003): (a) An expert–novice relationship is produced and reproduced, (b) the process of writing a dissertation is simplified to a series of linear steps, (c) writing advice is packaged as a set of overgeneralized rules, and (d) the texts are emphatic and offer a paradox of reassurance and fear. We now discuss each in turn.

An Expert–Novice Relationship Is Produced and Reproduced

Writers of the doctoral advice genre establish a relationship with their readers by positioning the doctoral researcher as a novice (Hochschild's first move). This positioning is accomplished through a number of strategies, the most ubiquitous of which is to write in the second person. The direct "you" address to the reader evokes the culturally familiar instructional genre. Instructional genres are organized to tell the reader exactly what to do or how to behave in order to achieve a specified goal. Although appropriate for recipes or home fix-it manuals, we question the reductive consequences of mobilizing this generic structure for thesis writing, as in this example:

It is essential that you structure your thesis or report in such a way that you take the reader from the aims to the conclusions in the clearest possible way. I shall now lay out the essential features of this structure—a recipe if you like, for making the cake and baking it. (Evans, 1995, p. 3)

Addressing the reader directly also activates imperative verb forms and modal adjectives (such as *must* or *should*) that command the reader to act in specified ways. Such grammatical forms create a syntactic positioning that constructs the student

Table 1
The Most Popular Titles on Doctoral Thesis Writing

<i>Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis</i> (Bolker, 1998)
<i>Completing Your Doctoral Dissertation or Master's Thesis in Two Semesters or Less</i> (Ogden, 1993)
<i>Mastering Your PhD: Survival and Success in the Doctoral Years and Beyond</i> (Gosling & Noordam, 2006)
<i>Dr, Dr, I Feel Like . . . Doing a PhD</i> (Russell, 2008)
<i>Winning the PhD Game: How to Get Into and Out of Graduate School With a PhD and a Job</i> (Moore, 1985)
<i>How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation</i> (Sternberg, 1981)
<i>Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process</i> (Rudestam & Newton, 2001)
<i>The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation</i> (Roberts, 2004)
<i>The Portable Dissertation Advisor</i> (Bryant, 2003)
<i>Your PhD Companion: A Handy Mix of Practical Tips, Good Advice and Helpful Commentary to See You Through Your PhD</i> (Marshall & Green, 2006)
<i>Writing Your Doctoral Dissertation: Invisible Rules for Success</i> (Brause, 2000)

Note. These are 11 of the most popular titles, out of a total of 4,594, from a search of the term *doctoral thesis writing* on Amazon.co.uk (June 29, 2008).

as the one-who-carries-out-orders from those-who-know. An unmodified use of the second person address ensures that the authority of the writer/professor is maintained throughout the text, as it invites no dialogue, reflection, or answering back.

This positioning is compounded by a second strategy, common to most advice books, where the writer/professor makes her or his claim to speak with authority (Hochschild's second move, constructing a didactic moral reality). Although it is not unusual for academic writers to devote time in the preface or introduction to establish their credibility, the claim in advice books more often rests on status rather than scholarship. Some authors do reference research about supervision to establish their authority (e.g., Mauch & Park, 2003), but most simply assert the vast experience they have as advisors and/or instructors of doctoral research and writing courses. Although it would be unacceptable to make scholarship claims on such testimonial assertion—as in *Trust me, I've been researching for over 20 years*—the advice genre allows it. Consequently, the knowledge that students already possess is unrecognized and negated. The rhetorically constructed “wise old academic” and “fledgling researcher” are firmly ensconced in their traditional hierarchical positions.

The Process of Writing a Dissertation Is Simplified to a Series of Linear Steps

The doctoral advice genre adopts the third move identified by Hochschild (2003), that of revealing hidden rules and offering concrete steps for readers to follow. Many advice books package their contents as a series of defined, linear steps. These steps operate at a number of different levels in the texts surveyed, as is evident from an analysis of their tables of contents. The majority highlight an orthodox plan of organization and sequential ordering of seven to eight chapters, presumably to make the process of writing seem manageable.

Some books focus on the institutional hurdles that students need to pass through to get the thesis through the system. These are often represented as distinct stages, to be dealt with in order to move onto the next stage:

- 3: Developing the proposal
- 4: Preparation of the proposal
- 5: The thesis or dissertation committee

- 6: Approval of the overview
- 7: Conduct of the study
- 8: Writing the manuscript
- 9: Defense of the thesis or dissertation (Mauch & Park, 2003, pp. x–xi)

This kind of step-by-step approach may give some sense of security, but it also constructs an oversimplified understanding of what is actually at stake in the often messy, unanticipated experience of conducting research and writing a dissertation. The illusory notion is created that if the stages are completed, the task will be fulfilled.

The linearity implied in step-by-step progressions is expressed in other ways besides the structural organization of the text. It is common, for example, for writers to talk about writing the dissertation as a journey, a metaphor that implies a progression from one fixed point to the other. This journey can be relatively straightforward and linear, but at times it is more like de Certeau's (1988) wandering through the city or Benjamin's (2002) flaneur strolling around to see what is on offer. This is not, however, the way advice writers generally portray the dissertation process.

One guide (Steane, 2004), for example, portrays the process of reviewing literature as a simple journey, where student travelers need only make a limited set of choices in order to reach their destination. They are warned of the dangers of getting lost but are sent out into uncharted waters with no map. How do they decide which streams or roads are worth exploring and which are not? How might they avoid being swept off course or getting lost in unexpected bends along the way? Little real guidance is offered, and in its place is a travel metaphor that makes sense only after students are fully familiar with the landscape.

Writing Advice Is Packaged as a Set of Overgeneralized Rules

Many of the advice texts offer rules about writing that look self-evident and give a sense of certainty. On closer inspection, it is actually quite difficult to know what to do or how to operationalize these rules. Often, rules are offered as a checklist of items to be followed without question. Here, for example, is a prescription for writing the “mature scholarly sentence” (Glatthorn, 1998, p. 117):

1. Combine shorter sentences. . . . 2. Put the main idea in the main clause. . . . 3. Reduce the numbers of ands. . . . 4. Achieve an effect of clarity and directness by expressing the main action of the sentence in the verb and the main doer of the action (the agent) in the subject. . . . 5. Avoid inserting long modifiers between the subject and the verb. . . . 6. Avoid using subordinate clauses that modify other subordinate clauses. . . . 7. Place modifiers so that they clearly modify what you intend them to modify. . . . 8. Avoid excessive use of the passive voice. . . . 9. Be consistent in matters of verb tense. (Glatthorn, 1998, pp. 117–119)

In this text, grammar is represented as a set of finite rules for fixing doctoral writing, but no guidance is offered about context, genre, or discipline. Of course, the final copy of the dissertation should be free of grammatical and spelling errors, but this does not mean that writing can be reduced to surface feature concerns. Functional grammars, as opposed to punctuation guides, can, in our experience, be used as an excellent diagnostic tool for pinpointing problems with student writing. Functional grammars ask questions about how people use language and how language is organized to make meanings (Eggs, 2004). Functional grammars do not emphasize correct usage or formal rules but can support students, in conversation with supervisors, to diagnose writing problems and guide revisions (for explication, see Kamler & Thomson, 2006, chap. 7). Using functional grammars is not to be confused with following rules to avoid errors.

The tendency to frame every doctoral challenge as a problem that can be solved with a universalized solution is repeated over and over in the advice books. Here, for example, are guidelines for topic selection, a complex and significant part of doctoral candidature:

1) A topic needs to sustain your interest over a long period of time. . . . 2) . . . it is wise to avoid a topic that is overly ambitious and overly challenging. . . . 3) . . . avoid topics that may be linked too closely with emotional issues in your own life. . . . 4) a related issue is selecting a topic in which you have a personal axe to grind. . . . 5) you need to select a topic that has the potential for you to make an original contribution to knowledge. (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, pp. 10–11)

As in the previous example, attention is given to what to avoid at the expense of what to do.

Such advice, as Piantanida and Garman (1999) argue, tends to “focus attention outward, suggesting that topics can be stumbled across or selected from an existing buffet of options” (p. 19). As such, poor advice does a disservice to students while positioning them as obedient rule followers.

The Texts Are Emphatic and Offer a Paradox of Reassurance and Fear

A further characteristic of many advice texts is that they assert certainty and brook little complexity. A sense of assuredness is accomplished through a variety of linguistic resources, such as the use of unambiguous adjectives, like *thorough*, *full*, *complete*, *systematic*, *total*, and *unambiguous*, particularly when writing about the research process. The titles of some texts profess a definitive answer—a *guide*, a *primer*, a *handbook*—whereas a

sense of unequivocalty is emphasized through the use of phrases such as *it is important* and *it is vital*. Even when writers recognize that there are no set rules and that the doctoral writer must exercise judgment, they still revert to a form of discussion that limits choices to the ones they specify. Oliver (2004), considering the use of quotations in doctoral theses, states, “There cannot be, of course, a precise formulaic answer to this question. . . . Perhaps as a very approximate rule of thumb, the quotation on a typical page should not exceed about one third of the total lines” (p. 83). The use of quotations is not, as suggested here, simply a matter of how many quotations and how much space. Doctoral writers need to consider the purpose for using quotations and the way that direct quotes might further their own arguments. When students proliferate multiple quotations, this can often be traced to their difficulties in taking an authoritative yet critical stance in their fields. The complexities involved in using literatures and in mobilizing them to argue for the study or for particular interpretations of findings (see Kamler & Thomson, 2006) are profoundly misrepresented in a technical rule-of-thumb approach.

Although the advice texts attempt to meet and deflect students’ fears about the doctoral process, they work paradoxically both to assuage and to heighten students’ anxieties. They promise relief from uncertainty but at the same time embroider their advice with “scary stories”—the equivalent of Hochschild’s fourth move, telling cautionary tales. There are stories of studies that go horribly wrong: a research instrument that is not piloted and produces no usable data or an introduction that is not revised after the findings have been completed. Mauch and Park (2003) illustrate both the emphatic tone and the use of implied doom that will ensue from failing to follow their instructions:

The care one should give to the selection of an advisor cannot be overestimated. A mistake here could lead to disaster. Yet, students, perhaps, find themselves in a complex academic and social situation with little experience to guide them. (p. 36)

In sum, we suggest that more than advice is at work in the doctoral advice genre. As educators, we understand that these textual moves and linguistic resources work together to construct a transmission pedagogy, where the student as *tabula rasa* is positioned to accept the accumulated wisdom of her or his betters. This is particularly problematic when doctoral candidates are likely to be midcareer professionals with teaching experience and completed master’s degrees and, in the United States and United Kingdom, graduates of doctoral education courses. Urban myths about research and oversimplified rules and lists are no substitute for texts that position doctoral researchers as competent and active problem solvers operating at the highest level of scholarship.

Moving Away From the Advice Genre

Our analysis suggests that when the topic is the doctoral dissertation and writing, the advice genre is almost inevitably mobilized, calling into play habituated social processes and the expert–novice power relations that are too often the norm in many U.S., U.K., and Australian universities (Anderson & Herr, 1999). So dominant is this cultural form that those of us who seek to publish about doctoral pedagogies are often unintentionally tangled up

in the genre by publishers, by style manuals such as the American Psychological Association's,⁴ and by rhetorical conventions. The title of our own book, for example, *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision* (Kamler & Thomson, 2006), was a publisher's preference that positions our work within the commercial advice tradition, despite our conscious efforts to write outside it and theorize the labor and craft of doctoral writing.

Happily, a number of texts have recently made important moves away from the advice genre by foregrounding the discursive practices of doctoral writing and positioning students as knowledgeable scholars-in-the-making. Dunleavy (2003) takes a different stance toward student writers; he mobilizes the notion of authoring to situate his approach to doctoral writing. What stands out is the more provisional nature of his text and mode of address:

For some readers, there is a risk that my suggestions may come across as overly slick or didactic, as if I am seeking to dictate what squads of PhD students should do. I am acutely aware that readers always will and always should construct their personalised versions of this text, adapting and domesticating what works for them, and setting to one side what does not fit. (p. xii)

Dunleavy does not offer one best model of the dissertation and therefore does not prescribe a set order of chapters that a thesis must follow. Instead, he discusses four patterns of explanation—*descriptive*, *analytic*, *argumentative*, and *matrix*—and differentiates these by discipline. He eschews simple rules and instead identifies, for example, four common failings in the way Ph.D. authors title the sections of their dissertation text: *nonsubstantive headings*, *integrative headings*, *inaccurate headings*, and *repetitive headings* (pp. 85–88). He then offers strategies students can use to examine critically the way they use headings. These create a diagnostic for students to use in the process of drafting and redrafting.

Other texts do emphasize research writing and explicate the kind of writing that researchers do. *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (Wolcott, 2001) is typical of the narratives produced by experienced researchers and attempts to make clear the processes that they use when writing. Again, the emphasis is on technique, so chapters focus on how to make a writing plan, the problems of sorting and organizing data, keeping track of references, making links to theory and method, revising and editing, and getting published. We recommend this book to students because it is an unpretentious demystification of some important technical aspects of the research writing process.

Some texts are situated in a wider context and provide students with the possibility of understanding the socially produced complexities of writing without simply reducing them to individual deficiencies. Becker (1986) addresses issues of writing in social science. He offers a frank discussion about the politics of academic work, including the difficulty of seeking feedback from colleagues with whom one is competing for reputation, promotion, and grants. He brings out into the open the vexed relationship between what he calls a “truly crazy style” of writing and issues of status and distinction endemic to higher education (Bourdieu, 1998):

If you want to convince yourself that the time and effort spent getting your degree are worth it, that you are changing in some way that will change your life, then you want to look different from everyone else, not the same. That accounts for a truly crazy style in which students repeat the worst stylistic excesses the journals contain, learn that the very excesses are what makes their work different from what every damn fool knows and says, write more articles like those they learn from, submit them to journals, whose editors publish them because nothing better is available . . . and thus provide the raw material for another generation to learn bad habits from. (Becker, 1986, p. 41)

Becker does not use the instructional *you* of the advice genre but the colloquial *you* that is characteristic of his vernacular style. He offers an insider critique of the makings of the scholarly persona and the ways it is institutionalized through structures such as journal publishing. Students who buy this book are provided with a set of intellectual resources that they can use to assert their authority. In interrogating the norms of scholarship, Becker gives students permission to question the unfamiliar and to determine their own responses to the status quo.

A similar kind of analysis is offered in Leonard's (2001) *A Woman's Guide to Doctoral Studies*. Although not writing about the dissertation, Leonard offers a collegial interpretation of the doctoral landscape that can be used by students to solve the inevitable problems. Her opening chapter on changes in higher education policies could equally be an introduction to a book on doctoral writing, as it makes visible the discourses, the relations of power, and the pressures on academic work that govern the work of doctoral study but may be unknown to students. Like Becker, Leonard takes discursive social practice seriously.

These four popular texts illustrate the directions we are advocating. They acknowledge doctoral researchers' existing and emerging expertise. They argue that good writing is necessarily a tentative and iterative process and that any recommendation or rule is not always appropriate in each and every circumstance. They also suggest that the simultaneous fears and reassurances experienced by doctoral researchers are constructed within wider cultural and institutional processes, not simply in advisory relationships.

Conclusion

Our focus has been on advice genres as a particular segment of the discursive practices that shape the doctoral experience. We have argued that advice books offer reductive tips and tricks, couched in a paternalistic, instructional style. They prescribe a structure for the dissertation and a set of linear rules to follow. This reinforces a habituated transmission pedagogy that ignores the knowledge and life experiences of doctoral researchers, while often failing to offer tangible strategies that address the complexities and anxieties they experience. We have suggested that the doctoral experience is better conceptualized both as text work/identity work and as a discursive social practice.

We gave illustrations of some texts that move away from the advice genre. Although they may share some textual characteristics—such as second-person address or a singular focus on the text—the crucial move they make is to recognize the experience, knowledge,

and expertise of doctoral students, offering them an intelligent set of resources that they can use to make decisions about their particular doctoral needs. These texts are situated within the institution and politics of the academy and recognize that the reader has agency. We also suggest (Kamler & Thomson, 2006) that it is important to offer students a practical, diagnostic tool kit that is not a set of rules but that illustrates and makes explicit what crafting a scholarly identity in and through text actually entails.

Although we have focused our discussion on the texts students may buy outside the advisor–advisee relationship, we believe there are synergies between this argument and the larger project of reinvigorating doctoral education and developing higher education pedagogies. Recent scholarship, for example, has focused on educating Ph.D. students as stewards of the discipline (Golde & Walker, 2006), building a critical pedagogy in higher education (Maclean, 2006), expanding students' research literacies (Green & Lee, 2008) and their graduate capabilities (Walker, 2005), and explicating new forms of doctorates (Herr & Anderson, 2005). These texts demonstrate less hubris on the part of experienced researchers as well as the recognition that advisors need to co-construct a different, writing-centered pedagogical relationship *with* students.

It is possible to ask whether we have overstated the damage doctoral advice books can cause, given that most students will not rely only on them for guidance and that the books' impact can be mediated when advisors remain the critical source of guidance. We do not know the impact of these texts; we simply know that they are popular and proliferating. Our purpose in this genre analysis has been to raise serious questions about the social practices in the academic discourse communities that allow advice texts to be as pervasive as they are. Our analysis can be seen as a first step. Future research might well take up the concerns we have registered and investigate how widespread is the use of advice books, and what *effects* they are having on students' attitudes and dissertation quality.

We suggest that, as advisors, we all need to pay scholarly attention to dissertation writing and to make sure students do not have to fall back on inadequate advice books because there is nothing more compelling or useful on offer. Such books may well be damaging because they ossify doctoral research and the dissertation to formulaic axioms that ultimately serve to bolster a *this-is-how-you-do-it* position. Despite the utility of some of the contents, authors of these texts do not look forward to the possibilities of new kinds of doctorates, new kinds of genres, and new ways of being a scholar.

NOTES

¹We recognize that there are cultural differences in the ways that countries organize their doctorates. In Britain and Australia, for example, the dominant pedagogical relationship is with a supervisor and a co- or associate supervisor with whom students meet on a regular basis in tutorials. In North America, by contrast, a committee that acts as both examiner and guide, with one advisor providing more intense support, oversees the dissertation research. In this article, we use the North American nomenclature of *advisor* to describe the doctoral *teacher*.

²We have refrained from giving too many explicit examples of the genre characteristics we describe. We gave more detail of this kind in previous

conference presentations but came to understand through face-to-face and e-mail discussions that a conflict exists between evidence and ethics. We now believe that more harm, both professional and commercial, might result from detailed exemplars than from omission.

³Scholars (e.g., Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Epstein, Boden, Deem, Rizvi, & Wright, 2007) have documented how *performativity* and regimes of *work intensification* have made increased demands on the time and emotions of those who teach in higher education. This finding may explain the current lack of time for the development of supervision pedagogies, including writing pedagogies, in many institutions.

⁴There is clearly a need for guidelines and generic conventions in academic writing. However, in our experience, the rigid use of style manuals can deaden and homogenize the prose and hinder the development of a lively writer's voice.

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