

Locating the doctoral study in the 'paradigm skirmishes': Challenges and prospects for adopting a paradigm cradle

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It is important to understand the thought patterns of students and supervisors that underlie the choice of paradigm and determine the progression of doctoral studies as an integral part of articulating scholarship at the doctoral level and subsequently, to completing the research. This paper traces a student's and a supervisor's thought patterns in the contested space of paradigms by adopting Bryman's (2007) phrase 'paradigm skirmishes' to explore their experiences of a doctoral research study. It analyses some of the contested issues in paradigm proliferation and juxtaposes the doctoral research journey within it. We observe that engaging within the paradigm 'skirmish arena' is a tricky process, but an inevitable part of the doctoral student's academic discourse. The use of the term 'cradle' in this paper is a metaphor to imply the 'nurturance' and 'upbringing' that doctoral students might require to develop intellectual maturity in academic authority and voice. As a 'written conversation of minds' of supervisor and supervisee, this paper not only traces some of the tensions that doctoral students undergo, but also illustrates how some university structures and supervision are critical to nurturing originality and critical engagement with discourse, particularly during moments of uncertainty and intellectual exhilaration.

Keywords: doctoral research, postgraduate supervision, research supervision, guided autonomy, paradigm, paradigm contestations

Introduction: 'Paradigm identity' and doctoral study

During the course of their study, doctoral students engage in and espouse, even if temporarily, what we call in this paper, a 'paradigm identity', as a lens to successfully conceptualise and complete their study. Denzin and Lincoln (2008a:31) cite Guba's (1990) definition of a paradigm as "basic set of beliefs that guides action". Nespor (2006:115) offers Kuhn's (1977) definition that "a paradigm is what the members of a scientific community, and they alone, share". In this discussion, we clarify a "paradigm identity" as the choice and adoption of, and engagement with a particular paradigm to guide the research process, for example, in regard to the clarification of the topic, literature review, data generation, analysis and interpretation.

Choice of paradigm, even if not openly acknowledged, is relevant to any study. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008a:31) note "all research is interpretive ... each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions the researcher asks and the interpretations he or she brings to them". Creswell (2009:11) contends that "the researcher not only selects a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods study to conduct, the inquirer also decides on a type of study within these three approaches". Within this effort to follow already established paradigms, supervisors and doctoral students are perhaps concerned about argumentation, independent thinking, creativity and originality (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009), as "by-products" of the doctoral study (Whitelock, Faulkner & Miell, 2008:143; Lovitts, 2005:140) but also about the paradigm within which to explore their study.

Discourse on paradigm relates to philosophical issues of ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology, all of which constitute a paradigm framework or a "basic set of beliefs" that researchers use to interpret and act on their world (Guba, 1990 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a:31, 245). Ontology addresses issues of the nature of the human being, and that of reality; epistemology explains the relationship between the inquirer and the known; and methodology embraces procedures of accessing and gaining knowledge

from the world (Bryman, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; 2008a; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Mertz & Anfara, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Denzin & Lincoln (2008a) add axiology, an ethical quest, to their definition of paradigm.

Rather than viewing a qualitative or quantitative approach to research from a continuum, we seek to validate our argument by limiting our paradigm discourse to the schism between them, and the consequential influence on paradigmatic perspective.

Through paradigm discourse and writing, among other requirements for the doctorate degree, doctoral students seek entry, engagement and acceptance into professional disciplines to qualify them as “professional scholar[s]” (Colbeck, 2008:9). Writing, as a conscious process is an identity exposition process, as text is intricately linked to the author of the text (Pillay, 2005:540). In regard to identity and writing, Swadener and Mutua (2008:35) suggest that “... these identities are represented in texts that script, ascribe and/or reify identities”, suggesting that some identities are more prominent in discourse than others. Thody (2006:130) adds “writing or presenting [data] cannot, should not be neutral”. Perhaps Holliday’s (2007:117) suggestion about doctoral students as writers locates them in contradictory spaces, as

[They] find themselves newly constructed, not as experienced professionals, but as [junior members] of an academic discourse community which decides for them what they are allowed to say, how they are allowed to say it and who they are allowed to be as writers.

It seems however, that the level of acceptance of the discourse engaged by the doctoral student may be regarded as “work in process” (Boot & Beile, 2005), notwithstanding the controls from the academic community which still expects originality and creativity from them. These contradictions and possibilities for the growth of doctoral students through paradigm discourse are the subject of the discourse with which we engage in this paper.

Entry: Redefining my paradigmatic identity: The ‘I’ emerges in the doctoral support sessions (Rose, the student)

I enrolled for doctoral studies as an academic, with some experience of teaching in higher education and engagement with academic discourse. I had five peer-reviewed publications, had supervised and examined four graduate students whose studies were all quantitative. At the start of my doctoral studies, it appeared that this previous experience in higher education would ease my adjustment to the doctoral journey. However, I realised that I could not assert my level of proficiency in academic discourse for several reasons that I subsequently explore.

First, as I engaged with paradigm discourse as a student, I encountered the qualitative approach not previously entrenched in my repertoire (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Mertz & Anfara, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a positivist I had also come to associate research with quantities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; 2000; Flick, Von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Second, in my research template was “the formal language”, used to reflect the scientific position of neutrality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Altogether, I had learnt that research is a process “within a value-free framework” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:8), as an objective process within controlled scientific procedures (Flick *et al.*, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

On the contrary, on an elementary level of referring to the author him/herself, in the faculty support sessions, one professor echoed the sentiments of authors such as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Guba and Lincoln (2005), mentioning that qualitative research privileges the researcher’s voice as it locates it in the research process. Accordingly, references to the researcher might be to “I”, rather than to “the researcher”, the latter being “out there” or “the voice from nowhere” (Lather in Guba & Lincoln, 2005:209). McNiff (2008:352) agrees that there is an increasing trend in scholarship to use “I” as a new form of scholarship to generate living forms of theory.

The professor gave us an article by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002), entitled: “Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research”, which explores

the progressive debate on the qualitative paradigm, especially how to verify qualitative data *vis à vis* quantitative data. I single out the following quote which I thought would disqualify me as a prospective qualitative researcher:

Also important were characteristics of the investigator, who must be responsive and adaptable to changing circumstances, holistic, having processional immediacy, sensitivity, and ability for clarification and summarization (Guba & Lincoln, in Morse et al., 2002:5, emphasis added) [N.B. regarding adaptability during research, I wrote in my personal journal on 24/05/2006: “I do not qualify”].

The call to be flexible during research contradicted my quantitative tradition of research as a ‘concise’ process. Besides, research that located *me* in the text resulted in a cognitive dissonance of sorts, as it contrasted with my previous knowledge about ‘scientific’ research. Therefore, even as I went through the above-mentioned article, I sensed a strong persuasion to cling to quantitative research which I thought was concise, predictable and objective, or perhaps I was being true to “institutional conservatism” (Pillay, 2005:540), a stance that required me to underplay qualitative research which was not familiar to me or not necessary at that point [since I had a quantitative proposal]. However, since I was engaged in a scholarly exercise, I thought of familiarising myself with the qualitative paradigm, even if only for the sake of knowledge.

I needed a paradigmatic shift if I was to assimilate the qualitative approach into my research repertoire. Such a ‘new realization’ would affect my research journey throughout. Clearly, my coming from a positivist paradigm resulted in this exposure to the qualitative approach to jolt my thinking somewhat, with the new realization that disturbed my research knowledge equilibrium. In the months that followed this new ‘discovery’, as I endeavoured to understand the role of a paradigm in research, I experienced and interrogated intellectual tensions arising from the discourse on paradigms such as noted by Lather (2006), Bryman (2007), Denzin and Lincoln (2000; 2005), Flick *et al.* (2004); Guba and Lincoln (2005) as the following synthesis illustrates.

Clarifying the path to follow: Reading about paradigm incompatibility (Rose, the student)

Immersing myself in literature on paradigmatic perspectives, I entered into a paradigmatic contest, a topic that raises diverse worldviews and different ways of interpreting the world (Bryman, 2007; Creswell, 2009). The contest on paradigms is currently obscure as a multidimensional concept that might be determined by students of research, type of discipline area, and faculty members, as part of shaping the research process. However, in this section, I aim to highlight some possible sources of intellectual tension for doctoral students (Creswell, 2009).

According to Bryman (2007:14-15), “paradigm wars”, or the assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research, are likely to continue because of the perceived “differentness and incompatibility of [qualitative and quantitative] approaches” as “fundamental philosophical issues about the nature of the human being and society” and how to study it. However, to Creswell (2009:6) “worldview” refers to different ways of interpreting the world that do not necessarily lead to contestation among researchers. He observes that qualitative and quantitative methods are compatible, as researchers can “triangulate” data sources across the divide (Creswell, 2009:14). Regardless of the call to see the two approaches as compatible (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; 2008; Denzin, 2008; Creswell, 2009), researchers cannot ignore the presence of a dichotomy, as highlighted by Bryman (2007).

A critical reading of the literature on the controversy and resistance to paradigm options and choices reveals constantly shifting spaces and issues with which to engage. Previously, some researchers discredited the qualitative approach for being “unscientific” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; 2005; Flick *et al.*, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and less rigorous than quantitative research (Flick *et al.*, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2000; 2005) confirm that in this discourse, quantitative scholars assumed supremacy over qualitative researchers. Besides the duality of the basic assumptions of the two

approaches resulting in contention, there also have been intra-paradigm wars (Bryman, 2007), in which qualitative researchers have resisted colonisation in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln in Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2007; 2008).

Currently, paradigm controversy reflects on issues of “politics and ethics of evidence and the value of qualitative work” (Denzin, 2008:316), subjectivity inherent in designing qualitative research, and the use of non-randomized samples (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; 2005; Flick, *et al.*, 2004; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Reyna in Nespor, 2006). However, Hatch (2007) and Tesch (1990) advise that bias is inherent in human nature, whether in quantitative or qualitative research.

Despite paradigm controversy, there is potential for a future of paradigm harmony between qualitative and quantitative researchers (Creswell, 2009; Denzin, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; 2008). Besides, some of the scholars initially opposed to the qualitative approach have since softened their stance. For example, Guba and Lincoln (2005; 2008) argue that a paradigm framework should include issues about axiology (role of values in research), as they have also revisited their earlier stance on paradigms, viz. “a second reading of the burgeoning literature and subsequent rethinking of our own rationale have led us to think that the issue is much larger than we first conceived” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005:201). There seems to be “production of respite in hostilities” between the two groups that allows the “mixing of methods that cross the quantitative-qualitative divide” (Bryman, 2007:15; Creswell, 2009:14). Denzin (2008) supports this position, “I seek a non-military metaphor, something more peaceful, less combative. I believe we are in the midst of a complex set of discourses which are moving in several directions at the same time” (Denzin, 2008:16).

Despite increased tolerance to divergent views about research approaches, discourse on paradigms continues to generate controversy, as “there are occasional paradigm skirmishes” (Bryman, 2007:17), as certain “methodology [as part of paradigm framework] is interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines” (Guba & Lincoln, 2008:256). What is the value of the debate about paradigm discourse to the doctoral scholar identity? In the following section, we locate the student’s anxiety in the paradigm contentions and the role that the supervisor played to counter the experience.

Paradigm position shift as intellectual exhilaration begins: The supervisor’s role (Rose, the student)

The intellectual tensions I encountered with paradigm debates furthermore arose out of a discussion I had with my supervisors, who challenged my critical thinking and subtly encouraged creativity. These invaluable interactions with supervisors turned out to be my paradigm search, as they re-awakened my level of introspection and conscience to embrace a scholarly identity that goes beyond entrenched experiences.

Whitelock *et al.* (2008) and Kiguwa and Langa (2009) locate the responsibility for originality and creativity in doctoral students’ work on the supervision process. The former list some of the processes identified by supervisors that lead to academic creativity: providing guidance while promoting autonomy, building confidence through positive feedback, encouraging risk-taking, filtering knowledge, identifying problems, modelling, and sharing practice. For me, apart from confidence building, promoting my autonomy, and periodic meetings to explore my thinking, my supervisors also encouraged me to keep a journal of my thoughts. The interplay between some of these supervisor-related processes and the development of my thinking are inherent in my paradigm journey. In this part, I mention how two supervisor-related scaffolds led to my paradigm cradle.

Breaking the boundaries of officialdom

One striking distinction between my previous experience in academia and my supervisors’ approach to feedback rested on style. Besides their dislike for a red-pen (which to me was synonymous with teacher-authority), they also used non-conventional approaches which include hand-drawn bulbs, lights, stars and various motivational stickers such as smiling (happy) or sad emoticons (a qualitative approach to feedback). This approach not only focused my attention on both the strong and weak areas of my work,

but its emotional appeal also synergised both my affective and cognitive energy. In the following caption reflections from my journal [27/03/2006] reflect on the supervisors’ style of assessment and feedback:

[Today I received feedback (actually the first draft of my proposal) from both of my supervisors. I am surprised by their mode of assessing the document with little stars and emoticons. I take note that the ‘smiling’ emoticons herald approval, while sad faces signify disapproval. The document is decorated with all kinds of drawings - a light bulb, smiling faces, sad faces, etc. The size of drawing determines the level of acceptance of a piece of writing. One of the supervisors has attached a homemade floral card saying ‘Dear R, Good start - keep going!’, while another has ‘written’ ‘An impressive start!’ Both packages arrived in two separate envelopes with smiling emoticons appended next to my name].

Given the stage at which I received these comments (at the start of the doctoral journey), these are significant. Apart from encouraging progression in words such as “keep going”, “an excellent start”, their *style* of comments with the use of emoticons ‘loosened’ the boundaries of officialdom for creativity to emerge [in line with qualitative research]. In addition, I perceived their positive energy and interest in my work (to make all the drawings and package the document in envelopes that I still file to date!). From each piece of the non-verbal cues, emerged a paradigm identity [qualitative, or so I thought] related to the progression and completion of my doctoral.

Somerville (2008) reflects from her experiences that a doctoral programme which is regimented might hinder the creative process, or stifle independence (Lovitts, 2005:140) as essential components in doctoral studies. The call to supervisors is to open up space for doctoral students to contribute original knowledge, rather than to restrict creativity through rigid measures, because the doctoral programme is a developmental process (Boote & Beile, 2005) that initiates candidates to engage in scholarship (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009; Lovitts, 2005:140). As my supervisors gave me space to think, explore and write as reflected in the cited journal, my experience was of an ‘opening-up’ rather than of a ‘closing down’ nature (Somerville, 2008).

Encouraging risk-taking and creativity

Although not explicit in the feedback [largely qualitative] that came from the supervisors, in a way, the call to think beyond conventional boundaries in doctoral studies was evident. To reflect the level of risk-taking and creativity I enjoyed, I designed my thesis in a series of ‘voyages’ that takes the reader down various ‘terrains’ instead of the conventional chapters, thus allowing my creative self to emerging. Admittedly, as I struggled to determine the best way to present my thesis, my supervisors’ positive comments gave me the confidence to have a playful mind, without losing the scholarly touch.

Guiding the student through paradigm tensions (Dr Lubbe, the supervisor)

Situating oneself in research and identifying an epistemological and ontological stance can be a challenge for any researcher. However, what Rose highlighted and reminded me of, was how overwhelming this process can be for the novice researcher, as she sought guidance and reflected on her process. Once again, the apparent binary view of quantitative versus qualitative methodologies emerged. My aim in guiding the student was for her to acquaint herself thoroughly with different stances, and to explore the potential to interweave and incorporate different or multiple viewpoints. This probably stemmed from my own doctoral journey, the continuous reflection on my paradigmatic framework, and the complexity and interrelatedness that can emerge. Reflecting back on my own doctoral journey is perhaps due to the fact that I engaged with Rose as a novice research supervisor, probably because the way we supervise is usually based on our own experiences (Bartlett & Mercer, 2001; Fraser & Mathews, 1999). The quest or urgency then to continuously engage with updating supervisory skills is of great importance. As a qualitative orientated researcher, I typically and spontaneously engage from an interpretive and social constructionist paradigmatic perspective. During my own doctoral and postdoctoral research I realised the extent to which one could engage with ambiguities and pluralist assumptions, which even necessitates drawing on

different perspectives. Incorporating different points of view is valuable for the way in which one analyses current literature, conducts the analysis, and reflects on the research. A complex methodological hybrid composed of elements that are typical of apparently different paradigms, might serve a study well. At the same time, acknowledging his might be more effective and congruent if there are shared elements between the different paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:174).

The thought process about epistemological and ontological concerns has to be combined with a grounded, strategic and practical consideration of the methods we choose and use. Everything we write and research is coloured by a personal epistemology and ontology, which in turn influences the methodology. Lincoln and Guba (2000:167) reiterate Laurel Richardson's comment, "even as we write, the boundaries between the paradigms are shifting". Once students engage with the formal writing process, it requires them to reflect on multiple realities and to engage with the ambiguities that qualitative research entails (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). For me this was evident in the student's process.

The overarching quest during this important time in the student's doctoral journey however, was not to impose my own paradigmatic perspective on her, but for her to engage continuously with different stances in a reflexive manner. As Schwandt (2000:195) argues:

... the reaching of an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgments, biases or prejudices. Only in a dialogical encounter with what is not understood, can we open ourselves to make sense of the previously not known and to manifest new meaning.

As Barnacle (2005) maintains, doctoral students should be focused upon engaging with the problematic status of knowledge and critically scrutinising the way knowledge is produced, as well as pondering the purpose and use of that knowledge.

Rose's experience of the feedback process made me reflect on the manner in which I give feedback to postgraduate students. This could stem from the influence of positive psychology with a strong focus on encouragement, but in addition, also reveals a personal epistemology and ontology, as an attempt is made to develop and sustain a symbiotic and cordial relationship (Li & Seale, 2007): "the effective management of criticism is a joint activity that underlies the capacity for supervision to be educationally effective" (Li & Seale 2007:511). Though each supervisory relationship is uniquely created, I would advocate establishing a climate of supportive mentoring, partnership and collaboration whilst leading the student to independence.

Contemplating the *status quo*: Locating the self in academia (Rose, the student)

I acknowledge, as does McNiff (2008), that peers in expert fields legitimise academic discourse, as a scholar engages with ongoing conversations (Holliday, 2007). Discourse on paradigms is inherent in researching within a discipline (Guba & Lincoln, 2008), regardless of the topic chosen. Therefore, as I position myself in paradigm discourse as a novice researcher, I am aware of academic genres and 'on-going conversation' related to disciplines. Hence, I have three objectives. The first is to attempt to establish reflexivity with regard to my journey; secondly, I contemplate the status quo to legitimise the identity (of the doctoral student); and thirdly, I learn to participate in the "discursive community of practice" (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009:53) as an upcoming scholar.

Smith (1999:36) values a critical mind, because "if we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous". Lather (2006:47) further justifies this: "teaching [or being taught] educational research in such a way that ... [the student] develop[s] an ability to locate ... [the self] in the tensions that characterize fields of knowledge". Besides, to write is to reveal one's paradigm identity. Huang and Archer (2008) suggest that, as they write, individuals take up a social, cultural, and institutional identity to define an "essential self", while Pillay (2005) argues for an active "self" in text.

Even as I engaged with the contested paradigms, I experienced intellectual inadequacy, and even helplessness. The tensions that existed before the current respite are telling. Although researchers are

invited to view “blurred” boundaries (Denzin, 2008:16) between qualitative and quantitative approaches, I reflect on several questions: Does an idea hold because it originates from an acclaimed identity? If that is the expectation, where does the doctoral student’s originality fit? In the space of paradigm discourse, what are doctoral students to do in the interim before such [paradigms] debates become conclusive? For example, if their stance contrasts with that of the acclaimed identities in discourse, does the academic community still sustain their contribution? Given their novice position in voice and academic discourse, does such rhetoric operate within the reach of both doctoral students and even an ordinary scholar’s reach? Hence, how should supervisors and supervisees decide between contested paradigms?

My ‘intellectual heart’ asking these questions resonates with Seale’s questions: “what is a practising social researcher to make of all this? How can these inconclusive debates become a resource for researchers rather than a source of frustration and negativity?” (Seale, 2003:174). The literature on paradigm discourse does not offer a solution to these unsettling questions. Rather, as I continued the quest, I reached a stage of intellectual exhilaration, arising from my perception of what seemed to be rhetoric on the scholarly level for ontological as well as methodological hegemony (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These questions are pertinent to the doctoral scholar’s identity development, but a doctoral student may not yet answer them, as s/he has still to qualify to legitimise his/her voice (Holliday, 2007; McNiff, 2008).

Contemplating the *status quo*: Locating the self in academia (Dr Lubbe, the supervisor)

Pertaining to qualitative research, the existence of a multiplicity of ‘truths’ (Daiute & Fine, 2003) implies that no researcher can make a claim that their text represents some privileged truth that is beyond critical scrutiny. In my view, the knowledge and meaning that we derive from that with which we engage throughout the doctoral journey is perhaps more like construction than finding or discovering (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Schwandt, 2000).

As I observed Rose’s quest to make sense of her ontological and epistemological premises, I could see that she was confronted with the challenges of the “messy, uncertain age” that qualitative research was entering in the 21st century (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:23). I hoped that Lincoln and Guba (2000:167) might comfort her: “there is great potential for interweaving of viewpoints, for the incorporation of multiple perspectives and for borrowing in bricolage, where it is useful or richness-enhancing or theoretically heuristic”.

Locating the researcher self throughout the doctoral journey might be characterised by multiplicity and even conflict, as it entails bringing different aspects of the self together into a unifying and purpose-giving whole. The researcher self will express different, multiple aspects of the personal self (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006). Scholarly works increasingly comprise an important part of a doctoral student’s identity (McAdams & Logan, 2006).

Therefore, even though still a student, I would argue that doctoral candidates should indeed have the opportunity to express, to contribute and to confront these deep-seated questions and challenges, and through critical engagement share the platform with mature scholars regarding the raised disputes of different epistemological and ontological stances. Being confronted with “blurred boundaries”, uncertainty and ambiguity so early in her doctoral studies, according to my observation, taught Rose critical thinking and reasoning skills, which laid the foundation for her work to become exemplary.

The significance of paradigm debates to the doctoral journey: Voices converge

How do paradigm discourses relate to the doctoral student’s identity development? We explore their influence on the doctoral journey from three perspectives. Firstly, Rhedding-Jones (2007) locates a significant attribute of the doctoral scholar’s identity in the supervisor-student power relationship. She argues that methodological choices are complex, sometimes seen as “politically-correct”, as doctoral students make their choices. However, in what appears to subdue academic freedom, Rhedding-Jones

(2007) acknowledges and situates such politics of choice in her own experience as a supervisor, as she suggests that she might have influenced her own students to adopt her methods. She reflects that “beginning researchers [should] seriously think about who they are, and how their ontologies or ways of being might make research a richer and more connected practice ...” (Rhedding-Jones, 2007:209). It appears that supervision that nurtures dialogue might develop a doctoral student’s critical conscience (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009).

Secondly, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) present another perspective about the allegiance of graduate students. They claim that students who graduate from educational institutions with an aspiration to develop a career in the world of academia or research are left with the impression that they have to pledge allegiance to a school of thought (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:15). Therefore, the question arises as to whether students who allege loyalty to a school of thought still nurture their critical consciousness in divergent thinking away from the norm.

The third level of significance of paradigm wars for the doctoral journey and scholarly development is the influence that funding might have on the research process. Nespore (2006:117) argues that paradigm debates are sometimes located outside the university community, as funding agencies might determine the paradigm approach to be used.

The issue of allegiance for future employment, supervisor control of the research process and adherence to academic genre, together with funding as part of the paradigm agenda (Nespore, 2006; Rhedding-Jones, 2007), further complicates paradigm discourse, especially if one views the supervisor-student relationship as a space for the doctoral student to develop critical consciousness. Therefore, the assertions from reputable scholars introduce complexity to the development of scholarly identity.

It would be naïve to suggest that research agenda might not include these issues. On the contrary, we view these issues as part of a holistic approach to research. However, caution in meeting the academic standards for qualification, in addition to other motives, such as funding for the doctoral student, might restrain the student’s intellectual autonomy and freedom, consciously or otherwise, as some thoughts or issues might be outside the domain of ‘the current’.

As we interrogate paradigm contestation, questions abound. Whose knowledge is it that we generate? Who generates knowledge? Edward Said (in Smith, 1999:37) asks questions that resonate with our experience, for example, regarding the purpose of or for whom we generate knowledge. Smith (1999:173) reiterates these questions in relation to writing, asking several research-related questions to counter the basic belief that anybody “has an inherent right to knowledge and truth”. Whitelock *et al.* (2008) argue that creativity and originality form the basis for doctoral students to qualify. Can originality, however, emerge from hegemonic controls where “institutional elites ensure academics comply with established traditions?” (Bourdieu as cited by McNiff (2008:354). Given their positionality in terms of voice and agenda for research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), can graduate students make a claim to ‘*becoming*’ who they are (Barnacle, 2005)? Can they claim a substantive contribution to ontology from what they *bring along* to research? Do they even always have an ‘ontological position’ in the first place (Rhedding-Jones, 2007)? Do students of research *really* have a voice in scholarship as ‘novice’ researchers? (Holliday, 2007).

To attempt answers to these questions is to limit the range of possible answers. However, these questions are germane to the development of a critically conscious doctoral student, so they are not just rhetorical. These are questions for both doctoral students and supervisors to reflect on, as there might be contradictory demands for graduate students to display originality in hegemonic spaces, as already pointed out by Holliday (2007) and Bourdieu (cited by McNiff, 2008:354). Most significantly, these self-introspective questions provide a platform for doctoral students to reflect on the paradox of locating their voices in those of others, even as they remain critical, creative and original.

Summarising thoughts: Unity of perspective

The doctoral degree draws on and demands the highest intellectual and emotional resources from the student. To explore their topics, doctoral students ought to locate their research in a paradigm cradle, even as they depend on the subject expertise and their supervisors to guide the research process. Understanding,

articulating and engaging various topics through a paradigm framework are not only germane to completing the doctoral study, but they also confer upon the student a scholar’s identity. Therefore, the student’s scholarly identity is a growth process as well as an end product that ought to be nurtured in the doctoral programme. The student’s reflections in this paper evolved from supervision that encouraged guided autonomy according to the negotiated order model (Acker & Black, in Kiguwa & Langa, 2009:51) and the article resulted from the student’s shared tensions with supportive supervisors. It appears that nurturing the scholarly identity among doctoral students begins with such support, without which superfluous knowledge might be encouraged at the expense of critical consciousness, argumentation and originality.

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