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BUILDING A SOUNDTRACK FOR A DOCTORATE JOURNEY: SONGS SUNG WHILE LEARNING REFLEXIVITY AND CRITICALITY

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CONTEXT OF THE DOCTORATE

The Doctor of Professional Practice (D. ProfPrac) is a programme that develops a candidate's knowledge not only in their area of practice but within themselves (Otago Polytechnic, n.d.). Set within the candidate's professional practice, the ultimate goal is to contribute new knowledge that will inform the participant, the field of practice and the profession. Putting simply, it consists of different tasks or projects to achieve throughout the time. Course I has the Review of Learning and the Learning Agreement components, where both require a written document, and the Learning Agreement also includes a presentation. Like every qualification in New Zealand, there are Graduate Profile Outcomes and Learning Outcomes which when achieved, indicate the candidate has demonstrated the understanding that is required.

THE ARTICLE'S CONTRIBUTION

This article outlines one phase in the journey of one doctoral candidate (me). It is centred within the Learning Agreement project as part two within Course I. Its goal is to document the author's journey, as part of the Me Project within my doctorate as well as to inform other doctoral candidates of the adventures that await. This article is a subjective academic narrative (Arnold, 2012), where the article becomes a scholarly story using a selection of my journal entries as data. I acknowledge as I own the stories, that the presence of me within the narrative is subjective and there is an attempt to add deeper understanding.

What is a learning journal and what is my learning journal? In essence, a learning journal is a place of accumulated reflective moments over time and deeply personal (Moon, 2006). Highlighting the different nuances in the concepts of learning diary, learning log and learning journal, Moon then divides content matter into three areas of focus: personal development, non-vocational education and professional education/development. My D. ProfPrac journal started as a record of my journey documenting my actions and emotions, a diary as such. It developed into a reflective learning journey in response to a previous *Scope* article and the understanding of how I would design the Me Project further. To demonstrate the D. ProfPrac's Graduate Profile Outcome "Systematically and critically reflect on experience, theory and practice as a means of creating new knowledge" (Otago Polytechnic, n.d.), I adjusted my D. ProfPrac journal from a diary into a tool for my professional development.

It now records not only my actions and emotions but also what my actions mean and how I know what I know. It is handwritten, filled with typos and grammatical errors caused from quick or rambled thinking and digressions into rabbit holes as well as being in notebooks that bring joy when opening. This article is a reflection of my authentic written voice, centred around three key learning moments. These lightbulb moments are considered as critical incidents when viewed in hindsight. A critical incident is an experience, in other words, the moment that has caused change due to the importance or critical thinking placed on the event (Tripp, 2012). Critical incidents are a useful tool in research and have been utilised in education and health research either as forward focused learning opportunities (Attrill et al., 2019; Hrovat & Luke, 2016) or reflective focused moments of learning (Bolton, 2016; Nejadghanbar, 2021; Wijaya & Kuswandono, 2019). In this article the critical incidents are defined as critical when I was reflecting on what I have learnt in the Learning Agreement, making them significant in hindsight rather than at that time. It is through my reflection on my actions that I have learnt.

MY D. PROFPRAC JOURNEY AND BUILDING ITS SOUNDTRACK

Studying is often linked to the concept of a journey. During Course Ia: Review of Learning, I viewed the doctorate ahead as a journey where I struggled to see the road and grasped for a map to guide me. The trials and tribulations of Course Ia: The Review of Learning (ROL) journey were outlined with the realisation that my mentors were beside me, I did not need a map and my feet would find their way (Quadling-Miernik, 2022). I completed Course Ia in January 2022 with "I'm Not Afraid" (Eminem, 2010) as my theme song. This one lyric, "I'm not afraid," brought a slight bravado so that within my head and my heart was calmness for the year ahead. While I acknowledged it would still be challenging, exhausting, confusing and perhaps frustrating, I started the Learning Agreement (LA) section of my D. ProfPrac journey with confidence and peace that I could do it; slowly and surely, stepping forward, guided by my mentors to the side of me. Now at the end of the Learning Agreement, I have a new song for the journey ahead. This article outlines the changes across the last year, the deeper understanding of my journey, specifically in regard to learning reflexivity and criticality, as well as building the soundtrack to my D. ProfPrac. I position myself as a student within the D. ProfPrac, but also as a participant in an autoethnographic view of development, filled with reflection on actions across the year.

According to Adams et al. (2017) there are two purposes of autoethnography. The first is "to offer accounts of personal experiences to complement, or fill gaps in, existing research" and second to "articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience" (2017, p. 3). While there is plenty of research on doctorate students and their journeys (Al-Kassar & Chaer, 2013; Goodall et al., 2017; Turner, 2016; Webber, 2017), even with their supervisors or mentor (Goode & Andrew, 2021) it is my personal knowledge of my learning within the experience of being a D. ProfPrac student that I focus on within this article. Furthermore, it is useful to consider that central to autoethnography is the critical view on the personal experiences; there needs to be accountability and truthfulness within the context discussed. Adams et al. also further add that the stories of a person's experiences, the feelings, and the thinking, allow the information to become part of the "field" (2017, p. 4). Self-narrative shifts from reflection and stories to the development of new knowledge or new understandings of old (Andrew & Rossignol, 2017). In other words, my contribution becomes data for whoever studies doctoral students' journeys. It is important to note that this article and the reflective journal entries which could form usable data are not part of any study.

Reflection on action as opposed to reflection in action, is a form of retrospective reflection occurring after an event (Schön, 1983). The question posed by my mentor was: "What are the landmarks in learning reflexivity and criticality in your D. ProfPrac journey so far?" The landmarks were moments within reviewing and developing the three draft versions of my Learning Agreement. They come as critical moments, moments of clarity; when I develop a deeper understanding and change as a result. Through reviewing my reflective journal entries and by writing this journal article I am able to discuss the critical moments as well as the changes, which become either permanent or temporary.

VI, V2, V3 REVELATIONS

A brief summary of the different versions (V) of the LA as time markers:

- End of January 2022 feedback from my RoL arrives
- February 16th first meeting starting the LA
- August 26th VI uploaded
- November 10th V2 uploaded
- January 22nd 2023 V3 uploaded
- February 15th LA Presentation.

Knowing that my first LA document would be reviewed and not be at submission level, I duly used the provided template as a guide. I dithered about filling in sections, leaving them, reading more, updating sections, abandoning them, revising, and rewriting written parts. In reality, the VI document I submitted was V4 as I started the document again and again when I was confused.

Reflective journal – June 6th I've just structured the LA. I realised that I had been throwing things into sections and things were becoming unclear. A bit like how I cook Chinese – cut up the bits, throw them in a pan and add this and that, add more seasoning, discover something in the pantry/fridge to quickly chop up and throw in then stick it all on rice and eat.... So I structured my sections – broke then down to ingredients and components and now can see the whole as well as the parts.

The journal entry above highlights a critical moment where I reflected on my approach. The final VI started as my own adaption of the template with each section holding the subheading to guide me on each paragraph. A few days later a future critical moment starts to appear.

Reflective journal – July 12^{th} Another uneasy feeling is one of the writing being not so academic and more I, me, and random statements based on my gut. I'm tired of finding more sources or needing to find more sources. I am not synthesising my readings. Hummmm – I need to know how to synthesise my writing questions. How?

VI TO V2 LIGHTBULB MOMENT: DESIGNING RESEARCH MEANS RESEARCH DESIGN

One crucial span of time was between receiving written feedback on VI, the meeting with mentors to discuss VI and the actions taken to get VI to V2. With "I'm not afraid," my theme song, continuously playing in my head, I processed the feedback, connected this to what I had written and connected it to further readings. It was these actions that helped me realise how important research design was. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that central to the intersection of three components: philosophical worldviews, research design and specific methods, are the research approaches of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. When I submitted VI, I wrote in my reflective journal what feedback I would receive as a form of competition between my mentors and myself.

Reflective journal – Sept 7th Today was my meeting with mentors re draft 1 of the LA. It's a wonderful ride of emotions, plenty of 'yes but...' or 'great but...' which leads to a 'grrrr why didn't you tell me before so I could do that' or 'I knew you were going to say that.' I am frustrated because the weak ones (ok – not weak but not of quality) are vaguely what I knew.

This journal entry highlights the grasping of understanding which areas of VI needed improvement, perhaps even before reading the feedback. It allowed me to see that not only was the LA document about the 'why,' the 'who,' and the 'what' of the future project, but it was really important to outline the 'how.' The questions I had to ask myself were "What are the processes to gather the data? Why am I choosing that process? How would I manage the data, the process, the analysis?" Adding to this was the struggle with, and linkage to, discovering my

epistemology and ontological stance. I realised it was important to outline where I sit and at whose table I sit. Once I did that within the LA document, the reader would understand my choices in the process. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest researchers "make explicit the larger philosophical ideas they espouse" (p. 44), as well as explain the choices made in the approach to the research.

While doing VI:

Reflective journal – March 19th – Today I started reading the SAGE handbook but the big words just made me tired. So I realised I need to work on my questions and then the method....In the first bit I focussed on ethnography and phenomenology. After reading and YouTube clips, I've narrowed it down – Hermeneutics phenomenology – as opposed to Transcendental. I've got to feel comfortable I am in Heidegger's camp not HusserI's camp....So I'll just check out some differences btw phenomenology, ethnology, and grounded theory, and narrative inquiry. Now I'm confused again...I feel as though before I take a step forward I have to take a step back (or more) to get an understanding of the foundations.

l also got asked to discover my epistemic position – another situation of stepping back to step forward.

Reflective journal – July 30^{th} – I also think I'm vaguely avoiding the harder parts of the writing, facing addressing my methodology and the lit review. Those parts are big – not just in writing but in comprehending the entirety. Justifying my methodology when I still don't quite get it, knowing I need to get it and being confident in it. It's all vaguely there, I can see things in a hazy fog but it's not quite clearing up nor do I spend time putting the heat on to clear the fog. But I will have to do it next week.

These journal entries outline the start of learning aspects of research design. They touch on the confusion and the attempt to grasp what I knew I needed to grasp. It was at this point I remembered the next line in my D. ProfPrac theme song: "I'm not afraid – to take a stand." I realised it was not just about the literature review or the completion of the template sections, but it was about taking a stand on how I would achieve this. Drawing a line in whether it was qualitative or quantitative, or even mixed methods. Looking about and choosing where to sit; at the table of narrative inquiry or ethnography, or even a phenomenological approach. It was also about considering how I would do the research and would those methods be achievable. Ultimately, it was outlining what I would do and why I chose to do it this way.

In VI LA, I felt I had outlined this stand but it seemed not. In my profession when taking leave, I write a lesson plan for the person teaching my class. The plan details what the relief teacher could do just as if I was there. I needed to approach the LA document as a plan that anyone could pick up and do themselves. In order to get to V2, the research design section needed to be clearer, more prominent and logical. It was like my lesson plan for my research, stating the procedure I would be using.

Post VI into V2:

Meeting Notes - Sept 27th

Pre-meeting questions Justification of method/methodology - needs more right?

Meeting notes: Walk the reader through my decisions. There is a landscape to describe – what is the research, paradigms (broadly). Then my decisions are to clarify my position in the landscape and the reasons related to my epsito/onto. I make those decisions.

Reflective journal – September 29th –So I'm reading the Research Design books (AGAIN!). It's amazing how much easier these books, words have become. Two phrases come to mind: The awakening of... The deepening of...which is happening I don't know – maybe both. Maybe I am awakening to a deeper understanding. Whatever it is I will say it again, it's comfortable but still a challenge to get it finalised. People have talked about the wrestle with this part of the journey. I don't feel I am wrestling with the choices, I am wrestling with the writing of why these choices.

Reflective journal – October 5^{th} – I truly understand what I have to do and why. I know I have to show the reader where I am going, what I am doing and also why – I'm just stuck on the writing structure.

It is only now by reflecting on my actions when receiving feedback on VI, working on that feedback to write V2, and utilising other doctorate and PhD dissertations that I can see that researchers take a stand and they are not afraid of where they stand, but in doing so they fully outline their research design.

Email to mentor – December 6^{th} – The next line of I'm not afraid by Eminem is "to take a stand" That is what I feel I'm doing with the LA – taking a stand in where I sit in the plethora of paradigms. Drawing a faint line in what I will and won't do in research design. This whole year has been about finding my feet, getting solid and confident in my ability to 'represent' myself in research and having concrete feet so I won't be knocked over.

V2 TO V3 LIGHTBULB MOMENT: TIMES OF LEARNING REFLEXIVITY

Event: Meeting a D. ProfPrac colleague who said "How do you know what you know?"

Reflexivity as headlined by Braun and Clarke (2022) is "the most important companion for your adventure" (p. 13). So who is my journey buddy? Who would be a good critical friend who I trust to ask the hard questions and provide a different view on significant issues? (Costa et al., 1993). I have my mentors, as well as colleagues and friends who are interested in my research. For reflexivity to happen, I am my buddy; well, my previous self is. By examining my own beliefs, judgements and practices throughout the research process, I can see my influences on the research. Braun and Clarke (2022) speak about the proactive and routine reflection on the choices and how these choices have produced knowledge. Considering this while writing the LA is important to set up before commencing research.

My colleague's question asks for me to provide evidence for what I say rather than trusting in my ability to understand what I do. If I extend this to my career in education, I know how to teach, it is in me and it has taken many years of experience to get to this point. I instinctually feel my way through lessons, responding to students developing their understanding, approaching the actions of teaching and learning in different ways, in any way to spark that lightbulb a teacher craves to see go off in the eyes of students. Within my teaching, I just know what to do next, or when to do things differently. This is what Schön (1983) would call knowing in action, where our knowledge is demonstrated through the skilful actions we have, and it is difficult to explain what we are doing. It's like driving – 90 percent of the time you just do it with little consciousness other than being aware of potential hazards. It is the other 10 percent of the time when you are very aware of your actions and the processes – like doing parallel parking. I do not feel the need to examine my practices, or my beliefs regularly within my profession. I may do some reflection on what I did within the classroom or how to approach the classroom the next day, but deeper questioning of my actions or beliefs rarely occurs.

Research however is not instinctual to me. I am constantly having to look, think, consider, revise, reword, justify, explain, frame, analyse, read and digest, read and disregard, ultimately leading to reflection on how this applies to my context, my research, and my understanding. This is preparing me to answer the reflexivity question – how WILL I know what I know?

Meeting Notes – June 15th See how you see the world. Reflection writing – helps work through the fog. Start with the I statement and then unpack it.

I took the time between VI and V2 to examine my beliefs to get my stance. It was also at this stage, I twice took time to understand the words 'synthesis' and 'read critically.' I realised that although I knew the words, I did not understand the actions behind the words.

Meeting Notes – June 13th Scholar's voices are stepping stones to my research. Consider: How do you use the scholar's voices?

- Writing beyond descriptions. Consider defensibility.
- Analysis/Synthesis helps to move beyond description.

First attempt at understanding synthesis, during writing VI:

Reflective Journal – July 16th Today I started with looking at what is synthesis and the structure of a paragraph. I feel silly looking at this but who cares. Actually I think I've realised that I have been summarising instead of synthesising. So that is a change. I've just got to work through my thoughts to develop the skill of synthesising. I then started – restarted? my lit rev.

Reflective Journal – July 17th Today I continued my lit rev. I'm reflecting now, cos I've come to a standstill in the writing, that synthesis is hard!

Second attempt at understanding synthesis during writing V2:

Reflective Journal – Sept 24th I started with my feedback of my writing was more descriptive and I supposed that meant for me, not doctorate enough. So I reviewed how to critically read at this level. I suppose my big learning curve here is to not accept the statements as is and to question them – I've been collecting statements rather than synthesising them. New thought here, cos I thought I vaguely got synthesis but I don't to be honest. Synthesising and critical reading go hand in hand, taking knowledge deeper. In order to synthesise you need to read and question and link to other questions and thoughts you have.to work out how I can make notes on all my readings so I can critically think and synthesise.

These two journal entries show not only the actions behind my conscious learning of the words and the actions but the change in my processes to link references into my LA. It was a careful examination of my practices in my academic writing. The second attempt also highlights that the first attempt was not successful.

Reflective Journal – Nov Ist Today I've finished the lit review... I'm at the stage I have read it several times, I have thought 'have I used the references well, have I synthesised the references, have I linked things to PI or am I just telling you what the strand is, have I summarised it, have I got clear paragraphs with one topic and finally, is it enough, have I responded to feedback and do I need to respond to feedback?'

This journal entry shows my learnings and the depth of my reviewing stage, important in the process of this journey. Being critical of what I do and why is linked to achieving the D. ProfPrac and was the thought when writing V3. I needed to go back to the D. ProfPrac GPOs as well as the Learning Agreement's assessment rubric to ensure that I achieved these. Asking myself "What will I do to demonstrate I have achieved these?" helped me write down the processes and the evidence. Considering how I was being assessed and linking my actions to the criteria would enable me to feel I have achieved the goal. If actions could not be linked, then the question to myself was "Why was I doing that action?" This questioning, reflecting and reviewing is developing and embedding the skill of reflexivity.

Around this time my theme song changed based on my journal entry:

Reflective Journal – Sept 15^{th} – I realised that the journey through the LA phase is one of everything being foggy and unclear. A person fights with understanding the -ologys, fights with having clarity, fights with being autonomous and not being led by the mentors, fights with finding their feet to stand up and be a doctorate level student, fights with the direction, the method, the methodology, the goal, the vagueness, the unfamiliarity of where you stand. It's a fog as thick as pea soup, and you slowly see through the soup and can make out vague objects. It's like the sun has come up and the fog is slowly being burnt away. And it's the same for everyone. I will stick with Natasha Bedingfield's lyrics from Unwritten.

I sang this for the rest of the LA journey; before each of the submissions of V2 and V3, I felt things were nearly there. I just had to let go and learn that I was undefined and just beginning. Additionally the future research; that is, the next phase, my book, was unwritten but I could taste it.

V3 TO PRESENTATION LIGHTBULB MOMENT: GROUNDED, GROUNDING, THE GRIND OF CONNECTING

It was with my presentation preparation that another critical moment occurred leading to me understanding more of grounding my statements. If I used the word "connecting" instead of "grounding," it was easier to understand. It was the act of connecting and therefore supporting what I am saying. I am providing evidence that I have a reason for my decisions and actions within the research design. Additionally, and more importantly, I have to be explicit in my statements through grounding them in previous research. This is opposite to a grounded theory approach where theory arises from the participants, but grounded, that is connected, to their views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I wondered how people come up with new theories, and new directions if all the time they are grounded back to existing theories. Perhaps these researchers show why the grounding to the existing theory is disconnected through questioning and debunking with evidence. This leads to criticality.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2023) "criticality" is defined as being critical or judgemental in nature. It involves a careful approach that examines and judges the topic systematically, such as critical reflection (Morley, 2008) as a process to develop. Critical incidents are moments that are unplanned yet spark thought (Richards & Farrell, 2005), or even a critical friend questioning with objectivity (Shivers et al., 2020). The word critical takes on the notion of being something that is very serious (a critical situation) something that is extremely important (a critical factor), but also of being judged very good (critical acclaim). In order to be critical, I had to question what I read, and then judge it as suitable or not. Furthermore, in order to ground my statements I had to ensure the theory was present and connected.

No journal entry highlights this learning, although the mentor meetings' notes highlight the need for the actions.

In preparation for writing V2 and V3:

Meeting Notes - Sept 27th Next draft is more critical. Use rhetorical questions - to strengthen my stance.

Meeting Notes – Nov 23rd Lift the criticality – in preparation for level 10.

Presentation preparation meetings:

Meeting Notes – Feb 1st – Come up with a short presentation to cover my bases. Cover methodological bases/ choices with rationales. Prepare to answer questions regarding choices I have made in the methods.

Meeting Notes – Feb 15^{th} – Deep dive – strong rationale for my choices. How the research question articulates with the method. As it is me telling the stories – ground them in the lit. The final statement, starred and in large writing: Keep it grounded/strong rationales.

POST PRESENTATION

I have a new theme song, "Unstoppable" (Sia, 2016). The song continues to empower and carry me into Course 2. Strangely, it plays on the radio on the days when I am slightly unmotivated to focus on the D. ProfPrac. I have my research design sorted and ethics is approved. Most importantly I know the questions to ask myself regarding my actions as I slowly deepen my knowledge of reflexivity and criticality.

CLOSING

This article was to outline the learnings I have taken from the Review of Learning stage to the Learning Agreement stage, with a specific focus on reflexivity and criticality. With this, I hope to add to the voices of D. ProfPrac students and their journey of self-discovery and growth.

Leigh Quadling-Miernik is building on her experience in a career of education by taking the Doctor of Professional Practice journey. Her passion is to create learning opportunities, and she has the motto "whatever gets to the goal with integrity." Her interest lies in supporting educators to develop their knowledge and skills and is now in year three of the doctorate looking into professional identity development for tertiary educators.

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