

Exploring Reflective Statements: what mid-career professionals choose to reveal about their learning and its effects

Eileen Carnell and Anne Gold

The Doctoral School and The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Institute of Education, University of London

ABSTRACT

Participants on the Doctorate in Education (International) at the Institute of Education, University of London are required to write a reflective statement to accompany the portfolio of their taught course assignments.

One set of reflective statements was analysed and revealed differences in what participants chose to reveal about their learning. A high level of emotional descriptors was found and participants provide a rich account of what they learned from an international perspective. Their statements suggest three main responses in describing their learning experiences: one, the development of academic and professional skills; two, surprising but welcome significant personal challenge leading to the transformation of themselves as learners; three, expected challenges leading to new ways of thinking and personal transformation.

From the analysis important issues about learning are highlighted and recommendations made for changing the reflective statements' task to ensure more effective learning.

INTRODUCTION

In 2005 the organisation in which this study took place was designated a Centre of Excellence in Work-based Learning for Educational Professionals (<http://www.wlecentre.ac.uk>). The Education Doctorate (EdD) programme falls within this remit. This has given us an opportunity to review elements of the EdD including the reflective statements participants in the programme are asked to write as part of the assessment process. This paper focuses on current debates around teaching in higher education particularly the focus on student learning (Carnell, 2007) and encouraging a meta-learning dimension (Jackson, 2004). It is set in the context of the Doctoral in Education degree and around the current dilemma in understanding the links between academic research and work-based learning (Carnell & Stobart, 2006; Scott *et al*, 2004). The aims of the paper are to: examine conceptions of learning in higher education; discuss the value of reflective statements in Doctoral level study; identify the significance of what students reveal about their learning; consider the effects of student learning in relation to their work-based experiences and in academic research. The data used originated from one group of participants' reflective statements that accompany their portfolio of their taught course assignments. Extracts were selected that reveal the participants' conceptions of learning. These extracts were then analysed to highlight their different ways of viewing their course experiences and then examined to draw out how they saw the effects of their learning in relation to personal, political and organisation dimensions.

The EdD programme is a professional doctorate, which means that it seeks to provide a combination of professional knowledge, academic knowledge and reflection on practice. As the programme has developed – the EdD (International) began in 2001 – more emphasis has been placed on reflection. This has come about as a result of annual course reviews, particularly an internal institutional review in 2005. Participants are now asked to write two reflective statements during their time on the programme. Each statement is about 2,000 words long, and the final statement is bound into the thesis and examined as part of the final viva.

The reflective statements we analysed for this paper are written at the end of the taught courses and before the research components. At this stage, participants have completed four assignments which have been supported by tutorials and formative comments on drafts – they have then been assessed at D level. The statement accompanies copies of the four assignments as well as the four sets of formative feedback and summative assessments, all of which are submitted as a portfolio. Successful completion of the portfolio leads participants to research an Institution Focused Study (IFS). (This is a substantial piece of ‘insider’ research into an institution, broadly defined, in which the researcher is professionally involved. The assessment format is a 20,000 word report.) They then produce a 40,000 word thesis on a further piece of research. (The participant is examined on the thesis by means of a viva. This is a similar process to the PhD viva except that the participant may begin with a short presentation.) From an internet search of university websites it was discovered that this, with the exception of the IFS, is a common format for most EdD programmes in the UK (Carnell & Stobart, 2006).

As we read through the Student Handbook guidance about the production of the portfolio, we noted that the guidelines for writing the statements seemed to describe quite practical activities – they did not appear to lay a great deal of emphasis on participants’ understandings about their learning:

The purpose of the statement is to indicate how your ideas have developed across the four courses and how the assignments relate to each other and your professional practice. The statement should provide the following:

- A brief description of and reflection on the content of the assignments;
- Reflection on the relationship between the assignments and on progression across the taught courses and assignments;
- If appropriate, how your academic thinking has been influenced and developed as a result of the feedback;
- Consideration of the relationship between the work you have done as part of the EdD (International) programme and your professional practice and development;
- Evidence of the development of your ideas for the institution-focused study (IFS) and thesis and how the coursework you have done relates to them.

International EdD Student Handbook, 2006/7 page 45

It is the 2,000 word reflective statement that forms the basis of this element of the research and which is the focus of this paper.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND OF THE EdD PROGRAMME

This EdD programme is an *International* one in that (to quote the Doctoral School website)

... it offers experienced professionals exciting opportunities for a cross-cultural and global examination of professionalism in education. The new and challenging perspectives on doctoral research brought by professionals from all over the world provide for stimulating debates among staff and students.

Professional doctorates now form an established alternative to the PhD both in the UK and in Australia (Lester, 2004). Professional doctorates offer academic study of professional practice – workplace learning. The UK Council's Report for Graduate Education (2002: 7) describes the professional doctorate:

The field of study is a professional discipline, rather than academic enquiry and scholarship...most professional doctorates are designed to meet a particular professional need...the research element of a professional doctorate is focused on professional practice.

The difference between the traditional and professional doctorate is that

‘the PhD aims to produce a professional researcher while the professional doctorate aims to produce a researching professional’ (Laing, 2000: 5, cited in McAlpine & Norton, 2006).

Some tensions may arise as students and academics may not agree on which goal to value (McAlpine & Norton 2006: 11). Some participants may come with a practical and skills-based set of expectations while others may seek personal and intellectual challenge. Other tensions may emerge, for example, when an academic discipline operates differently from the workplace. Lee (1999: 8) has suggested that what is successful in the workplace may not be validated by university practices:

Knowledge produced in the context of application clearly calls for principle and processes of evaluation that go far beyond the knowledge systems of the disciplinary arm of the university.

There have been recent changes in EdD programmes. The ‘first generation’ doctorates (Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001) were rooted in similar academic traditions to PhDs and Masters degrees. ‘Second generation’ EdDs (Scott *et al*, 2004) drew on Australian examples where the shift has been to more professionally related, rather than academic, outcomes which considered alternative forms of written assessment, for example portfolios or writing for multiple audiences. This shift highlights the importance of reflection in learning – a significant pedagogical move. A number of implications arise from this pedagogical move in relation to the writing of a reflective statement, for example about:

- views of learning
- the nature of professional knowledge.

VIEWS OF LEARNING

In order to analyse the reflective statements together we needed to share our view of learning. One definition suits our purposes well:

Learning ... that reflective activity which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge (Abbott, 1994).

This definition seemed to sum up the requirements of the reflective task as it focuses on the act of reflection. An analysis of this definition (Watkins *et al*, 2002) highlights its other features:

- an active process of relating new meaning to existing meaning, involving the accommodation and assimilation of ideas, skills, thoughts
- making connections between past, present and future which do not always follow in a linear fashion: unlearning and relearning play a part
- a process influenced by the use to which learning is to be put, and whether learning may be effectively retrieved in future situations.

Our own views connected with this process view of learning which contrasts with some prevalent views of learning, for example, that it is a passive process of knowledge acquisition, with predictable and measurable outcomes (Watkins *et al*, 2002: 1).

We also needed to share our perspectives about the purposes of learning so that in analysing the statements we might be able to detect different purposes within them.

The word 'learning' covers a range of meanings. In studies with university students Saljo's research (1979) identifies five conceptions of learning; Marton *et al* (1993) added a sixth:

- increasing knowledge;
- memorising and reproducing;
- applying facts or procedures;
- understanding;
- making sense of meaning;
- personal change.

The first three in this list are 'quantitative', the others 'qualitative' and range from 'meagre' to 'richer' conceptions of learning (Watkins, 2001). We note that there are a number of perspectives missing from the list, for example, belonging to a learning community and learning through dialogue (Carnell, 2007).

Our own views, especially in relation to learning on the EdD programme, coincide with the 'richer' conceptions. In our analysis we were aware that we would value more highly statements that expressed new understandings and insights, and indicated ways participants were making sense of meaning, professional knowledge as well as personal change.

For the purpose of the reflective statement the individual learner's construction of meaning is central as is reflection. Schön (1983) describes two aspects of reflection - 'in-action' and 'on-action' – in which the learner considers and evaluates their actions as they are doing them in the first instance and after the event in the second.

As reflection is key in this task for EdD participants we wanted to examine this concept in more detail. Schön (1983, 1987) claims 'reflection in action is essential as a mediation between theory and practice', an essential task for the EdD students. Schön stressed the value of reflection in the development of knowing-in-action into knowledge-in-action. Eraut (1994) also argues that deliberate processes are central to professional work, involving intuitive as well as analytical thinking and discussion.

There is another dimension that we feel is important in reflection - meta-learning (learning about learning) (Carnell & Lodge, 2002). Meta-learning is a concept not widely recognised in HE (Jackson, 2004). It is about helping learners connect their thinking about their own learning to actions and behaviours that engage them in learning strategically (Jackson, 2004: 391). Watkins usefully distinguishes learning and meta-learning: 'Learning is the process of creating knowledge by making sense of experience'; 'Meta-learning is the process of making sense of your experience of learning' (Watkins *et al*, 2001). Building meta-learning capacity, Meyer & Norton (2004) argue, is as important as learning about specific subject content, epistemologies and discipline mores. We feel this would be an important focus for analysis.

Higher Education is the space where learning, research and practice about learning and about learning about learning seem most logically to come together. We were united in the view that university contexts require richer conceptions of teaching and learning: to enable students to 'posses a capacity to look at problems from a number of different perspectives, to analyse, gather evidence, synthesise, and be flexible, creative thinkers' (Aulich, 1990: 3).

We concluded that for the purposes of the analysis we would look for evidence of the students' perceptions of learning and the extent to which they considered themselves to be active in the process, what they considered to be the purposes of learning and the purposes of the reflective process, and whether they demonstrated any skills at a meta-learning level.

THE NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In Higher Education, views of the purposes of learning link with views of knowledge, the nature of knowledge and whether knowledge is seen as something that is acquired or something constructed.

In analysing the statements we would look for the ways in which knowledge is seen by the participants. This is of particular significance as the EdD participants are professional people who have chosen the EdD route rather than a PhD. One view of the difference between a PhD and an EdD could be highlighted by the use of Eraut's (1994) distinction between an academic and a professional. 'Academics' (who are studying for a PhD) seek

knowledge possession which confers status and is demonstrated through erudition whereas 'professionals' (who are studying for an EdD) are aiming for action and operate in a 'what ought to be done' environment (Eraut, 1994: 52). Professionals in Eraut's view, adapt and develop knowledge according to the circumstances in which they find themselves, since it is effective action that confers status, practical rather than academic learning. Professionals seek effective action, in the form of the most successful realisation of their ideas and development of their practice, rather than knowledge for its own sake. In this view knowledge is constructed.

However, there may be tensions for professionals, who draw on theoretical knowledge as and when it becomes relevant, but who, when writing for university assessment purposes may assume that academic knowledge needs to be demonstrated. For example, Eraut (1994) raises two key issues: how is practical knowledge acquired through experience and how is it made explicit? Practical knowledge is understood not only to be experiential, but also complex, unpredictable, contextualized and difficult to generalize (Eraut, 1994, Schön 1987). This suggests that professionals may face the potential difficulty of possessing knowledge that does not easily translate into general propositions and is thus considered inferior. Scott *et al's* (2004) categorization of different types of knowledge helps to clarify this further and throws light on how different forms of knowledge are evaluated.

Scott *et al* (2004), address how the student-practitioner is constructed in the workplace and in academic cultures. They identify that there can be difficulties in equating academic and practitioner knowledge and in order to clarify the differences between the two, the authors identify four different models of knowledge. For instance they identify 'disciplinary knowledge' as the theoretical and methodological frameworks which characterize a particular discipline and serve to delineate a theorist from a non-theorist. In a disciplinary knowledge model, 'objective' and 'authoritative' knowledge dominates and practitioner or practical knowledge is seen as inferior, since it is not associated with ideas of truth, objectivity or epistemological authority.

They identify 'dispositional and trans-disciplinary knowledge' as 'non-predictable, non-deterministic, situation specific and contextualized' (*Ibid*, 2004, p.48). In this model, what they refer to as 'practitioner knowledge,' emerges through practice in specific, but dynamic contexts. It involves a continuous cycle of 'deliberation and action that cannot be transformed in the process into generalizable accounts' (*Ibid*, 2004, p.48), since the rationale for acquiring this form of knowledge is to inform the development of an individual's practice. Scott *et al* stress that practitioner knowledge is experiential and in continuous development.

Eraut (1994) identifies that practical knowledge is 'learned' through experience. However it is Scott *et al's* (2004) recognition of the importance of 'deliberation,' or reflection, to the development of practitioner knowledge that is relevant to this paper. Their argument is that experience contributes to knowledge and that experience must involve reflection as well as action. We feel it is important that there is a meta-level reflection and to gain a holistic perspective emotional aspects of learning also need to be addressed.

We both agreed at the outset, and in line with a number of other researchers, notably Burke and Jackson (2007) that emotions have a great influence on our learning and are part of the formation of knowledge and understanding. We are aware of the dominant view that knowledge is seen as objective, scientific and rational and that ‘subjective’, ‘irrational’ and ‘emotional’ aspects are marginalised (Burke and Jackson, 2007). Alongside Burke and Jackson, we recognise that emotions are constructed, contested, and as much a part of the development of ‘knowledge’ as supposed objectivity and rationality and that emotion should not be excluded from the learning process.

We concluded that for the purposes of the analysis we would look for evidence of how the participants view knowledge and how they use this knowledge to bring about changes in their professional context, rather than valuing it for its own sake. We would also look to see how participants deliberated on the development of practitioner knowledge, again at a meta-learning level. We were interested to see whether emotional aspects of learning would be included in the participants/students’ accounts and would be seen as an important contribution to knowledge. We also wondered at the outset whether any differences might be detected in terms of the responses of individuals – male, female or from different cultures. For instance, is reflective practice gendered? (Burke and Jackson, 2007: 138).

HOW THESE IDEAS LINK WITH THE REFLECTIVE STATEMENT – OUR OWN PERSPECTIVES

We took a set of 14 reflective statements which accompanied the 14 portfolios which had been submitted as part of the EdD (International) in the summer of 2006. We did not read the assignments or the feedback at this point – we focussed on the statements. We then read them carefully many times, talking together about what we had read, categorising, refining and re-categorising our findings. We were struck by how differently the participants had interpreted the set task. Some followed them exactly, carefully responding to each aspect of the guidelines. Others chose to tell us about profound and emotional reactions to the programme. To some extent, they told us about the expectations they had initially brought to the programme and the extent to which these expectations had been met.

It became clear that what we both found to be of value in the statements was linked with our own views of successful learning. We realised as we talked about what we had found that we were both moved by those statements which seemed to us to describe rich and transformational learning. We realised that what people chose to write in their statements revealed what they thought learning was about. It is important to note that what we went on to recognise and work with was what they *chose to tell us about their learning*, not what they had actually learnt. We do know that outside the task, some of them had changed but they chose not to reveal this in their statements. They wrote what they thought the task suggested.

It is also important to remind ourselves that the statement writers are all mid-career professional people working in education. Many of them are teachers themselves in different educational settings. Many of them will have studied and thought about learning

and teaching with other people. It would be another interesting project to find out the extent to which they had thought about their own learning both before and during the programme.

In analysing the statements we recognise our own views on what makes statements particularly rich. We value complex accounts and we are not distracted by what may appear to be a multi-layered process, indeed we welcome it.

WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS CHOSE TO TELL US ABOUT THEIR LEARNING

These are the participants, with pseudonyms and further information, whose reflective statements we analysed – with their permission:

Catherine (from the UK) wrote a paragraph to show how her work on issues of professionalism gave her an understanding of the wider implications for attempting to professionalise her field. It helped her to critique a political position and allowed her to understand better the nuanced power relations within her profession.

Karen (from the USA) used some of the theory she encountered in the programme and in her reading to make sense of her life within such conflict and turmoil as the learning caused for her.

Anna (from Iceland) wrote about how the international learning community provided by her cohort in the programme offered her safety and voice.

Nikos (from Greece) showed how he changed as a person, so that he now sees some things in a completely different way – he offered us a complex view of learning. He used emotional language to show this complexity and it is clear that his emotions led him to that change in the person – he reacted emotionally and that changed how he went into the classroom as a teacher.

Gudrun (from Iceland) chose this programme partly because she wanted to explore the international aspect and she was not disappointed. She said that she learnt a great deal both from her group and from her classes, and was able to process that learning and apply it to her own professional situation - there has been a transformation of practice and she has recognised it as important.

Eileen (from the Philippines) described the impact of EdD on her professional life and told how her use of theory and view of knowledge taught her to operate differently in her professional life.

Margaret (from the UK) described the meta-learning – the learning about learning – that she has gained from the programme. It seems that her definition of herself as a professional changed as a result of her involvement in the programme.

Joan (from Singapore) described an even wider spread of change beyond her own learning - her EdD affected her whole faculty. She described with some emotion how her faculty has been influenced by her learning.

Hiroku (from Japan) used the theory she encountered in the programme as a lens to interpret both her workplace and the activities which she shares with her colleagues. She explained how she cannot easily look at her own professional practice because she works collaboratively and she looked at the effects of her collaborative work on the outcomes of the work.

Jerzy (from Poland) described the way the theory he encountered shed light on his professional practice by offering a new way of looking at his own professional practice and questioning it. As a result, he is determined to change his practice. He seemed to us to be describing transformational change at a personal level.

Chris (is from the UK and is aged 52) described the way that theory affected her thinking and impacted on her practice. She described her learning autonomy and showed how she really understood about meta-learning.

Henry (from the USA) described the effects on him of the programme in a powerful and emotional way. He described that transformation, but he also retained some questions about the effects of the programme on his private life.

Louise (from the USA) wrote that she came just to learn, not for professional advancement, but she found she did gain professionally.

Lauren (from Canada) found the programme invaluable for her development as an academic – she is learning and developing new and appropriate skills.

WHAT WE LEARNT ABOUT THEIR LEARNING

We analysed the statements and were excited to find that they all illustrated particular issues about their learning. We found that we could discern some dominant trends and we have come to understand that it is the descriptions of the actual ‘learning’ journey that interests us, not just the outcomes. The statements suggested the following:

- In some there was a main focus on coming to learn academic and professional skills and they were pleased to have done so. They appear not to have been transformed or challenged by the course experience – or they did not chronicle that challenge or transformation. They do, however, tell us clearly about the competences they have developed. This was the dominant theme. We would not like to diminish either the learning or the emotional impact of the learning that these participants chronicled. Rather, we wish to point out that they did not describe their learning in terms of transformational learning. They did, however, use powerful and emotional language to describe their learning: ‘delicate’, ‘complex’, ‘proud’, ‘I am more secure’.
- Some others told us that they been transformed: they told us that initially they had no questions to ask or they were intent on doing just enough to pass, but instead, they were ultimately profoundly moved by the learning experience. They told us

about significant personal challenge. They may not have set out to change, merely to make better sense of their professional lives, but they have been profoundly moved by their experiences and reflections about their learning on the programme.

- And some told us that they came with the expectation of transformative learning. They wrote that they came into the programme in order to explore and find answers to their questions, to find new ways of thinking. It was as if they came on a quest. People also commented on the international dynamic of the programme, often to show how learning here in London has given them a clearer view of their own country. They also recognised the importance of belonging to an international learning community.

In reading through the transcripts it is striking that, a) so many different themes emerge about learning and knowledge, and b) that the way in which the participants write about their learning experiences is so very different.

DISCUSSION

We really enjoyed reading and analysing the statements. We felt the statements gave us a sense of the participants' professional and personal lives that may not always be present in other assessment tasks. It was a pleasure to read about how they had overcome struggles and were personally and professionally transformed.

We were particularly delighted when participants demonstrated rich, constructivist views of learning (Watkins *et al*, 2002) and knowledge creation (Eraut, 1994) and we were pleased to read how the participants' emotional responses provided an holistic account of their learning (Burke and Jackson, 2007). We were pleased that some had included a meta-learning commentary (Jackson, 2004; Watkins, 2001) although only a minority of participants included this. We constructed the following list drawing and developing the ideas of Eraut (1994); Carnell (2007); Guile and Young (1995); Scott *et al* (2004) to identify what we considered to be evidence of rich learning: An effective account demonstrates that a participant:

- questions and provides evidence of thinking differently
- makes sense of meaning and highlights personal change
- includes an account of how emotions connect with learning and can contribute to knowledge construction
- contains a meta-learning element
- includes richer conceptions of learning
- conceives practice as a resource to rethink theory as a way of explanation and understanding
- uses theory as a way of linking the personal, political and universal
- uses theory as a way of empowering the personal
- offers unique interpretations not general propositions

- uses theory to discern alternative or improved ways of resolving professional concerns
- is explicit about the social and organizational context
- creates new knowledge by the development of insights and understanding about practice.

We learned about the participants' perceptions of learning; all accounts differed. We noticed that if the participants used the task outline suggested, their narratives while perfectly competent, seemed to focus on skills and knowledge acquired in a descriptive way. These corresponded to the qualitative conceptions identified by Marton *et al* (1993). Other more creative accounts, for example those that deviated from the set task, presented more complex views of learning, included emotional language and talked about how they were constructing knowledge rather than absorbing it. These were more analytical. These corresponded to the richer, qualitative conceptions identified by Marton *et al* (1993), Watkins (2001) and Carnell (2007). Here the participants had richer conceptions of learning than the task suggested. This pointed to a redrafting of the task.

A few focused on what they were noticing about their learning – focusing on processes rather than content (Carnell & Lodge; Jackson, 2004; Watkins, 2001). An example of this is Margaret's story. She describes how she has become a more reflective practitioner. Louise acknowledges that she was motivated for personal stimulation and growth and yet has been professionally changed as well. Others like Lauren, talk about growing as an academic, thinker, researcher and writer. Elsewhere levels of anxiety are frequently highlighted when dilemmas, both private and public are mentioned. Henry talks about the importance of balancing work, family life and studies. But not many accounts include an explicit meta-narrative. This is not surprising as the task did not suggest including it and it is unlikely that the course programme focused on meta-learning in the different modules.

The focus on knowledge and the ways in which they use theory was highlighted in all the accounts – it was often used to discern alternative or improved ways of resolving professional concerns (Eraut, 1994; Guile & Young, 1995; Scott *et al* 2004). Karen, for example, suggested that different epistemological positions allowed her to create meaningful constructive elements in educational leadership, reform and development. The answer for her lies in the constructivist paradigm where she constructs opportunities to fit the appropriate educational situation. Joan also described the direct impact and relationship with professional practice that extended to her faculty. The accounts suggest that changes are often wider than individual level. Hiroku's account mentioned the importance of deepening specialist knowledge while retaining holistic and ethical views.

Most striking is the extent have they used theory as a way of becoming empowered both in their personal and professional lives. Jerzy, for example, talked about a major shift: *'my unbiased fascination with technology has been waning and has been gradually replaced by more careful and critical judgements'*. Catherine talked about her heightened political awareness. Others told us of the risks they took and the changes that have resulted. A number made an explicit reference to the way they questioned and gave evidence of thinking differently. Chris commented: *'I realize that at a profound level my perceptions of what it is to be a learner and a teacher are changing'*. Nikos said that he was able to look

upon educational matters in a different way: *'Now I can listen to and understand better what students have to say'*.

Several highlighted the importance of their community. Anna, for example, said she likes the international group of students and highlighted the importance of the informal theoretical and professional discussions both outside and inside the classroom. She continued: *'I can express myself freely in both situations and that is invaluable. I feel I have a voice'*. Louise stated that the international dimension was important to her too, especially relating her ideas to *'the bigger picture'*. Gudrun also commented on the gains of being part of an international group of students and a frequent visitor to another country. In this statement there is recognition of the importance of reciprocity in learning relationships: *'I have learned from them and I hope I have given them something in return.'* These are rich conceptions of learning that recognise dialogue and community as important elements (Carnell, 2007).

In this sense the accounts are generative – learning and change has occurred; the learning is explicit. As Eileen said: *'I have begun to develop a more integrated as well as a more nuanced understanding, and to explore theoretical frameworks that can guide both my professional and academic practice'*.

What we are still unsure of are the gender and cultural differences. This small-scale study does not allow us to make a comment on this except to say that we cannot make any conclusions about these important areas. This calls for further research.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed important insights into student learning particularly around the connection between work-based learning and academic research. This remains a tension in universities, as academic research is often valued more highly than work-based learning. For example, personal change and the emotional dimension of learning is often ignored in academic life and not encouraged in assessment tasks. From our study we support the view that making work-based learning and academic learning explicit helps to overcome this dilemma and helps students and their tutors be more aware of the inter-relationship between the two, the relevance of personal change and of the significance of reflection on emotional states in learning.

As a result of what we learned we made recommendations that the task of writing reflective statements should be changed to ensure that they encouraged an explicit focus on learning and what students are learning about their learning. These recommendations were acted upon and the guidelines changed. These changes included making the purpose of the reflective writing tasks clearer; asking the students to comment on new insights and understandings to avoid a summary of content; asking students to consider what they have learned in the process of writing thus encouraging a meta-level analysis; asking students to consider the ways their practices have changed and what they have done as a result.

Professional change, both at an individual level as well as an organisational level, is a vital component of the EdD. The coursework is constructed to facilitate research and development in the participants' workplaces. The extended task prompts the participants to make the changes they have brought about explicit as well as the learning that underpinned the changes.

When we first read the reflective statements we noticed that some participants chose to include insightful comments about how their emotions were helping or hindering their learning. In so doing they provided a rich account of their learning which was more holistic. We therefore recommended an additional task to encourage all participants to consider the emotional aspects of their learning asking how the participants' views of themselves as learners were changing and how their views of learning were changing.

By making learning explicit learners become more aware of themselves in the learning process and of the learning process; they become more effective learners. By drawing attention to the possibility of change, both as a learner and in their views of learning, encourages learners to take more responsibility for their own learning. Noticing learning requires the participants to stand back and consider learning at a meta-level.

We have argued in this article that effective learners are skilled in construction and co-construction approaches to learning. As the EdD course encourages participants to develop their own professional practice by learning through dialogue and reflection, there is little value in the transmission approach.

The changes brought about to the guidelines as a result of this study will encourage future participants to be more reflective about their own learning; about the connections between their learning and their practice; make connections between work-based learning and academic research, about the emotional aspects of learning; and what they have learned about learning at this stage in their careers.

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Eileen Carnell

Eileen Carnell has been involved in teaching, professional development and educational research throughout her career. She has contributed to a range of publications, including research reports, journal articles and authored books on effective learning. Her latest co-authored book 'Passion and Politics' focus on academic writing. It was published by the Institute of Education in 2008. Eileen is currently working with Caroline Lodge on an edited book entitled 'Retiring Lives'. This will be published by the Institute of Education in 2009.

Correspondence: Eileen Carnell, e.carnell@ioe.ac.uk

Anne Gold

Anne has just retired from more than forty years working in education, the last 20 years at the Institute of Education, University of London where she was a senior lecturer, Institute International Learning and Teaching Coordinator and programme leader for the EdD (International). She continues to be a resource person for the Association of Commonwealth Universities' women's' programme.

Correspondence: Anne Gold, a.gold@ioe.ac.uk