Helping Doctoral Students of Education to Face Writing and Emotional Challenges in Identity Transition.

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UNIVERSITY WRITING: SELVES AND TEXTS IN ACADEMIC SOCIETIES

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Chapter 12

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Paula Carlino

> Learning is particularly drenched in deep emotional issues, precisely because learning expands us beyond the secure realms of habit and prior senses of the self into new areas of competence and participation. (Bazerman, 2001, pp. 185–186)

Introduction

The difficulties that postgraduate students experience in order to bring forth their theses have been documented in numerous studies (e.g., Ahern & Manathunga, 2004; Kiley & Wisker, 2009; Lundell & Beach, 2002). As a consequence, the PhD completion rate is between 50% and 60% in Australia (Martin, Maclachlan, & Karmel, 2001) and the United States (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007). In Argentina there are no systematic data but the estimated rate is much lower (Jeppesen, Nelson, & Guerrini, 2004). Developing a thesis is, therefore, a goal that eludes many, especially in the fields of social sciences and humanities (Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Groen, So, & Price, 2007).

What is it about the writing of a thesis that makes it so difficult to complete? Besides requiring of the candidates the acquisition of conceptual and methodological knowledge, it is also an unfamiliar genre which demands a new kind of writing. Furthermore, doctoral research also entails the development of personal capabilities

(e.g., tolerance for uncertainty and perseverance in the face of failures). These are needed to address critical creative work (Lovitts, 2005), to cope with the disorientation caused by working in a field in which they often have little experience and references (Delamont & Atkinson, 2001) and to be able to persevere in an uncertain undertaking which shows no signs of reaching a successful fruition until close to the very end (Styles & Radloff, 2000).

Research shows that the main obstacle in social sciences is the weak academic integration (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000, Tinto, 1993) or the scarcity of exchanges (Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 1997). This may be linked to thesis work performed outside of a research team, the irregular dedication of those who lack scholarships (Evans, 2002), and the isolation that they experience (Miller & Brimicombe, 2004). Furthermore, many candidates feel disheartened by the magnitude of the task, given the fact that it does not usually show intermediate-range achievements (Manathunga, 2005). They often doubt about their ability to finish their theses (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003; Carlino, 2003; Castelló, 2007; Ngcongo, 2000). Such problems are enhanced when there is no supervisor especially committed to holding frequent meetings with the students in order to guide them through the stages of their work. This situation is endemic in the field of social sciences in Argentina (Carlino, 2005b).

In line with these studies, the core idea of this chapter is that the production of a doctoral thesis brings to bear challenges beyond conceptual, methodological, and writing knowledge. Delving into a research culture and being accepted as a full member involves learning new modes of doing and behaving, in a process of academic enculturation and identity transformation (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2008; Prior & Bilbro, this volume; see also Castelló & Iñesta, this volume, for the relationship between social and authorial identity). This slow change is often accompanied by the tensions and emotions that are typically activated in humans when they are exposed to the gaze of members of the community which they aspire to join (Boice, 1993; Britton, 1994; Carlino, 2003, 2005b). This is especially true when the candidates are unsure as to whether they can successfully carry out what the task will demand.

Several universities in the world have implemented institutional mechanisms to improve the writing development of PhD candidates (e.g., Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Cargill, 2004; Chanock, 2007; Dysthe, this volume; Dysthe et al., 2006; Rienecker, 2003; Rose & McClafferty, 2001; Rubdy, 2005; Zuber-Skerritt & Knight, 1986). Although some workshops allow for the exploration of the feelings involved in the doctoral experience (Lee & Boud, 2003; Lonka, 2003), it is not common for writing to be used as a way to reflect on the difficulties encountered.

In this chapter, I analyze a seminar that sought to create an environment in which these emotions could be shared through the work of academic writing. First I outline the status of writing in Argentine universities. Second, I describe the tasks undertaken in the seminar, their theoretical foundations, the participants and the graduate program. Then, I specify the corpus and strategy of analysis used to characterize the emotions involved in the experiences of these doctoral students, followed by the transcript of some of their voices in order to illustrate the topics that emerged. Finally, I briefly explore the relationship between the emotions which came to light through writing and the action of writing about them.

Writing in Argentine Universities

In Argentinian university Social Sciences and Humanities divisions, writing is usually required for assessment purposes, but is seldom supported in the disciplines. Viewed as a prolongation of a generalizable skill that should have been previously learnt, it is taken for granted. For that reason, students often receive scant guidelines and feedback. Since university teachers rarely consider academic writing as a learning tool, undergraduates are rarely given the opportunity to draft and rewrite afterwards (Carlino, 2010, in press). Conceived of as a medium of communication to convey already-formed thoughts, writing is regarded as ''a textual product rather than an intellectual process'' (Carter, Miller, & Penrose, 1998).

In contrast, the doctoral seminar described in this chapter acknowledges and nurtures the epistemic power of writing. In addition, based on a situated learning approach of academic enculturation (see Prior & Bibro, this volume), it has been designed to help students take part in the practice of writing precise texts for specific audiences, instead of teaching a general decontextualized technique.

The Doctoral Writing Seminar

A 33-hour writing workshop was developed over a 20-month period and delivered in two parts:

1. 4 classes of 3 h over a 2 1/2 month period and
2. a year later, 7 classes over a 6-month period (4 meetings before the summer vacation period and 3 meetings afterwards).

This temporal arrangement was aimed at working with students' different needs due to their progress in their postgraduate study. The second part of the workshop was intentionally split by a vacation period to allow for plenty of time devoted to writing.

The seminar included several different tasks focused around the process of writing, group and peer reviewing, and rewriting two scientific texts. During the first year of candidature, when they had not even defended their thesis proposal, students were asked to write a dissertation abstract as if their dissertation were finished. The purpose of this task was to encourage writing as an epistemic tool to develop their research problem and plan their theses work as a whole, taking into account the coherence among aims, research questions, methods, foreseen findings, and relevance of their prospective study. A year later, in the second part of the seminar, they had to write an abstract and then a paper with work in progress regarding their theses and find an appropriate scientific conference to submit it and present it.

Additionally, they were assigned several ''subjective'' reflective texts: an initial autobiography of themselves as writers, before the beginning of the workshop and after receiving by e-mail the professor's autobiography, a letter telling their experience as doctoral students at the beginning of the second year, and at the end

of the first and the second parts of the seminar, two reflective and evaluative accounts about their work in the seminar.

Besides the written assignments, the workshop started with an exploration of several PhD theses and thesis proposals in Education. Because these texts are not easily available for students in the Argentine context (in fact, research proposals constitute an "occluded genre" (Swales, 1996)), the professor brought them in a bag and distributed them to groups of three students. The task was to analyze and extract their features (number of pages, structure, type of information and relative extension of each chapter, titles, subtitles, verbal tense and person used in each, forms and functions of citations and their location, etc.). This analysis lead to a discussion about who the readers of these texts are, what purposes their authors have, what function is fulfilled by each part of the dissertation, whether its intention is explanatory or argumentative, etc. The need to insert the PhD contribution within the theoretical debates of a field of study was also elucidated, dismantling the stressful belief of original work as absolute novelty but requiring entering in an established conversation at the same time. To sum up, during the first and second classes, we characterized the thesis and the thesis proposal genres as social practices within specific communities, and abstracted the similarities among texts understanding that they are instituted means to accomplish similar writers' aims.

Linked to this genre analysis, the IMRD structure was explained considering the function that its parts (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) serve in the research disseminating actions of a scientific community. We listed the text types which constitute the academic genre set (research report, thesis, conference paper, research proposal, abstract, etc.) and pointed out how the IMRD structure was expanded, condensed, or cut across them. To show the relevance there is in learning to write an abstract, its central role in the academic writing practices was highlighted. We discussed when, who, in which situations, for what purposes, etc., abstracts were written and read in the investigative world (see *scientific academic genres* in Russell and Cortes' Figure 1.1, this volume).

The second part of the seminar began with an exploration of different calls for papers in Education conferences that students were asked to gather in advance, in order to choose one conference to present their dissertation work in progress. A shorter but analogous genre analysis was performed with conference proposals.

Over the entire workshop, the task of giving and receiving peer critique was assigned as regular homework. This was modelled on the shared review that took place in most of the classes, in which two or three students delivered copies of their drafts to be collectively read and reviewed. During this joint activity, multivoiced feedback (Dysthe, this volume) was coordinated by the professor, who commented on the drafts after the students did. In addition to giving her viewpoint, she synthesized students' responses, highlighting agreements and discrepancies among them. Participants were advised to comment first on content, structure, and substantive aspects (e.g., clarity, coherence, thematic progression, adjustment to genre expectations, and authorial image). They were also taught to pay attention to the consistency among the components of the research design (Maxwell, 1996).

Sometimes, the group also offered indications about how to modify certain portions of the text. In addition to textual problems, the positive aspects had to be pointed out. In all cases, reviewers were encouraged to justify their suggestions. The student authors whose texts were the focus of feedback were advised not to respond to comments during the session and, instead, to take notes about them. They would have to consider them in order to rethink their drafts afterwards.

At the end of each part of the seminar, the students' work was assessed through an individual portfolio in which they included a sequence of the drafts they wrote, the feedback they received, the improvement plan for their texts, along with their initial autobiography, the letter with their experience after one year of doctoral training, and a reflective account about their involvement in the different tasks during the seminar.

The professor made explicit that the philosophy of the workshop was not normative. Academic writing could not be reduced to following rules. Instead, the seminar attempted to promote the development of genre and rhetorical awareness. This meant that the improvement of students' drafts was usually a matter of taking into account the relationship between the authors' intentions and the effects that textual choices may have on the likely audience. It was necessary to develop an understanding of its probable expectations (the typical discourse actions this audience would expect in a definite situation), and the initial description of the genre would help on this. Therefore, the challenge was to learn to envision the point of view of the reader in order to minimize the gap between the writer's purposes and the reader's anticipated response.

Pedagogical Framework

The coursework included in the writing workshop was designed taking into account different and complementary contributions:

1. The concept of writing not only as a rhetorical and communicative practice but also as an epistemic process (Flower, 1979; Hayes & Flower, 1986; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1985). Further, the idea of writing as pertaining both to the "context of justification" and to the "context of discovery," in terms of Popper's epistemology (1934; Carlino, 2006).
2. The analysis of scientific genres, both in their textual features (Hyland, 2002, 2003; Swales, 1990) and as social activities (Artemeva, 2008; Bakhtin, 2002; Bazerman, 1988; Maingueneau, 2002; Miller, 1984).
3. The pedagogy of academic writing, which emphasises the need to teach how to give and receive critical comments on a piece of writing within a nonthreatening low-stakes situation (Aitchison, 2003; Caffarella & Barnet, 2000).
4. Central issues of research methodology such as the search for coherence among the different parts of the research design (Maxwell, 1996; Rienecker, 2003).

5. The concept of academic integration as a central factor in ''doctoral persistence'' (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Tinto, 1993) and how writing groups can relate to it.
6. The idea that learning (Bazerman, 2001; Pichon-Rivière, 1971) and academic writing (Bloom, 1981; Britton, 1994) are stressful challenges and, in particular, the experience of doing a thesis as part of a process of identity change (Lee & Boud, 2003; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2008) plenty of emotions (Manathunga, 2005; Morrison-Saunders, Moore, Newsome, & Newsome, 2005) and not just as a cognitive issue. Related to this, the role that text-work can play in identity-work (Kamler & Thomson, 2004) and the usefulness of creative writing to deal with emotional issues related to learning (Creme & Hunt, 2002).

The Students

Since 2005, the seminar was iterated with five cohorts of part-time Education doctoral students, having five to eleven students at a time. Most of them were over 40 years old and had a professional rather than academic career, although several of them had defended a master thesis (in Argentina this is not a requisite for doing a PhD). Only 5 students were under 30 years old studying on a full time basis inside a research group.

The Graduate Program

Argentina has an established tradition in Laboratory Sciences PhDs but a shorter history regarding Education doctorates. This means not only that the doctoral program in which this seminar took place was in its early stages but also that the available dissertation supervisors were few, overloaded with work and usually not full time professors in the same university where the doctoral program was being taught. Team research, co-authorship with supervisors, and learning from advanced students was seldom expected. At the same time, the idea of what PhD work entails was under construction and therefore not a given in the academic culture.

In this context, the writing workshop examined in this chapter was part of an unusual three-year long dissertation seminar in which students were guided to elaborate the thesis proposal and assisted to begin their thesis work with the help of other professors and through assignments other than the ones analyzed here.

Corpus and Method of Analysis

The material analyzed in this chapter involves the reflective notes included in the portfolios of the doctoral students. Using an interpretative-qualitative approach, the analysis aimed to understand the experiences from the point of view of those who

were involved. The students' notes were read, initially as separate cases and later seeking common themes among them. This coding process became more precise in several re-readings of the material that aimed to arrange themes in general categories. Finally, the writing of this chapter also helped to further refine themes and coordinate them in relation to one another.

Students' Reflections on the Seminar Tasks

The most recurring themes that emerged in this data analysis were the insecurity of doctoral students, their sense of vulnerability when observed by others, the workshop as a stimulus for writing, and the temporary building of self-confidence every time they achieved their goals. Other themes that appeared in student texts include gaining a more accurate understanding of doctoral work during the workshop; getting to know the academic community which they long to be a part of; the anxiety they experience when writing, knowing that their text will undergo many changes until they achieve what is expected; their relief upon perceiving that the workshop allowed them to express their personal feelings of incompetence without making them feel guilty; the pleasure they got out of certain writing assignments versus the painful challenge of others; the overcoming of certain writer's block as a result of the workshop assignments; writing as a method for thinking and not only for communicating, and the contribution of peers in revising their own texts.

To illustrate how the experience of writing as a PhD student "is drenched in deep emotional issues" (Bazerman, 2001), I provide quotes from students reflective notes, which were submitted in their portfolios at the end of each part of the workshop.

1. Students perceived the assignment of writing their "autobiography as writers" at the beginning of the seminar as an opportunity to reflect on their personal history and see where they were in terms of the challenge of the doctoral thesis. The thesis was seen as part of a rite of passage in which members of a community would assess them personally and not just their written product:

> [I believe that writing one's autobiography is] Very valuable because it encourages you to hold a very personal dialogue with yourself […] Very valuable in terms of exposing oneself to others, almost like a drill-practice […] of the baptism of fire that comes when you introduce yourself in (academic) society, a presentation that has a personal charge as strong as a doctoral thesis.

> it allows you to clarify the "symbolic" starting point for undertaking the task of writing, one's relationship to writing and the emotions that it provokes, in order to have them in mind when it comes to writing something as emotionally demanding as the thesis.

The assignment also encouraged students to get to know one another and to strengthen their mutual bonds:

> By reading the [autobiographies] of the other students, I got to know them professionally, academically and personally in a way that I would not have been able to otherwise, thus increasing the group's trust.

> it increased my expectations of the course. I really enjoyed exchanging these writings, and it was also a useful tool in terms of the familiarization and unity of the group.

Although it was not written in their portfolios, some students expressed that receiving the professors' autobiography at the beginning of the seminar was an unusual welcome. They also declared that the autobiography assignment laid the foundations for an atypical course, in which the personal "nonacademic" issues were also taken into account. Nonetheless, a few of the students felt uneasy because the assignment exposed them publicly:

> The task of writing an autobiography as a writer is an uncomfortable one, since it inevitably brings up issues about certain aspects of one's private life.

2. Skimming and analyzing theses and thesis proposals aided students in getting an idea of the written pieces they would have to submit and gave them a clearer understanding of the uses given to the pieces by the community they wish to become a part of. This knowledge had a reassuring effect:

> "Looking" at other people's theses helps diminish the reverential fear that slowly grows in academic circles. For me, in particular, it really kept me grounded to think about the specific people who would be reading my thesis – something I hadn't thought of in the past. The reader I imagined was academia as a whole, and this was an obstacle to writing, since it is impossible to write for such a vast, plural public.

> it allowed us to look at different styles, structures, presentations […] to see how they resolved things and understand that it can be done.

3. Writing a 400-word dissertation abstract (including "findings") before starting their dissertation seemed like an impossible task at the beginning. The professor invited students to approach the assignment as both a fictional writing game and a tool to develop their thesis proposals. Very soon, the students saw the assignment as a license to write without inhibition because it was a "game" with no losers. After three classes of writing, revising, and rewriting their abstracts, the students appreciated the task for several reasons:

> like a fun, motivating game […] moving forward on what didn't "yet exist" and willed to be brought into being. I got excited about it and it

> encouraged me to come up with definitions and to take a chance on
> some answers […] I felt like I could play the simulation game […]
> Maybe this 5th version won't look anything like the final one but right
> now, I can say it helped me make progress and keep me going […]
> Preparing the abstract forced me to make decisions about my thesis
> and made me feel like "it can exist."

The process of imagining the finished thesis was not only relieving but also
inspiring:

> It's like making the task of imagining something official, allowing
> yourself to go faster than you usually would go in order to "be there"
> before you arrive, and thus get an idea of the dimensions and
> acknowledge one's problems and the necessary steps.

> Imagining that the thesis is already done can really calm you down, but
> most of all, I thought it was great to write about something that is, to a
> certain extent, fictional, imaginary, unreal.

Writing the abstract encouraged students to consider the different components of
their intended research as a whole, and to check that they formed a coherent unit in
advance:

> it was a very useful strategy for rethinking certain global aspects of the
> research that we are about to undertake […] to anticipate some of the
> central work themes

> it gave me a global vision of how to develop the thesis, allowing me to
> perceive theoretical inconsistencies and methodological issues that had
> not yet been resolved and to evaluate the quality of what I had
> proposed to investigate.

It also made students ponder over possible outcomes of the research they were
envisioning and assess its significance:

> It helped me get better organized and allowed me to think about my
> hypotheses, as well. Up until now, I had only thought about the goals.

> It made us think about the potential findings and sketch an interpretation
> of them.

The task of writing the abstract was considered to be very useful in prompting
students to develop their thesis proposal:

> it forced me to come up with a better definition of my subject of study
> and the main question I wanted to answer.

> The abstract has "yanked" on my outline plan and has forced me to go back to it time after time, increasing its communicability.

> When I look at the first abstract I handed in and compare it with the last one, I see that in a short time, I made significant advances in organizing my ideas for the thesis.

Many students appreciated the task because observing their progress boosted their self-confidence:

> When I started the workshop, I was in a very particular, complicated stage of non-productiveness in terms of my doctoral thesis project […] Today, after three or four versions of the abstract, I am in a totally different situation. I am not convinced that the summary fully expresses the research that I am going to do, but I do believe that I am going to find the topic […] The workshop gave me a push; it awakened my curiosity and my confidence.

> it allowed me to clarify my own ideas about my thesis project, to get over the writer's block […] and to increase my self-esteem to some degree because I was able to effectively produce and make some progress in my thesis project.

After several rewritings, some students felt they had a decent written product to show outside the seminar. The abstract of their future dissertation was perhaps the first tangible structured *logos* after a creative process only experienced as chaos:

> it allowed me to start writing about what I imagine will be my thesis. It was the first thing I managed to send to my thesis advisor and her feedback was positive […] This was the push that helped me unblock myself and put my ideas down in the abstract.

> [the abstract served as a] tool for communicating with actors outside the workshop […] the "cover letter" of my progress in the Thesis Workshop and in meetings with my advisor.

4. The collective review of abstracts in class along with peer critique between classes served many purposes.[1] In the first place, it "taught" students that no good work

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[1]Group or peer review and giving/receiving feedback are very rare tasks in school or university curriculum in Argentina.

is born finished: recursively drafting one's ideas was an expected academic practice, not a sign of failure or incompetence:

> I learned to deal with the imperfections of my first drafts and thus overcome my desire to write the first draft as if it were the last.

> I started to understand that, for now, there is not a definitive version, accepting that a reading or comment from my professors or fellow classmates can mean "shuffling and dealing a new hand" […] I feel like I have experienced a major change: I can no longer write a report, a communication or any professional text in the same way I used to.

Some students realized that giving and receiving feedback to rewrite a text was a typical activity of the social community they aspired to become a part of. This was empowering for them:

> it put me in the position of the colleague and commentator of others, giving me a level of protagonism in the critical assessment of the texts […] having the chance to offer and receive criticism trains us in the academic dynamic of reflective criticism, with the criteria and requirements that are used in this environment.

Most students began to understand that receiving feedback from the professor and peers was an opportunity to develop their thinking and improve their abstracts:

> I realized that when readers did not fully understand my ideas, it was because I had not fully elaborated them at an intellectual level.

> My peers contributed with new ideas and perspectives, along with questions that I hadn't thought of and mistakes I hadn't caught.

> my recent entry in the social sciences limits my ability to evaluate all of the aspects that should be considered in the research. Therefore, writing the abstract and analyzing it with a peer have played a fundamental epistemic role for me, allowing me to come down to earth in terms of my unrealistic expectations.

> When I received suggestions, it made me want to start writing right away.

When students became aware of the effect their texts had on a reader, they realized that this knowledge was useful to redraft them to shorten the distance between their intentions and their achievements on paper:

> The chance to have someone else read what you have written seems very important to me because you always know what you want to say

but you may not always be sure what it is that you have actually expressed.

Choosing what to leave and what to take is very complex, and it is even more when you revise and see that you are not totally sure if the writing's rhetoric is clear to the target reader. Peer feedback is a good way to overcome this issue.

Giving and receiving feedback also facilitated the students' integration with their peers:

in general, I felt there was a lot of mutual respect and relevant contributions. It was useful for me to feel like I was part of a network.

It helped us to continue to build up the team as a group of doctoral students, to get to know each other and to stop being so afraid of giving or receiving criticism.

For some students, their accomplishments boosted their confidence:

It was helpful for me to read other abstracts from a critical point of view and realize that I could make specific contributions.

the exercise of feedback and re-reading helped me increase my confidence and also made me feel self-assured when the time to rewrite arrived.

At the same time, other students stated that in the first part of the seminar they or their peers felt highly exposed to their critiques. They provided several suggestions on how to deal with this:

sometimes I feel that making comments or interventions to other people's texts - especially if they have more experience and a longer academic career- can be bothersome [for them] or cause some silent displeasure.

the group had some misapprehension about "being critically reviewed." Sometimes we couldn't finish the exercise because we were defending a position instead of critically analyzing whether the suggestion made was relevant or not.

it would be great if the first abstract analyzed could be rewritten and presented again in the next class. This way, the author wouldn't necessarily feel like he or she did a bad job in comparison with the other [classmate abstracts] presented afterwards, as mistakes are

minimized thanks to this initial presentation. [This would allow] the author of the abstract to find his or her way out of a situation that is not always a pleasant one.

5. A year later, for the first assignment of the second part of the seminar, students wrote a letter reflecting on their experience as doctoral students ("Progress, obstacles, struggles I have overcome, and battles that I have not yet fought"). Six months later, they assessed this assignment in the second portfolio and found that it had been highly valuable because it legitimated the difficulties as being inherent to a doctoral student, allowed them to notice their accomplishments, and "authorized" the personal feelings in the dissertation research process:

> The task of reflecting was a very useful one […] because I had arrived to the workshop after some stressful months of discouraging experiences: thesis advisor's change, lack of motivation, feeling like "I can't do it". So, stopping at a point along the way, looking back and writing about it was […] great for my self-esteem and therefore gave me the energy to continue.

> it allowed me to gain more awareness of what had happened between the two workshops and also allowed me to informally express what I was feeling or what was happening to me, integrating the work process with the day-to-day complications.

> I wrote the letter a few days before defending my thesis proposal, with the concomitant anxieties and insecurities about the work I was doing. By pausing and reflecting, I became aware of the progress I had made since my Master's work, and this made me feel more confident about having to expose myself to defend my project.

> It was a pleasurable experience, one that brought back childhood memories of "writing a letter to you."

> Your suggestions for self-reflection on our own practices of academic writing continue to be so stimulating and engaging that I can assure you I don't consider this an academic "burden" but rather a discharge, a chance for an analysis that enriches our learning […] it is a very pertinent strategy for opening up a space that requires the commitment and the personal involvement of all the participants.

6. The main task of the second part of the seminar was to choose an academic conference to submit a paper containing work in progress related to the students' dissertation. For many of them, it was the first time they ever presented a paper at a scientific meeting. The seminar fostered their writing abilities to reach this goal, as a stimulus on the long path toward their theses. Their reflective notes in their

portfolios revealed topics similar to the ones mentioned in their accounts of writing a fictional dissertation abstract during the first part of the seminar. The differences that emerged were related to the new audience that guided their writing. This was experienced as an opportunity to participate in an authentic disciplinary community practice in the immediate future and not only after they had finished their dissertations, which represented both a tangible accomplishment and a menace to their emotional comfort.

In the first place, the deadlines of the chosen conference helped students organize their agendas and discouraged procrastination and digression:

> in the beginning, I experienced this as pressure, but in the end, it was an incentive. In addition, the pressure helped me set deadlines and start writing …

> Having short, middle and long-term objectives allowed me to better organize my work schedule and kept me motivated.

> it served as the antidote to becoming dispersed in my writing.

> Since the form and the deadlines were so clear-cut, I was forced […] to delegate [other tasks] and to postpone everything "except my thesis" […] If I hadn't had to present a paper in the conference, my thesis would probably have gone much slower […] During these two months, the fieldwork with secondary sources for my thesis advanced at this rate thanks to the decision to present part of the document analysis at a Scientific Conference.

Writing the conference paper encouraged students to move forward in their dissertations:

> [it turned out to be] the kick-off towards my fieldwork […] By writing the conference paper, I learned to sacrifice relevant information, to select and prioritize contents, to meet deadlines.

> it was the workshop's most important contribution […] It brought significant progress in my thesis – the document analysis stage. This advance allowed me to redefine […] the number of cases that I am going to use, amongst other things.

> it helped me to think about the chapters of my thesis, since it forced me to consider which of the partial results or what part of the theoretical framework would be useful to publish, and at the same time it led me to put together an outline of the thesis's structure.

On the other hand, having to expose themselves to wider audiences aroused new fears:

> The assignment of writing for an upcoming presentation outside the workshop environment, for an audience other than the professor and the group of my peers, was challenging and stimulating […] but at the same time, I was struck with doubts: What if they don't accept it? What if I'm not up to it and I get turned down …? I didn't voice these doubts; I kept them inside … until this moment.

> it means exposing yourself and this forces you to work on your self-esteem and on your psychic balance.

However, the work in the seminar aided students to face this short-term challenge with more confidence:

> the experience of working on the abstract during the past year [in the first part of the seminar] was linked with the writing of the paper, helping me to gain confidence since there was already one part "that I knew how to do."

The continuous experience of giving and receiving feedback helped mitigate some of their insecurities:

> Above all, I am losing my fear of writing and of receiving criticism. Instead, I have learned to value criticism as a significant resource for my thesis work.

> This workshop has taught me […] to listen to the comments of my colleagues in a "safe" environment and then reflect on these comments. Also, it allowed me to feel more confident when I defended my doctoral proposal …

> In my case, the revision process in 2008 [the first part of the seminar] was very different from this one. This year, I wanted to have my colleagues review my work as much as possible. As I got to know them, their opinion meant more to me, since not only each of them addressed different areas, but all of their comments were enriching …

Students also became aware of the need to develop some personal skills like patience and tolerance for failure:

> it was made evident to me […] that I need to be perseverant and "patient" with myself when I want to communicate something to my academic peers on paper.

Their accomplishments helped them feel more confident in their ability to work toward their academic goals:

> it was very important in terms of thinking about what I had to say regarding my thesis. Up until then, I didn't think I had the material […] and, because I "had" to do it, a topic appeared along with "something to say" […] I wonder if I would have made a conference presentation if it hadn't been for this workshop.

> [These assignments] helped me to get rid of my "fear" of academics and the related "demands" and to be more confident in my work. In other words, it allowed me to "get myself out there" […] Writing the conference paper has allowed me to reaffirm my identity and to value what I am producing …

> I know that I still have a long way to go, but writing the conference paper helped me come down to earth by moving on from the project into reality, at least in its smallest form of expression.

In short, the students realized that writing for the academic world was usually distressing because it involves interaction with others whose acceptance and welcome the writer seeks:

> We learned about technical aspects of academic writing, but we also understood how our subjectivity is at play in these processes.

> writing gets you in touch with deeper issues: to put yourself to the test to make the other person understands you, that is, to make him/her accept you and welcome you.

Students also became aware that developing their writing skills was part of a transition toward the identity change they desire so deeply:

> this is about constructing a new professional identity through written work and it gets me very excited …

Although the workshop gave students the opportunity to notice tangible achievements and thus reinforced their belief that they could in fact overcome the multiple obstacles they would face, a few stated that their anxiety was so immense that they would need a more extensive writing support:

> This workshop positively mobilizes personal efforts towards writing and allows you to achieve specific goals in a short period of time.

> Although all these tools are useful, the process continues to be very "anxiogenic" and frustrating at times. That's why I believe that the

more technique you acquire, the greater chance you have of dealing
with these feelings.

In sum, allowing that students' feelings of incompetence were made explicit and
offering postgraduates varied support to overcome them was experienced as an
opportunity for a long-term reflection on whom they were and whom they desired to
become.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the rationale, syllabus, and outcomes of a doctoral
seminar which was aimed at fostering students' writing, together with exploring the
emotional skills that become necessary when dealing with their PhD candidacies. In
turn, this had the goal of facilitating academic enculturation. Based on various
theoretical concepts, the workshop combined scientific with reflective writing,
nonthreatening peer review with authentic high-stakes audiences, and genre
awareness with process approach. The twofold purpose of the seminar allowed the
candidates to address epistemic and communicative writing while aiding them in
acknowledging that writing as a PhD student entails enduring social exposure with
feelings of anxiety common to most students. Helping students to achieve visible
results after laborious cycles of drafting, receiving feedback, and redrafting
gave them an experiential model for their entire dissertation process. This gently
exposed them to the literacy and emotional challenges that they will recurrently face
during their academic careers.

According to the reviewed literature, writing workshops used to focus on technical
and general skills. To the contrary, current initiatives tend to be based on genres as
situated social practice and on writing groups' approaches. There are also a reduced
number of doctoral programs that discuss emotions linked to the process of writing.
Within this framework, the seminar examined in this chapter offered an uncommonly
long experience of developing research writing along with writing about threats and
opportunities brought on by the writing of a PhD thesis.

The analysis of the postgraduates' reflective notes specified some of the tensions
that students faced when trying to participate in an activity hosted by the disciplinary
community that they aspire to enter. These tensions were brought on by
disorientation involving their own identities. The tensions that their emotions
expressed could have worked as internal obstacles. However, the seminar attempted
to make them explicit and shared to enable them to become one of the engines that
make learning possible (Castelló & Iñesta, this volume). Students' texts also showed
that the seminar gave them the chance to learn about academic writing and
participate in new scholarly genres, as well as gain exposure to the social and
emotional tools which are necessary to face this task. Interweaving writing to think,
writing to communicate, writing to participate, and writing to find out about oneself
has probably strengthened each of these separate undertakings.

Thus, this chapter has provided data on which to evaluate the acknowledged
anxieties experienced by doctoral student writers and by learners in general. The

question of whether making room for reflective writing has enhanced the development of academic writing as a result of its meta-cognitive effect (Castelló, 2007; Lonka, 2003) has been left open. Nevertheless, it seems evident that the seminar helped students advance their research goals as part of a process of academic enculturation. Their progress, combined with the awareness that difficulties are inherent in the task and by no means a sign of personal failure, has increased postgraduates' self-efficacy and promoted sustained motivation.

This seminar also illustrates a pedagogical innovation to make disciplinary practices more visible (Prior & Bilbro, this volume). In addition, the present case study can contribute in the direction advocated by Dysthe (this volume), to underpin institutional decisions and impact on educational practices.

In brief, two main ideas have been developed in this chapter: (1) Learning to write for the academic world involves threats and opportunities experienced with deep affect. (2) A lengthy seminar which takes into account writing and emotional issues can foster this learning. Both theses argued in this chapter require research to ascertain whether they receive support outside the Argentine context in which they have been explored.

Helping doctoral students of Education to face writing and emotional challenges in identity transition

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Abstract

This chapter analyses a 20-months writing seminar, iterated with 5 cohorts of part-time Education doctoral students. The seminar was designed to help them deal with some of the writing and emotional challenges involved in the identity transition process associated with becoming a PhD. The workshop intertwined scientific with reflective writing, non-threatening peer review with authentic high-stakes audiences, and genre awareness with process approach. Students received plenty of support to write a dissertation abstract and a paper to present in a conference within their field, and also wrote about themselves (an initial autobiography as writers, a letter telling their experience as postgraduate students, and two reflective and evaluative accounts about their work in the seminar). The analysis of these reflective writings revealed some of the deep emotions posgraduates face when trying to take part in the disciplinary community they aspire to enter (insecurity, doubts, incompetence, anxiety, fear of rejection,

achievement, agency, and empowerment, among others). The seminar gave them the chance to learn about writing, as well as to develop the necessary social and emotional tools while participating in authentic practices and genres. It also opened a space for students to express their feelings, which led them to start a long-term reflection on whom they were and whom they wanted to become. The chapter shows how some neglected aspects of postgraduates' enculturation can be integrated into doctoral education, contributing to the debate about which "contents", activities, and time frames should be considered. This could underpin institutional decisions and impact educational practices.

Ayudar a doctorandos en Educación a enfrentar algunos desafíos escriturales y emocionales que les plantea su transición identitaria

Resumen

Este capítulo analiza un taller de escritura desarrollado a lo largo de 20 meses y reiterado con 5 cohortes de estudiantes doctorales, destinado a ayudarles a enfrentar ciertos desafíos escriturales y emocionales involucrados en la transición identitaria que significa doctorarse. El taller entrelazó escritura científica y reflexiva, revisión entre pares con audiencias auténticas, y trabajo sobre géneros textuales junto con proceso escritural. Los doctorandos recibieron abundante apoyo para producir un abstract de sus futuras tesis y una ponencia para presentar en un congreso de su especialidad. También escribieron sobre sí mismos: una autobiografía como escritores, una carta sobre su experiencia como doctorandos y dos notas reflexivas y evaluativas sobre su trabajo durante el taller. El análisis de estos escritos reflexivos reveló algunos de los sentimientos que experimentan al tratar de integrarse en la comunidad a la cual aspiran (inseguridad, dudas, incompetencia, ansiedad, temor al rechazo, logro, empoderamiento). El taller les permitió aprender sobre la escritura tanto como desarrollar recursos sociales y emocionales mientras participaban en prácticas y géneros auténticos. También abrió un espacio inusual para expresar sus sentimientos, lo cual inició una reflexión a largo plazo sobre quiénes eran y en quiénes deseaban devenir. El capítulo muestra cómo aspectos habitualmente desatendidos de la enculturación doctoral pueden ser integrados en la formación de posgrado, lo cual contribuye al debate sobre qué "contenidos" deberían incluirse en su curriculum, a través de qué actividades y durante qué tiempos. Esto a su vez podría fundamentar decisiones institucionales e incidir en las prácticas de enseñanza.