When, Where, How, and Why do We Teach the PhDs to Teach? An Autoethnographic Comparison of Universities

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While most members of the wider community are able to state that the label “PhD” is the abbreviation for a “Doctor of Philosophy”, fewer individuals are likely to know that the term “Doctor” is the Latin expression for “Teacher” (Pearce, 2009). Clearly, the term “Philosophy” in the title indicates that a successful PhD candidate has acquired advanced knowledge and theoretical understanding of their field. However, our knowledge and understanding of the teaching component that accompanies the education process of “Doctors”, and their ways of acquiring teaching skills and leadership competencies, remains largely ignored.

The purpose of this study is to highlight how three individuals interpreted their doctoral education and training, both as researchers and teachers, at separate institutions before intersecting at a New Zealand university. For this project, the authors utilized an autoethnographic method “that is both the product and process” their “social and educational narratives” (Spigelman, 2001, p. 65). This approach was combined with social constructionism to reflect upon how they interpret their indoctrination (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998) into teaching at different universities in different countries and then sharing observations on how the School of Sport and Recreation at Auckland University of Technology educates and trains its doctoral students in preparation for the classroom (i.e. management and leadership roles).

Insight is gained by incorporating interviews with representatives from AUT, Florida State University, and the University of Technology, Sydney as to both the logistical components of training and educating future researchers as well as the different philosophical approaches presently utilized (Enders, 2002; Gordon, 2000; Pearce, 2009; Pearson, 1999). Comparisons are also made into the structures in place for primary and secondary teachers’ certifications in Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and the United States and how this differs to that of higher/tertiary education. Preliminary results indicate that while some formal learning approaches have been employed, most develop their tertiary teaching practice as a result of various informal mechanisms accompanied by an individual’s reflection on their practice.