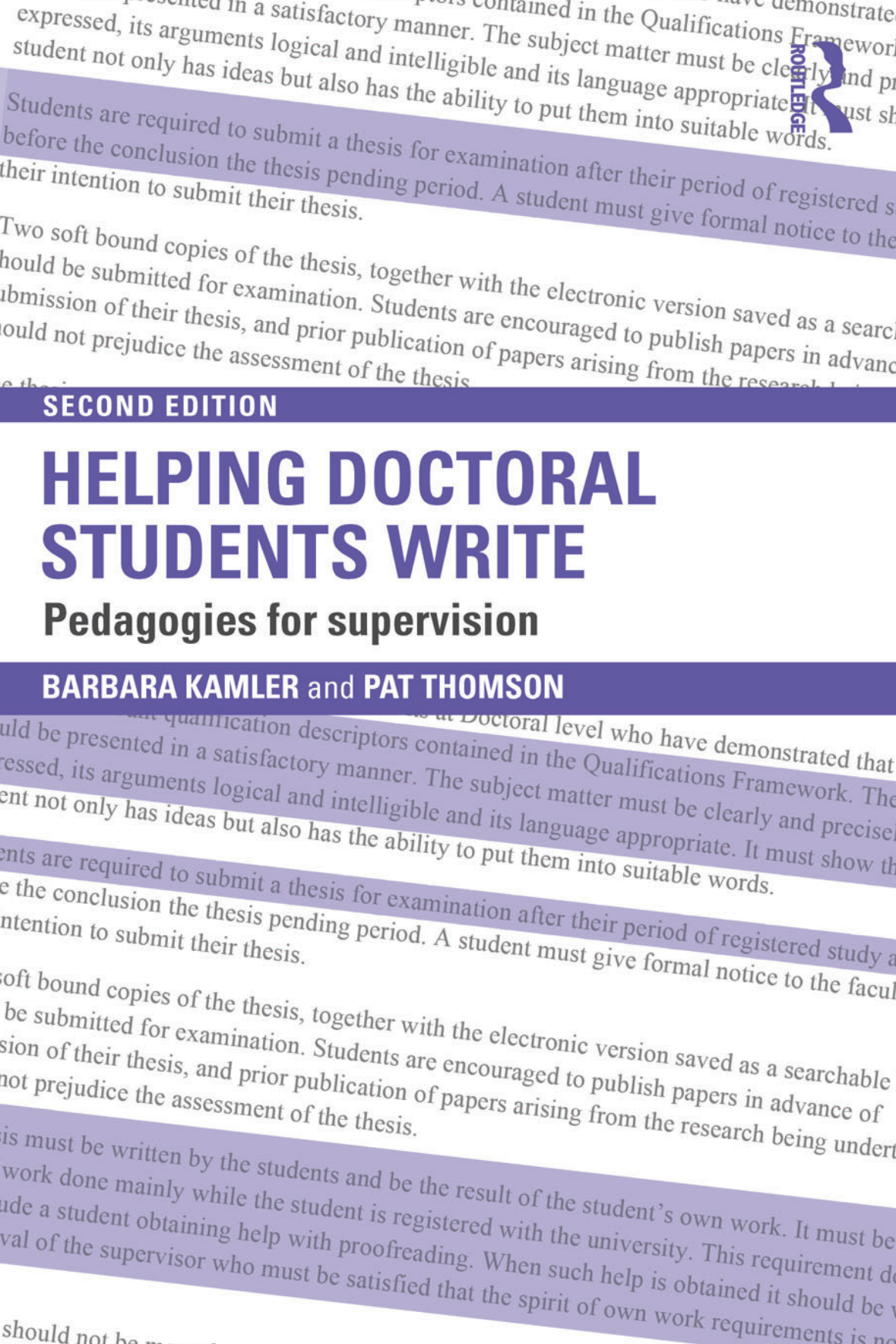
SECOND EDITION
HELPING DOCTORAL STUDENTS WRITE
Pedagogies for supervision
BARBARA KAMLER and PAT THOMSON

Helping Doctoral Students Write

Helping Doctoral Students Write is a proven approach to effective doctoral writing. By treating research *as* writing and writing *as* research, the authors offer pedagogical strategies for doctoral supervisors that will assist the production of well-argued and lively dissertations.

It is clear that many doctoral candidates find research writing complicated and difficult, but the advice they receive often glosses over the complexities of writing and/or locates the problem in the writer. Kamler and Thomson provide a highly effective framework for scholarly work that is located in personal, institutional and cultural contexts.

The pedagogical approach developed in the book is based on the notion of writing as a social practice. This approach allows supervisors to think of doctoral writers as novices who need to learn new ways with words as they enter the discursive practices of scholarly communities. This involves learning sophisticated writing practices with specific sets of conventions and textual characteristics. The authors offer supervisors practical advice on helping with commonly encountered writing tasks such as the proposal, the journal abstract, the literature review and constructing the dissertation argument.

The first edition of this book has helped many academics and thousands of research students produce better written material. Now fully updated, the second edition includes:

- examples from a broader range of academic disciplines;
- a new chapter on writing journal articles from the thesis;
- more advice on reading and note-taking, performance and conferences;
- further information on developing a personal academic writing style; and
- advice on the use of social media (blogs, tweets and wikis) to create trans-disciplinary and trans-national networks and conversations.

The discussion of the complexities of forming a scholarly identity is illustrated throughout by stories and writings of actual doctoral researchers.

Kamler and Thomson present a persuasive and proven argument that universities must move away from simply auditing supervision to supporting the

development of scholarly research communities. Any supervisor keen to help their students develop as academics will find the ideas and practical solutions presented in this book fascinating and insightful reading.

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Helping Doctoral Students Write

Pedagogies for supervision

Second edition

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Pat Thomson

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Preface

We did not intend to write this book. We began having a conversation about doctoral writing as a result of a presentation Pat gave to a doctoral summer school at which Barbara was present as a university staff member. Pat's discussion of the writing decisions she had made in her PhD thesis sparked lively conversation.

We discovered that we thought in similar ways about writing, despite the differences in our backgrounds and professional training. Barbara was trained as an educational linguist and after her PhD moved to combine this with critical discourse analysis in a range of research projects on gender and school literacy. She describes herself as a teacher and researcher of writing across the lifespan, most recently focusing on cultural narratives of aging and cross-generational literacy pedagogies. Her interest in writing is deeply connected to issues of social justice, identity and representation. Pat is a late career academic, having spent most of her life as a school principal and school system policy maker; she combined journalism teaching with extra-curricular activities in print and radio media. She describes herself as a scholar committed to social justice and her research focuses on policy, questions of power, place and identity, and democratizing education. Her interest in writing stems from being a compulsive writer herself.

We came together in a serendipitous manner, but our mutual concerns about the relative scarcity of well-theorized material about doctoral supervision and writing have kept us in dialogue.

We began writing this book after giving a performance at a conference about 'writing up'. We explain our exasperation with this term in the first chapter. But sometime during the writing of the paper, we realized we had the makings of a book. We gave a series of workshops in Canada, Australia and South Africa to help us sort out key moves in the production of a doctoral thesis – working with literatures, writing abstracts, constructing arguments and writing conference papers. At every workshop there were more people than we expected, and this affirmed our belief that doctoral writing was a kind of present absence in the landscape of doctoral education. It was something that everybody worried about, but about which there was too little systematic debate and discussion.

We interviewed our colleagues and our students as well as workshop participants, and their voices appear in the text in semi-fictionalized accounts. We have

adopted a convention of combining actual words and events drawn from actual interviews with fictional characters. We also use the writing of students, both exemplary and problematic texts, but modify these so that they are not identifiable. This is partly about ensuring confidentiality, but it is also about trying to capture the patterns, emotions and experiences at issue rather than anything specific. For that reason we have not given citations for any of the student writings. Rather, we focus on the way in which they have written and argued. Fictionalizing accounts has also given us more licence to write imaginatively in ways that we hope will resonate with readers (see Clough, 2002). We thank our students and colleagues for the gift of their words and hope that they agree with the ways we have represented them.

We want to acknowledge from the outset that actually getting words on the page is difficult. Anxiety about how to begin a piece of writing is not confined to doctoral students, nor does it necessarily go away once the doctorate is completed. We have separately and together made several starts on various parts of this book accompanied by much pacing, tea-drinking and cleaning. Since one of us lives in England and the other in Australia, we have worked through these periods by simply following our own advice – just sit and write anything! When we have worked together it has become obvious that one of us takes more time considering each section of text, while the other tends to write furiously and then spends time reflecting on it. Nevertheless, each of us has made several false starts and we have ultimately written ourselves into the production of this text, just as doctoral students do.

The second edition

We wrote the first edition of this book eight years ago. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the attention paid to doctoral education, doctoral supervision and doctoral writing. Indeed, we have contributed to this burgeoning literature ourselves, separately and together. We have edited a collection on pedagogies for publication (Aitchison, Kamler and Lee, 2010) and two doctoral companions which provide a guide to the key debates in research methods and doctoral literatures (Thomson and Walker, 2010; Walker and Thomson, 2010). Most recently we have written a book on writing for peer reviewed journals (Thomson and Kamler, 2013) and continue to run workshops, courses and supervise doctoral research, where we have learnt a great deal more about the practices of doctoral writing.

We have people to thank. We have already acknowledged how important our students and workshop participants have been to this book. Without them we would literally have had nothing to learn and say. But other people have helped us too. We would like to put on record our intellectual debt to Bill Green and the late Alison Lee whose work so firmly wrote doctoral pedagogies and academic literacies on to the scholarly map in Australia. We also want to thank Philip Mudd at Routledge for his early enthusiasm, energetic support and continued patience.

We have also been helped by critical friends along the way: thank you to Lesley Farrell and Rod Maclean for their close reading and productive suggestions for the first edition. Then of course there are our partners, Randy and Greg, who have endured endless reports of progress on the book (or not) and fed and nurtured us during our intense periods of writing together in each other's homes.

We know that the pleasure of completion is common to writers everywhere – be they doctoral researchers or supervisors. But we actually don't want to be finished with the topic. We would be delighted to hear from others about their supervision experiences and pedagogic strategies to support writing: we see this as part of an ongoing dialogue about how to help doctoral students write.

Introduction

Since writing the first edition we have not changed our view that supervision is both challenging and potentially anxiety-making. The exponential development of satisfaction surveys, career destination league tables and the like has added to funding pressures and other forms of audit. As the number of doctoral places continues to increase, so too does the concern about what completed 'doctors' will do in the future, and where they will work. Many supervisors are themselves early career researchers, and while their institutions increasingly provide 'training' for doctoral students, there is still little formal support for supervisors. Many have heavy teaching loads and need support, time and space to develop their own research profiles.

Despite this pressure on supervisors, supervision remains the primary way in which doctoral researchers are educated. The one-to-one meetings between doctoral candidates and their supervisors are not simply conversations in the office. They are THE key way in which the doctorate is achieved. A doctoral award is always a collaborative endeavour, but one which is a private and somewhat mysterious process occurring behind closed doors.

We understand the burgeoning literature on supervision as an attempt to metaphorically open these closed doors, to provide a forum in which this most important relationship can be understood. Some higher education researchers investigate approaches to supervision activities, developing heuristics to describe various aspects of practice (Eley and Murray, 2009; Lee, 2011; Peelo, 2011; Wisker, 2012). This is not our intention in this book. We are not examining the supervision relationship *per se*. We see our contribution as providing a resource about writing for supervisors to use with their students.

We refer frequently to Paré (2010a, 2010b, 2011; Paré *et al.*, 2009, 2011) who has systematically, over a long period of time, examined how supervisors talk about writing with their students. He shows the uncertainties that supervisors feel about dealing with the complexities of writing and the variously helpful/unhelpful feedback that they offer. His work convinces us that this book is still needed. Supervisors need a range of strategies that they can use to facilitate quality writing.

In this book, we use the British and Australian nomenclature of *supervision* and

supervisor to describe the doctoral 'teacher' and we refer to the person undertaking the doctorate as the *doctoral researcher*. We also use the term 'student' to signify the institutional power relations at work in the supervisory relationship. But our preference is to define doctoral candidates in terms of their work (research) and to acknowledge the increasing diversity of ages, experience and professional status they bring to doctoral study. We use the terms *thesis* and *dissertation* interchangeably to describe the summative research text presented for examination. In doing so, we recognize that there are cultural differences in the ways different countries organize their doctorates.

In Britain and Australia, for example, the dominant pedagogical relationship is with a supervisor and a co- or associate supervisor with whom students meet on a regular basis in tutorials. The new preferred model in Britain, however, also involves a first year of intensive research training coursework and, increasingly, Australian students are taking some compulsory studies. In North America, by contrast, students must pass a range of coursework subjects as part of the degree; the dissertation research is overseen by a committee who act as both examiner and guide, with one adviser providing more intense support. Examination in Britain is most often conducted by one internal and one external examiner and a viva (a confidential oral examination). In Australia, two examiners external to the university provide a written report, with a third being called in if there is a dispute. There is no viva.

These differences are not insignificant. The kind of audience and the kind of critical scrutiny the dissertation receives in examination will influence how students write. It clearly matters if judgments are made by academics inside the university (US) or outside (Australia) or a combination of the two (UK); whether a doctoral defence occurs in the private context of a viva (UK, New Zealand) or committee defence (US), or in a more public, adversarial forum as in Scandinavian and northern European countries. Our argument in this book, however, is that whatever the form of examination, thesis structure or supervision – whether by a committee of advisers or individual/multiple supervisors – greater attention to *writing* the doctorate is required.

In this book we join the notion of supervision with that of pedagogy. In English speaking countries, and particularly in the UK, the term pedagogy is often understood as technique. It is used interchangeably with teaching method. By contrast, the non-Anglo European tradition, which we adopt, understands pedagogy to be a practice which encompasses the students, the teacher, the context, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, assessment – and the ways these come together in an identifiable pattern or patterns. Pedagogic features include the way in which information is made available, the structuring and pacing of activities, the language and conceptual frameworks on offer, and the kinds of relationships that are permitted, fostered and prohibited. Pedagogies can manifest care or indifference, offer more or less agency to the 'learner' and be more or less inclusive of difference.

We argue that it is imperative for supervision pedagogies to be designed, rather than remain as Ward (2013) says, 'accidental'. That is, unintended, inex-

plicit, taken for granted. Ward suggests that it is the fact that pedagogies are *not* attended to which creates anxiety and failure for doctoral candidates. Supervisors, of course, understand this at some level. They do know that they don't just chat with doctoral students and that there is a pedagogical intent in the supervision conversation. However, the lack of institutional and disciplinary attention to the pedagogical features of supervision leaves supervisors with relatively few educational resources to call on, other than their own experience of being supervised.

A major challenge we have faced in the writing of this book arises from the difficulty of speaking across diversity. We have set ourselves the task of writing something that speaks to supervisors in different disciplines, in different countries and in different institutions. Indeed, the doctorate itself is diversifying, with multiple versions of the award, and what is an acceptable 'product' for examination. However, we suggest that, despite these differences, questions of writing are too often reduced to grammatical and stylistic problems, rather than, as we argue, a matter of textwork/identitywork. We hope that readers will find things in the text that do speak to their contexts.

It is probably important to say what we are not doing. We are focused only on the writing that doctoral researchers do in relation to their thesis. We do not cover curriculam vitae, progress reports or any of the other documentation that is part of the doctoral experience. Nor do we attempt to cover all of the disciplines. We have extended our examples from education (in the first edition) to include more of the social sciences. While we have been asked to include the sciences in this text, we actually feel they deserve a separate text, since the writing demands and relationships are very different to the social sciences and humanities. Goodson's book (2012) *Becoming an academic writer: 50 exercises for paced, powerful and productive writing* is strongly oriented to the behavioural sciences. Gustavii (2012) in *How to prepare a scientific doctoral dissertation based on research articles* specifically addresses the needs of biology, medicine and technology.

We are mindful that many supervisors are concerned about how to support students whose first language is not English, be they from home or abroad. We have paid more attention to their needs, especially in Chapters 6 and 7. We refer supervisors to Paltridge and Starfield (2007) whose book is specifically geared to the specificities and challenges of thesis writing in a second language. Curry and Lillis' (2013) work on academic literacies and publishing (written specifically for multilingual scholars) will also be highly useful. There are other texts, such as Graff and Birkenstein's *They say, I say* (2010), which offer more fine-grained strategies for making explicit the moves that matter in successful academic writing.

We have assumed that busy supervisors will be pleased to have a book that is based in scholarship and research, but which is, for the most part, written with a light touch. By this we mean that we have not heavily referenced the text, nor have we elaborated the nuances of the various arguments we make. We have provided some signposts to the broader literatures that underpin our position, but we do not assume that readers will necessarily share our views.

We see this book as useable, but it is not a manual, a how-to text. We don't

offer tips and tricks which assume that resolving the problems doctoral researchers face is simply a question of technique. Rather, we approach doctoral writing as a complex tangle of identity, discipline and institutional conventions and demands. It is possible, we think, to dip in and out of the chapters, rather than read the book from cover to cover, but we do suggest that it is worth looking at Chapters 1 and 2. These are where we spell out our theoretical premises and set the framework for our approach to doctoral writing and supervision pedagogies. We have amended these chapters in this edition to reflect the development of our conceptual framework. We have also used the notion of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), which we hope is already familiar to many readers, to bridge our thinking with that commonly used in the field.

In the third and fourth chapters we get to grips with work on literatures, adding in a new section on reading and note-taking. In Chapter 5 we get up close and personal with the pronoun 'I'. Chapter 6, substantially revised from the first edition, provides a set of linguistic tools to help students make their texts more persuasive. In Chapter 7 we consider how students can structure the dissertation as an argument, now with an additional section on the use of storyboarding. Chapter 8, new to this edition, examines publishing, both as the thesis and in addition to the thesis. In our final chapter we examine ways in which doctoral writing can become part of an institutional culture and practice, with a new section on social media and public engagement.

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Chapter 1

Putting doctoral writing centre stage

Getting the dissertation written can be as problematic for supervisors as it is for doctoral students. Our conversations with colleagues suggest that the issue of writing often remains a problem from the start to the finish of candidature. Supervisors describe students as either 'being able to write' – or not. Frustrations over turgid prose, badly structured arguments and laboured literature reviews are common. Supervisors have numerous questions. Why can't my students write an argument? How can I help them say things more simply? What can I do to get my students to write more logically? Why is their writing so tentative?

There are few places to which supervisors can refer for discussion specifically about doctoral writing, few places which might assist them to think differently about the textual practices of scholarship. This book begins to address this gap. It is written primarily for supervisors, although doctoral researchers may also find it of use.

But this book is not a self-help manual. It is not a how-to-do-writing-supervision compendium. Supervision is a complex pedagogical practice. It is a partnership between an experienced and an aspiring scholar which shifts over the number of years it takes for the research to be done and the thesis to be written. The supervisor begins with expertise in all aspects of the process – the literature that must be read, the design of fieldwork or textwork, the production of the thesis. Over time, the supervisor must relinquish control and the doctoral researcher must use their growing expertise to speak and write with authority. A 'student' identity is gradually replaced by that of 'researcher/scholar'.

This is not a straightforward process. It does not proceed in simple linear steps. As we will show in this book the process of becoming a scholar is irrevocably an integral part of writing the dissertation. However, most of the self-help books written for students focus on textual matters and largely ignore the complex tangle of emotional and intellectual work that is the doctorate. Supervisors, of course, are acutely aware of the personal dilemmas their students face, although they do not necessarily connect these to ongoing textual struggles. Our intention is to put the enmeshed nature of textwork and identitywork (addressed in detail in Chapter 2) at the centre of supervision pedagogy.

In this book we avoid the direct address – the 'you can/must/ought/will benefit' of the advice mode. Tempting as it is to tell people what to do, we try instead

to talk about things that we have done and found useful, and we provide sufficient detail for readers to imagine how they might use or remake strategies for their own supervision contexts. We write about pedagogy, the work of teaching and learning. We draw on: our reading in socio-linguistics, critical discourse analysis, policy sociology and pedagogical theory; our experiences in doctoral supervision (not all of them easy); our research into academic writing practices; and our own writing biographies.

We foreground issues related to language and texts. We object to the ubiquitous term 'writing up' as the dominant way to think about writing the dissertation. Instead, we work with notions of 'research as writing'. We attend closely to the language used to describe doctoral writing because we believe it shapes not only how writing is produced, but also the writers themselves.

We therefore offer new metaphors and ways of understanding the labour and craft of doctoral writing. We foreground writing and writing strategies. We pay attention to the field of scholarly writing, its genres and conventions. We explore the connections between academic writing practices and the formation of 'the doctoral scholar'. We offer a theorized approach based on current understandings of writing, identity and social practice. To begin, we interrogate some taken-for-granted assumptions about 'writing up' and the way these have marginalized serious attention to the practices of doctoral writing.

Talking down 'writing up'

When doctoral researchers talk about the writing they do in the doctorate, it is common for them to say 'Oh, I'm just writing up'. The phrase 'writing up' is ubiquitous in the various advice manuals on the market and on websites which proffer advice about writing. Even some of the most useful books on research writing, such as Wolcott's (2001) *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, embed the phrase in their title. We object to this way of talking about writing, primarily because it suggests that writing is ancillary or marginal to the real work of research. First we do the research, then we 'write it up', as if that were a fairly straightforward and mechanical act of reportage.

Writing, however, is a vital part of the research process. The activity of research is one that, from the outset, involves writing. Researchers keep notes, jot down ideas, record observations, summarize readings, transcribe interviews and develop pieces of writing about specific aspects of their investigation. These writings are not simply getting things down on paper, but are a process of making meaning and advancing understandings. Then there are public texts – conference papers, articles and the thesis itself – all of which do productive work. It is through these writings that researchers produce knowledge and become members of their various scholarly communities.

The phrase 'writing up' actually obliterates all this labour and complexity. And we are not just being picky about words. Our concern is that such ways of speaking have effects. They can actually mislead students about what is entailed in

writing the doctorate. A pivotal study by Torrance and Thomas (1994) noted that students who delay completion, or fail to complete their dissertation, often do so because of writing-related issues. These students see a 'strict demarcation between collecting data, or doing research, and the writing of this material as a dissertation' (Torrance and Thomas, 1994: 107); it is this perception that creates problems for student writers.

Other research findings about the connections between writing and academic 'success' (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000; Leibowitz and Goodman, 1997; Lillis, 2001; Lillis and Turner, 2001) suggest supervisors need to address the writing issues that actually prevent students from developing productive research writing practices (see Mullen, 2001). For us, one of these issues is reconceptualizing research writing so that it is not reduced to 'writing up'. This ubiquitous metaphor is most commonly used to denote a distinct phase of post-fieldwork activity. But like Lee (1998), we contend that the metaphor does important work in making doctoral writing both natural and invisible. We can state our objections as three propositions:

'Writing up' obscures the fact that doctoral writing is thinking. We write to work out what we think. It's not that we do the research and then know. It's that we write our way to understanding through analysis. We put words on the page, try them out, see how they look and sound and, in the writing, we see things we had no idea were there before we started writing. If the goal of research is to make sense of the data we have produced, and to theorize it in order to develop understanding, then writing the research is central to the process of inquiry itself.

'Writing up' obscures the fact that producing a dissertation text is hard work. Writing is physical, emotional and aesthetic labour. Sitting at a keyboard for hours on end is hard on nerves and bodies. Many scholars carry their scholarship deep in their psyche, bones and muscles. But the dissertation is also about the craft of word-play. Choosing words that encapsulate an idea, selecting quotations that effectively summarize an important point, and making decisions about syntax and subheadings are all important to how the final text flows and is read. In no way are these ideas of labour and craft captured in the matter-of-factness of 'writing up'. Rather the phrase evokes a glibness: 'Oh I've done the hard work, now I'm doing the easy bit, I'm just "writing it up"'.

'Writing up' obscures the fact that doctoral writing is not transparent. Researchers do not simply write up 'the truth'. Language is not a transparent medium through which we capture and communicate findings and facts are not already there, waiting for the researcher to discover and grab. What writing creates is a particular representation of reality. Data is produced in writing, it is not found. And the data and subsequent written texts are shaped and crafted by the researcher through a multitude of selections about what to include and exclude, foreground and background, cite and not cite. These choices often have profound ethical dimensions and raise issues that need the conscious attention of doctoral writers. Such issues are not even imaginable in the oversimplifying, apparently neutral term 'writing up'.

So why do we say 'writing up'? Tradition, bad habit, misconception? Why not writing down? Writing over? Writing around? Better yet, why don't we say 'I'm writing my research', where the present continuous verb *writing* implies a continuous process of inquiry through writing? We agree with Laurel Richardson (1990, 1994) when she says that researching *is* writing. It is not separate from the act of researching. Later in the chapter we offer principles that underpin this alternative to 'writing up'. But first, we expand our discussion of research writing by interrogating another misconception about doctoral writing: namely that it is only a set of *skills* rather than a situated social *practice*.

Doctoral writing – just a question of skills?

Whole sections in academic catalogues and entire shelves in bookshops are now devoted to a new kind of self-help book – the how-to-write-your-dissertation manual. These invite doctoral researchers to buy advice from experienced scholars to supplement the assistance given by their own supervisors.

The proliferation of such guidebooks is not simply a savvy niche-marketing strategy by publishing companies, nor should it be theorized away as an example of the democratization of expertise that is characteristic of high modernity (Giddens, 1991). Rather, as everyone involved with doctoral education knows, doctoral work is associated with a number of anxieties. Students have numerous questions. Will the work be good enough? How can all of the relevant literatures be read in time? What brings all of the data together? How can the research be organized into 100,000 words? These dissertation primers address these concerns by offering to 'skill up' doctoral researchers.

The problem with a skills-based orientation is that it is founded in a notion that language is transparent, a straightforward conduit for thought. The process of writing is simplified into a linear process, where students are exhorted to think first, then write. They need to plan, get the chapter outline clear, and proceed, bit by bit, chapter by chapter, as if meaning is already formed prior to the writing. When a draft is produced, it is treated as if there is no more meaning making to do. What is required is simply tidying and polishing. The writing process is made analogous to setting a table – once the cutlery and plates are out of the drawers and cupboards, it is just a matter of setting them straight.

Problems with writing are then treated in skill-deficit terms. They are located in individual doctoral researchers who don't 'get it' or don't 'have it', rather than in the broader disciplinary and institutional contexts in which they write. And the advice given to solve writing problems often focuses on the surface features of writing. Spelling, punctuation, grammar or simplified models of text structure or citation rules are offered because these are the more tangible aspects of academic writing.

When we first searched research writing websites, we mostly found handy tips and oversimplified guidelines for writing. This advice indicated not even the most basic understandings of writing developed in genre-based (Derewianka, 1990) or

process approaches (Graves, 1983; Murray, 1982) in the 1980s and 1990s. Here is a typical, reductive tidbit:

> Ask yourself what would have been the perfect paper for you to have read in order to understand everything you need to know. Then write it . . .
>
> Papers must be understandable and meaningful. Papers are for replication and understanding . . . Each sentence must be as informative as possible. Include all relevant information. Never use anything you do not know is absolutely and totally real. Outline the paper until it is perfectly clear, then write it . . .
>
> The following list of questions steps you through the major issues which must be addressed in a research paper. After each question is answered the construction of the research paper is simply developing transitions between items.
>
> (http://www.jsu.edu.depart/psychology/sebac/fac-sch/rm/Ch4–5.html. Accessed October 2001)

Implicit in such advice is the assumption that writing problems and their solutions are fairly straightforward, easy to identify and resolve. Since then, a new generation of online writing centre materials and blogs have been produced, offering much more nuanced support and strategies and we discuss some of these in the last chapter. However, there is still a great deal of poor advice around which doctoral researchers need help to critique and use selectively. The best people to help them in this 'crap detection' task are their supervisors.

Skills-based books on doctoral writing are also abundant. The oversimplification of some approaches is evident in titles such as *Completing your doctoral dissertation or master's thesis in two semesters or less* (Ogden, 1993) or *Writing your dissertation in fifteen minutes a day* (Bolker, 1998). The contents of such books, which are intended to give straightforward heuristics, often offer a straightforward and linear norm for the doctorate, which positions supervisors and supervisees as deviant if they don't adhere to the stages set out.

Writing is often given short shrift in such books. *The research student's guide to success* (Cryer, 2001), for example, covers topics such as: liaising with an institution, settling in as a new student, keeping records, producing reports, developing skills for creative thinking, producing your thesis and afterwards. Writing is discussed at various points throughout the text but always in terms of technique, and the emphasis is on tips 'that work'.

Even when writing is treated as more than formulaic, a skills orientation still oversimplifies the textwork involved in authoring a dissertation. For example, in *Writing the winning dissertation* (Glatthorn, 1998), a chapter titled 'Mastering the academic style' asks students to follow these steps:

> Write a paragraph. Stop and read what was written. Revise that paragraph.
>
> Write another paragraph – and start the cycle all over again.
>
> (Glatthorn, 1998: 109)

Further on, students are offered the following suggestions for achieving the persona of a knowledgeable scholar: 'strive for clarity', 'project maturity', 'project a sense of formality', 'strike an appropriate balance between confidence and tentativeness' (Glatthorn, 1998: 112–13). While supervisors might agree with these assertions, they are presented as commands and the examples provided are framed as correct and incorrect options. This is not helpful: the issues that underpin difficulties in writing are rarely as simple as the textual equivalent of whistling a happy tune.

Glatthorn is not unique. Many skills-based books reduce writing to a set of arbitrary rules and matters of etiquette. By following their seemingly arbitrary advice, rather than more informed research-based strategies, doctoral researchers are lured into believing that the winning dissertation will emerge, as if by magic.

There is, however, a rich literature that *does* treat academic writing as a social practice and meaning making as a social phenomenon. And it is to these texts we now turn. Rather than simply 'talk down' skills-based approaches, we want to 'talk up' the notion of writing as a social practice.

Doctoral writing as a social practice

We see research writing as an institutionally constrained social practice. It is about meaning making and learning to produce knowledge in particular disciplines and discourse communities. The distinction between *skill* and *practice* is central to our pedagogies for supervision. While we argue that there is a startling lack of explicit attention given to *writing* the doctoral dissertation, the attention that is given is diminished when it treats writing as a discrete set of decontextualized skills, rather than as a social practice.

In using the term practice, we are connecting to a scholarly tradition that regards writing as social action. Here, language is understood as being in use, bound up with what people actually do in the social and material world. Thus, ways of using language are not simply idiosyncratic or unique attributes of individual writers. They are repeated and practised and so become part of the patterned routines of both individuals and institutions. Lillis (2001) captures well what this shift to writing as social practice means:

> In broad terms, what this entails is that student academic writing, like all writing, is a social act. That is, student writing takes place within a particular institution, which has a particular history, culture, values, practices. It involves a shift away from thinking of language or writing skills as individual possession, towards the notion of an individual engaged in socially situated action; from an individual student having writing skills, to a student doing writing in specific contexts.
>
> (Lillis, 2001: 31)

Moving away from skills-based, deficit models of student writing allows us to engage the complexity of writing practices that are taking place at degree level in