Towards Becoming a Research Writer: Conversation as Doctoral Pedagogy

Dianne Bills, Jenny Barnett

University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia

With writing increasingly positioned at the heart of conceptions of doctoral ‘becoming’ and knowledge production, we see it as important to find out more about supervisory practices that inspire and facilitate writing by doctoral students, especially writing that occurs throughout the candidature and contributes to the thinking involved in developing a research thesis.

This paper presents supervisors’ and candidates’ accounts of conversation as a pedagogical practice that can generate both research thinking and research writing. These accounts are drawn from transcripts of interviews conducted with supervisors and doctoral candidates both separately and together, individually and in groups. Where possible illustration or elaboration is provided through reference to actual supervisor-candidate dialogue.

The data are taken from an ongoing study of support for research writing in the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences in the University of South Australia. The candidates are at various stages of the doctoral process, and are diverse in age, gender, nationality and research field. The analysis brings together constructs from Vygotsky and Bakhtin in an attempt to uncover the characteristics of conversation as doctoral pedagogy across such diversity. It shows how such conversations facilitate both knowledge production and academic identity formation.