9   The Dissertation as Multi-Genre: Many Readers, Many Readings

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> . . . I have found smart, accomplished colleagues in other disciplines who have little vocabulary for discussing writing beyond the corrective grammar they learned in high school. Although they have learned the genres of their profession and are successful in them, their reflective ability to manipulate them is limited because of a lack of linguistic and rhetorical vocabulary. (Bazerman, 2007, p. 46)

Since most academics have completed a dissertation, it is ironic that the genre is such an under-theorized, under-studied, and under-taught text (Rose & Mc-Clafferty, 2001; Lundell & Beach, 2002; Kamler & Thomson, 2006). Perhaps, like childbirth, it is best forgotten; more likely, as Bazerman's comment above suggests, the linguistic and rhetorical complexities of the dissertation are simply inexpressible for most academics. Unfortunately, doctoral students are often in desperate need of help with their dissertations, and yet, when Kamler and Thomson (2006) searched the literature, they found a "relative scarcity of well-theorized material about doctoral supervision and writing" and remarked that "doctoral writing was a kind of present absence in the landscape of doctoral education. It was something that everyone worried about, but about which there was too little systematic debate and discussion" (p. x). Our focus in this chapter is on the supervisory dyad and the collaborative relationship between doctoral students and their advisors. We see the dyad as a critical dynamic in the student's apprenticeship in disciplinary consciousness, identity, and discourse, and we set out to discover what occurred in supervisory sessions, especially when writing was the topic.

When we began the study reported here, we thought of the dissertation as a genre on the border between overlapping, sequential activities. On one hand, it is the ultimate student paper, the final school-based display of knowledge and ability. On the other hand, it is often—in whole or in part—the first significant contribution to a disciplinary conversation. We imagined the supervisor playing

a dual role: as Bill Green (2005) has noted, "the supervisor represents, or stands in for, the Discipline itself, and also the Academy" (162). However, our research has helped us see the dissertation as even more complex than that—not just a double genre, but a multi-genre, responding to multiple exigencies, functioning in multiple rhetorical situations, addressing multiple readers. In itself, this recognition breaks no new ground. For many years, the technical writing literature has considered how different readers of the same text create rhetorical complexity in even simple institutional discourse (e.g., Mathes & Stevenson, 1976), and work in Writing Studies long ago fragmented a unitary notion of audience (e.g., Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Paré, 1991; Park, 1982). What our study does contribute is a first look at that multiplicity in the context of doctoral education—a look that explains some of the difficulties associated with writing and reading the dissertation. Not only does the dissertation contain variations on a number of distinct sub-genres (the literature review, the essay, the experimental article), it also responds to various exigencies and performs a range of social actions in several different contexts, including the supervisory dyad itself, the doctoral committee, the academic department, the disciplinary community, and the research setting. It is its simultaneous response to and service in these many settings that leads us to call the dissertation a multi-genre.

STUDYING THE DOCTORATE

The larger project of which this dissertation research is part is a multi-site, longitudinal study of the doctoral experience that seeks to determine the complex factors influencing the success and failure of students pursuing the PhD. We view the doctoral student as located within a series of nested contexts (McAlpine & Norton, 2006) that begin in the wider society and end in the small community of the student-supervisor dyad. According to Green (2005), "supervision is better conceived *ecosocially*, as a total environment within which postgraduate research activity ('study') is realised" (p. 153), and this image of nested contexts helps capture the complex ecology of the doctorate. Each context, each activity system—society, discipline, university, faculty, department—exerts an influence on the others. For example, national economic policies determine government research funding priorities that, in turn, raise or lower the status and viability of particular research agendas and their affiliated disciplines until, finally, individual university-based researchers can or cannot afford to support doctoral students. On our own campus, as on many others, the effects of these relations are manifest in concrete and steel: buildings devoted to research in certain sciences and technologies sprout, while arts and humanities colleagues work in cramped and decaying quarters.

At the time of writing, we are completing the first year of data collection

from a variety of sources: student logs; interviews with students, supervisors, administrators, and others; focus group discussions; recorded supervisory sessions and follow-up interviews; policy and procedure documents related to the doctorate at various levels, from government funding agencies to departments; town hall meetings of students and faculty. Our design incorporates feedback loops because analysis is tested in seminars and workshops with doctoral students and supervisors; as a result, methods, questions, goals, and other aspects of the research continue to evolve.

SITUATED LEARNING, DISCIPLINARITY, AND GENRE

Our study of the dissertation follows and benefits from a rich tradition of research into the relationship between writing and disciplinarity (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Bazerman & Paradis, 1990; Spilka, 1993; Geisler, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Winsor, 1996; Prior, 1998; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Hyland, 2001; Bazerman & Russell, 2002); in addition, along with many others in Writing Studies, we have relied on such variations on cultural-historical theory as situated learning (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and activity theory (e.g., Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999). When we turn our attention to texts and textual practices specifically, our chief theoretical lens has come from rhetorical genre studies (e.g., Miller, 1984; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko, 2002).

With her 1984 argument that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (p. 151), Carolyn Miller gave writing researchers a powerful heuristic and a new agenda. Her insistence that we look beyond textual regularity to the consequences of repeated symbolic actions gave us our key questions: To what does a text respond? For what purpose or motive? As part of which situation or activity? To what effect? To understand texts or textual practices, we need first to know what a text *does*, what work it performs.

We see the dissertation as one genre within the doctoral genre set (Devitt, 1991)—a genre that students learn on the job, as it were, under the tutelage of a veteran scholar (and others). Learning to perform in or enact the dissertation genre is a critical part of the process of developing disciplinarity. As Carolyn Miller (1984) notes, "for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (p. 165). This perspective on learning-to-write as a central dynamic in the development of disciplinary or professional identity and consciousness extends previous research that considered the transition from school to workplace and disciplinary writing (e.g., Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999; Dias & Paré, 2000).

Viewing the academic department as a workplace in which newcomers are

inducted through apprenticeship has helped us make sense of what we are observing. Knowledge can be seen as a product of human labor and activity: we *make* knowledge in universities; or, more accurately, we deploy academic genres in order to make knowledge, and we apprentice doctoral students in that making process. That making then has consequences or outcomes; it performs social action. As Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger, 1998) have demonstrated in varied contexts, workplace learning involves the gradual passage to full participation through increasingly more difficult tasks. That process, which they call "legitimate peripheral participation," consists of engaging the workplace newcomer in authentic and ever-more central workplace activity under the watchful eye of one or more veteran members of the collective. Doctoral students may follow a teaching trajectory that goes from tutoring to teaching assistantships to undergraduate teaching and a research trajectory that goes from research assistantships to postdoctoral fellowships.

Elsewhere (Paré, Starke-Meyerring, & McAlpine, 2006), we have compared our own sense of this gradual transformation to Prior's (1998) description of three modes of graduate student participation: "passing," "procedural display," and "deep participation" (pp. 100-103). Our conception of this growth has relied on different terms but charts a similar path toward membership:

> undergraduates are eavesdroppers, listening in on the disciplinary conversation and reporting it back to the professor (an actual member); Master's students are ventriloquists, able to sound like participants, but really only channelling the voices of the true members; doctoral students—if they are fortunate—find themselves increasingly involved as participants in work that matters, in work that will be public and that might affect others. Their access to and engagement in the range of practices that constitute the community's work results in the "deep participation" to which Prior refers. (Paré, Starke-Meyerring, & McAlpine, 2006, p. 10).

Likewise, the doctoral genre set (Devitt, 1991)—a series of rhetorical strategies that might include grant applications, course papers, comprehensive exams, dissertation proposals, and finally the dissertation itself—might be considered a movement toward deeper or more central participation in disciplinary discourse.

As in other workplace settings, we have noted a constant movement back and forth between planned and serendipitous learning in the academic department, and there is a wide range of teachers—a phenomenon we have called "distributed mentoring" (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006). In data collected so far, we have heard students describe the variety of support they have received—from supervisors,

of course, but also from their committees, other faculty members, classmates, students in study and writing groups, administrators, and secretaries and other support staff. The lessons, too, are infinitely varied, from the highly pragmatic (when and how to apply for grants) to the ineffable and nearly inexpressible (the physical presentation of self during the oral comprehensive examination). Much of this appears to be taught and learned tacitly, an observation made by Parry (1998) about discipline-specific linguistic rules.

Academic workplaces, like many complex and multidisciplinary endeavors, are "laminations of activity" (Prior, 1998). The compressed nature of workplace activity captured by Prior's metaphor seems particularly apt to us. Doctoral students fill several subject positions simultaneously—student, teacher, researcher, classmate, colleague, university/faculty/department member, disciplinary apprentice—and all of that in addition to and interaction with their identities as parents, partners, members of affinity groups, and on and on. Even the descriptions of activity systems and the multi-triangular representations of those systems (e.g., Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999) do not capture that simultaneity. Consider how literacy theories, for example, might be simultaneously the doctoral student's objects of study (in the activity of learning) and mediational means (in the activity of teaching). Moreover, some of those concurrent and layered activity systems might be in conflict with each other; so, for example, a doctoral student whose disciplinary community favors qualitative research may find herself within a university department where a quantitative paradigm holds sway, or a student who wishes to conduct participatory action research might find himself in conflict with a research ethics committee that requires a detailed statement of methodology before research can commence.

Another similarity between university departments and other sites of on-the-job teaching and learning is the way in which the doctoral student's efforts reflect on the supervisor, and this may be no more apparent than with the dissertation. We hear supervisors refer to the dissertation as if it were a co-authored text, indicating what "we" need to do or how data support "our" argument. This seems to us a blatant reference to the induction into disciplinary culture that is the supervisory dyad's *raison d'être*. Our graduate students are highly visible products of our own knowledge work, and we have a vested interest in their successful passage to disciplinary membership.

These and other factors make a workplace perspective on academic units a productive way of seeing doctoral activity and the dissertation. However, in addition, there are certain aspects of the university department that makes it, if not unique, at least unusual. For one thing, the academic department, particularly in a multi-discipline like education, may be more of an institutional convenience than a community of like-minded scholars. The individual professor or

doctoral student may actually be a member of a widely distributed disciplinary community, no other members of which are actually present on the university premises. As a result, the education department's specialist in literacy, for example, may publish in journals that none of her university colleagues even reads, and attend conferences where she is the only representative of her faculty. The result of that, and another distinguishing feature of the academic workplace, is that one's community of practice is first encountered textually, as a disembodied collective dispersed over time and space. In what other line of work might a long-dead colleague continue to influence the current conversation? Where else are one's fellow workers—those with whom one might interact (textually) every day—encountered face-to-face only once a year at an annual association meeting? The doctoral student seeking passage to disciplinary membership must locate herself in a textually constituted community.

SUPERVISION AND COMPOSITION

We will now return to the specific focus of this chapter—the function of the supervisory dyad in the writing of the dissertation. The dyad is perhaps the most intimate and high-stakes educational relationship, and the supervisor's role is complex and critical. As Kamler and Thomson (2006) put it, "the supervisor embodies and mediates institutional and disciplinary cultures, conditions and conventions" (p. 144). Stories of disaster in the relationship are legion, and assistance is rare. For this aspect of the project, we had these sorts of questions:

- What do people talk about during supervisory meetings? What topics and issues come up? What advice is given/taken? What strategies considered/deployed?
- What relationships are formed/enacted? What roles are played?
- What seems to work? What doesn't?
- What are supervisors/students thinking when they come to these meetings? What do they think/do after the meetings?

From the data we have collected to date, certain patterns have begun to emerge. For example, the bureaucratic logistics of departmental, faculty, and university practice are a clear focus of much anxiety and advice: deadlines, appropriate paperwork, number of committee members and external examiners required, binding and layout regulations, and so on. Another identifiable theme in the conversations consists of supervisors reassuring students that whatever they are experiencing is normal, often by recounting stories of their own work. This is how one supervisor put it: "It's hard. I know when I was doing my thesis, you're just so close to it. You can't see the forest anymore, you're looking at the bark." Another pattern, which might be labeled "tea and sympathy," consists of

apparently non-dissertation related conversation about life outside the academy; based on our own experience as supervisors and on the work of our colleagues, we see these light chats about children or hobbies or current affairs as essential to creating working relationships. Finally, we have been much interested by supervisor and student commentary on organization and sequence in the dissertation, which depends heavily on spatial and design metaphors, but generally lacks explicit commentary on the rhetorical justification for the placement or order of ideas (more on this below).

READERS AND READINGS

In the remainder of this chapter, however, we would like to focus on an especially intriguing pattern, one that seems to us particularly revealing of the numerous exigencies to which the dissertation genre responds and the many social actions it seeks to perform. What distinguishes this pattern is the supervisor's performance as multiple readers and, as a result, her/his rendition or enactment of multiple readings. The pattern describes a variety of readers (and readings) from the general to the specific, the implied to the implicated—from the invisible and unmentioned reader, to the named reader for whom the dissertation could have serious consequences. In this pattern we see Prior's (1998) "laminations of activity" dramatized as the supervisor moves from one role/reading to another and, in the process, positions the student writer in different worlds. We have used the word "multirhetoricity" to describe the multiple locations, situations, and exigencies evoked by the supervisor and experienced by the student. For the moment, we have identified five readers/readings, although we recognize the categories as unstable and permeable.

The implied reader

Like Parry (1998) and Bazerman (2007), we have been struck by how implicit the teaching of disciplinary language conventions—linguistic and rhetorical—appears to be. Students are told to add to, reduce, move, and delete sections without clear reference to readers or to rhetorical justifications. For the researcher, the implied reader must be inferred, although it may be that both student and supervisor have a clear sense; sometimes it seems to be any reader (or everyreader, as we note below), at other times it appears the supervisor has a specific individual or type in mind. The reader lurks but does not emerge. Some examples[1]:

Larry: That's a very interesting phenomenon. You should, if you could, pursue that because I really think it's quite rampant.

* * *

Dennis: Because there is a section [in the dissertation] on critique of career theory and models; there's so many career theories and models. I mean, if you're going to criticize something, you will have to provide some information about those models before you do that.

Why "should" the topic be pursued? To whom, besides the supervisor, will it be "interesting"? Why does the writer "have to provide some information"? Again and again, we see examples in the data of this type of unexplained directive. They imply a reader and a rhetorical purpose—the information will make it possible, by someone's standards, for the writer to criticize "career theory and models." Claims must be supported, but when, why, and how? Again, the implied reader might be as general as a reader of English or as specific as a well known disciplinary expert on "career theory and models."

A similar but more explicit directive is apparent in a pattern we are calling Everyreader. The examples that follow do contain a reference to readers (or "us," in one case), but they seem to be *any* reader who happens to come across the text. With a reference to readers comes slightly more rhetorical justification:

Darlene: Here you sort of rapidly converge on something, and I don't have enough justification for what led you there. And then you need some sort of conclusion here: So, what does this tell us? Research in this field is fragmented? Underdeveloped? . . . So, you want to give a kind of sum-up. "Here's where things stand. Here's where I see the strengths and weaknesses of each."

* * *

Juan: When you're writing a thesis, one of the things you need are road signs to guide the readers through the thesis [and] prepare them intellectually to expect what's coming. And, if you don't do that, then they get lost, they get confused, and they get pissed off.

Both of these excerpts also contain the pattern we mention above in which spatial or movement metaphors are used to describe textual organization. Road signs are required at points of convergence. Readers are noted, but they aren't identified as specialized readers, or readers with particular expectations for the structure or logic of arguments. However, we believe that the reader portrayed in these readings may be a member of the discipline, and that the reading being

performed may be a specialized reading. These examples, we believe, demonstrate how knowledge becomes procedural without being declarable; students learn how to perform acts of disciplinary reading and writing without explicit instruction; genres become commonsense.

The absence of instruction becomes apparent when, in the rare event, a supervisor spells out reasons for injunctions, as in the following:

Wray: So for each study, make a grid like this; then you can iden-
         tify the parts and what you'll see in the first study is that none
         of these things show up. . . . that will help the reader to see
         that they weren't there. Those steps weren't there. You had some
         other steps which will not appear in these—in [studies] two and
         three . . . . But to have the steps the same, because then you can
         see how much they overlap and that will make people see, "oh
         if you don't have these steps, it ain't process drama."

The grid or chart described is not presented as a disciplinary convention; it's simply a good way to represent data. However, Golde and Walker (2006) refer to a similar chart as "a tool familiar to educators" (p. 248), and we believe much of the advice offered by supervisors comes from a deep, discipline-specific, but inexpressible discourse knowledge. Although we are attempting to get colleagues to articulate the standards to which they hold their doctoral students, even the most experienced supervisors seem uncertain, as Bazerman notes in this chapter's epigraph. Consider this interview excerpt:

Lex: . . . it's a very formal exercise, undertaking research for a PhD,
              in presenting the work in the actual thesis, and so I need to sort
              of enforce certain conventions.

Interviewer: Right, and whose conventions are those? Where do those con-
              ventions come from?

Lex: Well I . . . that's an interesting question. I suppose they come
              to [student] filtered through me, so as a supervisor I suppose
              at the end of the day it's my view of what is a convention, and
              I suppose my view is formed partly by seeing other theses. But
              I'm not sure that's the answer. I'm not really sure where . . . . I'm
              not sure I can answer it. I have a view. Obviously it must come
              from somewhere. But I don't know where. I don't know where
              we decide how we do this.

The evoked reader

As the reader being portrayed or anticipated takes on an identity, the rhetorical justification for directives becomes more explicit. In the following excerpts, readers with defined expectations or needs are identified, and the provision of required information is thus justified. An unpersuaded or perplexed reader is evoked, and rhetorical action is recommended:

Lex: [Committee member] is bound to ask, "Well, okay, but you have all this data, so how's it going to help you out?" is the question. I mean, I know he'll ask it, if one of the others doesn't.

* * *

Lex: I would give them a few numbers about it. Remember we talked about possible external examiners. We've identified three possible external examiners and none of them are from Quebec. Two are from the States and one is from Canada. Apart from whoever might read your thesis in the future and might not know the details of how things are done in Quebec. . . . I mean how would somebody in the US know what a French immersion school is?

In the latter excerpt, some of the specific readers evoked are members of the discipline, but it is not their disciplinary knowledge that is at issue. They are being brought to mind, as it were, as any reader who "might read [the] thesis in the future and might not know the details of how things are done in Quebec." The supervisor is not trying to help the writer position herself vis à vis the field's current conversation; that takes a different sort of reader and reading.

The disciplinary reader

As we move our research into seminars and workshops for colleagues, there is one type of reader and reading we will be promoting: the disciplinary reader/ reading—the one in which a discipline's rhetoric is laid bare. This is the type of reading that writing tutors are often trained to provide—the think-aloud reading that exposes the reader's meaning-making process, or the reading accompanied by commentary. In the three examples below, with varying degrees of explicitness, the supervisors help the students locate their texts in a community's ongoing conversation. In the first two, they offer rhetorical justifications for the inclusion of certain information; in the third, the supervisor states a blunt, rhetorical truth about disciplinary knowledge-making.

Frances: I think maybe what you should say is—have a footnote to say in that chapter—that some of this work has already been published in an international journal, or whatever, because that's gone through a peer review process, it's been published and [that] tells people that you've already got the seal of approval from your academic peers in an international journal.

* * *

Juan: A lot of adult education theory goes back to them [Gramsci and Freire]. So I think what you should do is figure out, when you read this again, just make sure that you've genuflected enough to them.

* * *

Juan: The thing is, with PhD theses, you've got to be careful about who you choose to be external examiners. Someone like [Prof. X], for example, might fail this [dissertation] because, you know, I mean, there's a bunch of people, of which [Prof. X] is part, and I think that she'd have huge problems with this, okay? There are other people who wouldn't. . . . And I think that's who we'll send it to. We'll put them down as the examiners. There's, if you like, a politics to it, right?

These comments begin to exhibit the type of rhetorical savvy that we believe supervisors and doctoral students need—not necessarily because they will learn better how to participate in their field's knowledge-making practices, since that seems to happen reasonably well without explicit instruction, but because we believe that a truly critical appreciation of those practices is not possible without a rhetorical perspective.

The implicated reader

In this final type of reader/reading, one we did not expect to find, we include comments about actual but non-disciplinary readers—those portrayed in the research or with a vested interest in its results. With the advent and increasing use of various action research approaches, this type of reader begins to figure more and more in disciplinary writing. The school, hospital, agency, community centre, or other research setting is also an activity system, one in which the doctoral student has taken a subject position, and in which the rhetorical stakes might be

considerably higher than in the relative safety of the academy. Here we see most clearly the dissertation's multiple exigencies and outcomes, the "lamination of activities" to which Prior (1989) refers.

Student: I'm feeling more pressure than I thought I would because it's not just my mom who's going to be reading this, and you. [The administration at the research site] is very interested in this work.

* * *

Larry: But you know what's going to be challenging as you write this, is that you have to do it in a way, first of all, you have to know that these teachers might read your thesis for one thing . . . .

Student: Yeah, I know. I'm going to have to be careful. . . . I'm not going to write in the same bull-headed way that I'm speaking to you about it. Because I'm aware that they're going to read it and I know that it's going to go to the school board office.

Here, too, we see much need for work with our students and colleagues. When the workplace text leaves the workplace, it can be confusing, off-putting, alienating, and hurtful.

CONCLUSION

As we noted above, we do not see these categories as closed or clearly de-marcated. We've described a variety of readers and readings which seem to lie on a continuum from the implicit to the explicit and from the general to the highly specific. In the next phase of our work, as we collect more supervisory conversations and post-conversation interviews, we hope to see and describe a clearer spectrum of readings and to ask colleagues to help us understand what is happening in those readings. One thing seems certain: when supervisors ven-triloquate readers or perform various readings, rhetorical consciousness is raised, even without explicit explanations. As supervisors express confusion, critique interpretations, question claims, wonder aloud, and ask for more information—even when they do so in the role of unidentified readers—students are alerted to possible mis-readings. They do go away and revise; and many do move toward a text that actual readers find acceptable in different settings.

As we consider these multiple rhetorical demands on the dissertation writer, we are developing a greater appreciation of how much more complex the dis-

sertation genre may be in the multiplicity of its rhetorical demands than perhaps anything else academics write. There are relatively few genres in which a writer negotiates university and departmental demands, criteria, and practices (including faculty from any disciplinary background attending comprehensive exams and thesis defences); committee demands that can reflect a disciplinary diversity and perhaps even incommensurable research paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) that would be rather unlikely to come together in the disciplinary forums in which the doctoral student will eventually settle; and the concerns of research participants who may read the dissertation because of their involvement and their stakes in the research results, but who often are not considered significant readers of specialized journal articles. Returning to Miller's observation about the key function of genre in learning how to participate in the work of a community, we see the dissertation as a highly complex multi-genre that not only locates the student in a particular disciplinary community, reproducing its "commonsense" ways of knowing, but also engages the student in its boundary work with other disciplinary communities (as represented by committee members or department demands) or practitioner communities (as represented by research participants). As a multi-genre, the dissertation thus becomes a rich and rhetorically challenging space for supervisors and students to enact the complexity of a widely distributed disciplinary and academic life in one text.

NOTES

[1] All excerpts, unless otherwise noted, are comments by supervisors from transcribed conversations with their doctoral students. Pseudonyms are used.

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