

## **An emerging PhD curriculum and what this might mean for doctoral level threshold concepts**

**Margaret Kiley**, The Australian National University, Australia  
Margaret.kiley@anu.edu.au

Until recently the PhD curriculum in Australia consisted mainly of individual work with a supervisor and optional attendance at university/faculty workshops. However, over the past five years universities have begun introducing forms of coursework, often with mandatory attendance by candidates. The inclusion of coursework in the PhD is becoming increasingly common in other similar systems, e.g. New Zealand and the UK through the work of organisations such as Vitae (<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/>) as well as through the number of professional doctorates being offered in the various systems. With the steady, and quite speedy developments in Australia there has been an opportunity to examine this more formal approach to learning to undertake research and the possible role of Threshold Concepts in related curriculum design and assessment.

It was hypothesised that universities would particularly focus their required coursework on those areas which they considered significant and from there it might be possible to embed into the assessment the various Threshold Concepts identified in learning to be a researcher (Kiley 2009, Kiley and Wisker 2009, Trafford and Leshem 2009, Kiley and Wisker 2010, Humphrey and Simpson 2012). To test the hypothesis three cases were used as examples from different Australian universities having different doctoral cohorts and each of which had developed its PhD curriculum independently.

One of the three cases specifically presented their research-related skills and learning separately from the broader generic and employability skills such as career planning and leadership. On the other hand, the other two included a number of additional skills and attributes related to being a researcher. Of the research specific areas of focus all three universities included: writing, research methods and design, ethical research, and situating or contextualising the research.

Following the analysis of four research-related courses/training programs were analysed in more depth with an aim of identifying strategies for addressing and/or embedding research Threshold Concepts within each. For example, in the course generally called "situating the research" five specific research Threshold Concepts were identified i.e. research paradigm, argument, framework, theory and doctoral writing.

The full paper will present the curriculum model developed from this, and a more extensive analysis of newly emerging PhD coursework in Australia, and suggest how we might use this opportunity to address specific Threshold Concepts in doctoral programs (see for example Walker 2013).

### **References**

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