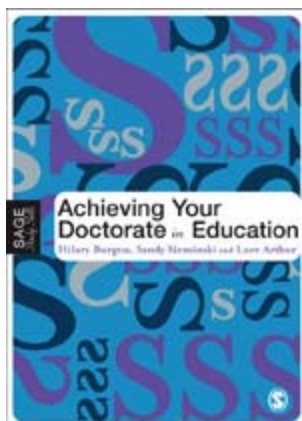


Book review



Achieving Your Doctorate in Education

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Review by K. R. Wall

Undertaking an EdD - the professional doctorate aimed at education professionals - is akin to undertaking a part time MPhil/PhD while working to support oneself during the research process: in both cases integrating work and study is a core issue. In the case of the EdD student, the work context is itself a key component of, and context for, the research being undertaken. 'Achieving Your Doctorate in Education' rightly focuses on two key aspects of doctoral level study – the 'how to work on a Doctorate' type issues: actively managing supervision and developing theoretical and methodological perspectives for example and the specifically professional practice related issues that necessarily inform the EdD focus. The authors rightly eschew any attempt at being a guide to research methods.

An opening chapter queries why one might want to undertake a Doctorate in Education, raising the sort of practical questions that are sometimes overlooked in the enthusiasm of wanting to take such a course. The significance of the taught component is made clear, as is the utility of completing regular assignments – assignments that need to be fitted into a busy professional life. Right from the beginning, readers are asked to focus on the purpose of their intended research, why it needs to be undertaken, where it is likely to lead and, more specifically, which issues and debates the research will allow the researcher to access and address.

The extensive practical experience of the authors gained in successfully supporting previous EdD students, is very evident in this text. Running through this and subsequent chapters is a clear emphasis on the need to effectively integrate sustained study with busy professional practice. This close inter-linking and its implications for how study might be undertaken and the professional issues of researching one's own professional context are clearly examined and developed.

The second chapter examines how research might be organized in terms of planning the research process. This aspect of doctoral study is succinctly described with practical and straightforward guidance on managing supervision, using supervisor contact time, coping with feedback and time management in general. It could usefully form the basis of a 'how we will manage our relationship' agenda for a student's first supervision meeting.

Similarly the next chapter on developing a literature review could also inform the personal planning agenda of a student at this stage of the research development process. One of the strengths of this text (among many) is how it repeatedly focuses the reader on practical aspects of the EdD process, supporting the reader to consider issues in a timely and systematic way. At this stage, issues informing academic writing style are signposted and the need to be both critical of what is being read and aware of how that same source might subsequently be used to inform their own argument is apparent. Again the authors do not

lose sight of the important contribution that EdD assignments make in developing an EdD researcher's writing skills, both critical and argument based.

In anticipating the operationalising of the research envisaged by the researcher, ethical issues are foregrounded in chapter four. For the EdD researcher the ethical dimension is a particularly important and often testing aspect of working in a professional context; itself often the subject of the intended research where it is regularly a researcher's own professional context that is being examined in some way. The implications for this in terms of professional ties, research relationships, mutual understanding with colleagues, the issue of confidentiality and its meaning in such closely interpersonal contexts are all appropriately highlighted.

Theoretical issues are not neglected and are crucially linked, in chapter five, with the status of professional knowledge and how this might inform the development and use of theoretical perspectives, through links between theory and practice. How theory might be developed from practice, the use of grounded theory and the implications for this in how theory might be further contextualized are all concisely addressed. Again, this chapter offers starting points for the student researcher in their own internal dialogue about their study as well as starting points for discussions during the supervision process.

Methodology in its various forms is given an overview in chapter six. Here the need to consider the fit between intended research strategies and the research purpose are examined. In weighing up both qualitative and quantitative approaches and the data that may flow from them, the ways that data may be collected are addressed in chapter seven. Through out these sections, the reader is implicitly invited to reflect on the broader intended-research outcome aspects of undertaking their chosen research. This is particularly meaningful in the EdD context where those involved in the research may have expectations about how the research, the data it yields and their identified outcomes may subsequently inform the shared working context. The choice of modes of data collection needs careful consideration in terms of the intended usability of research findings. In such a context, setting effective and realistic boundaries for the research activity is important – both in terms of the methods used and the types of data collected, as this chapter makes clear.

Analysing data in 'Achieving Your Doctorate in Education' is covered in chapter eight. Pointers regarding levels of analysis; the implications of analysing qualitative data and quantitative data are addressed with sensible, practical, advice (such as being clear as to what technical skills are needed for particular forms of statistical analysis - and seeking help when unsure!). More broadly, the implications (from a theoretical point of view) of the status of particular forms of data and how this might be presented and used (e.g. in analysing interview data) are also discussed.

The next chapter focuses on the writing (-up) process itself and the researcher's construction of their narrative in describing and reporting the research process and its outcomes. Here issues of style and its implications (the consideration of 'voice' is focused, clear and practical) in making a convincing argument are highlighted. Once again the practical issues of undertaking the EdD are not neglected. The need to create an appropriate writing environment is highlighted; an important issue for the busy professional who is writing up their research whilst continuing to be 'a busy professional'.

Two subsequent chapters deal with the examining process, including how to prepare for the viva. The final chapter focuses on the how the researcher's experience and findings may be disseminated through publications and conferences. Practical advice is evident here as elsewhere in the text. A full, up-to-date and wide-ranging bibliography completes the text.

Overall this concise and clearly written, systematically organized and supportive text offers the prospective EdD student (and those already embarked on the EdD process) a useful

guide to the 'real' aspects of undertaking a Doctorate in Education. It is written from an informed and experienced point of view and offers readers a sensible and timely mix of strategies, advice and concentrated experience, in a slim, accessible text.