

Working the Space: Augmenting Training for Practice-based Research

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Working the *Space*: Augmenting Training for Practice-Based Research

Becky Shaw

Summary

The worlds of practice and academic research produce powerful cultural identities: for this reason, practice-based researchers must work hard to construct a space for themselves within these differing forces. The need to “work the *space*” in this way is a creative and constructive part of practice-based research but often not recognised or catered for in university doctoral training. In this chapter, I explore some of the national requirements for doctoral training in the UK. These indicate that cohort development is desirable for all PhD candidates, but the delivery of doctoral training in UK universities sometimes offers a version of universal researcher identity that excludes practice-based researchers. Drawing on work with art and design PhD candidates in a post-92 UK university, I offer alternative ways to design group research training which build researchers’ understanding and construction of their intellectual and cultural research *space* without eschewing engagement with more generic notions of research training. These approaches draw on historic cultures of organising in art and design, employ critical and creative practices, and challenge how we might see training, skills and being a researcher. From this I suggest a manifesto for how practice-based research training can happen that might also be applied beyond art and design.

Introduction: defining *space*

The practice-based researcher is located between the professional world of practice and the academic model of research. These historical cultural contexts act like magnets, generating powerful currents that influence all aspects of practice in their radius: how knowledge is understood, behaviour, collaboration, dissemination, voice, use of time, use of resources etc. Given, this, practice-based researchers are positioned within both these powerful world views and have to build their space on the intersection. This *space* is needed so they can feel situated and so their work can be legible and transformational in its chosen location. While not all practice-based research happens within universities, undertaking research training as a PhD candidate often begins this process and all candidates are tasked to develop the contexts and world that their research sits in. However, practice-based researchers have a particularly complex job as they are not just trying to find their place in the scholarly world, but also weaving this together with worlds of practice.

When talking about the task of building a group context between practice and academia, spatial metaphors come readily to mind. The researcher must locate themselves in a particular place in the intersecting parts of a Venn diagram. One or more of the circles of the Venn diagram will be in practice-based research where the terrains may have some blurry edges in the first place. These circles often then overlap with other fields of knowledge and disciplines. In the written *space* of the thesis the researcher must build a new landscape of existing academic knowledge and practice knowledge with the circles of the Venn diagram and understand their position in it. This process involves the construction of the research knowledge *space* by the individual. Most of the policy and governance about supporting PhD researchers understands this endeavour as individual, supported by supervision and by some university training. The process of weaving a world between practice and research is a complex and creative act of construction. Not only is the context of study being built, but as researchers imagine themselves contributing to this, they are also bringing to life a new identity for themselves in this constructed landscape. While policy and governance understands the PhD as solo, perhaps it is useful to think about a shared endeavour for practice-based PhD candidates, where the navigation of practice and academia is collectively experienced and undertaken (although always with specific nuances). Given this, it seems important to explore how group learning could be used for building the space of practice-based research.

As *space* will be used frequently in this chapter, some definition is needed. I am first and foremost talking about a kind of social, as opposed to physical, space. This *space* is to be understood as a kind of group identity and belonging for those involved, but not one that has simple edges marking insiders and outsiders. This kind of *space* is not a fixed entity that individuals join but is being made all the time. There are extensive theories about the nature of *space* and even though it is exploring physical space, Doreen Massey's three- part definition¹ is particularly useful that:

- *space* is a product of social relationships and is formed through interaction
- *space* is a sphere of plurality: it contains lots of different, concurrent threads
- *space* is always being constructed- it is not finished.

While I am trying to describe the way a cultural social *space* can be built for practice-based research, it is still in the physical space of the University. In James Corazzo's² systematic review of learning space literature, social non-material spaces are not separable from the physical or virtual spaces where they form. The use of the term *space*, then, usefully acknowledges that there is a material dimension, and also emphasises an active making where individuals and groups form together.

In the following section, I explore what is nationally expected in the UK as a quality doctoral training offer and question how it might, or might not, generate useful conditions to support the creative act of building the *space* that practice-based research requires. Following this, I offer some examples of ways to recognise, explore and create these *space* building processes with practice-based researchers and to think constructively about what can be done within training policy, or in the relationship between training and individual PhD candidates. By doing this I hope to encourage experiment and even play, with forms of *space*-making.

Practice-based research is a pan-disciplinary concept, and the conception of the term also differs between doctoral programmes internationally and nationally. Given the additional complexity of encompassing all these differences, I focus particularly on my experiences of working with practice-based doctoral researchers on an art, creative media and design research programme within an interdisciplinary institute in the UK post-92 University, Sheffield Hallam (SHU).

The culture of art and design practice-based PhD candidates

Art and design doctoral research PhD candidates at SHU usually belong to a professional world before belonging to an academic research world, or if they have not been a professional, they have travelled through an undergraduate or master's education that constructs the habits and worldview of that discipline. For PhD candidates of vocational subjects (e.g. art, design, architecture, education, nursing, medicine, law etc.) this educational context is already entangled with practice, as teaching is orientated to "the profession".

When artists and designers (and film-makers etc) begin a PhD programme they are often not fully prepared for the changes that are required, believing it will be business as usual, but with a "bit more writing". They are not prepared for the upheaval doctoral research produces as it bends them to think, act and speak like researchers. In our experience at SHU, the processes of research training and doctoral management procedures generates critical moments where the researcher is torn between a long-cultivated way of being an artist/designer and the new differently alien languages of knowledge, foresight, method, ethics and bureaucratic accountability, as well as the return of the classroom where doctoral training is often delivered. The principles and discourses of knowledge and methodology are vitally important to all researchers, and there is a tendency for art and design practitioners to think that 'they don't apply to them' for a while. Principles are not alien to the critical and informed art or design practitioner, but in research training, they come in linguistic and cultural forms that are at odds with many researchers (not just those in art and design).

The work to accommodate and translate this learning is often done by supervisors and is

described well in John Hockey's³ paper. Drawing from interviews of PhD candidates and supervisors, Hockey describes the five categories where candidate's disjuncture between the worldview of being a practitioner and a new PhD researcher are played out. These sections include problems with:

- regulations
- documentation of research evidence
- analysis
- academic writing
- balancing academic and creative work⁴.

Hockey describes how supervisors gradually encourage PhD candidates that an engagement with university research protocols is worthwhile and within their existing skills, making use of and stressing 'continuing well-established biographical strengths'⁵. Hockey also records how supervisors encourage candidates to see engagement with research practices as 'risk-taking' - a quality already valued (and indeed, valorised) in art and design practice. These key factors show a movement from resistance to adoption or adaptation and art and design researchers finding ways to merge and develop a new identity as an artist-researcher. Hockey's research focuses on the supervisor-candidate relationship to do this work, at a time where there was little requirement to deliver cohort-level research training. It is interesting to consider then, how a training offer might also contribute to this adaption.

It seems that the deeply held professional identities of art and design practitioners generates a complicated and often difficult navigation of context, or *spaces* (introduced above). The practice-based researcher must navigate the terrain and boundaries between these different *spaces*: of university doctoral education and conventions of academic performance *and* the values and performances of art and design worlds. The act of working this *space* – the physical, intellectual and emotional moulding of a context where they can function and where their work is legible - has enormous impact on individual research journeys. It is easy to see the difficulties that arise from forming this space for the individual, and it is right to be attentive to the extra stress this causes. However, the production of this *space*, both for individual PhD candidates and also for institutions, could be seen as a dynamic, plastic, creative, critical and shared process. Before we think further about what might be developed, it's interesting to reflect on what is offered as cohort training, and what is required by policy.

Generic training policy and relationship with practice-based research

The policies that structure the processes of doctoral education focus primarily on the individual PhD candidate. This is not surprising as unlike a course, the doctorate is a singular programme of study, described, contextualised and carried out by the individual. Most UK universities work to meet the standards expressed by UKRI (UK Research and Innovation- the connecting organisation for all the separate research councils). Higher education (HE) organisations must meet these standards when providing doctoral provision in partnership with UKRIs. The guidance on the type of environment and support universities must provide includes ‘excellent standards of supervision, management and monitoring’, career advice that includes a range of sectors and not just academia’, and ‘in-depth advanced research training’⁶. The UKRI expects universities to operate a degree of flexibility and responsiveness specific to disciplines- such as practice-based research. The same policy usefully indicates that PhD candidates ‘should, wherever possible, benefit from the advantages of being developed as part of a broader peer group (e.g., through cohort approaches and Graduate schools)’⁷ but doesn’t (for brevity I assume) go into any detail about what purpose group work might serve.

Cohort delivery is often described as doctoral training. This always seems an uncomfortable word, producing images of shouting coaches and athletes competing against the clock. It also suggests there is a finite skill that has to be learned to become a researcher. Training differentiates the learning process from other standard models of education, perhaps to emphasise the non-taught nature of doctoral study, and also a professional transition to being a researcher. One on hand, this situates the process in more corporate models and implies there is a simple acquisition of skills to become a researcher, and on the other, it opens up the possibility of hybrid worlds between academia and professional contexts that could be useful and appropriate for practice-based researchers.

Research training: generic, practice-based, formal and informal

Most UK universities offer a generic training package for PhD candidates. ‘Generic’ research training includes skills that are deemed important for all researchers, regardless of discipline. Often a generic package includes: understanding of the principles of research design, bibliographic and computing processes, ethical and data management procedures, communication and engagement skills and also career development frameworks. However, all packages differ somewhat, and are likely to be more extensive when national funding is in place (from AHRC or ESRC etc). The current Researcher Development Framework⁸ specifies a detailed platform of skills and knowledges that individual researchers should be supported to develop during their doctoral study⁹. Many institutions take part in this framework, providing a way for researchers to map their own development, with supervisor input and some generic delivered training.

Art and design researchers seem to struggle to engage with the generic training on offer in institutions. This is certainly the case at SHU, but similar patterns are informally noted at other Higher Education Institutions.. While response will always be nuanced according to different programmes on offer, the ‘one size fits all’ way to be a researcher, can seem a gulf away from the candidate’s skills and usual disciplinary context and way of being. While candidates do adapt, as Hockey records, this is a slow process, and it is worth asking whether this generic training could attend better and quicker to the process of *space* building at work as part of its intellectual content.

As well as the difficulties faced by individuals in building a new *space* for themselves, it’s important to question what type of researcher identity is being communicated by universities in the first place, and how well this might relate to practice-based research. In my experience the notion of generic is inflected by the authority of certain subjects and their assumed defining of research training. In the case of many UK post 92 universities a version of the generic may tends towards an engineering and biosciences discourse.

One of the problems with generic training is that it conveys a way of being a researcher that doesn’t quite fit with the way of being a practice-based (and other) researchers. Like other forms of teaching, generic research training creates a form of ‘disciplining’. James Corazzo¹⁰ describes ‘disciplining’ as all the unspoken ways a discipline is communicated, such as via speech, behaviour, frames of reference etc. If generic training conveys a way of being a researcher that is too distant from any of the modes of research recognised by the practice-based researcher then it becomes difficult to creatively re-form their identity and *space* with- or in relation- to this. The particular inflection of university generic skills training reflects how a university as a whole understands, represents and values research, so if PhD candidates feel alienated from this it can make them feel alienated from the university as a whole, sending them retreating to the safety of disciplinary comfort, instead of doing the work to build a new *space* to inhabit productively.

Susan Carter reports¹¹ on an academic suspicion of generic training as ‘a bolt-on process suspected by some of inherent flimsiness’¹². However, the problem is not necessarily the idea of generic training *per se*, as there is value in striving to teach research skills or issues that all might have in common. In a paper on the generic provision of thesis writing skills for doctoral candidates, literature specialist Carter notes that the generic strangely means both a specific genre, as well as the general or universal: almost opposite concepts.

Rather than arguing against the generic then, perhaps the generic needs more critical and practical exploration, or could be understood as a goal to work towards or explore. Doctoral education is in UK terms *Level 8*: the highest educational qualification. The Researcher Development Framework accordingly sets out a sophisticated set of expectations of knowledge and critical thinking. Despite this, generic training is often delivered as a set of skills, without the same

expectations of critical engagement and questioning that we would expect from undergraduate level education. Surely at *Level 8* we should be abandoning an expectation of education to give PhD candidates skills or certitude, and instead offer challenging questioning of the nature of research, knowledge, truth and process. If this level of questioning was an expectation of doctoral training, it would, by its framing, enable practice-based PhD candidates to reflect on how their worlds of practice and research inform their worldview.

Susan Carter describes the generic as a term that is ‘promiscuous, slippery and generative’¹³, suggesting that we could be seeing it as a site for imaginative and challenging conversations. Carter draws on the work of others including Sharon Parry, and notes, warily, that doctoral candidates often vocalize their experience as a game – one or many meaningful social settings with rule/social codes that they have to learn to navigate. Navigating the building of a researcher identity and *space*, between profession (art and design) and university (generic conventions of being a researcher) is a key preoccupation of practice-based researchers, Carter feels that one thing that generic delivery could do better is to ‘explicate the rules of the game’¹⁴ rather than pretend that this particular world of academia is a universal given. I would go further than this and argue that exploring the possibility of the generic creatively and paying attention to how we form different research *spaces*, would help all PhD researchers understand where they stand in relation to academia and practice.

In the SHU community of 30-40 art, film and design PhD researchers, the navigation of the *space* of researcher and practitioner is a key preoccupation. Rather than accepting this as a necessary evil of working in a post-92 University, we decided to explore the problem creatively, and as part of our own doctoral training programme. There is a growing interest in ways that distinct practice-based training programmes can address the gap between the policies of doctoral training and the experiences of practice-based research PhD candidates: drawing together ways of being a practitioner, with recognisable ways of researcher performance (as in the excellent model at De Montfort University developed by Craig Vear, Sophy Smith and Ernest Edmonds). The benefits of making a formal programme are still being explored, however, one important aspect is that a formal programme makes this area of research visible, distinct, shareable, open to improvement and formally recognised by the university. It also performs a task of enculturation in which university needs and practitioner worlds are welded into a new form.

At SHU we sought to develop training practices to inculcate an understanding of discipline-specific “researcherly” behaviour, but without explicitly adopting the language of training, or if we did, to explore it critically. This approach was undoubtedly shaped by my experience as an artist-researcher exploring institutions and also as an artist-curator. I have been heavily influenced throughout my art and education journey by artists like Andrea Fraser¹⁵, who was in turn influenced by Pierre Bourdieu. As in *Homo Academicus*¹⁶ where Bourdieu applies sociological method to

sociology, it seemed appropriate to explore the conditions we found ourselves in using our own artistic methods, applying them to our understanding of what becoming a researcher might mean for the art and design practitioner.

By exploring how we train practice-based researchers, in relation to generic research training, we thought we might support practice-based researchers build a *space* between practice and academia, and also potentially improve research training by using some of the strengths of practice-based researchers. Sensitivity to context is often abundant in art and design researchers and we thought this could be employed to critically explore and challenge doctoral training and simplistic or out of date constructions of researcher identity. Instead, then, of feeling alienated or outside of the generic researcher, the critical, material thinking of practice-based researchers might build a relationship and *space* with it.

Recognising the need to think critically about training for practice-based researchers has led to us undertake a range of practical and material projects that approach conventional aspects of research training with a deconstructive and constructive eye. In the previous four years we have playfully remodelled research training, the conference, the academic poster, definitions of data, method, and research impact. In the following section, I explore some of the projects that tackle the plastic process of *space* building. This involves processes to build practice-based researcher identity: as a *space* or position between the generic and the specific and where practice meets research. These projects are not easy to order effectively as they overlap in time and one affects the other. However, for ease I organise them as:

1. making *space* through training
2. PhD researchers make *space*
3. making physical *space*

1. Making *space* through the time, structure and form of ‘training’

In this section, I discuss two projects, undertaken as doctoral training, that sought to construct researcher identities and *space* in relation to two different constructions of generic research presentation: the conference and the academic poster.

Universities often use conference models to train researchers in conference presentation, or to generate a showcase of PhD work. These conferences usually include PhD candidates of many disciplines and adopt a one-size-fits-all unspoken expectation of standards of research communication and identity. In these contexts, it can be especially hard for practice-based research

PhD candidates to communicate the landscape of their inquiry and their developing new researcher identity.

Our art and design doctoral candidates are (at time of writing) situated within an interdisciplinary research institute including computing, media and communication studies, and we are tasked to offer training for this wider community, filling in the gaps untouched by University-level training, as well as specialist art and design training. My focus in writing here is on art and design PhD researchers, but the purpose of this particular training initiative was for the wider interdisciplinary community. However, this interdisciplinary scope offered an excellent opportunity for practice-based researchers to explore how the identities and landscapes they were building, differed or were similar to, the researcher identities of different disciplines. Susan Carter notes a similar value in interdisciplinary dialogue and how ‘discussion at the borderlands illuminates discipline-specific practice’¹⁷.

In response to our concerns about the operation of the generic (and as a productive challenge to the institution) we wanted to find the grounds for a critical research training that could be interdisciplinary without alienating specific research cultures. Instead of seeking a theme around content of research, it was decided to focus on the principle of research that is common in all disciplines: method. The simple notion of method was chosen over the more philosophical methodology to emphasise that research involves practical acts, informed by philosophical positions. Core alignment to methods is also a central part of different researcher identities, for example, it is the use of practice that makes practice-based research, and the use of ethnographic methods that makes anthropology research etc.

To use the framework of the conference to support individual learning and collective *space*-building, as opposed to dissemination, we looked closely at every expectation of conference production. We avoided a triumphing of successful outcomes and instead sought to make the critical thinking and creativity embedded in research methods tangible and explicit. Instead of focusing on research content, we shifted emphasis to the *practice* of research: how researchers *build* and relate structures of method. Every researcher, including practice-based, must be able to understand what methods are available and what will work effectively to answer their research inquiry. They must also be able to articulate this decision-making journey, make a case for their chosen direction, and reflect on whether it was the best path. Method offered a clear training opportunity for researchers to articulate their process, but also challenge and enrich it by exposure to methods from other researchers. As well as supporting all researchers, this frame would ensure that practice-based researchers understood all aspects of their process as part of their practice-based research: the structure of time, the ordering of materials, attention to participants, and the processes of making, thinking, review and analysis.

The conference was built by using a PhD candidate steering group of diverse disciplines so they could devise the event in a way that would appeal to their disciplinary communities, and the difficult process of speaking across disciplines would be embedded in the development of the event from the outset. Some members of the steering group were uncomfortable with the need to talk about method as this type of reflection was outside of the conventions of their discipline where method is seen as a means to an end and just ‘how things are done’. Members were also concerned that the focus on *how* rather than *what* might undermine the expected, desirable academic status of a conference, or generate a situation where they might feel ashamed or uncomfortable. We encouraged them to understand that communication of problem solving, working with problems, or honestly reflecting publicly on flaws, is part of a researcher’s integrity, regardless of discipline. We avoided making our focus on language itself so we didn’t seek to form any agreed cross-disciplinary terms, instead we recognized the value of an open debate about different understandings.

The first abstracts submitted to the conference call focused on reporting findings, or only described method briefly. It took several weeks of supported intervention from staff for research PhD candidates to get inside their method and to understand their research practice as a process rich with philosophical and practical decisions and implications. Interestingly, the practice-based researchers tended to be better at discussing method, perhaps because they were practiced in the defence of their process as research, and the how is an integral part of any artistic language . However, this entwinement of doing and analysing is also what makes articulating practice-based research in an interdisciplinary frame difficult.

We wanted to make the construction of research visible, so that no aspect of the building of a research project could be taken for granted as “just what you do in my discipline”, or “just what my supervisor told me to do”. To do this we established key processual themes that went across disciplines. These processes included *Analysing Narrative*, *Constructing Data*, *Making Models*, *Questioning Method*, *Exploring where Real and Virtual Collide*, *Observing and Ordering* and *Translation*. These categories were intended to draw attention to and intensify focus on what makes up the research process. The presenters would have to “see” and articulate their disciplines while also recognizing what key shared ingredients of researcher process.

During the event itself there were moments when the inter-disciplinary clash caused caution and uncertainty. After the first panel on *Constructing Data* there was a silence and then an audible intake of breath as the audience was tasked to begin unpicking the relationships between one project that used numerical data collection methods and a project where an artist researcher understood

their artwork as data. Fruitful dissonance was generated powerfully in the session on *Making Models*. Here a computing research project exploring the creation of digitally constructed online classroom environment was bombarded with questions and input about the aesthetic visual and spatial language of the classroom. The online classroom hung in a simple visualized digital environment of a horizon line where sea meets sky: a token *anyplace*. This generated considerable challenge and debate as communications and creative practice candidates debated what this *anyplace* meant for education. All the candidates could not rely on daily disciplinary doing of their researcher identity and world, but had to pay attention to every sharp edge and blurry corner of it.

The apparently simple focus on method illuminated research process (and research training) as a site of creativity, innovation and discovery, and also built epistemological awareness, drawing attention to what is being researched and how knowledge is being produced. Art and design researchers contributed greatly to these conversations as they recognised the practical activities in the work of others, and the creativity, fluidity and problem finding involved in other disciplines. They also contributed significant insight into the non-neutral effect of visual communication in presentation that might have remained overlooked by others.

Method sought to challenge the tendency for generic doctoral training to present simplistic generic formula of how to speak, perform and get on, and an additional tendency to present research careers as a strategic, linear manoeuvre for visibility and success. This focus also generated an ability to appraise the quality of the research of others and to understand the formulation of different researcher identities and the construction of different *spaces* that can be occupied. After ‘Method’ candidates spoke frequently about their excitement about getting to know each other, recognition of similar outlooks in unexpected communities, and also about the way that exploring work criticality builds both a shared interdisciplinary learning community and a new sense of the *space* of the practice-based researcher community. The oscillation between the different communities and the assumptions of generic research identity and communication felt like an active ‘working the space’ where positions were seen, felt and articulated.

Case Study: The poster show: *Title, formatted in sentence case (the title of the project)*

The academic poster is a familiar part of the academic conference in many disciplines (including in design and film theory but rarely in visual arts). The poster is used as an additional presentation format alongside verbal performance of papers, keynotes and workshops etc. The posters themselves usually adhere to particular conventions of form including common fonts, language, spatial layout, digital software, the use of diagrams and visual representations. There are many

online examples of “how to do” academic posters suggesting a fairly narrow set of generic criteria for success. The conventions differ across disciplines but are, by and large, framed by an idea of scientific language and delivery. Like any other form of visual communication, the academic poster is subject to changing fashion and style, but its parameters remain fairly constant.

The poster performs an act of compression and completion, reducing years of work and potentially huge geographic space into a sheet of paper. The poster acts as a ‘point of visibility’¹⁸ for processes, spaces and contexts otherwise unavailable to us. It is usual to find a whole series of affiliation logos on posters including from universities, fieldwork sites, labs, sponsors etc. As well as registering investment, these are badges of honour, belonging and endorsement.

In art, design and film the poster is an historic and common part of professional practice. The poster can be the form of an artwork or can refer to another place and time, inviting us to go and see the ‘real thing’. The art and design poster extends/compresses place and time in the same way as an academic poster does, and it must also convey the atmosphere of the event it refers to in every bit of its form- its’ paper quality, its’ font, language, spatial arrangement, and location.

Academic posters are required to be clear and to carry a large amount of information about the process and progress of research, in an accessible form. While all PhD researchers seek clarity and precision, language is never solely about reportage after the event. For example, ideas (and researcher identities¹⁹, are built and discovered through writing. This is even more complex for creative practice researchers, as the visual language of the poster can be both the mode of communication and the medium of the research. The art and design researcher may also be looking for forms to communicate many different things at the same time, using creative mediums and methods to compress ideas, not pull them out in sequential points. Being able to communicate clearly is a vital part of research training, but it is also an important arena for thinking critically and sensitively, to challenge partial, exclusive definitions of universal clarity and norms.

Instead of simplifying or ignoring the relationship between worlds of academia and professional practice, we decided to explore it head-on by taking on the challenge of the academic poster. To the eyes of professional designers, artists and film-makers, the academic poster is often clunky, gauche, stuffy, uncommunicative and just plain ugly, with the demands of ‘clear information’ overwhelming all other concerns. Working with the poster, then, offered a context to materially construct, explore, experiment with, attack and enjoy a *space* where professional practice and research collide, offering frames for the communication of practice-based research.

During one afternoon, art and design researchers worked together to explore existing academic posters and to begin new ones for their own research. This process involved cutting, collaging, sampling, enlarging, copying etc examples of existing posters and then playfully building in the researcher’s own material. The resulting posters (as seen in the image 1.) adopt different

levels of adherence to academic poster standards such as the expectancy of a high volume of text. The fourth poster from the left combines a full-size image with little explanatory text, the sixth image from the left shows text fragmented across the image, and the seventh image from the left contains no text at all. The researchers also experimented with art and design standards of a successful poster (already complicated because they may well be seeking to challenge these conventions too). The process of discussion and practical workshopping that produced the posters was extremely rich, as we reflected on how to use the medium of a poster to convey practice-based researcher identity, and how to use the place of the exhibition to convey the *space* of practice-based research.

In this example, and the method conference, training situations offer different forms to produce the *spaces* of practice-based research. In doing this, the practice-based research PhD candidates conceived themselves within new shared discourses, and also understood themselves as on borders, valleys, cliff-edges or within territories. The academic poster offered a physical, plastic canvas where the landscape of the PhD candidate's own research could be viscerally moulded with composition, surface and information. Every material decision the candidates made when organising different parts of the poster could be considered as an expression of the terrain: the relationships between practice knowledge and academic knowledge being materialised as sharp cuts, overlaps, a blur, a gradation, a fold, a void etc. The group of posters also articulated a *space* of a particular research culture, one that defined itself by its active and critical exploration of its own culture and that of the University.

2. PhD researchers make *space*

Alongside experiments that explore generic concepts of research and researcher training, we developed contexts where candidates might lead on delivering training. The most constant of these is a fortnightly seminar that actively follows the conventional ingredients of generic research degree training: *research structure, methodology and method, the literature review, analysis, ethical consideration, intellectual property and the submission*. For each session one or more PhD candidate is invited to reflect on one of these through the lens of their research. This could be a simple recounting of *how* aspects are done, but more usually this involved experimental ways to learn and reflect.

One notable example included a researcher who explored the wrapping and unwrapping, storage and appraisal of differing sculptural objects as a way to engage deeply with ethical concerns. Through handling the different surfaces, weights, and textures of the objects she invited us to think about the ethics of moulding, shaping or reconfiguring material that belongs to another,

the way material is formed through the research process itself, and the inter-relation of sharp, intractable or fragile material with its environment. Another researcher used her own Deleuzian, rhizomatic study to challenge expectations of the literature review. These examples show how fundamental research issues can be re-considered, using practice.

We have also been lucky to have energetic and ambitious candidates who have used some of the sense of possibility grown from the close seminar relationships (and funding from the University), to foster additional projects and question academic life. A candidate²⁰ led an extraordinary project (outside of the seminars and for a wider audience) that invited people to reflect honestly on failure and shame. In a later project four art and design researchers worked together to explore the experiences and value of artist researchers who have dual identities as healthcare professionals. In one summer, to address the gap of staff-led provision, a group of PhD candidates sought University funding to develop their own entirely run candidate programme, using a deliberately DIY-maker aesthetic. In addition to projects that sat between community building and training, PhD candidates have delivered conferences on visibility and orchestrated significant exhibitions questioning what the purpose of the exhibition is for practice-based art and design researchers.

These examples all depend on committed, energetic PhD candidates, who recognise that building the wider researcher *space* in turn contributes to their own research experience and learning. Craig Batty and Marsha Berry²¹ note that despite the tradition of the lone scholar, PhDs are completed in teams, and communities where: ‘generative ideas emerge from joint thinking’²². Without candidates who understand this, none of these activities happen. For a short period, SHU offered funding for PhD candidate-led training, as an addition to staff-led. There seems to be a lot more scope for candidates to do this and to deliver effective learning that supports the development of a specific practice-based researcher space. These models sit in odd contrast to the policy defined cohort training, yet they take seriously the importance of peer learning as a vital part of researcher *space* creation.

3. Making (physical) space for practice-based research

There is growing interest in the intellectual space of a research culture, as explored by Craig Batty and Marsha Berry (2016). They offer an analysis of the playful space of the creative practice research degree, for example, deliberately conflating the cultural space of the research degree, the space of the inquiry of the PhD candidate, and, occasionally, the physical space where research is carried out, and the ‘constellations’ and ‘connections’²³ that it involves to both inhabit and construct these ‘spaces’. Their emphasis is more on the *space* of research co-created with candidate and supervisors rather than via cohort training. However, relevant to the exploration of disciplines, and

training, they reflect on the creative potential of the creative-practice researcher's occupation of dual worlds, noting that they are trained to 'use the playful space of the academy to develop and contribute new and innovative knowledge'²⁴. They note that the *space* of the practice-based doctoral project can be 'cluttered and chaotic'; a refreshing and critical counter to the desire for training to make things 'clear'. They also note that the space created in a training environment is 'only partially charted, where candidates and supervisors can find previously uninhabited spaces'. This sense of training as an adventure and an inquiry rather than an agreed delivered set of information is one that can be developed much further.

Following on from a conversation about the wider *space* of research culture, it is important to consider how physical learning space is used to support the formation of art and design practice-based researchers. Traditionally doctoral researchers are situated with their supervisors, either spatially, or organisationally. In this relationship the PhD candidate is reliant on the supervisors for all their knowledge of the doctoral journey, perhaps with some opportunity to meet others via research training etc. If candidates aren't situated in offices with supervisors, they might be in shared occupancy offices. In a scientific model, doctoral candidates might be working in groups in labs. Where and what, then, is the physical space of the practice-based researcher?

Many aspects of under-graduate and taught post-graduate (e.g., masters) design teaching (for example) mimic the behaviours and values of the professional design world. James Corazzo collates a large body of research on (amongst other things) the value of the studio as producing educational 'disciplining' in design PhD candidates²⁵. The physical space of the studio has an influence that is both tangible and intangible, contributing to forming the intellectual and cultural educational *space* of a course. The physical space teaches how it feels to be a designer and a design candidate, constructing how they and staff speak, perform, move, place materials, argue, relate to each other and understand quality (amongst many other things). While Corazzo's use of the term 'disciplining' refers to the effect of actual space (which will be returned to shortly) it can also be used to describe the way art and design candidates must become encultured²⁶ into a new identity of a practice-based researcher. Corazzo proposes that it is not just the curriculum that teaches PhD candidate to be designers, but also the other sensorial ingredients and spatial practices: for example, interpersonal interaction, speech, space habitation at different times of day etc. These ingredients are also at work when practitioners begin to be practice-based researchers. However, this leads us to consider what type of learning space might the University need to provide to achieve the 'disciplining' of the practice-based researcher?

Given the University's commitment to providing laboratories, it was considered essential that they provide some form of studio space for artist and designer researchers. A dynamic Head of Programme made a case for hiring space in a professional artists community. This decision sought

to find a spatial form to fuse an identity between professional art and academia. However, we recognised that the standard professional ‘solo’ studio was not quite the right form for a practice-based researcher’s space. Research candidates are not full-time practitioners; rather the doctorate involves periods of practice, writing, reading, talking and presenting etc. mixed across a day or sometimes separated through planned weeks or months. Separate studios would also mitigate against building a collective identity. These needs led us to consider the occupancy of contemporary design practices in Scandinavia (following a research trip to Copenhagen to visit some co-operative design for health studios). These provide shared, flexible space but without distinct allocated individual work areas, . This model allows PhD researchers to continue to be together while doing different things including writing, reading and making work, and which makes a spatial identity for practice-based research which is different to that of workshops, desk-based classrooms and undergraduate studios. If we had wanted to find this space within the University we would have needed to describe it as either classroom, studio or lab- not something in between. Obviously, some of the needs we describe are already commonly addressed in art and design teaching studio provision; however, practice-based doctoral candidates tend to be smaller numbers and with less consistent and conventional studio use. It is difficult to make spatial claims for conventional studios for practice-based researchers as their time also consists of other processes beyond making art- and design- work. However, it is the ways that practice-based researchers combine different modes of doing, that also produces their particular space, as described by Batty and Berry:

Whatever the form and whatever the methodology, the space of creative practice research encourages a critical engagement with doing, making, re-doing and remaking. It creates a place in which practice can be incubated alongside ideas, calling into question the past, present and future of that practice.²⁷

The studio we have at SHU is in a professional artists studio complex and does not always work well. Provision away from the University makes it harder to manage and cold is sometimes an issue (in the art industry frequent use of old concrete buildings makes this a common problem). Sometimes the distance from other University spaces dissuades occupation. However, when the physical-space does work well it adds an extraordinary layer to building the highly specific identity and *space* of practice-based research. The physical-space makes possible, and actively constructs, both the identity of individual art and design researchers and an art and design research community. The community then makes new uses and understanding of the space possible. In this space, art and design researchers share knowledge and understanding that generates some independence from supervisors. The space is populated at odd times of night or specific blocks of

time, the PhD candidates write there as much as make, they discuss, they have parties, invite others, trial work, drink tea, take part in research methods training and lead their own seminars and exhibitions, sometimes with staff.

Conventionally research space support is compartmentalised between the lab and the desk. As Hockey articulates, the bringing together of research and practitioner processes and identities seems to be the overarching problem/dynamic for practice-based researchers. Our research space refuses the separation of researcher and artist/designer identities and brings both together. Doctoral education and art practice are full of histories, experiences, metaphors and myths of isolation and separation. Labs are communal, desk spaces are separate, researchers work in libraries, offices, and solo artists use cavernous New York loft studios. However, running parallel to well-trodden myths of seclusion and isolation, artists and designers have other histories of working collectively, and practices that are made in communities, not studios at all. Artists and designers have always sought each other out to build new communities, use spaces to create visibility, work with different disciplines, lever funds, and to communicate externally. Historic versions of this include models of artist-led organisation and space, including examples like Casco projects in Utrecht²⁸, Sheffield's digital Access Space²⁹, and Static in Liverpool³⁰. These collective spaces overlap with histories of experimental and collective education like Black Mountain College³¹. These type of art spaces *make* artists: by making space and constructing a collective identity they give artists permission to 'be' in different ways: they are artist's engines. We wanted to harness this same process of using space to build practice-based researcher identity. One PhD researcher described it as follows:

Our PhD studio space gives me a home to my constant context: the low hum that powers each day – which is the people who give my research process, art practice and life texture and joy and depth. The space gives me a place, and the gift of just being a part of a World.³²

In addition to thinking about how artist's organisations influence how we might create researcher space, there is also a tradition of artists using their artistic processes to explore education; such as Annette Krauss' 2008 *Hidden Curriculum*³³ with school children. The exploration of training and spatial production of researcher space here might be considered to draw on the same tradition of using artistic methods to explore education. Nadine Kulin draws together some of these examples, including both art projects that take the forms of education, and artists who experiment in education, or propose to 'do it better'³⁴ than institutions as part of the 'pedagogical turn' in contemporary art. Kulin draws from the work of Lambert who proposes '(dis)organising a course at the juncture of art and pedagogy may permit the generation of alternative ways of knowing as well as the critical interrogation of norms and sites within the University'. Kulin also

draws on the work of L.E Bailey's 'syllabus that seeks to unsettle 'education-as-usual' in Universities. Sometimes generating a critical position can be a form of posturing or virtue signalling, an easy position of being the critic without commitment, a position we have sought to avoid here by exploring how space for practice-based research can be built with, and in relationship to, more universal forms of doctoral training and learning space-making within the university.

Summary and recommendations

Policy and governance offer no specific requirements for practice-based research, however, there is recognition of the value of cohort training.. The practice-based researcher (including many practices, such as nursing, law and education, as well as art and design) has a particularly interesting job at hand, to make a *space* that draws together worlds of practice and research. Understanding the significance of this process can provide inspiration to experiment with forms of researcher training.

In the above text I have explored a number of strategies for inculcating a *space* for practice-led art and design research: this includes finding ways to explore researcher training with practice, enlisting PhD candidates to produce training, and considering how physical space can build practice-based researcher identity. These projects are grown in response to the particular context posed by the post-92 university, and respond to the specific energies and sensibilities of a group of PhD candidates at a particular time. This specificity perhaps makes this body of researcher-development at odds with the need to agree wider strategies that can be applied in different institutions and different disciplines; and at odds possibly even with the needs of a handbook. However, there are principles here that can be developed by others, and that might contribute to practice-based researcher development. Given my own artistic identity and a pursuit of a conjoined identity that is also researcher and academic, (perhaps no less difficult and evolving than the researchers) instead of principles, I offer a manifesto for the shaping of practice-based researcher development that I hope can be of use to various practice-based researcher communities.

- See practice-based research *space* as an act of construction, not a given.
- See practice-based research *space* as always being built, never finished.
- Understand that all training is developed in context of disciplines and individuals- although this doesn't mean it can't be applied or adapted for others.

- See the construction of training as an experiment, where different approaches can be trialled.
- Approach every training opportunity critically: this is doctoral level education.
- Support PhD candidates to be critical of, and take ownership of, their own programme.
- Allow the professional methods and cultures of the practice-based field to inform how training can happen.
- Play with the spectrum between formal and informal training provision and the different opportunities and visibilities they offer.
- See the contribution of creative practitioners to training as offering a useful and productive critical perspective on the construction of research by the wider University/Institution.
- Explore opportunities for interdisciplinary discourse as a way to understand and build disciplinary and interdisciplinary *spaces* and identities.
- See training provision as expanding and joyous instead of procedural and repetitive.

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¹ Massey (2005)

² Corazzo’s 2019

³ Hockey’s 2007

⁴ John Hockey 2007 p.159-168

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ (<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-211020-StatementOfExpectationsPostGradTraining-Sep2016v2.pdf>).

⁷ ibid

⁸ (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework/the-vitae-researcher-development-statement>)

⁹ Editor’s note: As a contextual reference you can read Pearl John’s chapter *The impact of Public Engagement with Research on A Holographic Practice-Based Study* in section 1 of this handbook as a exemplar of how the Vitae framework can be implemented in a PhD.

¹⁰ Corazzo (2019)

¹¹ (quoting from Wingate 2006)

¹² (Carter 2011) p.727.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fraser (2007),

¹⁶ Bourdieu (1990)

¹⁷ (Carter, 2016).

¹⁸ (Harrington, 2016)

¹⁹ (Carter, 2016)

²⁰ Sarah ‘Smizz’ Smith (2018)

²¹ Batty and Marsha Berry (2016)

²² Craig Batty and Marsha Berry (2016) p.186

²³ Craig Batty and Marsha Berry (2016) p.182

²⁴ Ibid. p.192

²⁵ Corazzo (2019).

²⁶ (Batty and Berry, 2016) p.190

²⁷ Batty and Berry p.185.

²⁸ (Choi & Wieder, 2011)

²⁹ <https://access-space.org/>

³⁰ <https://www.statictrading.com/about/>

³¹ (Harris, 2002)

³² Sarah ‘Smizz’ Smith 2018

³³ <https://www.theshowroom.org/projects/annette-krauss-hidden-curriculum>.

³⁴ Kulin (2012)