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Decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate

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Research Domains

Postgraduate scholarship and practice (PGSP)

Abstract

The doctorate is powerful, arguably the highest educational achievement. Undertaking and completing doctorates in literary studies, and on literary related studies, defined here as the engagement of creating, or teaching literary or literary related texts, enables students to develop research and writing practices, construct and express original contributions to knowledge. However, the literary and the literary related doctorate can be seen as constrained, contested spaces where established culturally inflected custom could ensure exclusivity of engagement by a few on selected works in recognised forms. This scholarly research paper explores debates, research, practices and my own research and practice in decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate and argues that decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate means the curriculum, shape, research approaches, forms of expression, the objects, subjects and voices in the literary and literary related doctorate will also change and so will our supervisory and examining practices.

Full paper

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achievement. Undertaking and completing doctorates in literary studies, and on literary related studies, defined here as the engagement of creating, or teaching literary or literary related texts, enables students to develop research and writing practices, construct and express original contributions to knowledge. However, the literary and the literary related doctorate can be seen as constrained, contested spaces where established culturally inflected custom could ensure exclusivity of engagement by a few on selected works in recognised forms. This scholarly research paper explores debates, research, practices and my own research and practice in decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate and argues that decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate means the curriculum, shape, research approaches, forms of expression, the objects, subjects and voices in the literary and literary related doctorate will also change and so will our supervisory and examining practices.

Decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate is fuelled by the liberating politicising of texts underpinning postcolonial writing and critical practice (Achebe, 1958; Collins 1985) and more recently. It develops with asking questions about who writes, whose perspectives, which forms, which language and how doctoral researchers can explore and construct texts, modes of expressing different perspectives and worlds through words and other forms (Letsekha, 2013; Maldonado-Torres, 2011). It changes our research practice, research subjects, objects and expression (Boughey & McKenna). Some examples considered here come from Maori, Aboriginal and South African doctoral students, asking how they have changed what they do, what they look at and how they express their work (Chaka 2017; Carter et al 2016). The most radical examples tend to have creative practice, community and personal narratives at their core.

This paper explores research and experience in decolonising literary and literary related studies, including my own and that of colleagues from a range of cultures and international contexts. It focuses on debates about and in, and examples of doctoral research on literature and on creating and teaching forms of literature. It also therefore focuses on doctoral learning, supervision, examination and throughout it questions whose

knowledge is or has been shared and developed, who should no longer be absent, silenced, revealing challenges and opportunities in enabling doctoral voices from diverse knowledge cultures (Fanon, 1961; Jansen, 2017). Decolonising the literary and literary related doctorate means the curriculum, shape, research approaches, forms of expression, the objects, subjects and voices in the literary and literary related doctorate will also change and so will our supervisory and examining practices.

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