**Writing: Ups and (Yvonne) Downs**

Yvonne Downs

Well into my second year of a PhD I have not (consciously) written a single word of my thesis.  Sometimes this concerns me.  It concerns me when students who began their studies at the same time as me report completion of one or more chapters.  I also quake at the teeny scraps of study time and space remaining after being ‘mum' to teenage boys.  At such times I experience a kind of palsy during which it becomes impossible to get a grip on any productive activity. Nevertheless, contrary to the impression I may have given, I write almost daily and I write prolifically.  However, this writing would, I'm sure, be labelled ‘writing down' rather than ‘writing up' if it were to count at all.  Like a designer's diffusion label, it's good but not the real thing.

My ‘diffusion' writings consist in the main of my journal, field notes, notes taken when I read, emails, my blog, updates for my supervisor and sundry jottings in notebooks. I am not saying that they could or should be accepted in lieu of a thesis.  The thesis is for public consumption and carries with it particular obligations to its readers/audiences that these other writings do not.  I am also persuaded that the ‘thinking through writing', of the kind alluded to by Richardson, is of a different order when ‘writing up' rather than ‘writing down', just as writing a shopping list or transcribing my interviews is different.  I am guessing that the difference is in the type of creativity involved.  But the inference that writing up is what really counts and writing down is the beer and skittles element of doctoral research seems to me a strong one.

Sometimes I can ignore what others are doing and confidently keep faith with myself (the role of my supervisor is also crucial here).  However, it is only through writing this piece that I have come to appreciate that this confidence may not be (just) mindless optimism.  It is not simply that I know some of my writings will be directly incorporated into my thesis, because at this stage I cannot guess which.  Equally, I have always known that everything I write is in a sense relevant, part of a complex and barely understood process of sorting out my ideas; sorting of a different kind, moreover, to that which goes on in my mind while I am cooking supper or staring into space.  What I am suggesting here is that writing stuff down which is not consciously part of the ‘real thing' may account for the relative ease with which I then do write the proper stuff (which is not to say I don't get frustrated sometimes too).  In a sense writing down is akin to the displacement activities that are more usually a prelude to the immediate business of writing up.  So, although I tear my hair out sometimes, most of the time I find myself somewhere on a continuum of writing pleasure.  And at this point in my life I do have to take my pleasures as I find them.

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