

The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion

Getting to grips with research in
Education and the Social Sciences

Edited by

Pat Thomson and Melanie Walker

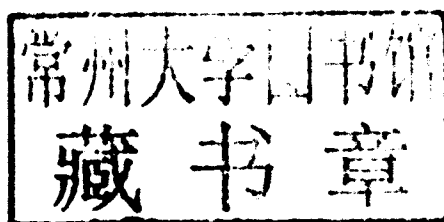


Companions for PhD and DPhil research

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This first edition published 2010
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset in Bembo by
Taylor & Francis Books
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The Routledge doctoral student's companion: getting to grips with research in education and the social sciences / edited by Pat Thomson and Melanie Walker. – 1st ed.

p. cm.

1. Education—Study and teaching (Graduate)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Education—Research—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Social sciences—Research—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 4. Social sciences—Study and teaching (Secondary)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 5. Doctoral students—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Thomson, Pat, 1948– II. Walker, Melanie. III. Title: Doctoral student's companion.

LB2372.E3R68 2010

370.7'2–dc22

2009044881

ISBN10: 0-415-48411-1 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0-415-48412-X (pbk)
ISBN10: 0-203-85224-9 (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-48411-4 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-415-48412-1 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-85224-8 (ebk)

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Part 1

Introduction

Why *The Doctoral Companions*?

P. Thomson and M. Walker

The Doctoral Companions are designed for doctoral researchers and their supervisors/advisers to read separately and together. The two volumes are neither advice books nor commentaries on the experiences of doctoral research and supervision. Their purpose is to provide complementary and situating commentary about doctoral research and to map key debates that work in and around the burgeoning research methods and doctoral literatures.

Indeed, there are an ever-expanding number of books available to support doctoral research – doing it-guides, toolkits and advice books, methods books, research and evidence-informed policy and practice and how-to-get published. There are countless methodology and methods texts. There is a growing literature on the changing nature of the doctorate, on the doctorate in different parts of the world, on the doctorate and the knowledge economy, on supervision, student experiences and the viva. However, this extensive literature is difficult for doctoral researchers and their supervisors to navigate and will thus not necessarily take students forward in their own doctoral projects. Supervisors are often unaware that their students are consulting advice books and, due to the existence of postgraduate methods training courses, may assume that students understand the nature of the enterprise in which they are involved. Their own intensifying work load also militates against supervisors taking time away from the details of specific supervision projects to engage in more general conversations about the doctorate and the processes of doctoral researchers becoming scholars. Students therefore may well end up confused, with the result that they may follow unproductive methodological and philosophical explorations. Alternatively, they may simply feel inadequate when apparently straightforward advice fails to do the trick. Holbrook and Johnston (1999) explain that such books are unhelpfully decontextualised and fail to acknowledge the messiness of real lives, not amenable to easy control or resolution. They write that, ‘Tears and tantrums, frustrations, phobias and personal agendas are missing, so are the supervisors who do have the correct answer or students with unmanageable problems’ (1999: 7). Our goal is to support doctoral researchers and their supervisors to interrogate the many catalogues of texts now available for doctoral purchase.

The widely read and highly successful books (Cham 2008a; 2008b; 2008c) and the comic strip titled ‘Piled Higher and Deeper’ (PhD), developed by graduate student Jorge