What ways do you think you have developed or grown as a result of your doctoral education?

Agnes: I became a writer, a researcher and an academic during the course of my thesis. I had so many firsts during that time: first conference paper, teaching my first tutorial, giving my first lecture, my first publication, my first research award, my first grant. It was, up to that point, the most difficult thing I had ever done [...] I discovered a persistence and determination that I did not realise I had.

Jayde: I have developed a high level of endurance. Writing a dissertation is like running a marathon—you just have to keep going even if you are moving forward with the smallest of steps. Although I did experience frequent doses of impatience while writing my dissertation, I think by the end of the process I had developed capacity for having patience with myself and my writing.

Writing is undoubtedly affective, and the development of a writerly identity is realised affectively. Scholarly writing can awaken positive and negative emotions from pleasure to anxiety in both novice and experienced writers (Cameron, Nairn & Higgins, 2009; Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald & Burns, 2012). Developing a writerly identity, as Grant and Knowles (2003) evocatively describe it, is about “making imaginative spaces to occupy as writers” (p. 7), which is a starting point for conceiving of oneself as a writer. A growing body of literature attests to this as a particular challenge for emergent writers during doctoral candidature. Petersen (2007) is explicit that doctoral education is about the “production of subjectivity” as well as the production of knowledge, with writing as a core component (p. 477). Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) describe doctoral writing as “the means by which students ‘come to know’ their subject and their scholarly selves” (p. 863). In most Australian universities, written work...
is the only assessable aspect of the doctorate, which makes the development of a writerly identity a high stakes exercise. The post/graduate writing pedagogies and research literacies that underpin the development of an academic writerly identity remain largely invisible.

The emphasis on the final written product is increasingly acknowledged as a problem with the doctoral curriculum (Gilbert, 2004; Green, 2012). Assessing “originality” or the creation of “new knowledge” is complex (Boud & Lee, 2009). The issue is compounded because the notion of originality is elusive (Lovitts, 2006). Content analysis of institutional documents related to Australian universities’ doctoral programmes found “originality” was the defining element in doctoral education, but understandings of originality and “its particular manifestations varied across facts, knowledge, theories and reinterpreting data or ideas” (Gilbert, 2009, p. 60). The dissertation assessment process, in particular the standards by which a dissertation is measured as ready for examination before it is sent to examiners, is largely mysterious (Lovitts, 2006). The PhD has become a key focus of research into academic writing, pedagogy and supervision; however, in the scholarly literature personalised accounts of doctoral writing from the candidate’s perspective are limited.

This chapter moves beyond the disconnection between what is being assessed and how, to focus on an affective account of PhD writing and the identity shifts that occur during and afterwards. The authors have previously examined their practice as members of a writing circle (Bosanquet, Cahir, Jacenyik-Trawoger & McNeill, 2014). This chapter builds on the conceptual and methodological frameworks applied in a writing group context—affect, identity, auto-ethnography and critically reflective practice—to explore our lived experiences or lifeworld of doctoral writing from the candidate’s perspective.

We completed our PhDs in Cultural Studies four and three years ago, respectively. In her thesis, Agnes performed an autoethnographic response to Luce Irigaray’s philosophy of the mother/daughter relation. Her daughter’s birth and illness during the period of doctoral candidature provided an opportunity to test the resonance of Irigaray’s philosophy in relation to her lived experience. Jayde’s PhD explored the everyday use of text messaging focusing on its materiality, which was examined through the policing of text messaging following racially motivated riots in Cronulla (a suburb on the south coast of Sydney, Australia) in 2005, and juxtaposed with how the technology is used in everyday routines. This contextual framework provided a broad spectrum to analyse the varying scales and meanings of surveillance, privacy, trust and comfort.

Following the completion of our doctorates, we have both shifted disciplines into higher education and are based in a centre for learning and teaching at