



What Got Us Here, Won't Get Us There

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PhD By Design: Rethinking practices to bring together practice-based design researchers conducting PhD's

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Abstract: Practice-based design PhDs have gained momentum, but the integration of design practice into the PhD thesis lacks consensus. The PhD By Design initiative offers insights and reflections on approaches to enable productive collaboration among design practitioners conducting practice-based PhDs. The initiative includes events, publications, and an interactive database showcasing practice-based research in design. The initiative rethought traditional academic event structures and encouraged unique formats for collective knowledge sharing, promoting quick and wide experimentation without the preciousness that often surrounds academic research. PhD By Design created a supportive environment to share practices, experiences, dilemmas, failures and doubts while contributing to the wider practice-based design research community. This paper presents the initiative as an example of a practitioner-led effort and highlights its three main formats to facilitate dynamic modes of engagement among participants. The initiative promotes collaborative exploration, unique formats for collective knowledge sharing, and supportive engagement for the practice-based design research community.

Keywords: Practice-based design, PhD By Design, Collaboration, Knowledge sharing

1. Introduction

In recent years, practice-based design PhDs have gained significant momentum. As Rodgers and Yee (2016) highlight, the number of designers pursuing postgraduate research has been on the rise since the late 1990s, with an increasing number of universities in the UK offering these programs.

However, despite this growing recognition, there is still a lack of consensus on how to effectively integrate design practice into the PhD thesis (Margolin, 2016). Further, Galdon and Hall (2022) call for more attention to be paid to the development of effective strategies and tools to support students in their practice-based research journey.

As the field of practice-based design PhDs continues to evolve, there has been an increase in cross-regional consortia doctoral training programs in the UK, such as the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE), Design Star Centre for Doctoral Training, and London Doctoral Design Center (LDoC) which is an encouraging development. However, these programs are

limited to participants registered with these programs or institutions funding their research (Chen, 2022). This lack of inclusivity has created a gap in the field that needs to be addressed by providing more guidance and support for those engaged in practice-based research. Such support would not only benefit individual students but also contribute to the growth and development of the field of academic design research and spill its transformative effects out into design practice more widely. Design research has evolved into an academic field, adopting typical models of dissemination via journals and conferences (Cross, 2007). However, these formats do not fully address the challenges and needs of doctoral students engaged in practice-based design research nor do they adequately support the dissemination of practice-based research outputs of academic contexts. These challenges include striking a balance between academic requirements with practical considerations, defining and evaluating research outputs, incorporating design practice into the research process and the thesis but also defining engaging ways to disseminate research to non-academic audiences once working in the world with a PhD in their pocket. Durrant et al. (2015) reflect on insights that designers have particular ways of discussing their work often attributed to studio culture or the art and design school critique "crit" formats (Sanders & Stappers, 2014; Flynn, 2023), to emphasise the need for productive formats for discussing practice within academic events. Current events like Research Through Design, Making Futures and the Design Research Society conference work towards creating spaces for practice-based design community to come together and share their learnings, but do not specifically provide inclusive and experimental spaces necessary for doctoral students to collectively work through issues specific to working with practice in a thesis. This is more than just adding a doctoral colloquium to a practice-based design research event; it's about empowering doctoral students to lead the discussion on the messier aspects of carrying out practice-based research. These spaces are especially crucial for early-stage researchers who are still exploring their research contributions and positioning in the wider academic field, but are also the ones defining the new parameters of what defines state-of-the-art research and disseminating processes.

To better support conversations and discussions about practice-based design research and the challenges faced by practitioners transitioning to academia, it is important to understand the specific characteristics and potential limitations of traditional academic doctoral consortium formats. The first conference on doctoral education in design was held in 1998 at the Ohio State University, sponsored by Design Issues. While this conference format was established to provide a supportive environment for doctoral students to present their research and receive feedback from more senior researchers in the field, it may not be the best fit for practice-based design research. This type of research is often not as linear as traditional research, and its unique characteristics, such as different epistemologies and methodologies (Cross, 1982; Schön, 1983; Sanders & Stappers, 2014) and can make it challenging to communicate through traditional academic formats. Additionally, practice-based research often prioritises aspects of making, craft and messy co-creation of knowledge, which lies at the forefront of the field and are often difficult to communicate through paper presentations or poster sessions. Therefore, alternative, and inclusive formats should be considered in order to strengthen the work of current PhD students and in order to create practices of knowledge sharing that can transform (design) research practices more widely.

Despite the increase of design PhD's, there are still few accounts of practitioners making the leap from design practice into academia, and little reflection on their decision to do so (Yee, 2010, 2017). Undertaking a PhD can be a daunting experience, so it is essential to consider the unique issues faced by practitioners who enter academia. Vaughan (2017) discusses the importance of the lived and situated experience of pedagogy in completing a research degree of PhD in design, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for students who come from practice and have unique needs and experiences. This is an important gap in the existing research on design. Understanding this decision-making process can provide valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and opportunities associated with this study and potential career path, which can benefit

both practitioners and institutions. Additionally, documenting these experiences and perspectives could work to promote greater diversity and inclusivity in the field by challenging dominant narratives and assumptions.

There are different priorities to practice-based research that are not always aligned with academic priorities. For example, different accountabilities for different audiences, ethics of practice and a consideration of the social, economic, and political structures that deeply affect design practice. Similarly, practice-based design researchers may come from established practice and possess specific skillsets, abilities, and experiences that are not always valued in traditional scholarly norms and procedures. As practitioners with expertise, they must navigate the differences between academic and design practice while engaging with both for their doctoral inquiry. Undertaking a PhD requires practitioners to learn how to negotiate these different terrains and establish themselves as scholars capable of working between the two fields. In fact, it is this negotiation between terrains that brought us authors together to grapple together and in an open forum with the challenges we encountered during our own PhD processes: Alison Thomson came from an interaction design practice where she already worked closely with multiple sclerosis patients and had developed modes of creative practice with them to address how they can be “seen” more fully by the medical system (Thomson, 2019). Bianca Elzenbaumer came from a socially-engaged design practice with an urge to understand better how the precarious working conditions can be undone to allow for more transformative design practices to emerge. She thus had a strong commitment to relate her research methods and findings to the socially-engaged design community (Elzenbaumer, 2013). Maria Portugal came from product design and had the urge to understand how design practices can help research and development teams understand and predict human experiences and behaviours (Portugal & Roche, 2019). Søren Rosenbak came from a critical design background, experimenting with how the design discipline could become more conscious of its own artificial nature through pataphysics—the science of imaginary solutions (Rosenbak, 2018).

This paper will discuss PhD By Design, a practitioner-led initiative that we have developed while being PhD students to explore conducting a PhD in Design. It will pull out learnings and reflections for methods and approaches to enable people conducting practice-based PhDs within design to come together in productive ways that are unique to their discipline. The aim of PhD By Design events were to vocalise, discuss and work through many of the topical issues of conducting a practice-based PhD in Design. These were particularly focussed on the specificities of dealing with practice within a doctoral project and focus on the process of designing as an integral part of research.

As the authors of this paper and the initiators of the PhD By Design project, we began by asking, “What kinds of encounters are most productive for sharing knowledge among practice-based design researchers?” We aimed to create dialogical formats that could facilitate productive conversations around practice, and to innovate established academic formats to better support practice-based research. We argue that designers have unique ways of collectively working through issues, and that existing academic formats (such as doctoral consortiums) can be too focused on presenting finished ideas rather than exploring common struggles. PhD By Design invited participants to apply their practice-based design skills to co-create events in various ways. By foregrounding conversations about research practice, the project created a space for generating new knowledge and supporting early career researchers.

2. Methods

We worked together to design encounter formats based on our practice-based experience of teaching, workshop, interaction and communication practices. We established PhD By Design, a co-created event format for practice-based design researchers. The events specifically invited submissions from people recognising the practice of design in their current PhD research. Each event had a theme that was relevant to practice-based PhDs such as “Navigating the messiness of practice-

based research”, “Making knowledge travel,” “Researching across difference”, “Idea of ‘self’ in practice-based research”. All potential participants had to submit a 200-word description of their research, three keywords, a 70-word biography, one image of their work and were invited to propose a workshop or exhibition entry. They were also required to submit three questions they were currently dealing with within their own research and practice, related to the overall theme. The questions were used to group presentation sessions and created a collective exploration of the overarching theme.

Within the events they were structured with sessions of:

- Messy introductions: At the very beginning of the event, all participants had 90 seconds plus one projected image to present themselves to the rest of the participants. These were fast paced and in unpredictable random order to create an energetic and welcoming atmosphere.
- Presentations: Each participant delivered a 5-minute presentation based on their on-going research in response to the event theme and question they submitted. Each presentation session had 10 participants, one chair (usually another PhD student), and one discussant (usually an established researcher sympathetic to practice), who facilitated the discussion around a table, allowing for the display of objects and sharing of materials. This approach encouraged active participation and feedback from peers, creating a trusting and curious atmosphere.
- Workshops: Participants could propose workshops they wanted to host or attend. These ranged from practical skills such as writing software, staging experiences, testing prototypes, methodologies or unpicking common problems.
- Keynote: A senior practice-based academic was invited to respond to the event theme through their own work.
- Exhibition: Participants could showcase aspects of their practice in an ad hoc exhibition, by simply placing the objects they brought along (plus a name tag and short description) on tables and plinths in a specifically dedicated space.
- Instant Journal: This was an activity to immediately document the collective knowledge generation and response to questions submitted at the start of the event. At the end the conference, in a collective effort between all participants a journal document was produced to share emergent knowledge with the rest of the practice-based research community (Thomson, Elzenbaumer, et al., 2015a, 2015b; Thomson et al., 2016; Thomson, Elzenbaumer, et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2018)

3. Results

A series of events were organised to bring together practice-based designers undertaking a PhD. Some events were stand-alone two-day events (Goldsmiths 2014 and 2015, Sheffield 2017), others were one day satellite sessions either at Institutions (Leeds 2015) or within the Design Research Society conference (Brighton 2016, Limerick 2018). All submissions went through a peer review process where we individually read every submission then shared feedback with each other, and decided which met the intended audience. A small number of submissions were provided with feedback on why they were not included which was mainly due to the research being focussed on other practice-based disciplines of performance or art, rather than the practice or consideration of design. There were between six and eight workshops per event and two exhibitions.

Table 1 shows the numbers of participants for the different events. Each event also required 7 chairs, 7 discussants, 3 organising team members and 5 members of a local team to be delivered.

	Number of design researchers	Number of Institutions represented	Number of countries Institutions based
2014 Conference: Navigating the Messiness of practice-based research 4th and 5th November 2014 Goldsmiths, University of London, UK	92	46	15
2015 Satellite Session: Making Knowledge Travel 14th May 2015 Leeds College of Art, UK	30	18	2
2015 Conference: Working Across Difference 6th and 7th November 2014 Goldsmiths, University of London, UK	71	39	16
2016 Satellite Session: What does the future hold for practice-based PhD's? 27th June 2016 University of Brighton, UK	53	37	14
2017 Conference: Idea of Self in practice-based research. 3rd and 4th April 2017 University of Sheffield, UK	39	25	7
2018 Satellite Session: Design as a catalyst for change. 25th June 2018 University of Limerick, IE	61	48	57

PhD By Design developed new ways to conceptualise, facilitate, document, and disseminate collaborative activities that explore the potential of this community. The success of PhD By Design can be measured in a number of different ways. Firstly, it has been well received by a large number of international participants, supervisors, and institutions. From 2014 to 2018, PhD By Design events enabled over 346 early career design researchers from over 124 different institutions in 38 countries to come together, shown in table 1.



Figure 1: A collection of visuals capturing the essence of the events and conference proceedings.

Second, through lasting impact of topical resources. The project is documented through the PhD By Design website which has become a depository of information generated through its events. The conference documentation and Instant Journal publications, displayed in Figure 1, have generated over 14,376 views through various platforms such as ISSUU, Academia.EDU, and ResearchGate. In keeping with the collaborative approach of knowledge creation, all contributing participants are recognised as authors.

Third, through participant feedback, such as:

"It was inspiring to see so many different approaches and ways of people doing their projects. That is really encouraging and energising. Also to get the feeling for a community to belong to is great. As I'm also not surrounded by other design researchers in my daily business and have to mark out my practice within other

fields of humanities research it is great to be in a group where design research is embraced like that" (2014 event participant).

"Enthusiasm to go on with practice-based/practice-led research (good examples are desperately needed)...community-building (in terms of "PhDs By Design") is absolutely crucial for this field" (2016 event participant).

Building on the positive feedback we were receiving, and in the recognition that we were collecting valuable information on the depth and breadth of the variety of topics being covered through doctoral researchers, with participants consent, we designed an interface to search through participants profiles who have taken part (<https://phdbydesignsearch.com/>), shown in Figure 2. This database is an important resource (accessed over 6,000 times) to demonstrate how practice-based doctoral work can be showcased and contributes to the advancement of the field through connecting the wider PhD network.

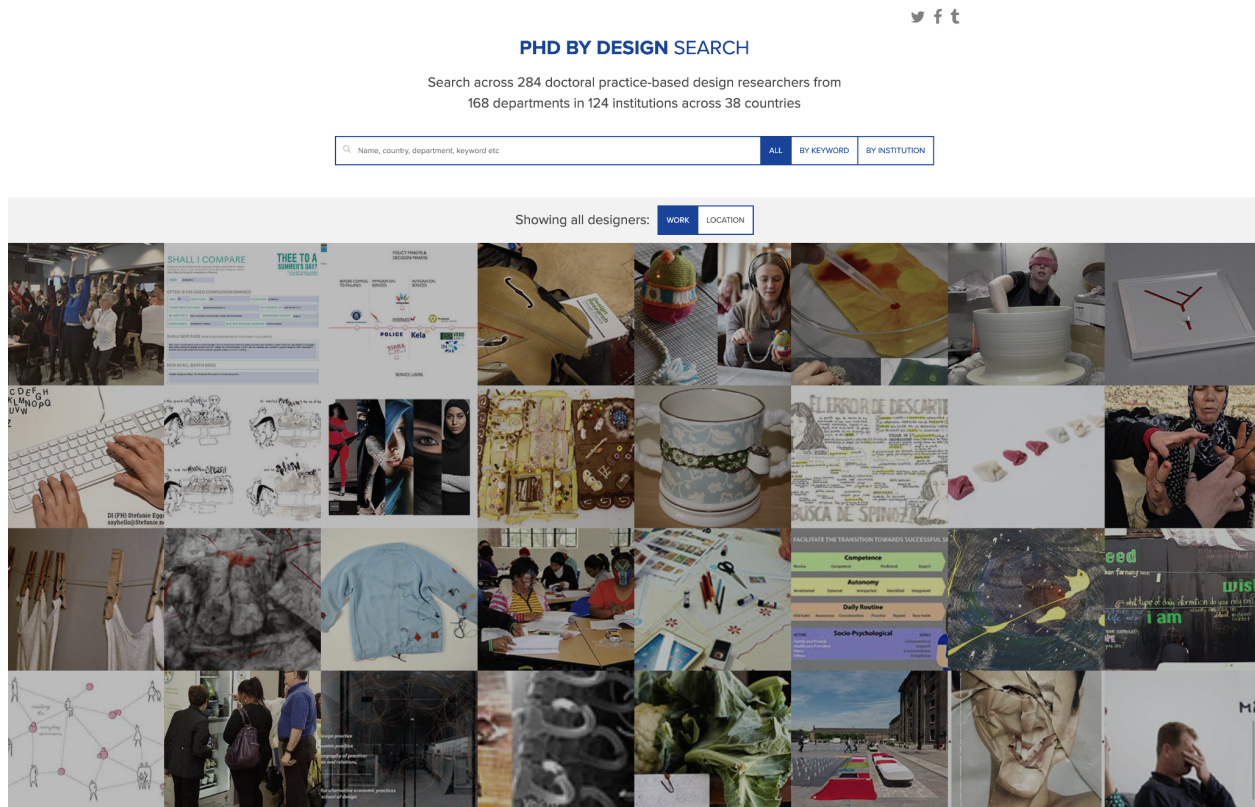


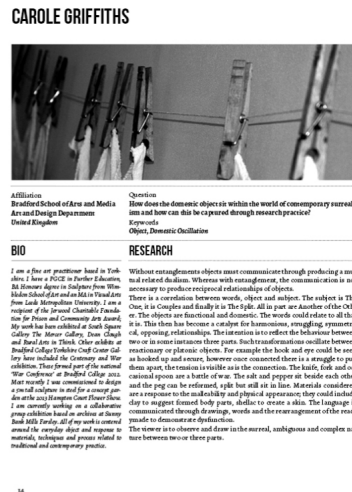
Figure 2: A screenshot of the PhD By Design search website

Finally, at a national level PhD By Design featured in two of the host institutions' 2021 Research Excellence Framework environment statements contributing to the research culture of practice based design in a national assessment activity. Demonstrating further impact, the formats of PhD By Design have also been mentioned in a number of publications (Rodgers & Yee, 2016; Vaughan, 2017; Chen, 2022).

4. Discussion

4.1 Making participation a productive moment for knowledge generation

Design is a knowledge generating activity. So bringing together over 300 design researchers is inevitably going to generate new knowledge on the topics they are encountering in the worlds they are investigating. We took this seriously and developed a range of methods to document and share this new knowledge.



Now know what a better presentation is than a relay!!
(cards).
QUESTION: 'Practice led research doesn't explain something, it realises it.'
See it more as a process of investigating
Key was object, domestic, oscillations...
Original question - How does the domestic object sit within the world of surrealism?
After presenting my ideas for PhD practice my question did not seem relevant - this was a good thing as it is forever changing - ~~from today~~ →
Thoughts: - Can the impact of cultural changes and response to physical and physiological differences be communicated through the domestic object? (consider a blog).
Can this be done through ruling an empty space with new language - in the first instance - View the artists' books. (and exhibition) one of which I should have seen this idea as integral to my proposal for a PhD - (the book).
Contradictions between theory and practice - New words I wish to consider one. ~~perhaps~~ / obscure.
New links with interesting practitioners particularly

Figure 3: Example of Instant Journal, PhD By Design satellite session at Leeds College of Arts, (Thomson, Elzenbaumer, et al., 2015a).

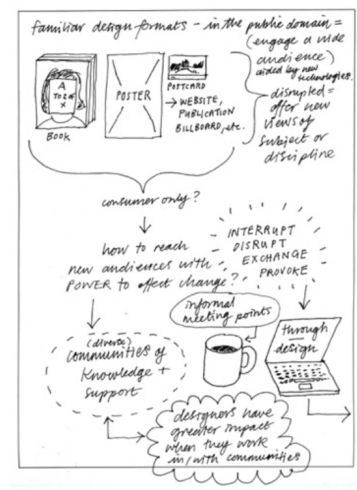


Figure 4: Example of Instant Journal, Photo from PhD By Design conference at Goldsmiths University of London (UK), (Thomson, Elzenbaumer, et al., 2015b).

The Instant Journal (Figure 3 - 4) and event documentation captured knowledge generated through the discussions at the events. During a dedicated session at each event, all participants were invited to respond to the day's theme based on their learning and reflections. This interactive session required participants to document their response on an A4 page, which was then collected and formatted into an Instant Journal that they could take home with them that day. We recognised that things happen in moments of coming together and we wanted to build a new way of collecting partial answers, reframing responses and recording dilemmas. Importantly, this approach did not diminish the value of the "classic/proper" knowledge contribution in design. To overcome this all-too-familiar schism in practice-based research, we added an additional editing stretch after the events were completed to formalise the document. This step involved adding further documentation and reflection, as well as ISSN numbers and co-authoring with all event participants (Portugal et al., 2014; Thomson, Elzenbaumer, et al., 2015b; Thomson, Portugal, et al., 2017). We recognised from our own experiences conducting our own PhDs that it can be a solitary pursuit with limited opportunities for peer input. As practice-based designers, we were accustomed to the

studio culture and "crit" formats mentioned previously, that encourage collaboration and sharing work in progress. These moments can be essential for addressing issues in your work, gaining critical external perspectives, and contributing alternative viewpoints that are ultimately very valuable. Facilitating productive conversations about work in progress through the events enabled and invited peers to contribute to others PhD processes. These conversations were supportive of unfinished ideas, projects and objects. As all event participants were practice-based design researchers, conversations were able to start from a position of shared understanding where everyone understood the specificities of practice-based research and the potential issues of conducting this within a doctoral project. It also meant that participants were comfortable with the messiness of this process and could deal, and respond to these unfinished ideas, prototypes and projects. The events further enabled participants to test new methods or pose experiments, such as deploying a series of interventions at the DRS Limerick event.

Framing presentations around problems or issues that participants were experiencing enabled group discussions to be about collectively working through specific issues. The purpose was not to answer the questions, but to move thinking, practices and methods in different directions. This enabled participants to collectively address and reflect on common issues in their research, generating new knowledge and insights, in lieu of any pressure to land on final answers. The event documentation records these discussions through various formats (visual representations, drawings and reflective accounts) to capture the collective exploration and outputs generated. This process of collective exploration, was quickly identified as significantly different to formats proposed by existing doctoral consortium events.

The workshop sessions further gave an opportunity to collectively come together to contribute to people's specific problems offering support and contributing experience. Topics covered included *Tacit knowledge*, *Prototyping design Research Tools*, *Design PhDs in economic transition*, as well as academic career-related topics such as "*Step into my shoes*": *What constitutes good supervision?*" and *Post-doc Survival*. It is worth noting that all these topics are of foundational relevance to doing a PhD in practice-based design. Interestingly, proposing these sessions revealed a gap in support that extended beyond PhD candidates, specifically in the lack of support for individuals in the post-doctoral stage of their career.

4.2 Removing barriers to participation

We were committed to addressing issues of privilege and issues of who can access PhD programs, recognising that varying degrees of access to resources and geography can impact who is able to participate. Traditional academic conferences can present barriers to attendance and participation due to high registration costs and international travel, which can disadvantage individuals without funding or with caregiving responsibilities. To overcome these obstacles, we carefully selected a venue and established a pricing structure that made our events affordable and accessible to a diverse range of attendees. We charged a nominal fee of £35 to attend (which mostly went towards covering the catering costs).

Another challenge in academic conferences is the expectation, that students must present their research in a formal paper format. This can be intimidating for students who are not yet at a stage to submit a full paper. We identified this may be a specific issue for researchers who have come from practice and may be new to writing academic accounts of practice. To overcome this potential barrier, we only required short research descriptions for entry submission, which allowed attendees to present their work-in-progress and share problems or issues that they may not have been comfortable articulating formally. We aimed to create a supportive atmosphere at the event by removing the requirement for lengthy written texts or fully formed ideas. This approach made attendees feel more comfortable sharing their work-in-progress and any issues they faced. Knowing

that others were in a similar situation helped to build trust and foster a collaborative environment among attendees.

In addition to the submission format, we also implemented a unique design feature to encourage interaction between participants. Each attendee was given a mug with three keywords that were specific to them. This not only created a low barrier for interaction but also fostered a curious and collaborative community-building environment. Attendees were able to easily connect with each other over shared, divergent or simply curious terms, leading to more conversations and networking opportunities.

4.3 Creating an inclusive and supportive environment

PhD By Design created a safe and inclusive environment that encouraged a willingness to take risks and learn from failure. It is important for us to acknowledge that we carried out this work during our time as PhD students, fully engaged as practitioners deeply involved in the issue, and in direct response to the challenges we faced. The resulting initiative successfully established the secure psychological environment that we longed for. We developed new formats that challenged traditional academic hierarchies and continuously reimagined the structures we were a part of. For example, we designed presentation sessions that prioritised collective sharing and exploration over critique, and carefully curated discussion dynamics to ensure productive and structured conversations (Figure 5). For example, when inviting discussants, we provided each presenter's biography and research topic along with guidance on how to prepare for the role to ensure that discussions would be helpful for the presenters. This enabled them to demonstrate a deep understanding of the presenter's work and contributed to their ability to facilitate discussion around it. The discussant role was designed for those who had recently completed a PhD or supervisor, offering the opportunity to participate in the session in a different capacity. The chair role was for participants who had attended a PhD By Design event previously and were familiar with the format and ethos. We also had an eye on valuing female researchers, when looking for keynote speakers and discussants. This was important to us because a very high percentage of our participants as well as members of the organising team were female.



Figure 5: Photo from PhD By Design conference discussion session at Goldsmiths University of London (UK), November 2014

The discussants and chairs produced written accounts of the discussion, summarising the presentations, questions, responses, and themes discussed. To encourage constructive feedback, "quiet questions" on small cards were used, which provided written feedback for each participant to take home. This approach ensured that participants received individual feedback from all peers to help them move forward in their research. The use of "quiet questions" is similar to the concept of a "critical friend," (Kember et al., 1997) emphasising the importance of constructive criticism and support in doctoral education.

We approached every interaction with an appreciation of care for the individuals we were bringing together. We paid attention to the needs of those who may have been presenting for the first time in a second language, as well as those who required privacy for prayer or breastfeeding. We cared for participants' bodies by providing good quality nutritious food. By giving careful attention to these diverse needs, we believe we were able to extend the values we deeply embrace into tangible actions that enhance the experience of those involved and foster an environment conducive to generating valuable knowledge.

The initial standalone events highlighted the transformative impact that the PhD By Design events can have at both an individual and departmental level. Hosting an event exposed organising team members to a diverse range of current design research issues that extended beyond their own area of study, while also providing visibility and recognition among peers. Additionally, through involvement of established design researchers as keynote speakers and discussants, the events represented a unique opportunity to build a professional network. In addition to research-related learning, organising team members were able to acquire knowledge and experience in institutional procurement and financial processes, which are valuable skills for a career in academia. By gaining a deep understanding of institutional processes, we were able to identify entry points for design proposals. This leads us to question: Where else can we seek out opportunities to propose better, challenging and much-needed equitable spaces to come together? As academic design research invites practitioners into the institution, it must also embrace the possibility of being re-designed by those practitioners.

Recognising the benefits of setting up an event, we streamlined the eight-month collaborative event development process and made it shareable with local teams at host institutions in Brighton, Leeds,

Sheffield and Limerick. This sharing of resources and processes allowed local teams to build on existing design research culture in their institution and contribute to it in a unique and productive way. By sharing resources and expertise, we sought to create more equitable opportunities for individuals and institutions to meaningfully engage in practice-based design research activities. This approach underscores the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing in advancing the field of design research.

4.4 Challenges

Throughout the PhD By Design project, we encountered several challenges, including balancing our own doctoral work with project responsibilities, navigating the autonomy of the project within different university processes, and finding appropriate spaces to host our democratic meetings. Despite this, we gained valuable insights into how to foster a supportive research culture. The project was born out of a desire to create a culture that supported our own research moving forward, and in the process, we grappled with theoretical and practical issues specific to practice-based research.

As we write this paper we have had time away from our PhD's and from PhD By Design to reflect on what was achieved. We now recognise the issues we came up against and reacted to as students, are issues that researchers still face across the field. We responded to these as practitioners. We turned them into a design problem, where we set out to create the right conditions to generate knowledge, that were safe, inviting, and where you could genuinely connect with others. We believe that extending this thinking and these methods to the wider field, will make the field more inclusive and will ultimately create conditions where better knowledge is created and shared. As a field, how can we design spaces where we can come together to have more daring conversations that get to the heart of the problems, challenges, and issues we are facing and working with? Spaces and modes of engagement where we are supported and feel safe to expose ourselves in order to receive help from peers and colleagues.

Rodgers and Yee (2016) posed the question of how we can cultivate design research, and we expand this to explore how we can establish a supportive culture for practice-based design research at the PhD level. Our aim was not only to articulate what a practice-based research culture should look and feel like within an institution, but also to embark on a journey and bring this culture and the values we believe to be important into being. We recognise that taking small, iterative steps towards this goal was a powerful approach to creating a culture that reflects our experiences as researchers in this field, and to fostering a supportive research environment for future generations of practice-based design researchers.

5. Conclusion

PhD By Design has demonstrated the potential for practice-based design PhDs to shape research communities and cultures by leveraging their unique skill sets in both design practice and research. This is particularly important as early-stage researchers will be the ones shaping the wider field in the future. The initiative's international resonance and recognition is a testament to its effectiveness in promoting dialogue and its ability to bring people together in productive ways. By empowering doctoral students to lead discussions on the messier aspects of practice-based research, PhD By Design has created spaces that are especially crucial for early-stage researchers still exploring their research contributions and positioning in the wider academic field.

This paper is in the same spirit as the open frameworks created through the project which provides another piece to the open manual for how someone can run something like this if they wish to. PhD By Design has encouraged experimentation with academic formats and challenged traditional event structures. It enabled conversations to be about the process of designing within the research process, and less about disseminating a final output, or presenting a finished product. Formats to

facilitate these conversations are crucial to supporting cultures of practice-based research, not only in design but more widely.

Finally, it highlighted the need for continued support beyond the PhD stage to ensure practitioners are equipped with the necessary tools to succeed in their academic careers. We hope that the experience gained through PhD By Design will carry over into a thriving discourse and research community in the future, where our methods and findings are productive also for other academic fields that feel a need to break open formats to enable a more dynamic, inclusive and impactful research environment.

Our efforts in fostering a supportive research culture for practice-based design research have the potential to address several key issues in the border design research landscape. By promoting inclusivity and removing barriers to participation we aim to address the issues of privilege and unequal access to the institution, thereby creating more equitable opportunities. Additionally, our emphasis on the attention of care to the spaces and formats where we come together challenges traditional academic traditions and encourages a culture of shared learning, exploration and a safe space to bring unfinished ideas.

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