

Foreword

When our postgraduate researchers choose to teach, we should show their value.

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The doctoral experience is characterised by uncertainty, and the need to make choices in an unknown territory (Albertyn and Bennet, 2021). Beginning with the setting of a novel research question to which the answer is by its nature unknown, it is from the outset a process of unique discovery. This necessarily involves a steep learning curve in which postgraduate researchers must, at speed, assimilate both the disciplinary knowhow required to engage in the processes of research as a robust practice, and at the same time become familiar with a vast and growing range of existing research so that they may communicate how their study adds meaning to the sum of knowledge to date. Further, they must learn to get the ‘job of research done’, learning how to operate within a large organisation, to navigate systems, to teach, collaborate, and innovate. Along the journey they must become familiar with the markers of career progress and esteem and build the foundations of a career as what Pitt and Mewburn (2016) call an ‘academic super-hero’: a multi-talented, always ready and available worker. An exciting time certainly, but without time for reflective sensemaking and a

clear framework for how to gradually succeed with these weighty challenges, this can be experienced as an overwhelming responsibility, rather than an exciting opportunity for discovery and growth.

Whilst still carrying the 'study' label, the doctorate's enquiry-based mode requires a very different approach to study and the letting go of previously honed ways of engaging with learning. This 'significant transitional leap' is also characterised by uncertainty as new self-governance strategies are constructed in parallel with the building of disciplinary knowledge (McPherson et al, 2018). These new strategies must respond to the challenges of the doctorate having fewer landmarks and milestones through which to gauge progress along the course of study. It is more independent, a solo endeavour, and a lonelier journey requiring constant attention to self-motivation. It is more subjective in terms of what is 'good', and what is 'enough', and some postgraduate researchers can struggle, without the reassuring familiarity of modular working, numerical indicators of quality, and regular validating feedback to guide their development (Mantai, 2017).

The list of challenges above may lead you to ask, 'if this is a common experience, is a doctorate worth doing?'. Research shows that, yes, it is worth doing. In addition to the explicit value of gaining the degree, research by Bryan and Guccione (2018) documented the reported personal and professional benefits of gaining a doctoral degree, with the gaining of teaching experience described as a skill and career boosting

benefit. A key message from their research being that much of that value is derived through reaching out beyond the project and disciplinary boundaries to engage with communities, opportunities, and the informal learning that is offered by these. As is documented in the collection of articles herein, a doctorate is rich with such hidden curricula (Elliot et al, 2020). This includes new insights accessed through the act of teaching, in developing engaging spaces, innovating with and from colleagues, peers and students in the online and physical classroom, creating safe spaces, supporting mental wellbeing, and engaging in shared critical reflection.

Learning to teach well and engaging with a diverse range of postgraduate teaching opportunities, is commonly positioned part of a holistic Researcher Development offer, and is specified as a desirable skill-set on the Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, 2011). Teaching provides researchers with opportunities to contextualise and reinforce disciplinary knowledge and understanding and offers an array of benefits such as improved confidence, interpersonal skills, and a sense of belonging (Alhija and Fresko, 2019). If well supported by specialist Educational Development colleagues as part of our institutional strategies for learning and teaching (Hill et al, 2019), it also offers the opportunity to gain a solid theoretical understanding of how students learn, what motivates them, and the chance to apply that in practice in the classroom. Experience of teaching as a postgraduate therefore offers an ideal early access point into

an academic career path. In addition to this, postgraduate teaching should also offer payment to the researcher, in compensation for their work for their university. It is, on the whole then, an attractive opportunity for professional development if supported and valued appropriately by the institutions that benefit from enabling such skilled teachers. Yet sector trends document rising casualisation of academic work and declining career opportunities (UCU, 2019), exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, means that postgraduate teachers have become precarious workers. Recent industrial action in the UK related to casualised and devalued academic careers, saw Graduate Teaching Assistants on strike, and carrying banners which expressed their feelings that their employers had treated them as ‘half price lecturers’. And whilst postgraduate teachers fulfil the core business of universities, there have been examples in the recent past of postgraduate teaching contracts being outsourced and therefore stripped of employee benefits (FACE, 2015). Looming over all of this is the declining number of academic positions, and the rising numbers of postgraduate researchers, meaning that the likelihood of an academic career path has decreased sharply, though reliable data on proportions sustaining academic careers long term is hard to come by (Hancock, 2021). Whilst the doctorate is on one hand an enriching time of exploration and opportunity, on the other, postgraduate researchers need to make strategic decisions about how they best invest their time in the pursuit of future employment.

As academic careers feature less in the career plans of our postgraduates, will we start to see a loss of interest in teaching as a postgraduate experience? Looking across the articles contributed to this issue of Postgraduate Pedagogies it would be difficult not to hold a deep appreciation for the value and expertise postgraduate teachers bring to their students, and their universities, from their unique positions as experts in their fields. Universities, and their students' experiences would be impoverished if we were to lose the contributions of postgraduate teachers. Of course, it is possible that our researchers would continue to engage in teaching simply because it is enjoyable and satisfying and not as an investment in career development. But that is a privileged position, and teaching for the love of teaching, is not accessible to many, our postgraduate teachers might also simply need the extra income.

What can we do to retain interest in teaching and retain the talented contributions we currently enjoy? As developers we can continue to advocate for our postgraduate teachers and to raise awareness of and value their expertise. We can also ensure we are explicit about the career value of teaching experience, beyond gaining an academic career. As is most clear from the articles you are about to enjoy, teaching requires nuanced communication skills, from oration, to facilitation to deep listening. Teaching well, means understanding how professional learning takes place, and how to mentor and motivate colleagues. Teaching involves team working, collegiality and succeeding with shared

endeavours, developing all the interpersonal skills required. And finally, teaching experience brings an understanding of outcome-focussed ways of working, it inherently transforms people, creates change for the better, and includes the skills required to recognise when that change has happened. This is surely a list that most of the diverse employers of our doctoral graduates can put to good use.

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