

## Beyond bolt on: re-imagining teaching development for the Australian PhD (0237)

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### Part 1 Abstract

This paper tests a set of preliminary findings from a current (and in-progress) Office for Learning and Teaching project *Reframing the PhD for Australia's future universities* (Barrie et al., 2015). While the overall project develops an argument for the PhD to be about stewardship rather than research narrowly defined, the aspect reported in this presentation focuses on the challenge of how teaching development and preparation can extend beyond a bolt on approach. In learning from how research and researcher development materialises in the PhD, we probe four existing learning spaces for research: the project, supervision, the departmental environment, and skills programs. Drawing on a range of data sources, we push and pull these spaces to explore how they might offer inquiry, conversation and challenge - professional learning - related to university teaching, inspecting how teaching preparation and development for PhD students can come alive in contexts that are traditionally 'research-only'.

### Part 2 Outline

Probert's (2014) report *Becoming a university teacher: the role of the PhD* for the-then Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) foregrounded a view that was in keeping with the long line of international disquiet about the indifference to teaching preparation and development in the PhD (Brew, Boud & Namgung, 2011; Jepsen, Varhegyi & Edwards, 2012; Blouin & Moss, 2015). She wrote "across the sector the low level of participation by HDR [Higher Degree Research] students in any kind of formal preparation for university teaching suggests that it is simply not seen as important by those who design doctoral programs, or by those with whom students work most closely, such as their supervisor" (Probert, 2014: 11). The danger of such inattention, she warned, was that these students' were likely to adopt an "approach to teaching based on how they themselves were taught, and on their observations of the current practices of the existing, ageing workforce. Yet these graduates will become academics in a world where teaching is being transformed by powerful forces - by technology, by a far greater diversity of students and educational missions, and by growing demands for demonstrable improvements in generic skills and employability" (Probert, 2014:14). Her observations set the stage for a considerable workforce, institutional and sector-wide challenge that has yet to be adequately addressed. Even in the most recent review of research training in Australia (ACOLA, 2016) while several novel examples of teaching preparation and development opportunities were identified, it is unclear how these programs fit into the current structure and timeline for completion, and what their impact has been on PhD students' approaches to teaching and student learning.

In attending to this issue from the perspective of current Australian research students, many

of the same concerns are echoed. According to Edwards, Bexley & Richardson (2011), most students consider their PhD program to be effective in preparing them for careers in academic research, yet many do not perceive it to be particularly effective at preparing them for other aspects of the academic role such as teaching or service, or indeed for careers in other sectors. Interestingly, two thirds of the doctoral students surveyed at the universities of Sydney and Oxford (SREQ 2014), indicated they felt teaching undergraduate students would help (rather than hinder) their future research.

By and large, universities do not need convincing that it is important to provide opportunities for PhD students to learn how to teach, not least because many form a large component of the sessional staff workforce during their studies. They have tended to provide additional training in teaching for new academic hires in recognition that the PhD does not equip them for this essential activity. The teacher training and professional development on offer runs the usual gamut of provision: from short 2 hour workshops (in face to face, blended, and fully online modes), to peer observations conversations, stand-alone downloadable resources, to the more considered professional learning entailed in a formal award programs such as a Graduate Certificate. What becomes clear from this picture is that teaching preparation and development on offer within a PhD candidature appears to take place in ways that isolate it from the vibrant and authentic disciplinary learning communities that support and encourage researcher development. In other words, teaching development remains bolt on to the PhD program rather than closely integrated with it. A radical view might be to suggest that the re-integration of teaching and research changes the outcome and artefact of the PhD learning experience.

This paper tests a set of preliminary findings from a current (and in-progress) Office for Learning and Teaching funded project *Reframing the PhD for Australia's future universities* (Barrie et al., 2015). While the overall project aims to shift the focus of the PhD from a narrow view of research to that of stewardship (which includes both research and teaching held together by a moral purpose that stretches beyond the academy), the aspect reported in this presentation attends specifically to the significant challenge of how teaching development and preparation can extend beyond a bolt on approach. In seeking to learn from how research and researcher development happens in the PhD, we probe four existing learning spaces for research: the research project, supervision, the departmental environment, and skills programs, and we interrogate how these spaces might offer inquiry, conversation and challenge - professional learning - related to university teaching.

To flesh this out further, the presentation highlights examples from data collected from a range of sources: from the prevailing scholarly literature on doctoral education, from interviews with PhD students, early career academics, and institutional leaders involved in doctoral education in 5 universities (4 Australian and 1 New Zealand) each with their own distinctive approach, and from our own collective experiences as supervisors and students. In investigating each of these four learning spaces, we aim to illustrate how teaching preparation and development for PhD students can live, and come alive, in the contexts that have traditionally been thought of as 'research-only'.

## References

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