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What the doctors did next?

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Research Domain: Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract: The main aim of this study is to explore the issue of the transfer of doctoral level learning into the workplace and professional practice. More specifically the study aims to critically evaluate how, if at all, transferable and generic skills (or attributes) 'acquired' and developed during the doctoral education process are instantiated within a workplace context. This will also include an assessment of the impact or influence (if any) of the substantive research project undertaken on their professional practice. The research approach is a straightforward case study – the phenomena being investigated is the affect of doctoral education on professional practice – with the graduates being the embodiment of that. As the study aims to capture the experiences an reflections of the post-doctoral journey the research methods incorporated a triangulated approach comprised of narrative interviews in conjunction with participant generated written biographies.

Paper: Background

The main aim of this study is to explore the issue of the transfer of doctoral level learning into the workplace and professional practice. Specifically it attempts to critically evaluate how, if it at all, transferable and generic skills (or attributes) developed during the doctoral education process are instantiated within a workplace context. This includes an assessment of the impact or influence of the substantive research project undertaken on their professional practice.

Surprisingly this is an under-researched area as much of the literature tends to focus on the doctoral 'journey' rather than experiences and 'journeys' beyond the graduation ceremony. Nowhere is this lacuna more apparent than with the professional doctorate, which although fulfils many of the same scholarly aims and outcomes of the 'traditional' doctorate, it is a degree usually conceived of in terms of applicability to professional practice. From what we know, both of these notions are quite fluid and not simply reducible to utility or instrumentalism but also include large elements of personal as well as professional transformation. Hence our intention is to explore the dynamic and dialectical relationship between the graduate and the workplace. In particular, this involves paying close attention to the structural, relational and cultural conditions in which the graduates are located.

As has been discussed by other authors, doctoral education has undergone profound changes over the past three decades (see Blume 1986; Scott et al., 2004; Boud and Tennant, 2006; Kehm, 2007; Park, 2007; Lee, 2008; Wellington, 2013; Boud and Lee, 2009; CGS, 2010; UNESCO, 2004; EUA, 2008; Fell et al, 2011; Loxley and Seery, 2012; Poole, 2014; Pratt et al 2015). As it has also been well noted,

these changes have been marked by a significant increase in the number of doctoral students and graduates (see table 1), and shifts in relation to expectations, processes, as well as purpose (Hramiak, 2018). This is underpinned by a complex narrative, which analytically can be 'distilled' down into four broad, but interconnected (and at times contradictory) discourses, each of which has contributed in varying degrees to reconstructed notions of doctoral education, which Loxley & Kearns (2018) have labelled:

- Human capital & the knowledge economy discourse
- Divergent career pathways discourse
- The institutionalisation discourse
- Purposes & processes discourse

Main Question

What affect (if any), influence, impact does undertaking a professional doctorate in the subject domain of education have on a graduates' professional career/trajectory?

Subsidiary research questions

1. Transferable skills directly and indirectly 'imported' into the workplace
2. Opportunity and application of subject content knowledge in the workplace
3. Opportunity and application of research skills in the workplace
4. Understanding of the doctorate by employers
5. Understanding of the doctorate by work colleagues
6. Change in interpersonal dynamics in the workplace
7. Change in job content – level of responsibility, activities due to doctorate- but not connected to promotion
8. Promotion and/or progression related to the doctorate
9. Use of doctorate for career/occupational change

Sample

This study draws its sample from previous cohorts (2005, 2006, 2008, 2014, 2017) who have graduated from an Irish research intensive university's professional doctorate in education programme which has provided us with a robust and historically pertinent group in which to explore their career trajectories and "impact" of doctoral learning on their personal and professional identities.

Methodology

The research approach adopted is a case study that investigates the phenomena being investigated is the affect of doctoral education on professional practice – with the DEd graduates being the embodiment of that. As the study aims to capture the experiences an reflections of the post-doctoral journey the research methods adopted a triangulated approach comprised of narrative interviews in conjunction with participant generated (Kwasnicka et al. 2015). Given the passage of time that has elapsed, particularly in relation to the earlier cohorts the use of participant generated data prior to the interview can "prompt rich narratives anchored in personal experiences" (ibid. p. 1191).

Preliminary Results

The twenty interviewees represent a broad range of professionals from higher and non-higher education settings. Using thematic analysis generated several emergent themes and sub-themes (see table 2) which highlighted their journey to being both consumers and producers of research. Whilst for some participants their trajectory may not have been expressed purely in terms of promotion it generated substantial levels of personal and professional enhancement. For the latter, this was often expressed in terms of being well regarded as a peer expert with respect to research and in particular those organisations which previously had a strong reserach culture.

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Table 1 - Doctorate Graduates – selected OECD countries (OECD 2019)

	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Country								
Australia	5,543	6,398	6,849	7,166	8,101	8,400	8,627	9,089
Austria	2,236	2,484	2,345	2,398	2,228	2,207	2,189	2,239
Denmark	1,019	1,428	1,569	1,640	1,888	2,126	2,176	2,198
Finland	1,874	1,748	1,843	1,828	1,899	2,013	2,000	2,009
France	9,818	12,666	13,188	13,278	13,419	13,729	13,774	13,016
Germany	24,287	..	..	..	27,707	28,147	29,218	29,303
Ireland	810	1,222	1,447	1,448	1,532	1,738	1,749	1,429
Israel	1,154	1,534	1,536	1,586	1,541	1,546	1,617	1,570
Italy	9,604	..	11,270	11,458	..	..	10,485	9,803
Japan	15,286	15,867	15,910	16,286	16,471	..	15,714	15,804
Korea	8,602	10,542	11,645	12,243	12,625	12,931	13,077	13,882
Mexico	2,432	4,167	3,795	5,119	5,013	5,782	6,050	9,268
New Zealand	629	1,005	1,106	1,053	1,288	1,414	1,332	1,296
Norway	838	1,202	1,298	1,408	1,549	1,442	1,407	1,368
Poland	3,141	..	..	..	..	3,376	3,787	3,764

Table 2 - Emergent Themes

Primary Theme	SubordinateThemes
Antecedents/Journey	• Why this doctorate? • Prior educational journey
Becoming the Dr. - Personal	• Identify • 'Comfortable' with being the Dr. • Feelings/Beliefs
Becoming the Dr. – Professional	• Institute Recognition • Sectoral/External Recognition • Professional Doctorate
Career Impact	• Promotion • Change Job • New Roles
Organisational Impact	• Committees • Policy • Module/Course Author
Tangible Skills	• Analysis • Enhanced Criticality • Writing
Research	• Research Skills

	• Culture of Research • Supervision • Further research projects

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