**2016 REVIEW ARTICLE**

# From steward to leader

## A decade of shifting roles for the PhD student

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Works on doctoral education reviewed:

Golde, C. and Walker, M. (eds) (2006) *Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education: Preparing Stewards of the Discipline*, Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate, Jossey-Bass.

Walker, G.E., Golde, C.M., Jones, L., Bueschel, A.C. and Hutchings, P. (2008) *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-first Century*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, San Francisco: Wiley Imprint.

Nerad, M. and Evans, B. (eds) (2014) *Globalization and Its Impacts on the Quality of PhD Education: Forces and Forms in Doctoral Education Worldwide*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

## Globalisation: changing context for the PhD student

Over the last two decades, the production of doctoral degrees has increased in most regions with advanced systems of higher education, such as Europe, Asia, North America, Australia, New Zealand and a few Latin American countries (Nerad and Evans 2014: 1). This trend is to a large extent a manifestation of globalisation, in a sense that it is a response to the rising demand for knowledge workers in what is commonly called the global 'knowledge economy'. Globalisation, understood in this context as 'the intensified movement of goods, money, technology, information, people, ideas and cultural practice across political and cultural boundaries' (Holton 2005: 14) is also reflected in the ways in which doctoral education is practiced. The PhD is now the focus of attention of governments and transnational

organisations such as the EU and the OECD, who are building policies to expand and transform doctoral education. The increasingly global dimension of the doctorate can also be seen in the rising flow of international students, the diversification of actors driving developments in higher education, the expansion of international partnerships, as well as the development of international systems of accountability exercised through standardised assessment and evaluation (Nerad and Evans 2014: 1).

These transformations have brought about new questions concerning the role and scope of doctoral education in the twenty-first century. They have also prompted academic work and research which look at how doctoral education has evolved in different regions, how certain practices have converged and at ways to deal with common challenges. More importantly, however, they have challenged and re-imagined the roles that PhD students are expected to play in this new global ecology. As Nerad puts it, 'policy-makers and professors alike are increasingly called upon to ensure that PhD programmes not only provide the high-quality research education but also prepare their graduates to contribute across a wide range of contemporary and future economic and societal needs' (Nerad and Evans 2014: 1). Of course, these 'needs' are constantly changing and so are the envisioned roles that the PhD student is expected to play: from apprentice, to steward of the discipline and, in more recent literature, leader. This academic discussion is inevitably accompanied by a debate about the skills and competencies that a doctoral candidate should have in order to fulfil the roles they have been given.

The perspectives of academics and policy-makers on these transformations are of course crucial, since they are an active part of this process, through designing, implementing and engaging with the policies through their practices; but so are the views of doctoral students, who are often the 'objects' of polices on graduate education that aim to equip them with a very particular set of skills, enabling them to perform as the 'knowledge workers' of

the future. It is therefore imperative that doctoral students do not remain passive objects of these policies and are given a voice – in academic books as well – on how *they* see the mission and the future of graduate education. This review takes the perspective of the doctoral student and assesses how well the student's voice is represented in the texts, as well as examining the variety of roles that PhD students have been assigned. I am myself a doctoral student who is researching doctoral education and I am interested in the voice that students have in academic books on doctoral education and the ways in which they are represented.

This review looks at three of the most influential books on doctoral education published in the last decade, judged by the fact that the authors are some of the most well-established and renowned scholars in doctoral education, as well as the fact that the works are highly cited and often referred to in the field. Another factor is that they reflect the span of conversations that have taken place in the field of doctoral education during the last decade and illustrate a paradigmatic shift: from a view centred around stewardship to a self-proclaimed future-oriented vision of doctoral education revolving around leadership.

The books are all either edited volumes or the result of a large collaboration between many authors, so in that sense they gather the expertise of the top researchers in this field, who share their knowledge on doctoral education under the thematic guidance of these volumes. The first two are more heavily focused on the U.S.A., while the third offers a more comprehensive international perspective. By drawing on a variety of issues affecting doctoral education globally, the books make a significant contribution to the literature in this field: they draw on different perspectives on common challenges and aim both to rethink the current state of doctoral education as well as envision the future of graduate studies. The academic conversation that these books create places them not only in the realm of doctoral education but also in the field of higher education studies in which these issues and debates are deeply grounded.

The first text, *Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education: Preparing Stewards of the Discipline*, is a collection of essays that is the product of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID). The CID is a five-year action and research project (2001–2005) which encourages and supports departments' efforts to improve the quality of their doctoral programmes by designing and putting new initiatives into practice. It was born out of a partnership between The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Atlantic Philanthropies (a private foundation, one of the largest foreign charitable donors in the U.S.A.). The project set out to explore the aims and practices of doctoral education in the U.S.A., as well as compare and contrast doctoral education among disciplines.

The book is structured in four parts. The first part consists of an introduction given by Chris M. Golde on Preparing Stewards of the Discipline; the second is a collection of commentaries on *Who* Should Do *What* (Kenneth Prewitt), Vectors of Change (David Damrosch) and Voices of Graduate Students and Postdocs (Crispin Taylor); the most extensive part of the book is the third, and brings together various essays, each exploring doctoral education in a different discipline: Mathematics, Chemistry, Neuroscience, Education, History and English; the fourth part acts as a conclusion to the volume.

According to the editors, throughout a century of development, the purpose of doctoral education has constantly been questioned to the point that it may have lost sight of its core mission. The purpose that the editors envision for doctoral education is 'to educate and prepare those to whom we can entrust the vigour, quality and integrity of the field' (Golde and Walker 2006: 5). At first, this definition may seem to lack a contemporary feel to it, because it emphasises a view of doctoral education that is based on the transmission of 'entrusted' values, which arguably underplays the need for designing new spaces for innovation and creativity. However, given that it was written a decade ago, the book could be seen as having

laid the foundations for future discussions in the field, including the role that innovation should have in doctoral education and the careers of young researchers.

As stated above, the book explores the current state of doctoral education in six disciplines, arguing that every discipline is evolving, with its boundaries forever changing and expanding. This discussion highlights the particularities of each discipline but also the common challenges. The point made is that the ways in which knowledge is created and shared are different depending on the respective history of each discipline – which is based on the discipline's forefathers. This treatment of disciplines as separate is not surprising seeing that the book was written ten years ago; what is interesting is to observe the evolution of this academic conversation in later books, which quite confidently announce that the future of doctoral education lies in interdisciplinary research.

Yet, even this earlier book acknowledges some of the challenges that have stayed with doctoral education since; the authors suggest that conventional doctoral programmes do not meet the needs of students, employers and society; that PhD recipients are ill-prepared to function in a broader spectrum of jobs beyond academia; that the transition to the labour market is challenging; and that the professoriate is still the career path considered to be the most valuable, or for which PhD students are prepared. Giving these stated challenges, the volume is structured around the question: 'If you start de novo, what would be the best way to structure doctoral education in your field?' (Golde and Walker 2006: 9). This umbrella theme raised other questions, such as:

- What constitutes knowledge and understanding in the discipline?
- What is the nature of stewardship of the discipline?
- How ought PhD students be educated and prepared?

One idea that is worth picking up here is the notion of 'transformation', which refers not to the effect of educational development on the student but to the student's ability to translate

specialised knowledge into non-expert language and make it accessible to a wider public, whether this consists of researchers from other fields or other members of society.

The volume is quite comprehensive in its coverage, yet the perspectives expressed are almost exclusively those of academics, with the student voice missing – the exception being the chapter by Crispin Taylor who argues that PhD students are important stakeholders in the development of reforms in doctoral education.

The second text, *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-first Century*, highlights necessary reforms to doctoral education mainly based on research conducted two years later by CID (Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate). It also reflects on what it means to be a scholar today. The book is structured in seven chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the book and proposes a reimagining of doctoral education to fit the new realities of the twenty-first century. The vision for doctoral education presented in this book is slightly different from that in the book above. Reflecting one step further in the discussion on doctoral education, Chapter 2 brings in a historical dimension and discusses potential strategies for change. Chapter 3 proposes different ways in which graduate programmes can be successful across disciplines. Chapter 4 looks at doctoral education practices and the communication that has ensued between disciplines. In Chapter 5 the term 'apprenticeship' is brought into the discussion, a term that occupies quite a central role in the discussion on doctoral education. Chapter 6 explores the idea of 'intellectual community'. Chapter 7 offers suggestions for action addressed to academics and administrators, as well as to PhD students, with a view of improving doctoral programmes.

This book diverges from the first one in that it acknowledges the blurring boundaries of traditional disciplinary fields, as well as the versatility of the doctorate. The PhD is envisioned as a route to many possible destinations and career paths, ranging from universities to business, industry, government, non-profit organisations and so on. Another central idea is

the creation and maintenance of intellectual communities. These communities are seen as the ideal replacements of the traditional isolated academic environments, as well as spaces where knowledge production takes place more happily and efficiently. The volume ends with a call for action by students, professors and administrators, in an attempt to move towards a more learning-centred view of doctoral education, rooted in the idea of forming intellectual communities where one could celebrate the advancement of learning and knowledge. Reading this from the perspective of a PhD student, I would argue that such a call is beneficial for the doctoral community as it facilitates a dialogue among key actors, where PhD students also get to partake in the rethinking of doctoral education and in deciding its future.

The third book, *Globalisation and Its Impacts on the Quality of PhD Education*, is the second in the planned three-volume *Forces and Forms in Doctoral Education Worldwide* series sponsored by the Centre for Innovation in Graduate Education (CIRGE) at the University of Washington; it is a follow-up of the first volume called *Toward a Global PhD* (Nerad and Heggelund 2008). The book came out as a result of exchanges that took place at the CIRGE workshop held in 2007 in Melbourne, Australia, in collaboration with the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Melbourne. It was given the Outstanding Publication Award 2014 by the AERA special Interest Group (SIG) 'Doctoral education across the disciplines' and has been praised for its international coverage of a range of issues.

The book brings into focus an exploration of different models of doctoral education, pursuing questions about the role and purpose of PhDs across various different states and regions with diverse histories of the development of doctoral education. It asks: What constitutes excellence and how do global forces and local forms shape what is meant by excellence? In answering, it sets out to develop a framework that links global trends in doctoral education to processes of globalisation. It draws upon issues such as the evolution of various national systems, the value of doctoral education, quality assurance models, the labour

market for PhD recipients and the tensions between national and international interests in transnational collaborations.

Written eight and six years respectively after the two books above, this book brings in a more complex perspective as it acknowledges graduate education as part of a larger environment, where diverse stakeholders and transnational policy-makers are important drivers in setting the direction for doctoral education. New realities are introduced, such as the increase in the number of international doctoral students and global collaborations, as well as the diversified modes of knowledge production. It is argued that this new context has redefined the meaning and purpose of doctoral education, and has brought forward new priorities, linked to contemporary economic and societal needs (Nerad and Evans 2014: 1).

The book argues that a global system of doctoral pedagogy is emerging through the convergence of common practices and illustrates this by exemplifying various case studies from around the world. Based on this statement, the authors extract the three commonalities of PhD programmes in Europe, the U.S.A., Canada and Australia, which are (Nerad and Evans 2014: 2):

- A PhD should contribute to knowledge through original research.
- PhD graduates are expected to have substantial knowledge in their areas.
- PhD training should include development of transferable skills and competencies.

Chapter 5 looks at how both external and internal forces have brought universities to accept and adopt a model of quality assurance that produces PhDs who are considered to be ‘fit for purpose’ by employers. This links to the idea of ‘transferable skills’ mentioned above – skills that are meant to enable PhD students to work in a variety of sectors. One chapter also brings in the perspective of early career researchers and stresses the importance of their understanding of the global forces of change that affect their lives.

**From steward to leader: the shifting roles of the PhD student**

Going back to the main concern that most actors in doctoral education have, I will cite Nerad and Evans (2014: 1):

> How can research doctoral programmes best educate students to innovate, solve scientific problems and master the societal challenges of today and tomorrow? What are the purposes of doctoral programmes, and how can education fulfil these?

These are all big questions that researchers and practitioners in the field have been struggling to elucidate for decades. The books have all discussed and problematised the role of PhD students and their relationship to knowledge and to the future. This section explores some of the roles that PhD students have been assigned throughout these books and discusses notions such as 'stewardship' (book 1), 'formation' (book 2) and 'leadership' (book 3).

***Stewardship***

In the first book, the idea of stewardship came across as a rather strong and significant one, affecting not just the thinking about doctoral education but also the roles that PhD students were imagined to take on. Golde and Walker (2006: 5) call the young researcher a 'steward' of the discipline. The definition of stewardship as defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary, and also as invoked by the editors, is the 'careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care' (Golde and Walker 2006: 12). More specifically, the authors offer this explanation for their understanding of stewardship:

> PhD recipients bear responsibility for the integrity of their discipline …. A PhD holder should be capable of *generating* new knowledge and defending new knowledge claims against challenges and criticism, *conserving* the most important ideas and findings that are a legacy of past and current work, and *transforming* knowledge that has been

> generated and conserved by explaining and connecting it to ideas from other fields (Golde and Walker 2006: 10, emphasis added).

Stewardship, as described in the book, is about mastering the roles and skills of a discipline in addition to having a sense of a *moral* purpose. The moral aspect refers to the responsibility that the scholar has of taking the discipline further while building on the work of and acknowledging the discipline's founding fathers. It thus entails a certain inter-generational handing over of knowledge; a relay for the next aspiring scholars. This view also attaches a certain morality to the responsibility of possessing knowledge as such, as well as transmitting it to the next generation. As useful as stewardship may be in understanding certain aspects of doctoral education, an over-reliance on it being the main purpose of doctoral education may overlook other – one may argue, equally important – aims, such as the creation of new, potentially interdisciplinary, research areas, as well as a more creative engagement with the process of knowledge production in relation to the changing conditions of the labour market, in which the PhD students could assume a more active role in defining their needs and values.

***Formation***

The second book reiterates that many doctorate holders are ill prepared for the diverse range of roles that they have to play, be it in academia or beyond. New challenges are seen as poorly understood and new courses of action are suggested, such as the need for stronger connections between academia, other sectors and society more generally. These new challenges, it is argued, require a fundamental rethinking of the purpose of doctoral education, as well as its vision for the future. As in the previous book, the authors claim that being a scholar requires a larger set of commitments – not just intellectual but also *moral*; the link between this and the notion of 'steward' detailed above is quite obvious: a scholar who has the responsibility of

taking the discipline further in a manner that is innovative yet also respectful of the discipline's predecessors.

This idea of formation is explored in the book through principles that expose different aspects of the phenomenon; the principles that the Carnegie Foundation proposes for student formation are the following:

- Progressive development towards increasing independence and responsibility
- Integration across contexts and arenas of scholarly work
- Collaboration with peers and faculty at each stage of the process.

The idea of formation as a development towards independence is further developed when the authors re-appropriate the term 'apprenticeship' to denote a new, alternative model for doctoral education, where the apprenticeship experience is *shared* between the student and the professor, thus becoming a process of mutual learning. This re-appropriation, the authors argue, appears as a result of the 'traditional' model having lived its course and having become inadequate for the preparation of scholars in the twenty-first century. However, one may also argue that doctoral education has always been about student formation, about preparing scholars to become gradually more independent and responsible through nurturing an academic relationship with their supervisor. The 'reciprocal' nature of this relationship from an apprenticeship point of view is of course more complex and may differ significantly not just throughout time but also across cultural contexts.

***Leadership***

Chapter 1 of the third book starts with a clear explanation of what a PhD does:

> As the most prestigious – and the most international – of academic degrees, the *PhD prepares leaders* for careers in academia and research but also and increasingly for a broad range of careers in other sectors (including business, industry, the non-profit

> sector, and government) and across international settings (Nerad and Evans 2014: 1, emphasis added).

This book therefore shows a slight shift in discourse towards a more entrepreneurial view of the student depicted as a 'leader'. This shift in ideology certainly mirrors the evolution of the 'knowledge economy' discourse, which has steadily risen in the last decade to emphasise a need for a more entrepreneurial scholar, able to compete in the global race for knowledge. The shift in the mainstream discourse has also marked a partial reconstruction of the PhD student identity, and a change in the desired skills and competencies that a young scholar ought to have in order to be 'successful'. It also reflects an evolution in the roles that learners should have, from being 'objects' of graduate policies to taking on a lot more agency and responsibility for their scholarly development.

**Conclusion**

All in all, the three books reflect the evolution of an important debate about doctoral education over the last decade. The shift to a more globalised world has significantly affected how doctoral education is designed and practiced. The global environment of graduate education, dominated by international students, transnational collaborations, diverse stakeholders and an increasingly competitive labour market, has fostered a major shift in the roles that PhD students have and are envisioned to have by various actors. Certain core features of the PhD, such as a deep knowledge of the field and a close relationship with one's supervisor, have stayed the same throughout these years; however, some roles of the PhD student have noticeably changed. These transformations are historically reflected in the selected books through the different terminology used in relation to the roles of PhD students: notions like 'stewardship', 'formation' and ultimately 'leadership' have all been invoked to reflect a gradual shift in what doctoral education has been thought to be about. As noted

above, the characteristics of all these roles are sometimes overlapping; however, the differences are perceptible in the shift towards a more audacious researcher equipped with entrepreneurial thinking who can present their findings to a wider public and make a direct contribution to the changing needs of economy and society. This is clearly reflected by looking at these three books together and noticing the changes in the language, discourse and even the articulations of hope for the future of the doctorate. A continuing challenge across the books – and implicitly throughout the years – seems to be that doctoral students are still 'ill prepared' – for jobs, for life after university, for the 'real world'. One can only hope and anticipate, therefore, that this situation will also shift, as it will most likely be replaced by new challenges of an ever-changing global world – and implicitly, of an every-changing graduate education.

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