

Editorial: Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education during a decade of change

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In the spring of 2013, I received an email from Sharon Parkinson, who at the time was publisher of *International Journal for Researcher Development* (which would later become *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*). The journal, as I would soon learn, originated as a small publication in 2009 based in the UK, published by University of Cambridge and acquired by Emerald Publishing shortly thereafter. After the acquisition, the journal had been led by a vibrant editorial team but was now in a time of transition. Sharon reached out to me because of my then-role as chair of the Graduate and Postdoctoral Education across the Disciplines special interest group, part of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). She asked if I might be interested in serving as editor of the journal. After several conversations with Sharon as well as with my colleagues at The University of Alabama and in the graduate education research community, I said yes.

So began my nine-year role as editor of what is now *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*. As I transition out of the role, I am honored by the invitation of the current editorial team (Drs Jamie Buford, Katrina McChesney and Maree Martinussen) to reflect on lessons learned during my editorial tenure, the current and future status of the journal and the journal's role in the scholarly community. I acknowledge the innumerable contributions made by other people over the past decade that have supported my editorial work and contributed to the growth and success of the journal, including Dr Tony Bromley, Dr Carmen McCallum, Sharon Parkinson, the Emerald Publishing staff, my colleagues at The University of Alabama, members of the journal's editorial board, graduate students at The University of Alabama who worked as editorial assistants, authors who submitted their work and countless reviewers for the journal. The thoughts and reflections presented in this article are solely my own, but they would not be possible without the efforts of many others.

I structure this article in four parts: reflections on the history of the journal during my time as editor, reflections on the content of the journal, potential futures of the journal and comments on the current and future state of research related to graduate and postdoctoral education. In this opening section, I intend for the reflections to serve as an account not just to the journal's growth and trajectory, but also to what the journal means for the global community of scholars who care about the field and seek to foster a space for scholarly conversation and engagement.

A history of the journal

The journal originated from the work and interests of scholars focused on researcher development, with the goal of sharing experiences and ideas in the public domain and with the initial guidance and commitment of Dr Denise Dear and Dr Linda Evans (Evans, 2011a, 2011b). In its earliest years, the journal was online and open access with an editorial board consisting of scholars from Australasia and the UK. Emerald began publishing the journal in 2011. From its start, the journal sought submissions that reflected the importance of scholarship across multiple disciplines, recognizing that researcher and scholarly development was not a discipline-specific endeavor. Evans (2011a) articulated the journal's goal to be one that "would consistently attract contributions from leading, internationally



renowned academics and academic-related colleagues across the globe” and to be a “world-leading, peer-reviewed journal.” While the earliest version of the journal incorporated researcher development as part of its title, the broad contours of this term were made clear: “Researcher development is about so much more than how doctoral students and research staff develop – it includes, for example, consideration of academics’ career-long development as researchers, and conceptual issues that expand our thinking and perspectives” (Evans, 2013).

Given the current estimate of 30,000 journals with publication of two million articles annually (Altbach and de Wit, 2018), it is surprising that there are few if any journals primarily focused on graduate and postdoctoral education. When I first began my editorial role, it seemed clear that the journal was well-positioned to fill the void in this area. All academic journals go through periods of growth and decline; these periods are related to a range of factors, including external influences on the field, the popularity of research topics in the field and the status of professional associations, especially if the journal is managed by the respective association. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* is a curious case, in this instance. The journal is not affiliated with a professional association and has never been (to my knowledge). The journal is also relatively young, only about 15 years old at this writing. For all the authors, reviewers and editorial board members who contributed to the journal in its first decade and a half, the work has been foundational in nature, contributing to what we know as the field of graduate and postdoctoral studies. In 2017, in consultation with the editorial board, the journal changed its name, a result of the effort to encapsulate and represent this broader field. Researcher development (part of the original name) remained important and became one of several areas of emphasis within the graduate and postdoctoral domain.

As part of the title change, the journal refined its aims and scope. Again in consultation with Emerald and the editorial board, these aims and scope were specified as:

- (1) master’s and doctoral program development;
- (2) master’s and doctoral student experiences;
- (3) the role of the faculty as advisers, mentors and supervisors;
- (4) the postdoctoral experience; and
- (5) professional graduate programs as well as alternative models of graduate education.

This articulation gave formal space for empirical research related to master’s level and professional degrees in addition to the growing body of scholarship on postdoctoral education – again, space that was not evident in any other journal at the time. Looking back on my editorial tenure, the title change was one of the most significant experiences.

Accompanying the change in name, aims and scope was an interest in documenting the growth and reception of the journal, which is important across internal and external audiences. During the time of my editorial service, the journal has seen a steady number of submissions with a manageable annual increase. The managing team for the journal has never been large: the editor; at most times an associate editor; frequently a graduate student from The University of Alabama serving as an editorial assistant; the editorial board; and the Emerald staff. Part of the journal’s status is its publication of high-impact research, and undoubtedly, one measure of high-impact research is the journal’s h-index and impact factor scores. In 2014, the journal was not ranked. A few years later, the journal was included as part of the Emerging Sources Citation Index and, around 2019, was indexed on academic citation portals. In my last year as editor, the journal was ranked in the second quartile of

education publications. These milestones resulted from the accumulation over time of high-impact research articles that were read and ultimately cited by scholars from around the world. While high-quality research can admittedly be published in a range of outlets, scholars in some countries face specific criteria for how they can be rewarded for published scholarship and are limited to those outlets with certain rankings. For better or worse, these criteria shape how we as a community engage with research.

As the journal secured these important footholds, it gained relevance for a widening group of researchers and thus, broadened the field. In recent years, the journal published articles from scholars with institutional affiliations in Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the USA. In my last year as editor, nearly one out of three articles published in the journal represented an international collaboration. I admit to bias based on my work with the journal these past years, but it is exciting to see the journal over a decade later, and I hope its founders feel the same sense of excitement. My personal hope is that the journal expands its global reach and continues to grow as an international journal. This global reach should be evident in the authorship of each issue, the content of the articles and the composition of the editorial board.

Reflections on the content of the journal

Across the years of my editorial role, the journal published many interesting, well-evidenced and thought-provoking articles. I do not presume to provide an exhaustive list in this text, but I do reflect on a few topics of importance based on published research. One topic focuses on the ways in which graduate education is accomplished. Graduate education is inevitably a process. Formally, the process begins with application and admission and ends with degree completion and degree conferment. Of course, the process extends much further, well into the student's experiences before graduate education and having implications for postgraduate work and life trajectories.

Several recent articles in the journal speak to the depth of research on the process of doctoral education. As one example, [McAvoy and Thacker \(2021\)](#) used a duo-ethnography to explore the delicate balance of parenting and doctoral enrollment, within the unique context of online education. While online education may offer the guise of flexibility, it also presents new challenges for those issues key to doctoral student success, including peer engagement, faculty connections and family support. The reliance on online programming postpandemic has yet to be determined, but we have certainly seen new possibilities for online platforms and outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic. These new platforms have further expanded the importance of future research related to what has been labeled nontraditional curricula.

In another example, [Zhang *et al.* \(2021\)](#) explored ways in which faculty and institutions might support doctoral students who do not fit the full-time, traditional student profile. This article forces us to examine the question of: for whom? As institutions and national systems invest in efforts to shorten the time to degree completion, further student opportunities and enhance research output, we should question our assumptions related to the doctoral student profile and how well those assumptions match the reality. Do these efforts match student needs? These assumptions are further complicated by the many differences among institutions, academic disciplines, degree purpose, funding mechanism and so on.

A last example is [Pyhältö *et al.* \(2023\)](#), who compared the perspectives of doctoral students and doctoral student supervisors on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the student experience. Doctoral student supervisors recognized the detrimental impact of the

pandemic and sought ways in which they could best support their students. However, the supervisors themselves were negatively impacted during this same time, which influenced the ways in which they were able to respond. The authors called for “shared sensemaking” as a way to understand these multiple influences, emphasizing the need for academic institutions to provide support for students and faculty. Understanding how doctoral student research was influenced by the pandemic requires understanding how faculty experienced the same and how faculty were able to support doctoral students in this time.

Another topic as seen through journal articles is that of outcomes. Indeed, future research should continue to emphasize the question of postgraduate education trajectories. This work builds upon questions related to the content and process of the doctorate and further explores how graduates might use their skills and expertise in the workplace. In the past few years, *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* has published numerous articles which focus on this important area of research. One example is the article by [Griffin et al. \(2023\)](#), which documented ways in which doctoral student agency shapes career decision-making. Based on interviews with students enrolled in a doctoral biology program, the authors emphasized how indecision is a common aspect of the career trajectory and can even be of benefit as students prepare for a range of options and potential transitions. This nuanced study of career decision-making illustrates how faculty and academic institutions can serve as partners for doctoral graduates and assist in professional transitions for all students.

Another example is [Guccione and Bryan \(2023\)](#), who used survey data from early career researchers to offer insight not just into how an individual might value graduating with the doctorate but also how the doctorate is received within the workplace. How well the doctorate aligns with the needs of employers outside of academia is a question of crucial concern, and one where the answer plays an outsized influence on the future of the doctorate overall. How should faculty and academic institutions respond when the degree is not perceived to have value by those outside of the institution? How do we differentiate between the skills and expertise of those with a master’s degree compared to those with a doctorate? The final example is [McAlpine and Inouye \(2022\)](#) with a focus on skills used by PhD graduates in the workplace, particularly communication. While the skill itself is relevant to a range of work settings and activities, perhaps more so is the ability to learn new behaviors, adapt old behaviors and recognize emerging contexts relevant for work performance. What abilities students learn during their doctoral enrollment and how those abilities translate into future work performance is an important area of consideration.

It is interesting to compare these articles to those published in the earliest issue of *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, under its former name, in 2009. Given the earlier title, it is not surprising that these articles focused more exclusively on researcher development. There is also a smaller geographical focus, which again suits the profile and nature of the journal in its nascent days. But looking across the first few volumes of the journal presents familiar themes, including how researchers engage in their work, in what ways the academic institution supports this work and what outcomes result from these efforts. These themes align with the goal for the journal as outlined by [Evans \(2011b\)](#): to publish work that “analyses and theorises and addresses the why and how questions that are fundamental to real scholarship.”

During my editorial tenure, in 2017, I invited two esteemed scholars in the field, Dr Margaret Kiley and Dr Lynn McAlpine, to provide reflections on their own careers as well as the field of graduate and postdoctoral education ([Kiley, 2017](#); [McAlpine, 2017](#)). Reading these two articles now provides an important perspective on the changes in the field over the

past few years as well as the insight of the words written. Rather than citing the two articles at length and posting my own summary, I offer this conclusion from Kiley (2017):

Perhaps the most interesting reflection is that over the past 20 years at least, the PhD internationally has slowly become “less different.” Poorly expressed I know – I do not want to say it has become the same but that the differences have become less stark. In the early 1990s, when we held the first international Quality in Postgraduate Research conference in Australia, the differences between doctoral education in North America, the UK, Europe, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were stark, but now, considerable similarities exist. One reason I suggest for this change relates to the lack of theorizing about doctoral education, which occurred in the past. With a rapid expansion in research in this very interesting area, we learn from one another, not only from personal experience but also from carefully undertaken research and publication [...]. In summary, a fascinating future for research and practice in doctoral education.

Potential futures for the journal

Given the many strengths of the journal, I remain optimistic about its future growth and trajectory. I am especially optimistic about the ability of the journal to continue to support the profile of the graduate and postdoctoral research community. I feel this ability is crucial to nurture in the years ahead – to engage scholars at all stages of their careers, and from a range of global perspectives and contexts. The doctorate is truly a global degree, and the experiences of master’s students, professional degree students, doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars should be understood in a global context. A delicate challenge exists for researchers in the field: documenting a global degree that exists within a specific local, disciplinary and institutional community, and doing so with a range of methodologies, theories and frameworks and in ways that offer robust empirical findings. Fully understanding the graduate and postdoctoral experience requires using these efforts across the disciplines, as no single discipline has ownership over these experiences. I consider the journal well on its way as a space to host these necessary conversations and foster a sense of community.

That being said, I offer three areas to watch as the journal moves forward. The first is the ability of the journal to represent the global profile of the community. Doctoral programs exist in 178 countries around the world (Taylor *et al.*, 2021). Understanding the experiences of scholars at the graduate and postdoctoral stage requires recognition of this range of global settings. It is important that the community’s scholarly platform reflects this diversity of voices. This recognition needs to be embedded at all stages of the publishing process, such as making sure early career scholars are encouraged to submit their work, ensuring an easy to access and navigate submission portal, recognizing that not all researchers write in the same primary language, facilitating a rigorous and responsive peer review experience and being intentional that the journal’s contents reflect the field as a whole. The process should also recognize the range of options available to disseminate scholarship beyond the traditional journal format and encompass social media, virtual networks and in-person events.

Another measure of a journal’s future is the investment in the journal by the publisher and editorial team, which is the second area to watch. This investment in *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* is tangible, based on the journal’s growth. The earliest volumes offered two issues a year with four to six articles. The same number of issues, but with a growing number of articles, continued until 2019, when based on the increasing number of submissions and the wait time for articles to be included in a published issue, Emerald added an additional issue to the annual volume. The time from acceptance to publication on Emerald’s Early Cite option has decreased, which means accepted articles are

available to the journal's audience in shorter periods of time. With a continued growth in submissions and the journal's relevance for the field, I would expect the publication schedule to further expand and more issues added. The number of submissions to the journal doubled during my editorial tenure, and the acceptance rate dropped to around 25%. Questions related to open access and the accessibility of scholarship to the broadest possible audience (both the medium of access as well as the language of access) are central to scholars across disciplinary communities, and those questions are of relevance to the journal as well.

A third and final area to watch is if and how the journal might partner with other entities in the field. A reality exists in that academic publishing almost always contains multiple stakeholders between the author and the reader. Examples include the author's own institution or the agency which funded the research. We as academics are partners with many other groups in our work. Our training may have made us more comfortable with some of these partnerships compared to others but regardless, these partnerships shape our daily practices. The list is lengthy: students, other faculty, administrators, community members, funding agencies, for-profit publishers, professional associations, copyeditors, policymakers, public advocates, technology specialists, event planners, travel and event organizers, just to name a few. It is common for journals to have not just a publisher, but also a professional association which provides financial and human resources to sustain the journal. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* is unique to the extent that it is not affiliated with a professional association. The ability to connect with a range of conferences and networks globally will continue to be important in the journal's future.

Current and future state of research

I now turn to the final section of this article, which includes comments on the current and future state of research related to graduate and postdoctoral education. After I stepped down from the editor role, a colleague asked me what I would miss most about working with the journal. It was an easy answer for me – the opportunity to read manuscripts from a global community of scholars about a wide range of important issues in graduate and postdoctoral studies. I consider this opportunity to be a privilege of editorial work. Doing so gave me insight into what topics were valued and of relevant and the ways in which our community advances scholarship. It also gave me the opportunity to understand what might become future directions for research, which I offer here for discussion. One immediate answer relates to research focused on graduate and postdoctoral studies throughout and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This body of scholarship is just beginning to take shape, and the ways in which we frame the individual and institutional experiences during this global event will be important to note.

Another future direction for research focuses on policy and decision-making related to graduate and postdoctoral education. Certainly, the ways in which governments and institutions responded to the pandemic and how these responses influenced process and outcomes is of interest. But the influence of policy and decision-making preceded the pandemic and will presumably continue in the years ahead. This influence can be found globally. A few examples: The China Discipline Evaluation program originated in 2002 with the goal of improving the value of graduate education as well as informing the public about institutional and degree quality. Institutional participation is voluntary, but highly encouraged. Programs are assessed through a range of measures, such as peer review, student evaluation and degree completion rates. Some 20 years later, India introduced a similar effort through its University Grants Commission (UGC). The regulations related to the minimum standards and procedures for the award of the PhD degree set a time limit for program duration; offer extensions for women candidates and those with disabilities;

standardize admission processes; and formalize criteria for faculty to serve as doctoral supervisors. In the case of supervisor criteria, the criteria align with what are increasingly global standards: the publication record of the faculty, departmental and institutional approval and a limit on the number of candidates a faculty can supervise annually (in this case, eight candidates). UGC no longer requires postsecondary faculty to hold a PhD degree; the doctoral standards further emphasize levels between undergraduate and graduate education. How might these policies be emulated by other systems – in what ways, and with what rationale? What might be the differential impact depending on unique national features, and how might we understand larger impacts based on shared global features of the doctorate?

Another future area of research might explore ways in which graduate students and postdoctoral scholars interact with others, including but not limited to faculty and the doctoral supervisor. It is well-established that the quality of doctoral supervision is a significant factor in terms of a doctoral student's satisfaction with their degree program as well as degree completion and career outcomes. [Taylor *et al.* \(2021\)](#) illustrated that the ways in which the doctoral supervisor is selected and rewarded for their work is an important element of doctoral research, but also one that varies by discipline, institution and national context. Some of this research, of course, should prioritize the student perspective on supervision, including ways in which the supervisor helps students plan and achieve degree outcomes, but other aspects of the research are needed to understand how faculty engage in such work. The default response of “faculty supervise doctoral students in the way they themselves were supervised” does not go far enough in understanding the complexities of the student/supervisor relationship.

In an era of political tension and division, documenting the formal and informal curriculum remains of significance, especially how these curricula might vary globally and how scholars of different backgrounds might experience them. The curriculum might be in-classroom learning but might also be out of class experiences in the research laboratory, the field, the community or the workplace. Regardless of location, the way in which learning is sequenced as well as the content of the learning influences degree outcomes ([Holley, 2018](#)). More research is needed, as one example, about what knowledge doctoral students need at what stage of the degree journey. How can institutions, programs and faculty ensure that students are best prepared to succeed in their program? How can these stakeholders ensure that students have the tools, knowledge and skills necessary to be successful?

A last future area of research might emphasize the global nature of the graduate and postdoctoral experience, especially ways in which international scholars engage with local and national contexts. Knowledge, research and people travel across national boundaries with great frequency, and such exchange might only be presumed to increase. How might these scholars be best supported? What does it mean for institutions to recruit and support international scholars at a graduate and postdoctorate level, and what influences do the local contexts outside of the institution have? I offer two examples from some of my own recent research. Drawing from different national perspectives, [Caliskan and Holley \(2017\)](#) explored how doctoral student support programs are designed, delivered and experienced by students. The comparative analysis of programs in Turkey and the USA showed how such programs were constructed through assumptions about doctoral student identities, needs, trajectories and outcomes. These assumptions did not always fully address the needs of all doctoral students, raising questions about how students who might not be perceived as traditional or central to doctoral programming are supported by institutions and faculty. Another example focused on the postdoctoral experience, noting how such scholars are a common but too frequently overlooked aspect of the global higher education landscape

(Holley *et al.*, 2018). The ways in which the experiences of these scholars vary by national systems and context is important to understand, especially in light of changing professional outcomes by those holding graduate degrees and the reliance on postdoctoral labor by academic institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has provided reflections on the history and content of the journal while also outlining potential futures of the journal. I also offered comments on the current and future state of research related to graduate and postdoctoral education. I write this with appreciation for the good work already underway by the new editorial team, and with excitement for the future not just of *Studies of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, but also the field of graduate and postdoctoral studies broadly. This is a future we are well prepared for yet is also a future in ways uncharted as new generations of scholars make contributions to our understanding. I encourage these generations of scholars to continue to consider the journal as a primary outlet for their scholarship. Doing so involves not just submitting manuscripts, but also reviewing for the journal (one of the most crucial yet invisible aspects of the research process) and providing feedback on ways the journal might grow. I hope we can continue to prioritize the importance of a range of voices related to scholarship in our field and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, topics and methodologies.

Karri Holley

College of Education, The University of Alabama System, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA

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