

Editorial

Doctoral students' season schools: multi-national and intercultural enrichment experiences for learning and networking

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Part of the work of universities worldwide is to train new doctors who can meet current and future challenges and who have the knowledge and skills required in academic life. There are many ways to achieve these goals, and it is necessary to explore these avenues. For the last decades, a diversity of spaces for learning and networking beyond formal ones has been provided to doctoral students. International seasonal schools, intensive programs, international writing retreats, international research communities of practice, and international seminar groups, among others, have been learning opportunities where students have the opportunity to discuss their work with peers, mentors and teachers. These learning spaces are organised by various facilitators such as universities, scientific associations, and researchers who usually focus on the same topic. In many cases, those experiences became even more relevant during the pandemic, keeping some of those activities in online environments with a significant role as a supportive network for social isolation (Cullinane et al., 2022). Now that the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been lowered in most countries of the world and people seem to be craving to meet other people once again face-to-face, it is reasonable to assume that participating in these learning opportunities will become even more popular.

Previous research points out that these learning environments, as seasonal schools, are intensive, focused, and do not last long (e.g., Dallari et al., 2011), being an efficient way of learning and developing expertise. Besides offering a context for learning the subject matter, methods, research ethics and the like, these international contexts have the potential to enhance networking opportunities among participants. Networks can play an important role in the development and establishment of an academic career by offering social support and career enhancement, to name some of the gains for the participants (e.g., Heffernan, 2021).

The purposeful design of educational spaces that foster both formal and informal learning is critical to enable doctoral students to draw significant connections between a variety of research-related tools in their respective interests and to take ownership of their own learning. This SI aims to explore the impact on doctoral students' experiences of and opportunities for holistic learning when "they demonstrate through their writing, presentation, discussion, and even demeanour that they have undergone a change in the way they understand their learning and themselves as learners" (Kiley, 2009). Moreover, the aim is to discuss the value of international learning and social experiences, such as participating in summer schools, in doctoral students learning pathways as opportunities that may drive "learning leaps" and contribute to the robustness of their research (Wisker et al., 2010).

The special issue focused on the role of extracurricular activities such as international season schools, visiting researcher opportunities, international seminars, and similar learning experiences in higher education as contexts for learning and networking and as research communities that have a great impact on emerging researchers and doctoral students.

Included are four methodologically very versatile articles ranging from an autoethnographic study to a mixed methods study with 768 participants. Two articles deal with international summer schools for doctoral students, one article with the learning experiences offered to doctoral students while organising multidisciplinary seminars in their university, and one article explores doctoral students' engagement in researcher networks.

Below, the four articles comprising the Special Issue are introduced one by one.

The paper titled "'I Am Here': Insights and Sense-Making from a Shared Doctoral Summer School Experience" by Joana Cruz, Shelbi Taylor, Julia Römer, Deepti Bhat, Álmos Szócs, Kathrin Paal and Betina Lopes, aims to offer a practice-inspired contribution to reflect on the role of extracurricular activities in the journey of academics, in particular PhD students, by describing and analysing a particular lived experience at the European Educational Research Summer School, held at Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal, which was focused on "Participatory approaches in educational research". The group consisting of two tutors and six doctoral students depicts some of the impacts the week had on all participants while sharing and reflecting on the potential of participatory research and processes in both individual projects and collective experience. The group mobilised Arts-Based Research (ABR) methodologies to start a reflexive dialogue on the transitioning process from doctoral student to researcher. Inspired by Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and Image Theatre (Boal, 2002) to attend to the multiplicity of visions, voices, and experiences in the room, the group endeavoured to foster a safe and creative space for collaboration where thoughts and feelings could be collectively experienced and reflected on. The use of Arts-Based Research, the rapid growth of trust within the group, and the agency that was felt and taken by the group's participants are the main themes targeted in the analysis, which were at the heart of the unexpected and profound way the week unfolded.

The first section of the article “Building Communities and Professionalism Through Student-Organised Conferences: Opportunities and Reflections for Doctoral Education” by Banderlipe and Ingram frames the reasons for the discussion around doctoral students’ organisation of their symposium. Secondly, an outline of the framework, which includes a range of interdependent activities that this article purports, is to be embraced by students in other universities or could act as a springboard for this to become more of a norm around the higher education sector. Some preliminary findings from a survey of students included those who attended their university’s purely internal symposium. Finally, some reflections on the impact of the multidisciplinary nature of the research that students encounter, along with the multicultural discussions and presentations, have the potential to expand the horizons of the research of the individual and perhaps fuel more collaboration, which may not occur at the time but could result in it being more of a possibility in the future because of this exposure to the varied disciplines which can become silos in themselves due to what can feel like a solitary journey in the writing of writing a PhD.

The article titled “PhD Candidates’ Engagement in Researcher Networks and the Key Learning Experiences Embedded in Them” by Henrika Anttila, Jenni Sullanmaa, Lotta Tikkanen and Kirsi Pyhältö explores PhD candidates’ engagement in researcher networks, ranging from the local to the global sphere, the key learning experiences embedded in them, and how such engagement is associated with their doctoral thesis format, research group status, and the candidate’s country of origin. The authors start by stating that researcher networks are highly important for a positive PhD experience as well as for the future career of PhD candidates in and beyond academia. A total of 768 PhD candidates from a research-intensive multidisciplinary Finnish university participated in the mixed methods study. The data were collected through a doctoral experience survey. The results showed that PhD candidates participate widely in research collaboration activities, especially by presenting at conferences and participating in international summer schools. Most learning experiences were located in local networks. Some differences between the candidates were found related to the thesis format, research group status, and candidates’ country of origin. This study provides a new understanding of PhD candidates’ researcher networks, and the results can be used in the development of support systems in doctoral education to enhance PhD candidates’ research collaboration locally and globally.

The article titled “International Summer Schools as a Platform of Inclusive Education for Doctoral Students” by Suparna Bagchi is based on reflections on the author’s understanding of international summer schools, drawing from personal experiences while participating in one of them. The author suggests that international summer schools can play an important role as an international academic forum in the practice of inclusive education for doctoral students and early career researchers from various perspectives. The author uses the model of three levels of inclusion advanced by Qvortrup and Qvortrup to justify the arguments in this autoethnographic study. The study methodology is discussed in the paper. The author claims that the timetable of the summer school provided an inclusive learning experience to the participant students from

numeric/physical, social, and psychological perspectives. She concludes by arguing that international summer schools need to utilise their transnational nature to initiate race-sensitive, culturally responsive discussions among their participant students. This approach will help to create critical cultural awareness among its students, trying to give a clear picture of the intercultural makeup of the world as it exists.

The need to cooperate and know what other researchers are doing highlights the importance of networking. Mobility and international cooperation are highly recommended by many funders of doctoral studies. Yet long-time mobility is not possible for all doctoral students for various reasons, such as having a family or a part-time job, for example. The extracurricular activities focused on the Special Issue often support the internationalisation and networking of doctoral students.

Based on these four articles, the role of various extracurricular activities seems significant in the never-ending process of becoming a fully learned academic professional. Yet we suspect that universities and supervisors do not give enough attention to these activities. It would, in the future, be interesting to do a large-scale study covering several countries on doctoral students' experiences in extracurricular activities.

This issue also contained two further articles. The first, “We Must Take Care of Those Who Care: A Study on the Construction of Early Childhood Educators' Professional Identities”, co-authored by Bárbara Tadeu and Amélia Lopes, discusses the importance of promoting the educational dimension in daycare centres and the need for training support and quality working conditions that allow educators to develop their relational professionalism. The study draws on empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews with thirty early childhood educators and is based on the theory of the construction of professional teaching identity as an ecological construct. The articles point to the positive correlation between the qualifications of the professionals present in the baby rooms (namely babies' early childhood educators) and the quality of education in this context, as well as the relevance of the presence of pedagogically enlightened professionals who are available for their own and joint work in the daycare centre, which promotes more favourable conditions for the child's development.

The second article, “An Exploration of the Child's Perspective in the Illustrated Book *Nicholas* by Goscinny & Sempé” by Constança Freire de Sousa, examines the link between literary analysis and educational theories. The aim is to discuss the significance of children's literature and to analyse the educational dimensions of children's fairy tales. This article focuses on the illustrated book “*Le Petit Nicolas*” by René Goscinny and Jean-Jacques Sempé and analyses the educational and social role of representation and the power of building a collective consciousness through stories. Discourse analysis of the text and illustrations reveals forms of representation of others that neglect diversity and different voices. Critical literacy and an understanding of reading as a performative social act can help provide younger readers with analytical tools to promote critical and counter-hegemonic perspectives.

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