

Developing knowledge-rich accounts of ‘graduateness’

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Introduction

This symposium examines how different elements of students’ ‘graduateness’ are formed through their studies, and how these elements change their relations to knowledge and society. The central focus of the symposium is on how we can develop knowledge-rich conceptions of graduateness that capture the ways in which students are transformed through their engagement in higher education and how this transformation prepares them to contribute to their societies. This perspective is intended to offer an alternative to dominant approaches to graduateness that focus predominately on the employment outcomes of graduates. These dominant approaches to understanding graduateness tend to perpetuate social injustices by favouring students who are socially privileged (Ashwin 2020).

Each of the three papers in the symposium are positioned in conversation with the Pedagogic Quality and Inequalities project of Monica McLean, Andrea Abbas, and Paul Ashwin (McLean et al., 2018). This project originated in the notion of higher education as a ‘pedagogic device’ (Bernstein, 2000), which showed how knowledge moves from a research context to higher education curricula and to the understandings that students’ develop through interacting with this knowledge. The three papers presents their own take on this perspective, searching for critical ways of understanding ‘graduateness’ that do not reproduce inequalities different settings.

Link to conference theme

This symposium links to the conference theme by taking a critical approach to the notion of ‘graduateness’. Collectively the think pieces raise a series of questions about the role of the universities in making knowledge accessible to all students and how this has been impacted by increased marketization and competition (Komljenovic), the continued slow progress towards transformation and inclusion (Hlengwa), and pressures on researchers in producing knowledge (Macfarlane).

Paper 1

Ashwin, P., Blackie M., Pitterson, N. & Smit, R. *Knowledge-rich conceptions of Graduateness in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering.*

In this paper, we examine how students studying Chemistry and Chemical Engineering in South Africa, the UK, and USA are changed by their engagement with knowledge over the course of their undergraduate degrees. Drawing on a phenomenographic analysis of students’ accounts of chemistry

and chemical engineering, we explore the variation in students' understanding of their subjects of study and how these change over time. This allows us to explore the transformational impact of these disciplines in terms of the ways in which they transform students' sense of identity as they engage with disciplinary knowledge. This is a key element of 'graduateness' that is characteristic of higher education and will provide new understandings of how undergraduate degrees in these areas prepare students to be critical citizens and the differences between how students' understanding develops and changes across these two subject areas.

Paper 2

Weenink, K., Roelofs, E., Park, N. and Griffioen, D. *Changing perceptions: balancing professionalism during bachelor education*

This paper focuses on how students in applied bachelor programmes transform from students to professionals during their educational path. At the brink of their educational pathway towards professionalism, students bring their own beliefs and expectations of what it entails to become a professional through higher education (Brownlee et al. 2009). It is, however, unclear how students' interaction with the systematised body of knowledge and with the professional fields, both provided by higher education, result over time in professionals. Hence, the aim of this project is to understand how students' professional identity, knowledge, and action transform during their bachelor trajectory.

In this paper, the notion of higher education as a pedagogic device through interactions with knowledge is expanded to becoming a professional, which implies changed knowledge, as also identity and actions of students. Combined knowledge, identity, and action comprise their professionalism (Griffioen, 2019). As (Young & Muller 2014) note, for a student, each step taken requests a transformation and therefore a struggle for knowledge, identity (see also Trede et al, 2012), and for action. While the construct of professionalism was conceptualised as a balancing of these three elements, it is so far unclear, how these three notions play out and relate with each other empirically at different moments in the students' development towards professional.

The presentation focuses on the methodological aspects in the analysis of the development of the student through four professional disciplines as captured in multiple interviews. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior is used as an analytic lens (Ajzen, 1991). The findings are expected to contribute conceptually by expanding the Theory of Planned Behavior (intention to action) to a new Theory of Planned Professionalism, with an addition of intentions of knowledge and intentions of identity.

Paper 3

Abbas, A., Gao, J. and Ismail, G.: *Addressing the complex knowledge needs of contemporary graduates and societies: critical provocations.*

This paper connects with the conference and symposium focus on the need to increase the value of critical perspectives, in relation to a concept of graduateness (Stuer et al, 2012). As with the other papers in the symposium it engages with McLean et al's (2018) understanding of the role of the pedagogic device in facilitating graduateness. This pertains to a form of development in which students' understanding of critical knowledge and transformative knowledge is necessary to the form of broader intellectual, personal and moral development that students need to access socially just outcomes and to be able to play a role in generating just societies and professions.

Three brief provocations based on analysis of research data show how critical concepts might be integrated into the pedagogic device to facilitate broader and deeper understandings of injustices. Our work relates particularly to Amanda Hellengwa's focus on 'higher education institutions spaces that are democratic and inclusive promoting belonging and a social justice agenda'. However, there are implications for some of the issues about research raised by MacFarlane in his think piece (Ismail and Abbas). Also, the increased marketisation and some of its consequences alluded to at the start of Komljenovic's think piece. In addition, our work speaks to Phipp's paper regarding the issue of how to interact globally and ethically being central to all of our work.

The first by Abbas brings an intersectional lens to some of the original data from Mclean et al's (2018) project and illustrates how the injustices associated with disability and ethnicity (and their other gendered intersections) cannot be separated with the injustices embedded in all 3 stages of the pedagogic device (Abbas, 2020). The second by Ismail illustrates how Freire's concepts (1974, 1997) are a helpful addition to the pedagogic device in identifying the difficulties Arab PhD students' have in applying their UK based transformations to generate knowledge for students who become academics in their home countries. The third by Paul Gao illustrates the importance of the addition of the concept of 揚棄(youki), also known as 止揚 (shiyou) (derived from Hegel's philosophy of Aufheben (e.g. Masato, 2021) to understanding the way in which graduates returning to China from the UK are transformed and apply their knowledge. Together they reflect the levels of complexity and the depth of change required for socially just pedagogic devices and the consequences such actions would have for universities.

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