

Shaping access and equity in the doctoral curriculum: questions, observations and provocations

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This submission brings participants into conversation with insights from a project funded by the World-wide Universities Network entitled ‘Challenges of access and equity: The higher education curriculum answers back’. In four research universities, we examined how understandings of access and equity have driven decisions about the shape of doctoral education curriculum; if and how that curriculum is being redesigned in response to those understandings; and how the people responsible for doctoral education in universities understand their role in relation to access and equity. While challenges of these kinds are routinely being asked of undergraduate education across the globe, it is less clear how they manifest in shaping the demands on curriculum in doctoral education.

We draw on key findings from across our research sites to generate questions for discussion with participants. For a start, there remains uncertainty about what is being explored by attending to access and equity at the doctoral level. Is it the particular students who have traditionally been excluded from doctoral education? Is it a question of the specific knowledges these students bring to their learning and their efforts to include these in their research? Is it a focus on the institutional strategies designed to address access and equity? Or, perhaps it is an acknowledgement that the very cultures of higher education (and by implication doctoral and postgraduate education) intended to enact transformation have been complicit in the perpetuation of disadvantage and discrimination. This desire to move beyond a view of equity in terms of just access; that is to consider *what is being accessed*” (Gale, 2014:5, *our italics*), provoked us to scrutinize the recent embrace of curriculum (McWilliam & Singh, 2002; Green, 2012) now evident in government and institutional reshaping of doctoral education. For us, shaping a doctoral curriculum that does justice to agendas of access and equity depends on a thoughtful response to some of the challenges raised through our project.

References

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