



Introduction

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WHAT THIS BOOK AIMS TO OFFER

As someone interested in doctoral education, why might this book be relevant to you? How could this book be pertinent today? To address such questions, an ideal starting point is to discuss briefly selected but crucial doctoral concepts, i.e. *well-being*, *researcher independence*, *interdependence* and *the hidden curriculum*. In so doing, we raise two main questions: (1) How are these doctoral concepts perceived, understood and translated into practice? (2) What do these concepts mean for doctoral scholars' personal and professional development, supervisors' guidance and provision, researcher developers' and institutional leaders' approaches to supporting doctoral communities as well as for anyone who has a strong interest in

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successful, meaningful and transformative doctoral education? It can be argued that how the first question is answered is strongly connected to how the second question is to be addressed.

We also aim to clarify competing concepts or widely held beliefs and then ‘connect the dots’ that underpin these various concepts, with a view to capturing and offering our readers a holistic view of the doctoral learning processes in the final chapter. Familiarity with existing, at times, differing conceptualisations of these ideas can assist in getting a sound grasp as these ideas are presented and illustrated in each chapter. What is more, this book is strongly pragmatic in nature. Our intention is to go beyond the theorised components of these concepts. Instead, it is to offer in each chapter practical demonstrations of how these concepts can be realised in various contexts.

DOCTORAL WELL-BEING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Within the fascinating world of doctoral education, shared issues typically confronting doctoral scholars that require urgent and ongoing attention are increasingly being recognised. This comes with a greater appreciation of how complex the doctoral landscape can be for its different cohorts—domestic, international, part-time or working PhD scholars. Arguably, this is something to be expected from anyone who embarks on the highest level of educational studies. It does not come as a surprise that one or a combination of its several dimensions (e.g. doctoral genre, research culture, academic working conditions) contributes to the discourse about doctoral scholars’ mental health and well-being (Barry et al., 2018; Byrom et al., 2020; Elliot, 2023; McCray & Joseph-Richard, 2020; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). If left unaddressed, such well-being concerns may lead to or exacerbate other doctoral issues, e.g. lack of motivation and engagement, delay in progression, doctoral attrition or mental illness (Ayres, 2022; Devos et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2023).

These studies exemplify and indicate the extent to which the doctoral population is plagued by this predicament. While Evans et al. (2018) suggest that the doctoral population tends to experience depression and anxiety about six times higher than the general population, Levecque et al. (2017) highlight the risk of developing a psychiatric disorder (e.g. depression) associated with doctoral academic working conditions. Accordingly, mental health concerns are far from being isolated experiences but could arise from a complex combination of personal psychological dispositions

(e.g. impostor syndrome) even prior to the PhD, exposure to a toxic research culture and disquiet over the precarious working conditions awaiting post-doctoral scholars (Deconinck, 2015).

Mental health and well-being are not the main focus of this book, but since their immense influence to serve as a propeller or a barrier is recognised in each doctoral journey, you can expect well-being to be either explicitly or implicitly discussed in the chapters that follow.

Notably, such discussions contest the often implied discursive understanding of well-being found in policy and university strategy associating well-being with a clinical psychological discourse, thereby pathologising doctoral scholars before they have even begun their studies. This also often comes with a narrow view of well-being as being an individual, rather than a community and organisational phenomenon and linking well-being together with performativity agendas (Elliot et al., 2023; Petersen & Sarauw, 2023; Sarauw et al., 2023). On the contrary, many chapters in this book argue that well-being issues need to be tackled as social, knowledge-based and relational dimensions of the doctoral journey.

RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE AND INTERDEPENDENCE: AN OXYMORON?

Another crucial and related area that has generated attention in the doctoral literature concerns the connection between *independence* and *interdependence*. To this end, it is first worth addressing the widely held beliefs associated with researcher independence. Available literature on this topic signals the conflation between the term independence and working alone. While independence in conducting research denotes scholars' capacity to undertake research tasks with a high degree of autonomy, criticality, confidence and competence that equips them with a sense of research direction, we strongly argue that the process of achieving researcher independence can be attained through intentional pursuit of interdependence, thereby contesting the personal-social binary often unfruitful for doctoral formation (Bengtson, 2016; Gardner, 2008).

As we see argued in several chapters in the book, it is through engaged discussions, collaborative pursuits or working together, or in other words, interdependent learning and critical thinking, that development naturally flourishes. In turn, it yields collective wisdom and more sustainable research communities, which offer scholars reciprocally meaningful

learning for all involved. Further, observed interdependence among community members is widely recognised to offer social and emotional support (Cornér, 2020; Cornér et al., 2018). Beyond this support, such a community also often serves as a platform that invites learning of various forms—targeted and focused, incidental or random—via casual chats, informal brainstorming, exchange of ideas or peer mentoring, which tend to generate scholarly enrichment and cross-fertilisation of ideas (Elliot, 2023).

This is contrary to the widespread individualisation of researcher trajectories and careers encouraged by increased neo-liberal management of doctoral education, often focusing abstractly on the individual disconnected from the researcher, collegial, educational and institutional milieus and contexts within which the PhD is nested (McAlpine & Norton, 2006). Instead, we view researcher independence as a concept often catalysed and facilitated through collective effort, collaboration and community building (Cai et al., 2019; Elliot, 2023). Largely influenced by Vygotsky's social constructivism, this places learning as a collective effort among the community members (Daniels, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978) and more recent theory development within higher and doctoral education that focuses on ecological learning and doctoral ecologies (Barnett, 2018; Bengtson, 2019). While seemingly oxymoronic, this view of researcher independence emanates from fostering interdependent practice (where individuals collectively influence each other's thoughts, actions and development—see Colman, 2015). Interdependence then facilitates deepening knowledge and subject expertise, broadening appreciation of concepts and ideas and expanding one's repertoire of skills.

Pursuit of researcher independence via interdependence stands in sharp contrast to the often misunderstood perception that developing independence means working alone, or rising above the crowd (i.e. the community). Instead, we argue that independence, thriving, creativity, criticality and originality in research rest on practising interdependence, relational trust-building and co-construction of knowledge found in balanced and sustainable researcher collectives (Guccione, 2016). This is based on the premise that researcher independence in the doctoral context is not only strongly conveyed but is developed through promoting interconnectedness and collective learning (e.g. reflective growth, navigation, leadership, enculturation, development of expertise and wealth of experience). Doing so is arguably even more crucial in the doctoral context where scholars

generally operate within the constrictions of a pervasive culture of individualised working conditions.

SO, WHAT MIGHT RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

For doctoral scholars, a sense of researcher independence might be characterised by combined acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, scholarly identity and a doctoral-level skillset—complemented by a set of dispositions and competencies, e.g. personal agency, creativity and innovation, critical and autonomous thinking, feedback literacy or use of an interdisciplinary approach (Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Bastalich, 2017; Brodin, 2017; Guccione, 2016; Inouye & McAlpine, 2017; Johnson et al., 2000; Wisker et al., 2003).

Some doctoral scholars may already possess many of these characteristics even from the outset of their doctoral journey, and further development of researcher independence occurs during the doctoral process itself. Moreover, pursuit of researcher independence can pave the way for doctoral scholars' sense of ownership and direction over their own research priorities, capability to define and design their own research and conceptualise ways of knowledge generation. Perhaps, this can even lead to new collaborations and/or research grant applications—both during and after the PhD in continued academic or professional work environments. Since each doctoral study is distinct, formal and informal curricular lessons that reinforce researcher independence not only vary widely but manifest themselves differently.

Concurrently, there exist different views and understandings of when researcher independence begins to happen, what characterises this concept and what are the indicators that this quality has been attained (e.g. Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Albertyn & Bennett, 2021; Elliot, 2022; Lovitts, 2005; Savva & Nygaard, 2021). While researcher independence is often strongly associated with doctoral learning and development, it is essential to acknowledge that there also exist several interpretations of this term. Therefore, a vital purpose of this book is to bring clarity to this multiplicity of interpretations in relation to researcher independence. More specifically, this book is expected to generate a comprehensive depiction of how formal and informal curricular elements can be harnessed specifically to foster researcher independence among doctoral scholars and how research

environments and institutional culture may aid the formation of competent, independent doctoral researchers (Barnett et al., 2022; Overall et al., 2011).

HIDDEN CURRICULUM AS A VITAL CHANNEL OF DOCTORAL PEDAGOGIES

Having considered key and contemporary challenges facing doctoral scholars, let us now turn to potential ways of addressing them. In so doing, it is vital to connect our discussion to this book's predecessor. In 2020, when our team published the book 'The Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education' (Elliot et al., 2020), the reception it received was indeed heartening. It also conveyed a strong indication of the 'thirst' to further explore this crucial topic. Likewise, there were questions raised concerning hidden curricular lessons' wider utility and applicability within (and beyond) the context of doctoral education—often with a hint of philosophical musings. Examples include: once found, is the hidden curriculum no longer 'hidden'? Can we disregard the hidden curriculum's previous negative connotations? Or is the scope of the hidden curriculum restricted to informal dimensions of learning? Equally, how do hidden pedagogies manifest themselves in different doctoral settings? How can we harness the potential of such doctoral pedagogies? All these questions suggest that there is much more to explore and that these questions are vital and deserve further attention. This interest and the increase of blog posts on this topic (e.g. see its accompanying website <https://drhiddencurriculum.wordpress.com/>) convinced our team that the time was ripe for a follow-up book on the hidden curriculum.

In our earlier book, we presented and discussed the negative connotations attached to the 'hidden curriculum' when it was first conceived (e.g. Gair & Mullins, 2001; Jackson, 1968; Martin, 1994). Originally contextualised in the school setting, its primary aim was to identify unintended messages and lessons conveyed through class activities, how learners are responded to, and even the classroom structure where learning took place (Jackson, 1968). Exposing the hidden curriculum then implies identifying and avoiding potential negative impacts of learning. Not discounting that the hidden curriculum could have a negative effect in any context (e.g. school, higher education), our team also argue how any unintended or incidental lessons and pedagogies arising from learning experience may

equally bring about positive impact, and in turn, prove to be beneficial to learners. Consequently, this became the primary focus of our first book on the subject (Elliot et al., 2020). In this book, we continue to draw upon and build on our earlier book's conceptualisation of the hidden curriculum. At the end of what we regarded as a conceptual journey in writing this book, we proposed a more comprehensive definition of the hidden curriculum—a definition that we again employ for this edited collection.

The hidden curriculum in doctoral education comprises all unofficial mechanisms of learning that take place within and outwith academia. Learning via the hidden curriculum is recognised as genuine pedagogical spaces or sites of learning that can extend pedagogical practices by offering support provision for learners' academic, personal, social and psychological needs. Whereas the starting point in the pursuit of the hidden curriculum tends to be driven by doctoral researchers' ownership of this personal process, the entire doctoral ecology recognises that there are key 'hidden curriculum agents' who are able to support, empower and enable doctoral researchers in creating learning pathways that are strategically intended to harness a tailored hidden curriculum based on personal needs and professional aspirations. (Elliot et al., 2020, pp. 130–131)

Our definition stressed the value of the entire doctoral ecology, which takes into account Barnett's (2018) concept of ecological university to explain how 'knowledge creation, learning and higher education curricula and institutions are typically embedded within a wider range of disciplinary, institutional, societal, political and existential contexts' (Elliot et al., 2020, p. 98). Moreover, it extends the notion of 'nested contexts' in doctoral education (McAlpine and Amundsen, 2016; Elliot et al., 2016) in order to highlight how doctoral learning is situated within a range of contexts that are inhabited by doctoral stakeholders or 'hidden curriculum agents'. While we acknowledged in the first book the complementary and supportive roles of these stakeholders, this very idea has inspired the focal point of this edited collection. Linking to the earlier discussion on interdependence, we aim to convey how personal and collective efforts among various communities in the doctoral nested systems can crucially improve the quality of the research culture. Such intention is reflected in the structure of this edited collection—affording various doctoral stakeholders a voice and a perspective on how they initiate, promote and support the development of researcher independence via the hidden curriculum.

Notably, exploring the positive dimensions of the hidden curriculum, particularly the strong pedagogical benefits embedded in it, is particularly apt in the doctoral learning context. While a lack of structure is core to the doctoral genre, it, nevertheless, comes with intellectual, social and psychological demands, as well as a high level of commitment. Therefore, increased understanding of the hidden curriculum is a means of maximising the tools and resources that doctoral scholars can meaningfully tap into. It is worth contending that although hidden curricular learning may come from both the formal and informal curriculum, simply prioritising institutional provision risks limiting doctoral scholars' potential for transformative development, researcher independence and career readiness.

WHY DEVELOP RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE THROUGH THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM?

In planning this new book, our team gravitated towards exploring two vital concepts in doctoral education—the hidden curriculum and researcher independence. For us, exploring them together is promising on two counts. Not only do we intend to bring a deeper understanding of these key concepts, but it is to examine their potential connections and, in turn, enable us to paint a fuller picture potentially to highlight their interwoven importance—both in theory and in practice. Apart from being research-based, and as discussed in the previous section, we want this book to capture various stakeholders' voices, their perspectives and their first-hand experience based on culturally and geographically diverse doctoral settings.

Employing an ecological approach in supporting researcher independence, we contend that it is critical to seek complementary perspectives from doctoral scholars, supervisors and mentors, researcher developers, institutional leaders and others (Barnett, 2018; Bengtsen, 2020; Elliot et al., 2020). Not only could they helpfully elucidate the 'fuzziness' surrounding the term researcher independence, but with authors coming from differing contexts, it has an added advantage of highlighting similarities, overlaps or differences to complement, enrich or challenge conceptual understanding and practices. The combined insights from the 45 book contributors who are equipped with disciplinary expertise and represent various geographical regions—from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, South Africa, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada and United Kingdom—are also intended to offer a

more comprehensive account and stimulate current thinking with a view to presenting examples of unconventional, yet effective doctoral pedagogical practices in support of doctoral scholars en route to becoming independent and competent researchers.

Having taken all these into account, we regard an edited collection to be the best way forward when probing researcher independence using the conceptual lens of the hidden curriculum. Through this edited collection, our shared aim is to elucidate potential theoretical links between these two important concepts while offering practical examples and demonstrating how the hidden curriculum may support the development of doctoral scholars' researcher independence. Each chapter is an attempt to highlight, discuss and exemplify the instrumental and formational roles played by the hidden curriculum in promoting or facilitating researcher independence. Our secondary aim is that in addressing these doctoral concepts, not only will we contribute to the limited scholarly resources on the hidden curriculum, but we can also stimulate conversation and debate concerning its theoretical and pragmatic importance in reinforcing doctoral scholars' transformation into independent researchers. In sum, each chapter is filled with conceptual and practical insights from different perspectives and contexts giving this book a strong applied focus as we (editors and all authors) collectively examine if and how the hidden curriculum may serve as a channel for fostering or strengthening researcher independence.

HOW IS THIS BOOK DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE ITS CORE AIM?

In executing our book's primary aim, serious consideration was given to various factors:

- The book conveys views from doctoral scholars, doctoral supervisors, researcher developers, institutional leaders and other stakeholders outside academia concerning the hidden curriculum in the doctoral context. We capitalise on the research-based perspectives and first-hand examples of these key players in doctoral education to crystallise what developing researcher independence entails.
- Expert contributions from different geographical regions are intended to offer complementary insights and enrich current understanding. Likewise, they are expected to raise contestations and tensions, challenge current understanding or offer an alternative

appreciation (e.g. researcher independence) where differences of perspective are put forward.

- Each chapter typically features a conceptual model, experience-based observations and reflections, and/or complemented by an empirical study to demonstrate how the hidden curriculum may facilitate and sustain the development of researcher independence, including preparation for the post-PhD stage.
- With the book's pragmatic focus, we ensure that a range of voices from differing doctoral groups are included, e.g. domestic, international, part-time or working PhD scholars as well as of early career scholars.
- We strategically curated each chapter of this book, initially from many authors who responded to a request for a 1000-word blog post. Doing so has established a firm basis for capturing the authentic voices of the international research community.
- Finally, each chapter intends to clarify the academic, institutional and pedagogical 'fuzziness' surrounding conceptualisation and development of researcher independence using hidden curricular pedagogies. It attempts to offer examples of what 'striking a balance' may mean in terms of what might be the required level of autonomy and academic support, accountability and boundaries when supporting doctoral scholars' personal and professional development (and/or their supporters, e.g. supervisors, researcher developers) (Benmore, 2016; Overall et al., 2011; Wisker et al., 2003).

THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK

This book is strategically divided into five parts to represent the wealth of perspectives from key stakeholders in doctoral education. Twenty-two chapters have been grouped according to five doctoral stakeholder categories in order to:

- (a) contribute to the meagre scholarly resources on the hidden curriculum within the context of doctoral education with its strong emphasis on hidden curriculum's pedagogical benefits;
- (b) elucidate the interconnection between hidden curriculum and researcher independence to achieve a better appreciation and a more holistic view of the doctoral process; and

- (c) offer hidden curriculum-focused theoretical, conceptual and practical contributions containing further reflection and scrutiny of existing literature, in-context observations, first-hand experiences or empirical studies from a number of book chapter contributors across the globe.

The Conclusion chapter will draw upon all the chapters in order to synthesise the multiplicity of ideas and messages highlighted throughout the book—from ‘food for thought’ through to alternative approaches or consideration of other doctoral pedagogical practices. Primarily, it is to support our contention that the hidden curriculum plays a central role in developing doctoral scholars’ researcher independence. Finally, we will discuss and elaborate on what the implications are for all doctoral stakeholders—doctoral scholars themselves, supervisors, researcher developers and institutional leaders.

Each part of the book is briefly presented below.

Part I: Insights from Doctoral Scholars

These five chapters comprise a combination of ethnographic accounts from doctoral scholars as they reflect on: (a) identifying retrospectively ‘hidden curriculum agents’ and their long-term influence on scholarly independence; (b) mapping out the learning opportunities offered by the hidden curriculum specifically in an international doctoral setting; (c) appraising the developmental value of peer mentoring; (d) critically examining hidden curricular lessons when returning from overseas PhD study; and (e) exercising interdependence and developing researcher competence via participation in a Journal Club.

Part II: Insights from Doctoral Supervisors

In the next four chapters, discussion will revolve around how doctoral supervisors may strategically embed and harness the hidden curriculum for doctoral scholars’ benefit via: (a) capitalising on ‘Fridaying’ and other supervisor and doctoral interactions as ‘forms of dynamic developmental dialogues’ to demystify doctoral processes leading to successful researcher independence; (b) unlocking and stimulating doctoral scholars’ independence, interdependence and creativity by differentiating ‘creative supervising’ and ‘supervising for creativity’ as pedagogical strategies; (c) examining

the potential role of metacognition not only in navigating the doctoral experience but in strengthening a sense of researcher independence; and (d) entering into the #thesisthinkers project—a negotiated partnership with doctoral scholars involving ‘co-creation’ of their own curriculum.

Part III: Insights from Researcher Developers

The five chapters that follow investigate further contributory concepts, practices and pedagogies in relation to fostering researcher independence. These chapters exemplify how researcher independence can be pinned down, and, in turn, applied via a deeper appreciation of the formal and the hidden curricula as well as the interaction between them. These chapters specifically consider: (a) development and evaluation of pedagogical practices designed to support scholars at all stages of the doctoral journey by tapping into both formal and informal ways of learning and multiple ways of doing; (b) creative use of humour in conveying the desirability of understanding PhD norms and expectations, connecting doctoral standards and values through supervisory practices and negotiating boundaries—all with a view to building doctoral scholars’ sense of independence; (c) instilling confidence in writing and enhancing well-being via participation in doctoral writing groups, in which doctoral scholars serve as a valuable resource to foster each other’s success in the research environment; (d) conceptualising doctoral intelligence framed with the four domains to guide dynamic doctoral researcher development, i.e. ‘knowing’, ‘doing’, ‘thinking’ and ‘willing’ mindsets; and (e) developing effective or multiple support villages for part-time doctoral scholars who typically have limited interactions.

Part IV: Insights from Institutional Leaders

Drawing upon the perspectives of those whose remit involves Doctoral and Research Leadership, four chapters are designated to raising both crucial and timely concepts and issues for consideration by institutional leaders, given today’s doctoral education challenges informing overall practice. This section covers: (a) the value of skilled coaching, mentoring, good quality peer and supervisor conversations at the centre of managing doctoral learning experience; (b) recognising doctoral education both as a key site for knowledge production and as an avenue to reclaim, revive and extend indigenous and transcultural knowledge to harness ‘hidden

reservoirs of knowledge and agency’; (c) the juxtaposition (and intriguing thought) behind the ideas of leadership for doctoral education, hidden curriculum and researcher independence; and (d) enactment of practices within institutional leadership in doctoral education based upon the interplay between opportunity structures in the institution.

Part V: Insights on Doctoral Education Beyond Academia

The last four chapters illuminate the value of researcher independence following doctoral completion and more broadly, i.e. beyond academia. In these chapters, the authors clarify and discuss more deeply: (a) the ‘extra’ in extracurricular argued to be integral in enriching the doctoral experience—with featured examples of such learning; (b) the misaligned, hidden or ambiguous ‘meanings’ of researcher independence and their implications for doctoral recruitment, development, provision, supervisory practice and assessment; (c) the transition from doctoral study to post-PhD work, particularly to careers outside academia, where a mismatch between prior experience and organisational culture and practices require negotiation and adjustment; and (d) an analysis of employment data to inform and empower doctoral scholars’ career planning endeavours, to value doctoral skills beyond academia and to strengthen their sense of agency to increase their readiness for the next phase after their PhD.

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