

TIME TO TAME THE TOME: MOTIVATING THE THESIS BY PUBLICATION AS A MODE OF STUDY FOR A PhD IN THE HUMANITIES

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ABSTRACT

Globally the PhD is recognized as the apex of all academic qualifications. For a large part of the qualification's history, the only way to obtain it was by taking on the arduous journey of completing a dissertation. However, some changes in postgraduate education and the job market have led to a greater emphasis on published outputs and skills that can serve a lifetime of article writing. The PhD deserves all the prestige and rigour with which it is regarded, but these changes have left some asking whether the dissertation is the best way to drive the discipline and raise up researchers.

Obtaining a PhD via the Thesis by Publication (TBP) mode is a well-established practice in the STEM fields and Medicine. In these fields, research progresses fast and needs to be disseminated speedily. Therefore, it makes sense to write articles to disseminate research and then put them together to form a thesis.

With the above-mentioned changes in postgraduate education and the job market, the TBP is gaining ground in the humanities as well. What we propose in this article does not threaten the standards of the PhD. It might even better aid students in meeting them. If the desired outcomes are published outputs and research skills, then following a format that produces these outcomes during, rather than after, the completion of the PhD is advisable. In what follows we suggest that perhaps the time to tame the tome has now come.

The article starts with a brief survey of the history of doctoral education and a look at the current status of the TBP. After that, approaching the issue from various angles, we discuss why the TBP is a good idea. Lastly, we also warn that the TBP should be approached with caution.

Keywords: postgraduate education, doctoral education, dissertation, PhD, thesis by publication, article-based thesis, thesis by papers, humanities

INTRODUCTION

Globally the PhD is recognized as the apex of all academic qualifications (CHE 2018, 8; Ramrall, Singaram, and Sommerville 2020, 130). For it to be awarded, a student must meet or exceed certain attributes of knowledge and skill that make up the purpose of a PhD (CHE 2018, 13, 14). Traditionally this qualification has been joined at the hip, in an almost sacred manner (Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 3), with the girthy tome that is the dissertation.¹ This stems from the days when the PhD was a game of the elites, constituted a life's work (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2), and was almost an end in itself. However, there have been some changes in postgraduate education and the job market that caused the focus to shift to published outputs and skills that can serve a lifetime of article writing. In light of this, some are asking, however much splendour he might have, whether the emperor has clothes on (e.g., Duke and Beck 1999).

Since the PhD is the apex, the highest degree that can be attained, nothing that can do damage to its prestige and rigour should ever be contemplated. However, in this article, we subversively suggest the tome does not deserve the prestige it has been accorded. We believe the time to tame the tome has now come. We suggest taming the tome, because it is not irrevocably connected to the PhD qualification, which is worthy of every bit of prestige, rigour, robustness, and ardour ascribed to it. What we propose in this article in no way threatens the standards of the PhD. On the contrary, it might better aid the student in meeting them.

This article progresses in the following format. In the first main section, we ask, "How did we get here?" The history of doctoral education is briefly surveyed, and we look at the current status of the Thesis² by Publication (TBP), and we briefly describe how a TBP works. The next major section asks "Why TBP?" Here we look at the freedom the Council of Higher Education (CHE) provides, we ask "why not the dissertation?" We also ask why the TBP is a good idea, we show that it is advantageous for Africa, and we explore the narrative, a vital part of the TBP.

The third major section warns that a TBP should be approached with caution, and there we lay out potential challenges, pertinent issues to be considered, and briefly look at students and projects that might not fit well with a TBP.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

A short, recent history of doctoral education

The doctorate used to be a teaching certificate and was not centred on research (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2). It used to be awarded for attaining some significant achievement in a field of study, and only in the nineteenth century did research training become the centre, and

then the dissertation was introduced (Davies and Rolfe 2009, 591). The Doctor of Philosophy degree, along with the dissertation, had its origin in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century (Spriestersbach and Henry 1978, 52). It aimed to train students in scientific methodology.

It is commonly thought that the TBP had its origin at Cambridge University, UK, in 1966 (Peacock 2017, 125; Jackson 2013, 358; Davies and Rolfe 2009, 592). However, the first PhD by TBP was conferred on the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1929³ for his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which he had written seven years prior. The mathematician F. N. David also received the award via TBP in 1935 (Davies and Rolfe 2009, 592). Since then, the TBP has become an established mode of producing knowledge at the doctoral level (Frick 2017, 299).

Current status of the TBP

According to Kubota et al. (2021, 1), the countries that have led the move to TBP are Australia, South Africa, and some countries in Europe, though it is uncommon in the USA and Canada. Currently, there is a global shift away from the traditional monograph in favour of the TBP (Frick 2019, 50).

The TBP is well-established in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), as well as in Medicine (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 1). It is also common in the performance and design disciplines (Durling 2013, 3; Niven and Grant 2012, 106) as well as in Economics, (Stock and Siegfried 2013, 648). In the humanities, however, TBP is still relatively new (Niven and Grant 2012, 105).

What is a TBP?

A TBP is a thesis that is made up of several stand-alone but related articles (Dowling et al. 2012, 295) that are accompanied by a “narrative”. The narrative shows how these articles come together as a larger project with a coherent argument (Nygaard and Solly 2021, chapter 1). A TBP generally consists of three to five articles (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 6).

Peer-reviewed journal articles are the gold standard, though conference proceedings and conference papers have also been included. When it comes to combining the narrative with the articles as a thesis, there are two main types. There are several “Sandwich Models”, in which the articles are bookended by the introduction and conclusion. There might also be some transitional material between the articles. The other major narrative type is the 2-part model. Such a narrative has the introductory material and the conclusion set up as a contained unit. This is followed by the articles on their own (Mason and Merga 2018a).

A TBP can be done prospectively (planning and then executing a thesis) as well as

retrospectively (bringing a few already-written articles together to form a single thesis) (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 1). It was set up to allow practitioners who have already published and continue to publish to gain recognition for their work so that they can supervise research students. Similarly, it has also served those who have already produced research but have only entered academia mid-career (Peacock 2017, 125).

WHY TBP?

Requirements of the Council of Higher Education (CHE)

The CHE (2013, 40) gives little detail on the requirements for a PhD. Some of the relevant requirements are 1) the production of research at the highest level that leads to the submission, assessment, and acceptance of a thesis, 2) research that demonstrates a high level of research capability that makes a significant and original contribution, 3) research that satisfies peer-review and merits publication, and 4) that the graduate must be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others.

The CHE (2018, 4) recognizes how fundamental it is for higher education institutions to promote their own quality assurance, therefore they allow them so much freedom. The CHE also explicitly allows for a student to present peer-reviewed academic articles in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD (2013, 40).

According to the CHE (2018, 9), two ways in which to judge the quality of a PhD program are 1) the quality of the graduate when they exit the program (including, though not limited to, employability) and 2) the quality of research outputs emanating from the PhD work (CHE 2018, 10). They furthermore state that a PhD should be beneficial to all relevant parties, including the awarding institution, the CHE, the students and graduates, and prospective employers (CHE 2018, 4). Since it is the *status quo*, one might assume that the dissertation delivers quality graduates and research outputs and that it also benefits the relevant parties. However, in what follows, we show that this is not necessarily the case.

Why not the dissertation?

There is a growing concern about the relevance of the PhD and its contribution to graduate employability (Jackson 2013, 357). In line with this concern, tertiary education is undergoing a change with the tightening job market (O’Keeffe 2020, 289), and internationally there is a call for greater accountability and quality assurance (Frick 2017, 299). There is also a desire to see the rapid and public dissemination of research and the deliverance of employment-ready graduates (Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 1). The marketplace today has a “voracious

appetite” for new knowledge and graduates, and it is averse to long timeframes and the inaccessible edifice that is the dissertation (Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 3).

In international policy, the focus has also shifted beyond the traditional focus on the textual product of the dissertation and now also emphasizes doctoral capabilities – the production of the researcher (Lee 2010, 15). The perception of the PhD is shifting to being seen as a journeyman’s certificate, offering proof of research capability (Lee 2010, 16).

The high attrition rates and low competence levels of PhD graduates (Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 1, 3) have led to “the traditional, almost sacred, status” of the dissertation being challenged. Several other options are now coming to the fore (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 2).

The traditional mode of supervision is quite a private relationship that centres on the student and supervisor (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2). However, some (e.g., Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2; Mason and Merga 2018b, 140; Jackson 2013, 357; Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 2; Davies and Rolfe 2009, 591) have found that this mode of training does not adequately prepare students for what is required for a life of publishing. More desirable than the amassing of knowledge (Jackson 2013, 357) are skills that are transferrable into the industry (Aitchison, Kamler, and Lee 2010b, 2), that enable the student to address diverse audiences (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2) and engage in multidisciplinary research (Davies and Rolfe 2009, 591).

Traditionally the PhD was seen as a culmination of a life’s work, but now it serves as the entry point for various careers. Indeed, a dissertation may be well-written and well-ordered, but it gets written to be examined, rather than to be read by the scholarly community. Even if it is turned into a monograph for publication, that process requires much time and effort (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2) and, as Mbiti (CMS 2015, 0:28) reminds us, often involves costs that are prohibitive for scholars working in Africa. With a dissertation, new knowledge is also slowly disseminated, so it runs the risk of dating and devaluing (Jackson 2013, 364). A dissertation could require spending a long time reviewing literature that will be out of date by the time one reaches one’s conclusion (David Woods, pers. comm., March 15, 2022), even further dated by the time of publication.

A stark example of this is one monograph⁴ produced from a dissertation completed under the preeminent biblical scholar Gordon Wenham in 2012. The monograph only made it to publication in 2019, and the author’s bibliography has less than 10 sources from the intervening years. This is understandable since life in the academy is quite demanding. Another negative drawback of such a lengthy process is that inadequately disseminated research will not impact current thinking, and this might lead to a doubling of efforts in that more than one researcher will research the same question (Jackson 2013, 364).

Beyond that is the problem that many students fail to publish their dissertations as monographs or articles after finishing (Odendaal and Frick 2017, 1). They might not be interested to publish, or they may not have the opportunity since employment may have sent their research in another direction (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 9). It might also be due to saturation, a lack of confidence or skills (Jackson 2013, 364), or a lack of supervisor support after they finish their PhD (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 9). As a journal editor, Paré (2010, 30) says postgraduate students' articles often do not get published because they do not know how to write articles. They write to display knowledge, but they fail to engage with the dialogue among scholars working in the field.

The phrase “publish or perish” originated in 1942 (Mason and Merga 2018b, 140) and has since become a mantra in academia. The number of peer-reviewed research outputs now acts as a measure of personal success as well as an indicator of the research excellence of an institution (Mason and Merga 2018b, 140). If students are taught how to write for publishing it could lead to publishing for them and the institution (David Woods, pers. comm., March 15, 2022). Many people find a problem with the TBP because of co-authorship, fearing that the work done early in the process will be mostly the supervisor's work. However, Paré (2010, 40) aptly notes that “the dissertation is a co-authored text, and the supervisor is usually the invisible second author”. A TBP requires that you explicitly indicate who was responsible for what, which is a level of transparency that the dissertation does not offer (Mason and Merga 2018b, 140).

The need to do a dissertation to acquire a PhD is negatively impacting institutions' most prized resources – their academics. Multiple sources (Håkansson Lindqvist 2018, 1395; Peacock 2017, 130; Jackson 2013, 355; Davies and Rolfe 2009, 590; NWU 2022, 1) allude to those who are already in a full-time academic position, seeking professional advancement, but who find the idea of a dissertation overwhelming (Jackson 2013, 356). This experience is likely shared by South African academics, considering that 60 per cent of our doctoral students study part-time (CHE 2018, 9).

Someone who works full-time as a humanities educator, does a PhD part-time, and has family responsibilities has much to deal with. This means they are unlikely to finish a dissertation in less than five years. After the dissertation, with the little time available for the project, it might be sensible to estimate that it will take them two years to rework their dissertation into a monograph. Although the student might manage to publish a paper or two along the way, this means it will be seven years before they can really *move on* with their career. This process is a bridge too far for many would-be PhD students causing some humanities educators to stop short of the apex.

The institution that employs an academic pursuing a PhD gains from their training, but in the case of a dissertation the institution will get a very low return on investment. According to a calculation⁵ we did, after the seven years of working on the project, as indicated above, they will have cost the company just short of ten times their first monthly salary. Another angle to consider is the cost of time. If the academic works 4 hours a week on the project and the academic year has 50 weeks, then after seven years they will have spent 1400 hours of the company's time on the project. They will have done all this for a single monograph written in the name of the institution.

With the global increase of interest in doctoral education, the idea of “knowledge economy”⁶ came to the fore (CHE 2018, 8). The status of institutions (as well as countries) is aligned with their “knowledge economy”. One might naïvely assume that completed dissertations equal “knowledge economy”, but this is not true. The currency of academia is peer-reviewed academic outputs. Therefore, a pedagogy that centres on publication will benefit the institution, the student, and even their future employers.

Discussing the drawbacks of the dissertation has already identified some benefits of the TBP. More advantages are discussed below.

What is so good about a TBP?

The expected benefits of early career publications are far-reaching (Horta and Santos 2016, 29). A study done among the eight public universities of New Zealand found that publishing during your doctoral studies sets you up for success in all scholarly facets (Frick 2019, 52). The problem is that without proper institutional support, students might avoid publishing during their studies (Kamler 2008, 288).

If, however, publishing is part of the thesis, the student can join the professional community from the start and build their knowledge base (Casanave 2010, 54). The articles that are published can also act as resources that contribute to the field, generate interest, and stir debate (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 10). In this way, students can navigate the “publish or perish” world of academia while completing their PhD (Jackson 2013, 355). With a TBP there is no need to convert a dissertation into a monograph, so the student can launch their career immediately (Stock and Siegfried 2013, 649). They will even have a body of published work on which to build their future research (Frick 2019, 55).

Publishing during the PhD also boosts the student's visibility (Kubota et al. 2021, 4). During a longitudinal study of career scientists, Horta and Santos (2016, 40–43) found that it could lead to more publications, more citations, more single-author publications,⁷ and more collaboration with international colleagues.

A TBP lets students do what they will be doing after their PhD, namely writing articles (Stock and Siegfried 2013, 649). As such, the TBP is quite a fit for those aiming for an academic career (Nygaard and Solli 2021, Chapter 1). These early publications could be a catalyst for developing academic skills that can be used for producing solid research in the future (Horta and Santos 2016, 29). While the need to juggle multiple projects at the same time, which the TBP requires, might be tricky for some, it is also a good practice since it is most often the norm for researchers (Nygaard and Solli 2021, Chapter 3).

A TBP facilitates the student learning from the supervisor how to process, interpret, and respond to reviewers' comments, which requires a special kind of literacy (Lee 2010, 24). When faced with negative comments from reviewers, many early career researchers take the comments personally, are paralyzed, and never resubmit. Others might not really understand what the reviewers are requiring of them. This should not be undertaken without a literacy broker (Kamler 2010, 65). But if a student can be taught how to ingest reviewers' comments, it could transform them for the better (Håkansson Lindqvist 2018, 1404). There also comes a point at which the supervisor might be helped by insights provided by an extra pair of eyes (Frick 2017, 301). Likewise, students might also have unrealistic ideals and will need the supervisor to teach them about compromise and at what point to give in to the editor's requests, and how that does not constitute selling out (Kamler 2010, 80).

In research, text work and identity work are enmeshed (Kamler 2010, 65), which is why doctoral writing is so difficult (Kamler 2008, 286). The formation of a scholar's identity is an ongoing process (Dowling et al. 2012, 302); and while it will not be finished by the end of a TBP, it will only start when writing for an authentic rhetorical context starts (Murray 2010, 101). A TBP kicks off the process (Dowling et al. 2012, 303). Writers learn how to effectively write when they write like an authority (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 3), assuming they can create knowledge, instead of just being passive recipients (Kamler 2010, 68).

Academic writers grow their capabilities by gradually being enculturated into the discipline (Paré 2010, 37). However, through an apprenticeship with a supervisor, during their TBP, a student can be socialized into the discipline (Casanave 2010, 54). By joining the conversation, the student learns to manage anxieties about where they fit in (Dowling et al. 2012, 302). In this way, they are better equipped, and the discipline ultimately benefits from it as well (Peacock 2017, 130).

A TBP also holds some advantages when it comes to examination. Because of peer review, by the time of examination the student has received feedback from dozens of scholars (Dowling et al. 2012, 300) that might even have an international reach (Lee 2010, 23), and great improvements will have been made (Frick 2019, 55). Since the work has been published,

examiners might already be familiar with the student's work. Some examiners have indicated that an awareness that the work has been published made them favourably disposed toward the student (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 13). Hennie Goede (pers. comm., March 11, 2022) also says that in his experience, though the examiners did not always know what to expect, their responses have generally been positive. Bill Domeris (pers. comm., March 17, 2022) suggests that this uncertainty can be mitigated by sending examiners some guidelines on how to assess a TBP. An example of this is the article by Sharmini et al. (2015), which they prepared because they realised the TBP is not the same as a dissertation and should be assessed with different criteria (2015, 90).

The bite-sized nature of the TBP also helps with the student's writing. Students could develop productive writing habits that will help them to keep the flow of writing steady (Dowling et al. 2012, 298). This could reduce attrition rates (Jackson 2013, 363), battle low and slow throughput rates, and boost student outputs (Frick 2019, 50).

TBP also simplifies literature reviews, since the student does not have to cover such a large body of literature in one swoop, but can break it up into smaller, manageable groupings (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 11).

Frick (2019, 49) argues that disseminating PhD research is not only important for building the researcher's career but is also an ethical imperative since the research is done with public funds.

Advantageous for Africa

The TBP could also serve the training of humanities students in Africa quite well. Distance education used to be difficult and impersonal (Smith 2014, 38), but recent developments (e.g., technology, globalization, and the pandemic) have greatly improved it.

Western education is often not focused on the African context and does not address its questions (SATS 2022, 2:40). Western-trained graduates might also feel out of place when they return to Africa (Mbiti 2013, xv). Few students who leave their local institutions for further training in western institutions return there (Smith 2014, 42). One example is Gerald Okoro⁸ (2022), who left a nine-year teaching position in West Africa for training elsewhere and decided not to return afterwards. Such educational migration causes a loss in the intellectual capital of Africa.

Gerald Okoro (2022) also testifies of the cost to his young wife and small children he had to leave behind for five years of training. If he is fortunate, he only sees them twice a year. He still has to offer financial support and direction to his household and extended family, a task which, unlike postgraduate education, is difficult to do remotely.

The local context is important in higher education generally (Smith 2014, 39) and especially in Africa, where high value is placed on community. Much can be gained from keeping the student in their primary sphere of influence while they teach at local institutions.

While doing a TBP, a student can be present for their family, play a part in their local communities, and teach at their local institution. They can do this while studying via distance education at a TBP-offering institute of their choice. They can also organize short intensive research and teaching trips to institutions elsewhere on the continent, fostering reciprocity as contextually relevant resources and research are shared.

A TBP might seem cost prohibitive for students in Africa due to page fees, but it does not have to be. Considering that the supervisor is a co-author, and their department gets a publication on the record, they might consider using subsidy money to pay for the page fees. Another avenue to explore is to search for high-quality open access publishers (e.g., AOSIS) that welcome applications for a partial or complete page fee waiver to scholars from the Majority World.

The Narrative

A great feature of the TBP, which could make it even more tricky than a dissertation, is the narrative. The narrative is at the heart of a TBP and is used to show the coherence and originality of the thesis (Niven and Grant 2012, 108). It essentially *is* the thesis, which is why Niven and Grant (2012, 107) argue that calling this mode of study a thesis *with* publication is more appropriate. There was nothing in their experience of doing TBPs that convinced them that the TBP is an easy way out, or even easier than a dissertation (2012, 110).

The narrative ought to be written as a solo project since in it the student is meant to demonstrate their “doctorateness” (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 1). By bringing the articles together the student can draw new findings that come to the fore when the articles are considered together, but none of them shows on their own (O’Keeffe 2020, 295). In the narrative, the student can report on any setbacks that the research incurred and how it was dealt with (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 4), as well as discuss the limitations and implications of each article (chapter 6).

The narrative must demonstrate that: 1) the student is capable of producing publishable material, 2) their body of research is cohesive, 3) they have disciplinary belonging, 4) their work is original, and 5) they can do independent research (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 4).

TBP: APPROACH WITH CAUTION

Because it is quite different from the dissertation and has unique challenges, the TBP should be

approached with caution. In this section, we present some challenges to be aware of, pertinent issues to keep in mind, and some notes on students and projects that might not fit well with a TBP.

Challenges to be aware of

The TBP is an “emerging genre”, so it has not yet quite found its form (Nygaard and Sollie 2021, chapter 1). It presents a supervisor with a set of challenges that differs from that of the dissertation (Frick 2019, 50). The TBP should not be attempted in “an unskilled, *ad hoc*, unplanned and information-poor environment” without “the necessary pedagogical and environmental infrastructure” (Lee 2010, 27). Since a TBP requires an apprenticeship approach to supervision, it might be beneficial for supervisors to use the growing body of literature⁹ to educate themselves on what it means to supervise a TBP.

Many supervisors also might not be equipped to guide students through the often-tough journey of publication (Frick 2019, 51). Frick (2017, 301) references a study done on publication trends in South Africa and finds that few supervisors in the country have enough publishing experience to guide such a study. One also cannot assume that since someone knows how to publish, they can utilize a co-authorship pedagogy (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2).

Students might be challenged by the compounding effect of going public and “impostor syndrome”,¹⁰ which is prevalent among graduate students (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 3). Students will also have to face colleagues that are sceptical about a TBP (Niven and Grant 2012, 106). Because a TBP is focused on a series of smaller literature reviews rather than one large one, there is the risk that the student’s literature study might appear shallow (David Woods, pers. comm., March 15, 2022). The study might also be perceived as lacking in depth (Lee 2010, 26) and having reduced rigour (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2). The lack of guidelines also leaves the student vulnerable, since there might be divergent interpretations of the mode of study between the examiner and supervisor (Jackson 2013, 365).

One challenge a TBP student might face is that they might not be prepared to supervise a dissertation (Peacock 2017, 130). However, whether the student did a dissertation or not, the responsible institution will require that a new supervisor starts as a co-supervisor, as it is required by the CHE (2018, 16). Another challenge to overcome is that they will not have been trained for conducting a major research project (Stock and Siegfried 2013, 649). While this is regrettable, we argue that early career researchers are more in need of article writing and publication skills.

The administration might also face some challenges with a TBP. While some believe a TBP might help students progress faster, journal turnaround times, peer review, feedback,

revision, and acceptance could take quite a long time (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 2). The TBP process is also not always a linear process, with multiple projects running at the same time (chapter 3). It could be long before the first article appears and another long period might lapse before the second one is out (Bill Domeris, pers. comm., March 17, 2022). Therefore, knowing how to charge fees and how long to allow for the qualification might be challenging (Peacock 2017, 130).

A challenge for a TBP in the humanities, which stems from its variance from the natural sciences, is that humanities research is often quite broad and therefore difficult to compartmentalize into smaller pieces (Mason and Merga 2018b). Joint authorship also does not come so easily, since the humanities seldom have such close-knit research communities as one finds in laboratories (Frick 2017, 308).

Another challenge is that the TBP could play into the commodification of research. The shift to neoliberalism in higher education led to students being seen as human capital and research went from promoting the public good to being a business (O’Keeffe 2020, 291). This means the TBP could lead to the operationalization of the PhD student, utilizing their desperation for the good of the company (2020, 289). With such a great focus on publication, a TBP does create the possibility for the student to be abused. If a TBP is to be conducted ethically, the good of the student, rather than the institution and the supervisor, must hold centre stage (Frick 2019, 47; Frick 2017, 310).

While the TBP has the potential to effectively battle isolation, it could also promote it. With the drive to publishing, there could be a drive to individuality and isolation (O’Keeffe 2020, 295) as the aim of publishing in high-impact journals consumes students (Jackson 2013, 365). This could limit their chances of engaging in other, more social, academic activities (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 15).

Pertinent issues to consider

One of the most discussed matters when it comes to the TBP is copyright issues (Hennie Goede, pers. comm. March 29, 2022; Kubota et al. 2021, 1; Hennie Goede, pers. comm. February 25, 2021; SUFASS 2019, 13; Mason and Merga 2018b; Peacock 2017, 130; Odendaal and Frick 2017, 7; UCT 2016, 2; Robins and Kanowski 2008, 7). Universities generally leave it up to the student to handle copyright issues (Kubota et al. 2021, 8), but students ought to be made aware of how pertinent copyright issues are. They should be informed that they ought to ask permission from the publisher, even if it does not seem necessary (Hennie Goede, pers. Comm. March 29, 2022).

Before submitting to a journal, a student should read the journal’s copyright policy to see

if sharing it on the institutional repository is allowed (Kubota et al. 2021, 8), as the university might demand a license from them to do this (UCT 2016, 2). Since some publishers might not be willing for their articles to be included in a TBP that is placed on an open repository (Peacock 2017, 130), some of the material might have to be placed under extended or permanent embargoes (Mason and Merga 2018b).

However, Hennie Goede (pers. comm. March 29, 2022) says they have not had any trouble from publishers, and our reading also indicates that publishers are accommodating. Some publishers (e.g., Brill, Elsevier, Sage Publishing) allow the article to be part of the thesis if there is no commercial gain (Peeters 2022; Brill 2022; Lena-Sophia Tiemeyer, pers. comm., March 25, 2022; Kubota et al. 2021, 8;). Others (e.g., Peeters, Emerald, Taylor, and Francis) allow the accepted version to be shared on the institutional repository (Peeters Publishers Order Department, pers. Comm., March 25, 2022; Sage Publishing 2022; Kubota et al. 2021, 8), though not the Version of Release.

There is also the open access route. Open access journal publishers (e.g., AOSIS, SciELO SA) naturally have no problem with research being passed on, though it would be wise to still ask permission. However, many pay-wall journal publishers (e.g., Sage Publishing, Peeters, Brill) now also offer an open access option (often called Gold Open Access), so that one can share the article as if it was published in an open access journal, although an Article Processing Charge applies (Sage Publishing 2022; Peeters 2022; Brill 2022). If the circumstances are right (genuinely lacking funding, being from the Majority World), some publishers (e.g., AOSIS) also provide a partial or full waiver of the Article Processing Charges.

Another pertinent issue is co-authorship (Kubota et al. 2021, 6). The student must be the primary author and be credited as such, but with a TBP there is room for abuse of both the student and supervisor. The student, having little power to negotiate, might be forced to take the position of the second author on their articles. At the same time, there also exists a danger of the supervisor not receiving due credit for their contribution (Mason and Merga 2018b).

Some fear that with a TBP the early work may mostly be the supervisor's work, with the student taking the credit (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 8). But with a TBP it should be a requirement that an appendix is supplied, indicating what each contributor did and what percentage of the work it constitutes. This should also be signed by all contributors (Kubota et al. 2021, 7). In light of the TBP having an intense co-authorship pedagogy, the policy on what constitutes co-authorship needs to be decided ahead of time.¹¹

The TBP should not be facilitated like a dissertation, since they are epistemologically and ontologically different (Niven and Grant 2012, 109). The required infrastructure should be supplied. A scaffold should be built for students to learn the needed theoretical knowledge and

methodological skills. They should also be made familiar with the operation of journals in their field (Frick 2019, 52).

The PhD is always a liminal space, through which the student passes on their way to being a scholar. However, with a TBP, and the repeated cycle of article writing, there are multiple liminal spaces through which the student must be guided (Håkansson Lindqvist 2018, 1403).

Doctoral students often struggle to identify the thesis of their study, and with a TBP it could be even more tricky (Dowling et al. 2012, 297), especially since the different articles might be written with different voices (Mason and Merga 2018a). Articles published later in the study might also not agree with earlier ones, but such difficulties are often inevitable, and they can be addressed in the narrative (Mason and Merga 2018b).

Who not?

Since doctoral programs differ and students are not all the same, the TBP should not be universally applied (Nygaard and Solli 2021, chapter 1). It could easily be an uncomfortable epistemological fit for many projects in the humanities (Niven and Grant 2012, 110). Since not all students are suited to publish during their PhD journey (Frick 2019, 51), the TBP should be reserved for advanced students (Hennie Goede, pers. comm., February 25, 2021) since it is not for the faint of heart (Davies and Rolfe 2009, 593).

The student should count the cost of the stress involved in this pathway, especially the pressure of publication, which could be aggravated by the need to adhere to a timeline (Jackson 2013, 366). The student will need to have excellent time management skills, be a capable writer, be willing to be schooled in the literature of the discipline, and have perseverance (Jackson 2013, 365). For some students, this might require that they operate in a mode that is foreign to their personality. They may have to acquire skills they do not naturally have (Robins and Kanowski 2008, 7). According to Frick (2019, 55), for a student to be a good fit for a TBP, they need to be hungry for the experience and have a desire for a career in academia. However, since doctoral training by definition “provides training for an academic career” (CHE 2018, 6), it might be beneficial for all and therefore well worth considering for students and administration alike.

CONCLUSION

As the apex of all academic qualifications, the PhD is a rigorous journey whichever way one does it. However, we have endeavoured to show the dissertation is not the best way. Higher education and the job market now require quantifiable outputs in the form of peer-reviewed publications.

The set of skills required to put out research articles is what a career researcher needs most, but the dissertation provides very little preparation for this. A dissertation is an impressive collection of information. However, it is so dense that it takes hundreds of hours to transform it into a readable monograph with potentially dated information that will not be disseminated very far if the monograph gets produced at all. This is very little reward for the academics, their discipline, and their employer.

The TBP, and its accompanying outputs, on the other hand, could greatly advantage the student, their discipline, and their employer. The student joins the professional community early on, contributes to the conversation, and gets enculturated into the discipline. They spend their PhD years publishing, just like they will be doing afterwards, except they finish with a body of work on which to build future research.

The discipline is advantaged in that new knowledge is disseminated sooner and more widely. New graduates are also not held back by the production of a monograph and do not have to spend a few years finding their voice and learning how to write for publication.

The employer of a graduate student also sees a quicker return on investment. The time and money they invest in their employee produce countable research outputs that add to their esteem. However, a TBP needs to be approached with caution, and we have tried to indicate some matters that need to be kept in mind when considering a TBP.

NOTES

1. The term *dissertation* is used to designate the product of the traditional doctorate.
2. The term *thesis* is used for the final product submitted for examination, regardless of the mode of study.
3. With regards to the supposed antiquity of the dissertation, this shows that it only antedates the TBP by *circa* 80 years.
4. Culp, A. J. 2019. *Memoir of Moses: The Literary Creation of Covenant Memory in Deuteronomy*. London: Lexington Books.
5. We did the calculation based on the academic getting a market-related salary, using 10 per cent of their work week (4 hours) for the project and getting a 5 per cent annual increase. The calculation assumes it would take seven years to complete the dissertation and convert it into a monograph. We conder this projection realistic, sober, and even minimalistic.
6. This refers to one's share in the production of new knowledge to drive innovation.
7. Single author articles are rare for scientists.
8. This is a pseudonym.
9. Two noteworthy manuals are those by Nygaard and Solli (2021) and Aitchison, Kamler and Lee (2010a).
10. "Impostor syndrome" is the name given to the feeling of inadequacy that many postgraduate students and early career researchers have.
11. General agreement (Kubota et al. 2021, 7; SUFASS 2019, § Basic Principles; Mason and Merga 2018b, 150) seems to be that co-authorship includes all the following points: 1) Substantial

contribution to the conception and design of the project. 2) Analysis and interpretation of data. 3) Drafting significant parts of the article or critically revising, which could count as an intellectual contribution. 4) Final approval of the article. 5) Agreement to be held accountable for all aspects of the article.

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