Impacts of doctoral education: recognising the value of different types of learning

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In Australia doctoral education has been criticized as “too narrow, too specialized and too theoretical, leading to graduates whose communication, interpersonal and communication skills require further development” (Kemp, 1999, p.17). Such criticisms have increased pressure on doctoral education to demonstrate its relevance and value to the knowledge society. This has led to a valuing of the outcomes after the doctorate is completed, which is often understood as marketable knowledge, rather than the outcomes of the learning acquired during the doctorate. This paper seeks to re-adjust the focus. We discuss the different forms of learning that a group of full-time PhD candidates consistently identified as positive impacts of their doctoral education. These types of learning are described as self learning, social learning and cultural learning. Links are made between the impacts of the types of learning and contemporary issues and debates in doctoral education in the current knowledge society. These links illuminate the synergistic relationship between learning processes and outcomes of doctoral education. They prompt broader understandings of the impacts of doctoral education that ameliorate, it is argued, the raft of impacts doctoral education facilitates and contributes to a knowledge society.

Key words: doctoral education, impacts, learning, knowledge society