

Using Bourdieu to understand the value of postgraduate online masters degrees

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For Bourdieu a key concern was the nature of the habitus of 'agents' in relation to their area of practice; the ways in which habitus both shapes and is shaped by practice.

'Field' is a term used to describe an area of practice (such as a medical school or clinical department) characterised by an internal struggle for power or resources.

Capital is an acquired form of power or influence taking many forms (financial, social, cultural, and symbolic), all of which are ultimately resources that can be exploited by agents

An individual's unique characteristics: their tastes, perceptions, or ways of responding and thinking.

Shapes and is shaped by practice.

Application of this framework can help educators and students to better understand the utility of a postgraduate degree to the clinician and how academic study can influence what goes on in the clinical setting.

25 recent graduates from two programmes (MSc Clinical Education & MSc Clinical Management of Pain) were initially contacted by email and asked to participate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using online conferencing software.

Methods & Participants

	Clinical Education	Management of Pain
Participants	13	4
Country	UK, Canada, New Zealand, Caribbean, Pakistan Singapore, USA, Egypt, Hong Kong, Ireland	UK, Australia, USA,
Discipline	Emergency Medicine, GP, Nursing, Lecturer, Lab Tech, Neurology, Obs and Gyn,	Physiotherapy, Dentistry, Medicine

The interview schedule centred on two core questions relating to the experience of the PGT programme: what was learned, and its value in a clinical and career context. Data were thematically analysed using the process described by Braun and Clarke (2008).

Themes	Bourdiesian concept	Categories	Indicative quote
Academic voice	Altered habitus Enhanced cultural capital	Constructing arguments	<i>I think that comes from actually reviewing material, integrating it, understanding it, challenging it, ... [And] putting it [in] to something and asking it to be scrutinised by someone external (Participant 1)</i>
		Using a new vocabulary	<i>After having done the masters I definitely know the most within the practice now in terms of the language of education and the theory behind it (Participant 4)</i>
		Acting with authority	<i>I'm a little more confident taking on roles in medical education within my department, even though as a junior resident I was taking on fairly big responsibilities (Participant 14)</i>
Professional curiosity	Altered habitus	Epistemological flexibility	<i>I was introduced to qualitative research methodologies, [which] I'd largely been ignorant of, and perhaps thought they were not that useful, but they were quite a big part of some of the modules we did, and it became pretty clear that they're the only way to do certain kinds of research (Participant 3)</i>
		Critical approach	<i>I think I became quite good at reading research papers [or] any article I was reading, I found myself questioning it ... I didn't take things at face value, I tried to maybe delve a little bit further and explore it a little bit more and not just accept things and maybe question it (Participant 4)</i>
		Reflection	<i>Reflection is an active process... having a framework to think about thinking has helped me manage my clinical work, possibly even my personal life, and certainly how I teach others and how I mentor others (Participant 6)</i>
Infectious scholarship	Altered habitus/ Enhanced social capital	Knowledge consumer and producer	<i>[Being able to] contribute rather than recite (Participant 1)</i>
		Role-modelling	<i>you kind of learn from observation of how somebody facilitates a session and then helps people to join in... I learned more from the online facilitator (Participant 13)</i>
Expanded world view	Enhanced social capital	International	<i>It was wonderful ... to exchange experience and I found that there is no barrier between us. We all share the same profession, so we share the same problems, the same obstacles, whatever we are... whatever the culture backgrounds or the country you hail [from]. (Participant 12)</i>
		Multidisciplinary	<i>how to speak with people, how to respect each other and still, you know, you can convey your message (Participant 8)</i>

Academic Field of PG the Programme
Characterised by bottom-up, self-directed and person-centred approach to learning. Change in habitus through the attributes obtained enables the student to re-enter the clinical field with enhanced cultural and social capital that bestows an advantage.



Clinical Field of the Individual
Characterised by multiple hierarchies of seniority and specialty with competing subordinate fields of clinical education, clinical research, management/leadership positions, and gender relations. The Clinician is relatively disadvantaged in struggle for power.

- We originally set out to investigate online postgraduate students' perceived acquisition of graduate attributes. We have come to recognise the overly simplistic nature of this approach. Relating these benefits to mere competencies or transferable skills misses the real value of these degrees. By reframing the changes undergone through postgraduate study in terms of Bourdieu's work we can better appreciate the impact of PGT degrees on healthcare professionals.
- Using Bourdieu's concept of field helps to better understand the potential impact of postgraduate qualifications on an individual's workplace when framed in terms of increases in the individual's capital and effect on habitus
- The outcome of participation in these programmes has significant implications for emerging pedagogy related to online PGT programmes. In contrast to the top-down, box-ticking tendencies characteristic of some institutional approaches to the development of graduate attributes, these programmes demonstrate the efficacy of a bottom-up, self-directed and person-centred approach to learning and the subsequent benefits to clinicians. This research suggests that realisation of that goal may be assisted by pedagogical methods which directly engage and foster student agency, thereby enabling graduates to better negotiate institutional structures.