The Collegial Gaze in Doctoral Supervision

This paper explores the emotional labour involved in doctoral supervision. It focuses on ways in which institutional regulations and expectations guiding progression and examination in particular can cause additional emotional labour for supervisors. As doctoral students progress through their studies, they are required to demonstrate their skills through giving papers at conferences, contributing to seminars or defending their work in an oral examination. At such public events it is not only the student who is under scrutiny but also the supervisor, as a poor performance can reflect negatively on the academic advisor. The paper is based on interviews with fourteen doctoral supervisors from five UK universities – three post-92 and two pre-92 institutions – and representing eleven disciplines.

Doctoral education is not only about production of new knowledge. It is also about the development of individuals and the shaping of new identities. Crossouard (2010) has shown how the doctoral learning experience has a powerful impact on individuals' views of themselves both during their doctoral studies and after they have completed their degree. Similarly, when exploring motivations among students for pursuing a doctoral degree, Leonard, Becker and Coate (2005) found that the learning process significantly influenced identities with regard to students' self-worth and their professional ambitions. Green (2005:154) too has described doctoral supervision as a 'field of identification', arguing that the transformational processes taking place in the supervisory space are about negotiating and re-positioning identities between students and supervisors. Powerful emotional dimensions to the doctoral learning process are emerging from the students interviewed in all of these studies.

However, it is not just students' identities that are shaped or re-positioned through doctoral studies. Doctoral supervision is far from just being a strategically managed project (Morley 2004). Supervisors, too, may experience strong emotional responses to the supervisory process which can have an impact on their self-image and identities. Such responses are often intensified when the supervisory process is exposed to the public gaze, particularly in relation to progression and examination. It has been suggested that the audit culture replaces a system based on autonomy and trust by one where visibility and accountability become paramount (Shore and Wright 2000), and this has had a profound impact on doctoral supervision. McWilliam (2004) has gone as far as to argue that the role of the supervisor is no longer to be a mentor or academic advisor. Instead, supervisors have to function as auditing agents for the university whether they approve of this or not. This implies that doctoral supervisors invest emotional labour when working with their students. Morris and Feldman (1996) argue that emotional labour occurs when an individual's authentic feelings (what he or she actually feels) are incompatible with what is required by an organisation.

Hey (2011) has theorised the academic work environment in the current UK government's economic austerity agenda in relation to the articulation of affective dimensions of academic work. With increased competition between higher education institutions and continuous restructuring within the sector, she argues that it is paramount for academics to focus their energy on presenting their work in auditable

form, because only measurable output matters to the organisations. More importantly, the author calls for an acknowledgement of the fact that power is affect-laden and that when discussing emotional labour, the desires that drive power and the ability to induce certain feelings in other people should be considered (Hey 2011: 212). Seen from this perspective, it is not just the power of line-managers that impact on the emotional well-being of academics, but also the power of colleagues and students. It seems that university management relies more than ever on emotional labour being performed by its staff, but also on academics auditing each other.

In the neo-liberal audit culture which permeates UK universities, doctoral supervision has become a high-risk business. Universities and doctoral supervisors must ensure that the students they admit to their doctoral programmes will complete and complete on time. However, apart from ensuring timely progression and successful completion by their doctoral students, supervisors also need to maintain their own values and standards in order to protect their professional reputation and academic identity. In other words, doctoral supervisors must hold themselves to account as well as being held to account while supervising (Clegg and Rowland 2010). And throughout the whole process they are under the gaze of their colleagues. This situation requires doctoral supervisors to negotiate their own supervisory authenticity continuously. One of the key pressure points for doctoral supervisors is the oral examination where they have little control over what happens. Yet, the performance of their students influences how supervisors are regarded in their professional field. In an Australian study, Holbrook et.al. (2004) found that when doctoral students performed poorly, examiners tended to blame it on the supervisor. This is yet another way in which academic colleagues scrutinise the performance of supervisors.

A key argument in this paper is that some of the measures implemented in UK universities in order to ensure timely completion for doctoral students can be regarded as ways in which institutions share or even shift responsibility for the high-risk business of doctoral studies. Such measures often masquerade as quality assurance initiatives. For example, the QAA Code of Practice Consultation document which was published in January 2012 states the importance for doctoral students to have a supervisory team with one principal supervisor as the point of contact (QAA 2012, Indicator 10). But evidence from my study suggests that supervising in teams can cause serious distress in supervisors when teams break down or when personal agendas are played out within teams to the detriment of the least powerful team member. In addition, Manathunga (2012) has argued that team supervision is yet another surveillance tool instigated by management to encourage colleagues to evaluate and assess each other throughout the supervisory process.
The paper is structured around supervisors' personal stories of working within and around institutional structures and expectations.

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