Is 'friendship' educationally relevant in doctoral pedagogy? - A study into the personal and social relation between doctoral supervisors and students and its effect on possible learning outcomes during the PhD (0020)

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The research into the so-called extra-curricular and non-formal dimensions of the PhD is growing rapidly. These dimensions include the learning and coping strategies in the PhD, which take place outside the formal, institutionalised curriculum and disciplinary environments on campus. Studies show that doctoral students sometimes fall through the cracks of the institutionalised supervision and support systems and encounter what lies between these 'nested contexts' (McAlpine & Norton, 2006), which has been described as 'institutional darkness' (Bengtsen, 2016a; Bengtsen, 2016b; Bengtsen & Barnett, 2016). Here the doctoral students risk becoming homeless and 'orphans' (Wisker & Robinson, 2012) in a system that cannot contain them as the complex individuals they are. Other studies show that what goes on in the so-called 'hidden lives' (Hopwood et al, 2011) of the doctoral students to a large extent influences and affects the momentum and quality of the research undertaken by doctoral students. Jazvac-Martek et al (2011) have revealed the vast amount of extra-curricular activities that are part of a regular work week for the doctoral students, but which never find way into the institutionally acknowledged curriculum.

These important, but still largely educationally and institutionally overlooked, parts of what it means to do and complete a PhD have by Elliot et al (2015) been described as 'third spaces' of doctoral education, and Wisker, Robinson and Bengtsen (2016) have promoted the idea of 'the doctoral learning penumbra' to include these elements into a more holistic understanding of doctoral pedagogy. These background studies have made me ask the research question, which probes the relation between personal and professional dimensions of the PhD and their implications for doctoral supervision pedagogies: To what extent does the personal and social relation between doctoral supervisors and students influence the learning outcome of the PhD, and how do doctoral supervisors reflect this pedagogical element?

During my research stay at the Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford, in the spring 2015, I tried to answer that question by conducting a series of video- and audio recorded semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 doctoral supervisors from the Humanities and Social Sciences Divisions at the University of Oxford. The doctoral supervisors were all professors with affiliation to the Faculty of English, the Faculty of Music, the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Art

History, and the Department of Education. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes and was performed at the individual doctoral supervisor's office in college or in the department. I designed and conducted the interviews in line with phenomenologically oriented qualitative research interviews as described by Brinmann and Kvale (2014), Fog (2007), and McCracken (1988). The data were transcribed in parts and analysed in hermeneutical research loops according to the approach of 'video hermeneutics' (Raab & Täntzler, 2012), linguistic phenomenology (Johnstone, 2000; 1996) and 'cycle coding' (Saldana, 2016).

In my presentation I argue that the findings from the analyses can be divided into three main categories: The first category contains supervisor perspectives that prefer to keep a clear distinction between the personal (private) and professional sides of the supervisor-student relationship. This group of supervisors find an emotional bond between supervisors and students to be potentially dangerous and threatening the sober and Socratic academic relation in the supervision process. The second category contains the supervisor perspectives that to some degree acknowledge the importance and relevance of more informal forms of socialising between supervisors and students. However, this group of supervisors links the socialising activities strictly to relevant research agendas and campus based events such as research seminars or symposia. The third category contains the supervisor perspectives that fully acknowledge and realise a deeply personal relation between supervisor and student and who allow an emotional bond to grow and strengthen, because such a bond, according to the supervisors, enhances the elements of trust and honesty in the supervision process, which hightens the quality of the research and the probability for timely completion.

The variety of supervisor perspectives show that even within a small sample of a relatively homogenous educational context the pedagogical implications for the research supervision conducted are greatly different. This, I argue, calls for a more systematic and rigorous conceptual refinement of the understanding of the personal-social dimension of doctoral supervision. I discuss new and advanced conceptual underpinnings inspired by Aristotle's notion of friendship (Aristotle, 2014), Carl Rogers' notion of kinship and brotherhood in counseling situations (Rogers, 2004), and Edmund Husserl (1970) and Martin Heidegger's (2000) concept of the life-world surrounding and upholding human relationships. I conclude my presentation by drawing out the importance and potential of personal and social dimensions within doctoral supervision, but also I critically discuss how such dimensions may challenge and strain any doctoral pedagogy.

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