

## **Group Discussion V10.1 Denbigh 1 Friday 7 December 12.00-12.30**

### ***Shaping the 'knowledge object': the role of dialogue in DProf research (0411)***

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#### **Shaping the knowledge object: the role of dialogue in DProf research**

##### Introduction

Research in modern doctorates is often based on knowledge production that involves context and application, relying on the professional experience and expertise of the researcher: this can be termed 'Mode 2' knowledge (Gibbons, 1994). Such knowledge is often 'tacit' (Collins, 2001), and indicators of it may not be obvious. Additionally, because the research relates to the researcher's own practice, self-reflection is often an essential element, leading to the involvement of 'Mode 3' knowledge (Scott, 2004). Modes 2 and 3 knowledge can often be difficult to articulate, particularly for new researchers. Hence, the 'knowledge object' which forms the kernel of the research question and proposal (Knorr Cetina, 2001) may be particularly difficult to understand and shape in programmes of research based on professional practice.

In any doctoral-level research, effective supervision is vital, and candidates place a particularly high value on their supervisors' knowledge and expertise (Fillery-Travis, 2017). This applies equally to generic DProf programmes, in which there may be taught elements for aspects such as critical thinking, academic communication, research methods, data analysis (often in Part 1 of the programme). However, in generic DProf programmes the main research project (undertaken in Part 2) involves a topic in which students may frequently have more expertise than their supervisors. This adds a layer of complexity to the supervision of candidates, and means that skills such as good communication become especially important (Fillery-Travis, 2017). Dialogue can be an important aspect of this (Wisker et al, 2003), and in generic DProf programmes such dialogue would need to be far-removed from the Hegelian 'master-slave' model often evident in more traditional doctoral programmes. In this situation, the learning conversations that take place between candidate and supervisor may be similar to those in a coaching relationship (Godskesena and Kobayashib, 2016).

##### Case Studies

Case studies are outlined for three candidates on a generic DProf programme, and the role of supervisory dialogue in their support is highlighted. The dialogue was based on a coaching model, and hence in each case study the focus was on the identification of issues and formulation of solutions.

Candidate A was not unlike a typical doctoral candidate in that there was reasonable clarity about objectives, but a lack of certainty and practicality about the details of research methods. In this case, dialogue in the form of face-to-face conversations helped to identify specifics.

Candidate B was a distance learner with several possible research options available. Dialogue via Skype helped in the prioritisation of options based mainly on professional need.

Candidate C was a distance learner whose extensive knowledge and reading did not help in the identification of an appropriate knowledge object, and this prevented the initiation of sensible research plans. Dialogue via Skype helped the candidate to formulate an appropriate research question.

## Conclusion

Dialogue in a form that emulates coaching can be particularly helpful in building confidence, supporting independent thought, and initiating self-organised research activity. It is particularly useful in the context of generic DProf programmes, in which the subject expertise lies with candidates, but supervisory support may be needed to shape the knowledge object and research plans. However, dialogue of this sort may involve more supervisory time, and training may also be required with possible associated costs.

## References

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