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Walking the Line: Doctoral Supervision In Changing Times (0508)

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Context

Increasing emphasis has been placed on the role supervision plays in doctoral programmes (Lee, 2006; Halse, 2011). At the same time, doctoral education has increasingly been made accountable, particularly in terms of completion rates, leading to a growth in structured courses for supervisory skills (e.g. Kiley, 2011) as the response of universities to these imperatives; the development of supervision being most easily quantified as knowledge and skills acquired as a series of stipulated doctoral milestones. Such models are aligned with notions of supervisory 'quality' which make certain assumptions: that 'quality' refers to the 'standard' of doctoral work; that this standard is measurable as time and completion; that completion rate can be improved through procedures; and that such procedures can be directly acquired through training and development programmes.

However, 'quality' has a different meaning too, as the 'nature' or 'essence' of something. In doctoral work, this meaning is defined through the criteria for successfully meeting requirements at level-8: originality, significance, criticality, methodological rigour etc. (QAA, 2015). Limited attention appears to be given to developing doctoral pedagogy with a critical insight into 'quality' (Tomasz and Denicolo, 2013; Kiley, 2011; Halse, 2011). More, structured, training focused on the management and monitoring of supervision, is seen, in part, to be the answer to the 'problem' of supervisor deficit; aiming to drive improvement in 'doctoral quality' (Lunt, 2016; Kiley, 2011; Deuchar 2008). As Bastalich (2015, p.2) notes, this conception of supervision places supervisors firmly,

as distant masters with sole responsibility for 'quality' outcomes. ... The production of new knowledge within the doctorate is seen to arise from an individual development capacity, best fostered within interpersonal relationships, among which supervision is primary.

Mathanunga (2005) notes resistance to such models voiced on the omission of an explicit pedagogy. Furthermore, they tend to isolate supervision, and supervisor training, from the disciplinary culture within which it takes place; constructing it as something 'to be done to' doctoral candidates and supervisors respectively, rather than as the explicit development of pedagogic relations which support pedagogy (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999; Anonymised authors, 2017).

Methodology:

Our research stems from a small-scale study funded by SRHE examining the complexity of Doctorate in Education (EdD) supervisors' pedagogical approaches and their embedded assumptions in navigating the discourses surrounding supervision. Space limits the description of methodology here, but data were generated from interviews with supervisors and students at five different HEIs, along with an analysis of programme documentation, the aim being to understand more fully EdD supervisory processes and how these develop. Full

details can be found in [Authors anonymised, (2018)].

Outcomes:

The focus on *procedures* promoted by universities (above) was revealed in supervisors' accounts, with regular descriptions of 'worrying about completion times' and how this backwashed into programmes, such that 'the taught aspect has got increasingly packed into the smaller, smaller space to give as much space as we can for the thesis' (Ingrid). However, alongside supervision procedures, QAA asserts that:

Doctoral candidates learn to research primarily through undertaking research under the expert guidance of supervisors, and are supported through training in research skills and methods, which is usually provided by the institution. (QAA, 2011, p.11)

Here, the most important ingredient for supervision is seen in terms of subject expertise and supervisory pedagogy as looking over, and looking after, the production of academic knowledge (Zeegers & Barron, 2012).

The focus on both procedure, and supervisors as subject experts, reflects the version of quality as 'excellence' and 'standards' outlined above. However, even if this is an appropriate model for full-time, funded, science research projects, where students are working on a project managed by the supervisor, it is much less applicable to part-time, social science, projects; especially for EdD students whose work is on, and in, their own context. Here, projects are usually individual, emerge from the interests of the candidate, not the supervisor, and are often isolated from the academic space. In this sense they take on a different quality with implications, we think, for those involved.

For example, in our research, Yvonne, a student on an EdD, but also a senior administrator in her own university noted that 'I've really struggled with seeing myself as a researcher, it seems a bit pretentious' and accounts for this by suggesting that 'I think it's my own personal identity from a background where you don't show off, you don't boast about what you're doing and researching feels a bit like boasting about what you're doing to me'. Clearly, her sense of identity is complicated and in a complex relationship with her workplace practice. However, for academics too EdD supervision is not a simple matter of expounding their subject expertise. As well as students' identities (Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Pratt *et al.*, 2014), supervisors' identification is also complex. For example, Amy noted that 'I don't come from a discipline that fits in education and I feel that really keenly ... [I] always feels a bit of an imposter', and Ingrid describes the way that 'they move beyond you and ... to what extent do you try and keep them on this path because it's going to be a quick completion, or allow that exploration into something that actually I know nothing about?'

Implications:

A focus on procedures, completion rates and 'quality standards' can actually militate against the 'quality of the experience' for some students; and ultimately the diversity of candidates' thinking. One supervisor noted, 'you want your student to get through so you don't want to do something that's risky for them and encourage them towards something and then someone else not get it' (Gale). Moreover, it threatens the diversity of recruitment too. Many EdD candidates are non-traditional entrants; experienced practitioners but who 'probably wouldn't have been accepted onto PhDs at other universities because of their

qualifications'. Thus, supervisors described 'wanting to apply the same approach to every single student, [being] aware that has an efficiency to it, but only if it's suitable, [and] I just don't think that's appropriate'. In this sense diversity seems to be a welcome bedfellow of the quality of the EdD experience; but less so where quality refers to the efficiency savings manifested through doctoral supervision training.

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