

A whole culture approach to doctoral education: expanding collegial dialogue

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Research Domains

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Abstract

Recent large-scale investments have been made in UK universities to support the development of positive research cultures, moving from individualistic, elitist, competitive behaviour, encouraging collegial and collaborative practice. One way of conceptualising such a culture is through a broadening of pedagogies for doctoral learning, de-centring the supervisor(s) as sole provider(s) of disciplinary guidance and enculturation, professional and career development and social and psychological support for doctoral learners. There are several access points into which we can design and enable expanded collegial dialogues: by reimagining traditional sites of intellectual collegiality; by enhancing the quality of learning dialogues; by supporting postgraduate researchers to understand the importance of collegial dialogue; and by acknowledging the contribution of collegial communities of supervision to doctoral success. This paper offers consideration of the factors influencing the design of doctoral education and examines the interwoven concepts of research culture, collegiality, and the hidden curriculum of doctoral education.

Full paper

Research cultures are observable as the values, behaviours, attitudes, and norms which influence interpersonal connections within the academic community. In the UK, large-scale investments have been made to support the development of positive research cultures, moving away from individualistic, elitist, and competitive behaviour, and encouraging inclusive, collegial and collaborative practice. Whilst these developments have responded to serious concerns (Wellcome Trust, 2020), taking a cultural approach to the doctorate can support universities to design programmes that consider doctoral development as a function of the learning culture. This paper offers consideration of the factors influencing the design of doctoral education and examines the interwoven concepts of research culture, and collegiality.

Viewing doctoral candidates as individuals working within diverse local cultures and personal and societal contexts helps us to recognise the need to evolve beyond the centrality of the supervisor(s) as the single learning source. Achieving contextualised academic, emotional, social, and psychological growth as promised by the hidden curriculum (Elliot et al, 2020; pp130-131) calls for the design of doctoral programmes in which we activate variety of supporting players to offer collegial dialogue responsive to learning and support needs. Considering a broadening of support sources through accessing the hidden curriculum, whilst still acknowledging the supervisor(s) as critical to disciplinary guidance and enculturation, enables us to also recognise the natural limitations of supervisory support

withing the wide-ranging professional development and social support needs of individual doctoral learners (Cornér et al., 2018). If we consider how we can complement and supplement supervisory support by facilitating access to a multi-layered community of people (Wang *et al*, 2023), we not only provide a variety of tailored support types (Mantai & Dowling, 2015), but we create ways to relieve the pressure on our already overloaded doctoral supervisors.

There are several access points into which we can design and enable expanded collegial dialogue:

Reimagining traditional sites of intellectual collegiality.

The addition of space for collegial dialogue within, for example, journal clubs, peer review, and research presentations shifts the primary focus from that of being a corrective or conclusive process, to being one enabling collaborative exploration, and ideas testing. The resulting more balanced power relationships and relative anonymity create a sense of relative psychological safety (Merga & Mason, 2021) increasing researchers' active engagement. Working together as collegial peers enables a sense of progress, momentum and the navigation of the 'ill-defined problems' reducing stress (Beasey et al, 2020) and increasing motivation and resilience (Cai et al, 2019).

Enhancing the quality of learning dialogues

Employing coaching tools and techniques enables the development of specific collegiality skills (Guccione, 2023) and creates awareness that the role of the conversational partners (be they supervisor, disciplinary peer, or development professional) is not only to proffer opinions and information, but to support the learner to process and make sense of their experiences and new information. It involves putting aside a tendency to advise, in favour of listening, supporting reflection and empowerment (Guccione and Hutchinson, 2021).

Supporting postgraduate researchers to understand the importance of collegial dialogue in their doctoral success.

Increasing awareness of the value of collegial dialogue covers two important aspects – sites of *delivery* and sites of *appraisal*. Increasing *delivery* of collegial learning conversations can be achieved though adding awareness of the learning gleaned through informal conversations such as breakroom chats, and

engagement in the social aspects of disciplinary communities. In parallel, increasing the visibility and value of collegiality through the sites of *appraisal* (annual progress reviews, career planning activities) resets it as important and desirable research work.

Acknowledge the contribution of collegial supervision to doctoral success

Performance as a supervisor has traditionally been judged using reductive indicators (completion numbers and timeframes). Global discourse on good practice in doctoral supervision indicates a range of sophisticated interpersonal practices integral to the sustained momentum and wellbeing of researchers (e.g. Janssen et al., 2020; Albertyn & Bennet, 2021; McChesney, 2022; Griffin et al). This type of approach requires significant care and attention on behalf of the supervisor, and there is need to recognise those who invest energy collegial supervision.

The development of supportive supervisor communities of practice.

Notions of contextualised intellectual and emotional learning as part of a collegial culture apply also to the processes of supervisory socialisation which is a parallel culture-dependent processes (Almlöv & Grubbström, 2023). The development of confident, collegial, and emotionally resilient supervisors is documented (Wisker & Robinson, 2016), and a supportive collegial approach to supervisor development is needed.

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