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Lecturers' Criteria for 'Good Research': a Framework for Debate (0042)

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Over the last years, institutes for higher professional education (HPE) have increasingly transformed from teaching-only institutions into institutions that generate new knowledge through research (Kyvik & Skodvin, 2003). As an effect research criteria of lecturers play an increasing role in teaching research to students in professional education, hence in educating future professionals. This interview and focus group study investigates the criteria lecturers in HPE and universities apply when they discuss 'good' and 'not good' research. The results show six themes that both groups of lecturers find relevant when they judge research. Only two of these themes seem to be part of formal frameworks for the grading of student's theses: a) the design of the research and b) the correctness of the research report afterwards. While these two are the more 'classical' themes to judge research by, one may wonder whether these are most essential in the research-related training of future professionals.

Introduction

Since the end of the 19th century, teaching and research have gone hand in hand at Europe's traditional universities (Ruegg, 2004). Over the last years, also institutes for higher professional education (HEP) have increasingly begun to conduct research all throughout Europe (Lepori & Kyvik, 2010), hence transforming from teaching-only institutions into institutions that generate new knowledge through research (Kyvik & Skodvin, 2003). As an effect research criteria of lecturers play an increasing role in teaching education to students as well as collectively shaping research programmes, similar to the traditional universities (Griffioen & De Jong, 2013).

As an effect, both types of institutes increasingly state to be of a different character than the other; the traditional universities emphasize to educate 'professional scholars' with competences on fundamental research, while the higher professional education states to educate 'scholarly professionals' with practice-based research skills (Griffioen & De Jong, 2013; Van der Rijst & Visser-Wijnveen, 2011). These stated differences also imply to result in a different opinion on what 'good research' consists of. Hence, the central question in this study is: what are lecturers' conceptions of 'good research'? And what are the differences between the lecturers of traditional universities and lecturers of higher professional education?

Lecturers' perceptions on the demarking of 'good research' from 'not good research' are of influence on how students are trained and judged when it comes to research-related tasks. These perceptions are also expected to influence the content and form of educational programs and therefore influence the relation between lecturers and students (Visser-Wijnveen, Van Driel, Van der Rijst, Verloop, & Visser, 2009). At the same time is the connection between conceptions and behaviour complex and inconclusive (Visser-Wijnveen, 2009).

Most previous studies on how academics consider research had a focus on conceptions of research, disregarding judgments on quality (e.g. (Brew, 2001; Levy & Petrulis, 2012; Visser-Wijnveen, 2009). Furthermore, of the studies on conceptions of research, most considered the creation

of a list of objective criteria to rank research, disregarding the different perspectives academics apply. Of the studies that does consider academics' differences in conceptions of 'good research', Hemlin (1993) and Kiley & Mullins (2005) both found four themes that researchers take into account when judging research: 1) the set-up of the research, 2) the research problem or topic, 3) the relevance of the study, and 4) the study's results. Additionally, Kiley and Mullins (2005) found that 5) the way the results are communicated influences the opinions of researchers. Albert, Laberge & McGuire (2012) confirmed that the medium of communication matters, since their results show that researchers – regardless of their discipline - evaluate scientific articles higher, especially when these are published in peer-reviewed journals.

Hence, based on previous research five themes are relevant for academics in traditional universities to demark 'good' from 'not good' research. The present study will add to this body of knowledge by investigating the conception of 'good research' of lecturers in both types of higher education.

Method

Two groups of lecturers were part of this study: a) Lecturers from HEP ($N_h = 25$), who previously participated in an elaborative survey study, were asked to participate in focus groups; b) University lecturers ($N_u=20$), who were gathered using a snowball-method (Westerkamp K. & M. van Veen, 2008) participated in individual interviews. All sessions were set-up in an open-ended way. At the beginning of every session, the participant(s) were asked to come up with one example of good research and one of non-good research. Then the participants were each asked to introduce their example. In the focus groups sessions all examples were discussed among the group of lecturers, in the interviews the interviewer asked clarification, probing and follow-up questions.

All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed *at verbatim*. The resulting transcripts were analysed using 'content analysis' in accordance with the analysis method of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), using Atlas.ti. First, all separate arguments and statements concerning criteria for good and non-good research of the first part of the focus group meetings were labelled *in vivo*. Then codes covering similar themes were grouped and classified. The classification system found was then applied to all transcripts, and the results described.

Findings

The results show that lecturers apply six themes on 'good research', which are comparable to the findings in previous research: 1) the design of research; 2) the characteristics of the final product; 3) the value of the research and its outcome; 4) the topic; 5) the way the research was conducted, and 6) the researcher as a person.

The second question in this study addressed the differences between lecturers of traditional universities and professional institutes. And although the criteria used by individual lecturers varied greatly (large intra-group variation), the differences between the HEP and the university sample were only minor (small inter-group variation). The two main differences considered the utility value versus the scientific value, and the practical origin of a research topic versus the funding of research. The present results give a basic insight in what themes are relevant for lecturers in both types of higher education. So far this line of research shows that six themes should be considered in formal frameworks for the judgment of research by lecturers. And furthermore, the both types of institutes are less different than they would sometimes like to be.

Selection of References

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