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Title

What is a doctorate? : a concept-mapped analysis of process versus product in the supervision of lab-based PhDs / Camille B. Kandiko and Ian M. Kinchin

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Abstract

Background: Concept-mapping and interview techniques are used to track knowledge and understanding over the duration of PhD study amongst four students and their supervisors in the course of full-time research towards their PhDs. This work is in contrast to much PhD supervision research and policy research that focuses on supervisory styles and roles and may decontextualise the topic and disciplinary setting. Purpose: The work investigates the understanding of the process and product in PhD-level research and supervision. Sample: Participants were four students and their supervisor(s). Case studies were based on longitudinal studies conducted over three to four years (the duration of a PhD). The students were all enrolled in lab-based PhDs in one UK-based higher education institution. Three of the four students were international (one EU-based) and three supervisors were from outside the UK. Design and methods: The data provide documentary evidence of the ways in which these supervisors act to facilitate learning and discovery of research processes

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and an understanding of lab-based science research supervision. In the initial interview (conducted separately with students and supervisors), the interviewee constructed two maps, one on the topic of the PhD and one on the process of a PhD. In subsequent interviews, the student or supervisor reviewed and updated the previously constructed maps. Transcripts of the interviews were made as well. These data draw on 72 interviews and 96 unique concept maps constructed. The challenges of a PhD being both a process of learning (for the student and the supervisor) and a product of a research project are explored using case study analysis of these four pairs. Findings and discussion: Analyses of the collected data suggested that the students focused more on the product of a PhD (completing a thesis and publication), whereas the supervisors concentrated on the process of learning and scientific development. Conclusions: Evidence in the study suggested product/process differences in the student and supervisor conceptualisation of the PhD. This paper offers development towards a research-led pedagogy of supervision that places the process and product of a PhD at the centre of the supervisory relationship. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)