CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY DOCTORAL SUPERVISION: WITH A FOCUS ON INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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Structure of Presentation

- My Involvement with Doctoral Education
- A Brief History of The Doctorate
- Challenges in Contemporary Supervision
- Supervising Interdisciplinary Doctoral Candidates
- Conclusion: Doctoral Supervision in a Post-Humboldtian World
My Involvement with Doctoral Education

A HANDBOOK FOR DOCTORAL SUPERVISORS

Stan Taylor and Nigel Beasley
Wilhelm Von Humboldt establishes First DPhil, 1811
PhD adopted around the Globe

- West Europe: 1980s
- East Europe: 1990s
- Australia and New Zealand: 1940s
- Brazil: 1930s
- Mexico: 1930s
- South Africa: 1920s
- US: 1861
- Japan: 1887
- China: late 1970s
Changes in Doctoral Supervision

Survey of experienced doctoral supervisors: They found that all of their respondents:

Described doctoral supervision Between 1970s and 1990s

- ‘as an intellectual and social enterprise, where personal boundaries were sometimes blurred but the roles of supervisors and students were clear: the supervisor provided oversight and guidance; the doctoral student was responsible for producing a seminal thesis that would secure his or her place as an authority within the field …’

- Described Current work with doctoral candidates:

  - ‘...as significantly different from their former experiences. They spoke of actively fashioning students’ development to address deficits in expertise; deliberately intervening to ensure timely completion; purposeful provision of tutoring or research assistance to minimise the risk of financial distress and withdrawal; and the deployment of personal networks to facilitate completion and ensure post-graduation employment.’

- Halse and Malfoy (2010: 80)
Major Global Developments in late 20th and 21st Centuries

- Formalisation (Completion Rates, Regulations, Supervisory Teams, Structured Programmes, Graduate Schools and Doctoral Training Centres)

- Growth and diversification of candidate population (Domestic ‘non traditional’, International)

- Diversification of modes of study (Part-time, Distance)

- Diversification of purposes (Reproduce academic workforce – Supply human capital for knowledge economies; Proliferation - Publication, Professional, Practice-led, Collaborative, Interdisciplinary)

(Hammond et al 2010; Taylor 2012)
Interdisciplinary Research

A mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of practice.

(The United States National Academies 2004)
Types of Interdisciplinary doctoral environments

- **Traditional**
  - Doctoral candidate located in one discipline, supervisors from different disciplines

- **Durham**
  - Doctoral candidate located in one discipline, supervisors from different disciplines, spend time in interdisciplinary Doctoral Training Centres

- **Kyoto**
  - Doctoral candidate located in interdisciplinary Doctoral Training Centres, supervisors from different disciplines
Challenges of Interdisciplinary Doctorates

- Supervisors limited understanding of other’s disciplines and different expectations of doctorate;

- Disciplinary boundaries removed - complexity overwhelming for candidates;

- No disciplinary framework, ‘...there are no handrails [for candidates] to hold on to’ (Gardner 2011);

- Resources be scattered and difficult to access;

- Different disciplinary writing conventions;
Challenges of Interdisciplinary Doctorates (2)

- Inconsistent Feedback;

- Few colleagues working in similar fields for mutual support;

- Take longer and more active time management to meet completion targets;

- Difficult to find outlets for interdisciplinary research;

- Risk in appointing Examiners;

- Difficulties in starting careers;
Strategies for Effective Supervision of Interdisciplinary Doctorates

- Developing and maintaining a supervisory team committed to interdisciplinary research

- Building foundations, setting boundaries, and ensuring the provision of resources

- Structuring and writing an interdisciplinary thesis and giving feedback

- Guidance on time management
Strategies for Effective Supervision of Interdisciplinary Doctorates (2)

- Building an interdisciplinary network
- Identifying appropriate examiners
- Developing a publications strategy
- Mentoring and career guidance
Supervision in the Post-Humboldtian World

- Professionalisation

- Supervisor Training

- Recognition

- Shift in Supervisory Pedagogy
Shift in Doctoral Pedagogy

- From Relational to Processual Grounding (Humphrey and Simpson 2013)
  - Away from ‘Master/Apprentice’ Relationship
  - Towards process of ensuring doctoral candidates submit and complete on time within an institution’s regulatory framework that includes monitoring progression, maintaining throughput, quality assurance and quality enhancement.

- Supporting Complexity (Taylor, Kiley and Humphrey, Forthcoming)