The power of collaboration: Team supervision of doctoral students

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Team supervision of doctoral students has become widespread practice in Australian universities. This has been driven by concerns about student support in traditional dyadic models, completion rates and time to completion. With a focus on the metrics of completion rates and completion times rather than the quality of theses or indeed on the quality of the learning experiences, the current discourse in doctoral studies is dominated by neoliberal paradigms. In response to policy changes that require at least two supervisors for a doctoral student, supervisors have been experimenting with various modes of team supervision (Guerin, Kerr, & Green, 2015). The modes emerge in response to both student needs and available resources creating a panoply of variations. One team mode has been identified as horizontal (Guerin, Green, & Bastalich, 2011). Without the power relationships embedded in hierarchical modes, power is shared more equitably, with team members exercising power in different ways at different times. The horizontal collaborative team mode (Robertson, 2015) of supervision are implicitly resistant to neoliberal compulsion to quantify input to set against Key Performance Indicators. While there remains an administrative requirement to nominate the Principal supervisor, the responsibility of supervision is shared equally within the team. This however, does not mean that the workload is halved. In a recent qualitative study into team supervision in Australia, it was found that team supervision increased the workload but this was offset against a perception by supervisors that there were also significant gains. These gains were noted as being an opportunity to grow intellectually through a stimulating discussion format of team meetings and consciousness of self-regulation through a team context. Doctoral students and supervisors believed that their agency was fostered individually and as a team in this mode of supervision. The perceived benefits for supervisors and students speaks more to humanist discourses of identity and agency which defy measurement, in resistance to neoliberalist account keeping.

References

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