Experienced Research Supervisors’ Views on good Supervision

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The supervision doctoral students get nowadays differs from what was available when the supervisors of today themselves were doctoral students. Criticism has been raised against the quality of supervision. One prerequisite for development is to gain an awareness of ones own actions. A study with experienced research supervisors from all faculties at one university in Sweden demonstrates the variation of their views on research supervision.

At a cultural, group level, certain parallels can be drawn with previous studies like concordance between the area of research and the type of thesis.

At an individual level, however, the supervisors’ descriptions vary in many respects like education, feedback, motivation and role models. Three different styles of supervision emerge: researcher, leader and official. These differ mainly in the supervisors’ relationships to the doctoral students, in their reasons for becoming supervisors, in their outlook on power, and, to a certain degree, in their views on who is responsible for the doctoral students’ results.

The supervisors in the study have not previously reflected very much on the issue of supervising. Most of them have neither received nor requested feedback and do not expect to get honest verdicts from their students. They profess themselves to have developed a mode of supervision on their own, without assistance or any form of training. Most of them have never attended any organized supervision education and would never have attended if offered. Most of them claim that being a researcher is enough, by doing research you become a good supervisor.