Well-Being in the Doctoral Thesis Process

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What Is Well-Being Made of?

Work

Love

Play

Health

WORK

- Achievement, sense of competence
- Meaningful work
- Meaningful clear role in the group
- Clear goals and expectations
- Balance between resources and demands

LOVE
Human relationships

- Contact with other people
- Sense of belonging
- Safety
- Safe resolution of conflicts and differences
- Relationships in private life

PLAY

- Meaningful interests outside of work
- Engaging, demanding things
- Relaxing, restful activities
- Fun

HEALTH

- Eating
- Sleeping
- Physical exercise
- Illness
- Functional variety
- Medications
- Alcohol, illegal drugs

Reseach Education and Challenges to Well-Being

- Unsure nature of research work
- A learning process, tough on one's sense of competence
- Academic writing
- A variety of socio-economic situations among doctoral students
- Long-term supervisory relationship

Challenges Inherent in Doctoral Supervision

- Novice vs. Expert
  - A challenge for understaning and communication
- Learning the tricks of the trade vs. autonomy and emancipation
- Micromanagement vs. laisser-faire

- A relationship with a power differential:
  - Does the student dare to say what she/he really thinks? To ask questions? Show uncertaintly? Take initiative?
  - "I thought I understood, but..."
  - Everyone wants to look smart!

Safety Is Key

- Threat Reactions: Fight and Flight, Freeze
- Safety helps in cognitive, creative tasks

Watch Out for Avoidance!

- Avoidance of discomfort is a deeply human experience
- Avoidance of uncomfortable discussions may lead to problems in supervision

- Clear, open and brave communication creates safety
  - Clarity and safety are not mutually exclusive!

Setting the Stage: Initial discussions

- Important to talk about expectations and goals early on
  - To calibrate expectations and prevent misunderstandings
  - To create a common vision, mutual goals
  - To concretise what is being committed to

How Do You Discuss

- The nature of the project?

- Expectations for supervision?

- The motivation for and purpose of the doctorate?

- Uncomfortable aspects of the work?
  - for example: working hours, administrative tasks, amount of lab work, balance between clinical work and research, teaching duties…

The Skill of Asking Good Questions

- Open questions invite more engagement
  - Supervisor gets information on the student's understanding
  - The student's thinking is activated -> deeper learning
  - Invites autonomous motivation

- Ask first, tell later
- Asking good questions is easy in theory, difficult in practice

Asking is Always Better Than Assuming

- Write down three open questions you might ask your student at the beginning of the supervisory process

- KI's Dialogue Facilitator can be a helpful tool:
- https://ki.se/sites/default/files/successful_supervision_-_a_dialouge_facilitator_0.pdf

Experiences of International Doctoral Students

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwNcTmtRs54&feature=emb_logo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4vH5UCTTdg&t=6s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZrp9y7V4GY&t=15s

Common Intercultural Differences In Supervision

- How do people in different hierarchical positions communicate with each other?

- How does one express yes and no?

- What is expected of a student vs. a supervisor?
  - Is a student expected to critisise, come up with suggestions, think critically and innovatively?
  - Who does what? What is expected of a student in terms of loyality and service?

- What is intended as a recommendation and what is intended as a "must"?

Engaging With Difference

- We engage with difference in all communication and all supervision

- Many of the same practices that are good in an intercultural setting, are useful in all supervision

  - Assuming that my asumptions may be wrong
  - Asking before explaining oneself
  - Asking open questions to elicit explanations
  - Creating a safe, open space for exploration
  - Being curious

Intercultural communication calls for communication to be particularly explicit! Even more dialogue. Not avoidance of differences.

(Some) Qualities of a good supervisor

- In intercultural supervision, supervisors need to
  - Allow students to experiment with their independence and freedom
  - Provide scaffolding and support within which students can practice their independence
  - Include students in a supportive research culture
  - Encourage international students to develop agency
  - Schedule regular formal and informal contact
  - Value cultural difference as a dynamic for growth for supervisors and students
  - Deal with personal issues if they arise

"I've Always Been a Good Writer, Why is This so Difficult?

Students may not realize how writing for publication differs from

– home assignments

– examination papers or

– lab reports

The practice of iterative (process) writing may itself be knew

(Maher et al., 2014)

Academic Writing
Not Merely a Cognitive Skill

- Academic writing be emotionally challenging (Maher et al., 2014; Aitchinson et al., 2012;)

- Linked to the development of academic thinking and identity (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2014; Maher et al., 2014; Aitchinson et al., 2012; Danvis et al. 2018))

Academic Writing
What is There to Learn?

- The reviewing process, new to many (Maher et al., 2014)

- Writing in a second language, often the case

- Good writing habits; Managing thoughts, emotions and behaviour (Kearns & Gardiner, 2011)

Process Writing

- That texts need to be revised several times is often new to doctoral students
- The three-stage model:
  - First write for yourself; Second, write for an audience; Third, edit.
- Writing as a tool for thinking
- Notes, mind-maps, concept maps, diagrams, brainstrorming sessions may help in getting started and organizing thoughts

Write Early and Often!

- Reading and writing should alternate from the very beginning
- Writing is useful even before reading:
  - What am I looking for
  - What do I know now, what do I need to read more about?
- Taking useful notes while reading, perhaps with several subheadings

The First Version

- Can be written in very simple language
  - The goal is to explain the idea to oneself (or as if to a colleague, if that helps)
- Important to get ideas on paper first
  - Anything can be edited later
  - More precise words can be added
  - Especially useful for second-language speakers!
- Places for references can be marked and finalized later (ref)

Harmful Postponing

- Procrastination is a real problem with writing
  - A loosely defined, demanding task that arouses anxiety gets easily postponed
  - A demonstration: https://youtu.be/ItMFWpKofSg

Procrastination

- The needless (and harmful) delay of things one intends to do" (Klingsieck, 2013)

- Extremely common among university students (Inkinen et al. 2012; Pychyl, et al., 2000; Rytkönen et al., 2012, Schouwenburg, 2004)

- Experiential avoidance (Hayes et al., 1996) of unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations may lead to behavioral avoidance of the actual task

Examples of Unpleasant Experiences in Procrastination

- Thoughts: "I am too stupid to do this", "In this stage of my studies, this should feel easier

- Emotions: Anxiety, shame

- Physical sensations: Tiredness, "knot in the stomach"

Strategies to avoid these unpleasant reactions:

- Postponing: "I'll do this tomorrow", "I can't do this before I will have done X"

- Doing other things: Other useful things or work, Exploring the Internet, ….

How to Turn a Vicious Cycle of Avoidance into Approach?

- Contact with actual work is key

- Even a small step is a step

- Normalizing anxiety and uncertainty: "This is part of the process of academic writing"

- Learning helpful behavioral strategies

Snacking Freely

- Writing in small bits ("snack writing", Murray, 2012)
  - Even just for 10 minutes in the middle of an otherwise busy day
  - May help with overcoming emotional barriers, time-management, and thus also procrastination

Tips and Tricks for Productivity

- Five minute free writing excercise may help to get thoughts unstuck and process going
- How do you use your best two hours?
  - Should be used for the most demanding writing!
- Other Tips?

The Best Two Hours of the Day

- Writing new text is cognitively (and often emotionally) demanding: when are you at your best?

- Best done at less optimal times:
  - Editing
  - Checking for grammar and proofreading,
  - Correcting references
  - Reading articles
  - Answering emails!

See, for example: Kearns and Gardiner, 2011

Writing Groups and Retreats

- Time for focussed writing, feedback, and goal setting
- Support and feedback from peers and supervisors
  - "Peers were more useful than supervisors" A comment from a participant in a writing group

Structured sessions on
- Skills of academic writing
  - E.g. text structure, argumentation, appropriate language, referencing, flow of the text, etc.
- Process skills
  - Tools, tricks and helpful habits
  - Awareness and normalization of psychological barriers

Murray & Newton, 2009; Kumar & Aitchinson, 2017

Collective Support for Writing

- Times set aside for focussed work
- Rules about disturbing others
- Signs that will protect writing time
- Writing retreats
- Agreed upon practices in supervision

Tools and Charts to Map Progress

- Visualizing concrete steps taken and those ahead can be very useful for academic work

- How to divide academic work into small concrete "baby steps"?

Some examples can be found
http://www.ithinkwell.com.au/index.php

- Making a timeline backwards from a deadline can be very helpful

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