



Partnering with supervisors and doctoral students around feedback on doctoral writing

Key Words

Partnering; supervision; doctoral students' feedback; doctoral writing

Abstract

This paper draws on the experiences of partnering-in-action between two academic language and literacy (ALL) practitioners, supervisors and doctoral students through an Association of Academic Language and Literacy (AALL) supported research grant. It explores the possibilities afforded to ALL practitioners when engaging in research on important topics shared with our colleagues within faculties and schools. A research study on the topic of feedback on doctoral students' thesis drafts was initiated and conducted by the two ALL practitioners in four main discipline areas in two Australian universities. The research provided new opportunities to have discussions with supervisors and doctoral students (particularly multilingual students) about feedback on doctoral writing – the nature, purpose, value and issues. This paper draws on sociocultural theory to discuss the importance of dialogue with the key research partners – supervisors and doctoral students learning to become competent research writers mediated by the ALL researchers who bring a linguistic perspective to the interaction. Initially, this paper will explore the mutual benefits of and barriers to establishing productive partnerships of AALL practitioners with supervisors and doctoral students. It will then discuss the strategic decisions taken by the researchers to ensure that this partnering would result in positive processes and outcomes. For example, one key strategy was to create positive conversations about the important role of written feedback on doctoral student drafts. Thus, this research was positioned as an opportunity to focus on best practice on feedback through seeking interviews with recommended and successful supervisors and a doctoral scholar they are currently mentoring. This partnering with supervisors and their doctoral students increased the awareness of all partners of the dynamic and complex area of doctoral writing and the role of feedback, opening possibilities for further research and collaborations. The study deepened our understandings about the role of feedback. This paper will speculate on how such partnerships can be sustained and nurtured beyond the initial research contact. We reflect on what we have learned about approaches that seem to be more successful than others in facilitating ongoing productive collaborative dialogue. We also suggest that one approach which builds on this partnering is for the AALL practitioners to use their newly-acquired valuable insights into successful feedback to develop resources and tools useful for both supervisors and students. We argue that adopting a research-orientation to our professional engagements, in this instance, with faculty colleagues and doctoral students contributes to ongoing sharing of valuable knowledge and provides tools with which to enhance supervision capacity as well as develop doctoral students' ability to accept constructive feedback.