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Early stage publication strategies: will they work?

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Introduction

Enabling PhD students to develop a viable publication strategy (PS) at an early stage is an integral part of the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) course taught to PhD students at most Danish universities.

This project investigates whether PhD students follow their early stage PS, formulated as part of a mandatory assignment in the RCR course, and what characterizes PSs that are followed compared to abandoned PSs.

Theoretical framework

David Kolb’s learning inventory shows learning as an outcome of experience, observation, conceptualization and experimentation.

PhD students undergo all four modes in the context of the RCR course, starting by at least one publication before enrolment (formal requirement) (Fig. 1).

Learning is continuous and proceeds beyond the RCR course by active experimentation and, again, concrete experience etc.

Method

Assignments from the 2014 cohort of RCR courses at the Faculty of Health were analyzed (N=52) (Fig. 2).

Assignments specifying publications as identifiable distinct chunks by working titles/subjects and journals were classified as PSs. The material was classified by two coders (intrarater-reliability: 100%).

Fulfillment of each PS was verified by searches in PubMed and Scopus by author name/ORCID (March 12 2019). Each PS was put into either: Abandoned (no article match), Partly fulfilled (at least 1 article title/subject match), Fulfilled (at least 1 article title/subject and journal match, or at least 2 article title matches).

Results

The majority of PSs have materialized over the five-year period, at least in part. Only four PSs are abandoned.

PS length, number of planned articles, JIF factor, and Open Access intention were inspected. The data did not indicate any systematic between-group differences.

None of the abandoned strategies were created by PhD students still engaged in research. Among the 16 authors of fulfilled strategies, five are in active research positions, either within a university or hospital environment or in a private company. Among the 24 authors of dismissed assignments, ten are in active research positions.

Conclusions

• PS assignments in RCR courses facilitate publication skills.
• Future assignments should be stipulated along with format requirements, to facilitate more active experimentation (‘Doing’), cf. Kolb’s model.
• Future classroom teaching should empower students to create realistic PSs (some of the discarded strategies contained only one ambition: to publish in extremely high impact/prestigious journals). This could be done in class by the more active use of examples to enhance reflective observation (‘Watching’).

References