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What Engages Doctoral Students in Biosciences in Doctoral Studies?

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ABSTRACT

Reduced levels of engagement and dropping out have been identified as a major problem in doctoral education worldwide, including in the biosciences. Research suggests that engagement predict student satisfaction, degree completion, and persistence in studies. To explore the anatomy of engaging experiences altogether 40 doctoral students' theme interviews were analyzed by using abductive strategy. Accordingly, we were able to identify factors that promoted doctoral students' engagement in their work. In general, the students described many experiences of satisfaction, inspiration, joy, positive work drive, meaningfulness, and fulfillment in terms of their doctoral studies. The doctoral students' engagement in their work originated from various contexts of academic work, including research, scholarly communities, the supervisory relationship, and formal studies. The results indicate that although the interrelationship between individuals and the environment is complex and it is difficult to predict the outcome at an individual level, the central ingredients of engaging experiences among biosciences can be identified. Accordingly, activities that contribute to the doctoral students' sense of competence, autonomy, belonging, and contribution ought to be considered when trying to develop engaging learning environments for doctoral students. The results provide evidence-based tools for developing doctoral education in an academic environment.

KEYWORDS

Doctoral Students; Positive Experiences; Engagement; Satisfaction

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