CONFIDENT SUPERVISORS VOL 2

CREATING INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS

EDITED BY SUSAN GASSON JILLIAN BLACKER
ABBE WINTER CHRISTINE BRUCE

Confident Supervisors: Creating Independent Researchers

CONFIDENT SUPERVISORS: CREATING INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS

Volume Two

ABBE WINTER; AFRICA HANDS; ALAN MCKEE; AMY WEBSTER; ANNA SZORENYI; CHRISTINE BRUCE; DAVID SILVERMAN; DENISE DILLON; EMMA PHILLIPS; HERI HERIYANTO; JILLIAN BLACKER; KAREN CLEGG; KAREN DOOLEY; KYLIE PAPPALARDO; LAURA ANDERSON; LESLEY WOOD; MARGARET KILEY; MICHAEL MU; MICHELLE REDMAN-MCLAREN; NARELLE LEMON; NATASHA KITANO; RACHEL SPRONKEN-SMITH; RIFKA PRATAMA; SANDRA GATTENHOF; SHELLY BUCHANAN; STAN TAYLOR; SUSAN GASSON; VIRGINIA M. TUCKER; XIANG-YU HOU; AND YULI ROHMIYATI

Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University
Brisbane, Australia

Confident Supervisors: Creating Independent Researchers Copyright © 2026 by Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Disclaimer

.....

Note that corporate logos and branding are specifically excluded from the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial ShareAlike Licence of this work, and may not be reproduced under any circumstances without the express written permission of the copyright holders. Individual images, videos and animations may have different licences applied. Check the licence for individual materials and contact the copyright holders for express permission if you wish to use them outside of the conditions stated.

This edition is copyright Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University. For each chapter, copyright is held by the author/s of the individual chapters or their employers as appropriate.

First published in 2026

eISBN: 978-1-925553-59-8

How to cite this eBook:

Gasson, S., Blacker, J., & Winter, A. (Eds.). (2026). *Confident supervisors: Creating independent researchers (Vol. 2)*. Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University. https://doi.org/10.5204/qutop/XOCR1950

How to cite a chapter of this edited eBook:

Spronken-Smith, R. (2026). What are you educating for? In S. Gasson, J. Blacker, & A. Winter (Eds.), *Confident supervisors: Creating independent researchers (Vol. 2)*. Queensland University of Technology and James Cook University. https://doi.org/10.5204/qutop/SSCQ8915

Cover Design by Amber Swayn.

Queensland University of Technology TEQSA PRV12079 | CRICOS 00213J

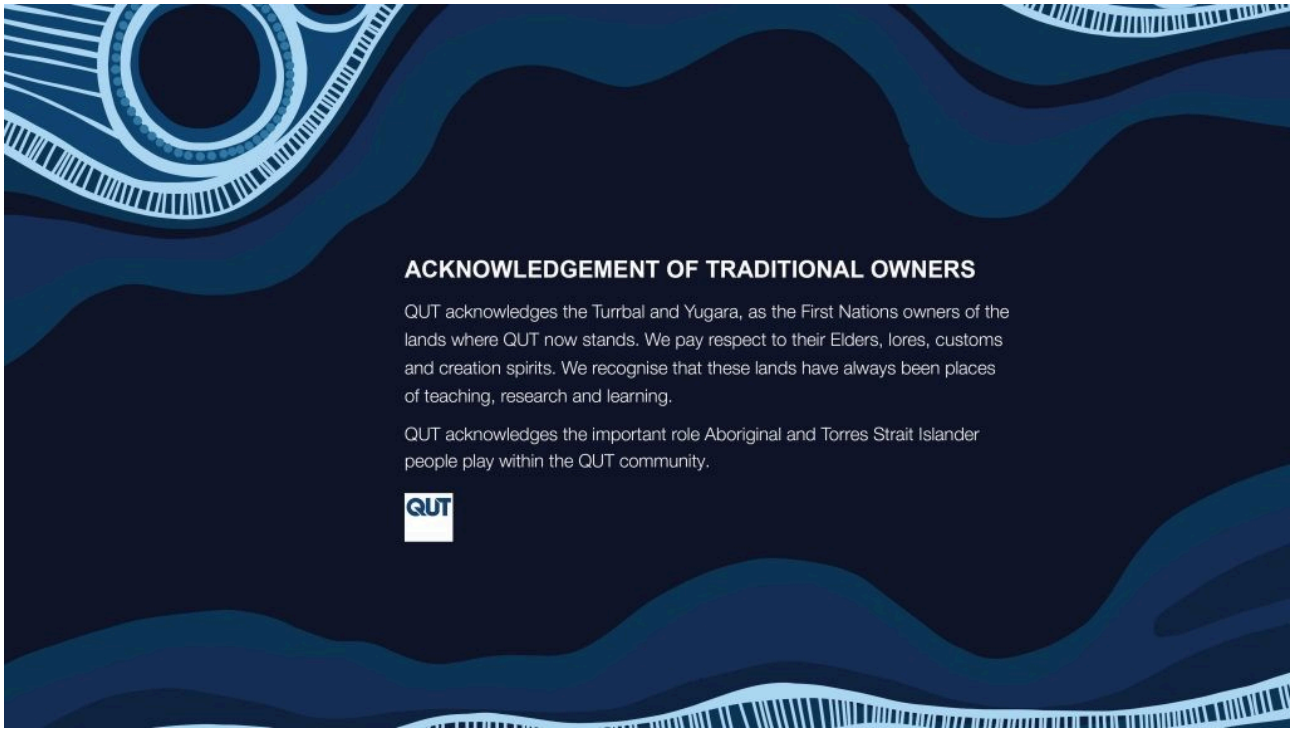
CONTENTS

Supervising diverse methods and methodologies

Technologically informed supervision

Diversity, equity and inclusivity in higher education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND EDITORS

Editorial Team

Susan Gasson

Susan's research focuses on research education and development, research collaboration, and employability. Adopting qualitative approaches including narrative inquiry her research has benefited from years spent working in higher education, and building strong national and global networks. She held the role of Coordinator HDR Advisor Development, Graduate Research School, James Cook University while writing for and editing this book. She is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE.

Christine Bruce

Christine's research and scholarship is focused on information literacy, higher education learning and teaching, postgraduate study and supervision and research collaboration. She regularly presents keynote addresses on these matters. Her research is multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary stemming from an interpretivist qualitative research perspective informed by phenomenography and phenomenographic pedagogy. Christine is a Principal Fellow Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) and a member of the International Federation of National Teaching Fellows.

Jillian Blacker

Jill is an innovative administrative manager with over 15 years' experience in the higher education sector working across many different areas including action research projects focused on the widening participation agenda. She has extensive experience providing support to researchers, supervisors, and academic leaders on all aspects of higher degree research; and has a proven track record of resolving complex cases to ensure mutually agreeable outcomes. She is a confident mentor and coach and has been drawn to learning about mental health practices and strategies to provide support to researchers and supervisors. Building relationships and working collaboratively and creatively is a key component of her professional practice. She is a Fellow of Advance HE.

Abigail Winter

Abbe is a results-driven writing specialist, collaborative mentor, and independent researcher, skilled in the analysis of words and data for user needs. Abbe is a researcher trainer, leader, and mentor, with over 20 years' experience in quality assurance, and change and project management. While her PhD focused on what helps workers in higher education cope with large-scale organisational change, and she was part of the small team that created and developed the concept of academagogy (the scholarly leadership of learning), her more recent research has focussed upon professional identity, developing writing skills, and reflective practice.

Authors

Chapter 1: The scholarship of supervision

Susan Gasson

Susan's research focuses on research education and development, research collaboration, and employability. Adopting qualitative approaches including narrative inquiry her research has benefited from years spent working in higher education, and building strong national and global networks. She held the role of Coordinator HDR Advisor Development, Graduate Research School, James Cook University while writing for and editing this book. She is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE.

Christine Bruce

Christine's research and scholarship is focused on information literacy, higher education learning and teaching, postgraduate study and supervision and research collaboration. She regularly presents keynote addresses on these matters. Her research is multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary stemming from an interpretivist qualitative research perspective informed by phenomenography and phenomenographic pedagogy. Christine is a Principal Fellow Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) and a member of the International Federation of National Teaching Fellows.

Chapter 2: What are you supervising for?

Rachel Spronken-Smith

Rachel is a Professor in Higher Education and Geography and works as Deputy Dean in the Graduate Research School at the University of Otago. She has been a Geography lecturer, academic developer, head and dean, and is now overseeing researcher development. Her current research interests are in doctoral education and doctoral outcomes and undergraduate research and inquiry. She has won several university teaching awards and a national tertiary teaching award in 2015. In 2016 she won the TERNZ-HERDSA medal for Sustained Contribution to the Research Environment in NZ and was a Fulbright Scholar in 2018.

Chapter 3: Supporting increased diversity among candidates

Stan Taylor

Professor Stan Taylor was Director of the Centre for Academic and Researcher Development at Durham University in the UK, where he is currently an Honorary Professor in the School of Education. He formally retired in 2013, but he remains an active researcher in the field. His most recent work (with Margaret Kiley) is a third edition of A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors (Routledge, 2025).Recent edited books include (with Karri A. Holley and Margaret Kiley) *Gobal Perspectives on Graduate and Doctoral Education* (Routledge, 2025), (with Vijay Kumar and Sharon Sharmini (eds.)) *Doctoral Examination: Exploring Practice Across the Globe* (Routledge, 2023) and (with Margaret Kiley and Karri. A. Holley) *The Making of Doctoral Supervisors* (Routledge 2021).

Margaret Kiley

Margaret Kiley's research and teaching interests for well over 20 years have been in the area of research education. She is now an adjunct at the Australian National University.

Chapter 4: The supervisor's journey: Navigating thresholds and building communities for higher degree researchers

Virginia Tucker

Dr. Virginia Tucker is Professor at the School of Information, where she teaches and coordinates curriculum for courses in information retrieval system design, information architecture, and search, telecommuting from Bellingham WA. She received the School's Outstanding Professor Award, 2018, and Distinguished Scholar Award, 2021. Her current research is focused on knowledge organization, information experience, expert search, and design as a professional practice. Prior to joining the School of Information faculty, Dr. Tucker was a product architect at Dialog/Thomson (now ProQuest), the client training manager at Dialog Information Services, and the Physics Librarian at Stanford University. She was also a County Law Librarian for over ten years. Tucker has a PhD in information systems from Queensland University of Technology, an MLS from the University of California at Berkeley, and a BA from Stanford University in music.

Chapter 5: Supervisors' and the admission of higher degree researchers

Susan Gasson

Susan's research focuses on research education and development, research collaboration, and employability. Adopting qualitative approaches including narrative inquiry her research has benefited from years spent working in higher education, and building strong national and global networks. She held the role of Coordinator HDR Advisor Development, Graduate Research School, James Cook University while writing for and editing this book. She is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE.

Denise Dillon

As acting Dean Research at JCU Singapore, Dr Denise Dillon oversees research strategy and governance for diverse teams of researchers pursuing high-quality, curiosity-driven and strategically significant research to achieve international excellence in all areas. In her role as Associate Dean Research Education, Denise also overseas higher degree by research education and she is also Chair of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) at the Singapore campus of James Cook University (JCU Singapore). After serving as Head of Academic Group for psychology, arts and education for almost 10 years she now facilitates and promotes the strategic direction of research within JCU Singapore, improvements in the quality and impact of that research, and the growth of local, national and international research collaborations.

Dr Dillon has extensive supervisory experience in fourth-year and postgraduate research, having supervised more than 100 fourth-year students and more than a dozen graduate-level students to completion. Graduate students include those in the Master and Doctor of Clinical Psychology courses, and PhD.

Michelle Redman-McLaren

Michelle is an Anglo-Celt born on Gubbi Gubbi country who grew up on a farm on Gamilaroi Country (near what is now known as Narrabri). With a professional background as a social worker, Michelle continues to enact inclusive, developmental and decolonising processes developed during her Undergraduate and Master of Social Work studies at the University of Queensland.

Since 2006, Michelle has contributed to higher education as an Associate Dean, Research Education (2020-2022), supervisor of higher degree by research candidates (2017-current), researcher (2009-current), lecturer (2005-current) and field educator (2005-2009).

In her role as a **public health researcher**, Michelle facilitates qualitative and mixed methods research in partnership with groups and communities to promote health. Michelle works with Pacific Islander, Australian South Sea Islander and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to: improve health and wellbeing, including sexual and reproductive health; reduce transmission of infectious disease; and strengthen health systems.

Michelle's **NHMRC-funded PhD research**, undertaken in the College of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University, was a transformational grounded theory study focused on HIV prevention with women in Papua New Guinea.

Chapter 6: Supervising across a cultural divide – China and Australia

Xiang-Yu Hou

Dr Xiang-Yu (Janet) Hou is an accomplished academic and research leader in epidemiology and health services at The University of Sydney. Trained in clinical medicine, she integrates analytical precision with a deep commitment to compassion, cultural competence, and humanistic values.

Dr Hou has extensive experience supervising Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students across disciplines, guiding them from research design to publication and impact. Many of her former PhD students have become associate professors and professors in universities across Australia and internationally, reflecting her enduring mentorship and dedication to excellence.

Her supervisory philosophy blends a compassionate heart, an intelligent mind, and competent hands-on guidance. She cultivates critical thinking, resilience, and ethical scholarship, fostering an inclusive and empowering learning environment. With a focus on co-learning and cultural humility, she inspires students to conduct research that is both methodologically rigorous and socially meaningful.

Through her leadership and mentorship, Dr Hou continues to build research capacity and promote a culture of scholarly curiosity, integrity, and care, empowering the next generation of health researchers to create lasting impact in communities around the world.

Susan Gasson

Susan's research focuses on research education and development, research collaboration, and employability. Adopting qualitative approaches including narrative inquiry her research has benefited from years spent working in higher education, and building strong national and global networks. She held the role of Coordinator HDR Advisor Development, Graduate Research School, James Cook University while writing for and editing this book. She is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE.

Chapter 7: Supporting HDR students through thesis examination (and beyond)

Jillian Blacker

Jill is an innovative administrative manager with over 15 years' experience in the higher education sector working across many different areas including action research projects focused on the widening participation agenda. She has extensive experience providing support to researchers, supervisors, and academic leaders on all aspects of higher degree research; and has a proven track record of resolving complex cases to ensure mutually agreeable outcomes. She is a confident mentor and coach and has been drawn to learning about mental health practices and strategies to provide support to researchers and supervisors. Building relationships and working collaboratively and creatively is a key component of her professional practice. She is a Fellow of Advance HE.

Abigail Winter

Abbe is a results-driven writing specialist, collaborative mentor, and independent researcher, skilled in the analysis of words and data for user needs. Abbe is a researcher trainer, leader, and mentor, with over 20 years' experience in quality assurance, and change and project management. While her PhD focused on what helps workers in higher education cope with large-scale organisational change, and she was part of the small team that created and developed the concept of academagogy (the scholarly leadership of learning), her more recent research has focussed upon professional identity, developing writing skills, and reflective practice.

Sandra Gattenhof

Professor Sandra Gattenhof is a researcher and practitioner in Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice (CIESJ) Faculty at QUT situated on Turrbul and Yugara lands in Meanjin (Brisbane). She has previously been Director of Research Training for CIESJ and Discipline Leader Dance, Drama, Music. Sandra is internationally recognised as expert in the field of arts education and arts & cultural evaluation. Sandra has authored books, book chapters, journal articles, and is sought after speaker. Sandra was chief investigator for ARC Linkage Project *The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia* (2019-2023*), Social Impact Strategy for the Puuya Foundation* (2021-2023), and led *Valuing the Arts Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (2020). Sandra is currently lead researcher for *Woven Stories: Engaging the Arts as a resource for resilience in rural communities*. In 2012 Sandra received Drama Queensland's Life Member Award. Sandra received Drama Australia President's Award for her outstanding contribution to drama education in 2021.

Chapter 8: A model for enabling effective team supervision

Karen Clegg

Karen is a Reader in Doctoral Education in the School for Arts and Creative Technologies at the University of York and Co-PI/Director of the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP), a £4.6million, Research England funded project designed to transform the practice and culture of research supervision. An experienced Researcher Developer and senior manager Karen has created and implemented policy, designed and delivered award winning accredited programmes for research students, fellows and academic staff. Her research and publication portfolio includes assessment, reflective practice and doctoral education. She is an elected executive member of several professional bodies, a trained coach and an accomplished conference speaker.

Natasha Kitano

Natasha is a higher education specialist and doctoral researcher with over 20 years' experience in teaching, researcher development, and academic support. Natasha is a national and international leader in HDR wellbeing, mentoring, and supervision pedagogy who is passionate about building inclusive, connected research cultures and enhancing supervisory practice. Natasha has been successful in the role of Chair for mentoring and researcher development communities (Mentoring for Researcher Developers – M4RD, Network for Researcher Developers -NeRDs), which has seen strong global engagement and impact.

Chapter 9: Supervising qualitative research methods projects

David Silverman

David Silverman is also Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane and Visiting Professor in the Management Department at King's College, University of London and the Business School, University of Technology, Sydney. He has authored 15 books and 45 journal articles on qualitative research, ethnography and conversation analysis.

Teaching

David pioneered a taught MA in Qualitative Research at Goldsmiths in 1985 and supervised around 30 successful PhD students. Since becoming Emeritus Professor in 1999, he has continued publishing methodology books. David has also run workshops for research students in Australia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, France, Sri Lanka and Tanzania.

Besides all this, David's other interests include classical music, literary fiction, bridge, county cricket and spending time with his grandchildren.

Chapter 10: Enabling students to capitalise on their linguistic-cultural resources for higher degree research

Karen Dooley

Karen is the Deputy Head of School in the QUT School of Education. She was involved in higher degree research leadership for a decade at School and Faculty level. Karen has taught research methods and research proposal development units. She has supervised more than 25 higher degree research students to completion. Karen is a critical sociologist with an interest in the work of language in research and research training in multilingual contexts.

Guanglun Michael Mu

Guanglun Michael Mu is Associate Professor and Enterprise Fellow of Education Futures at Adelaide University. He is also the Portfolio Lead (Research) of UniSA's Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion. As a sociologist of education, Michael is particularly interested in building resilience for and with: (1) children and young people in migration contexts (e.g., floating children and left-behind children in China, children with an immigrant background, and international students), and (2) educational professionals (e.g., school teachers). His work has attracted a total research income of over 1.3 million dollars and has been published into over 100 books and articles. Most of his publications are framed through a Bourdieusian lens. His current research on international students' housing issues, community engagement, and everyday wellbeing has attracted national and international attention, featuring in major media outlets such as ABC news, SBS news, Times Higher Education, University World News, and many others. In addition to scholarly publications, Michael is also an author of two picture books *Journey to Resilience: Kaya's First Day of School* and *Journey to Resilience: Feng and the Phoenix Fruit*. Michael has deep methodological expertise in quantitative analyses that align with relational sociology. These include but are not limited to multiple correspondence analysis, social network analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis, and structural equation modelling. Michael also has rich experience in conducting mixed methods research in educational contexts.

Chapter 11: Applying the PALAR paradigm and process to the supervisory relationship for professional learning and development

Lesley Wood

Lesley Wood, D Ed, MA, BASS, BA, PGCHE, is the ETDP SETA Research Chair for Early Childhood Development in the Faculty of Education at North-West University, South Africa where she applies participatory action research for the professional learning of ECD practitioners and managers. A former social worker, Lesley is committed to helping educational stakeholders address the social disadvantages they face within contexts of poverty. She is a National Research Foundation rated researcher whose interests lie in researching participatory ways to facilitate psycho-social wellness within various educational communities. She has been inducted into the Academy of Science South Africa (ASSAf) and the international Academy of Community Engaged Scholarship (ACES). Over 40 postgraduate students have received their degrees under her supervision. She has published over 100 articles, chapters and books, and received several national and international grants for her projects.

Chapter 12: Writing challenges in the context of language limitations: Technology as both a solution and an ethical dilemma

Rifka Pratama

As of 2018, Rifka has served as a full-time lecturer at Universtas Diponegoro Semarang, Indonesia specialising in American studies, cultural and intercultural studies, and other relevant sociological disciplines, with a primary focus. Complementing these fields, Rifka instructs minor courses in English language skills. Rifka's research endeavours are primarily dedicated to investigating cultural, sociological, and religious themes in Indonesia and the United States. Furthermore, he actively engages in various organisational pursuits associated with these disciplines. Rifka is also currently pursuing his doctoral studies in American Studies at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. His position as a doctoral candidate involves him in collaborative research writing sessions with his academic supervisors. In this regard, he reflects on his research writing experiences through two simultaneous lenses: as a lecturer and as a PhD/HDR student. For access to his research publications, kindly refer to Rifka Pratama on Google Scholar.

Chapter 13: Technology-enhanced HDR supervisory practices

Yuli Rohmiyati

Yuli Rohmiyati has been a lecturer in Diponegoro University, Indonesia from 2008. Her areas of expertise are Library Science, User Experience, and Human-Computer Interaction. Yuli received a Bachelor Degree in Library Science from Padjadjaran University, in 2004, Master Degree from Gadjah Mada University (UGM), in 2006, and Doctor of Philosophy Degree from University Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2024.

Chapter 14: Helping higher degree researchers navigate open access publishing

Kylie Pappalardo

Dr Kylie Pappalardo is a leading researcher in intellectual property law, especially the intersections between copyright, culture and creativity. She studies how automation, digital distribution, and intellectual property laws shape the reach and diversity of our culture. Her work seeks to develop and inform law, public policy and industry norms that prioritise marginalised voices and diverse perspectives in the production and distribution of screen content.

Dr Pappalardo is an Associate Professor in the Law School at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), a Chief Investigator with the Digital Media Research Centre (DMRC), and was an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Early Career Research (DECRA).

Chapter 15: Supervising for wellbeing and self care?

Narelle Lemon

Professor Narelle Lemon is a Vice Chancellor Professoriate Research Fellow at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. She is Lead of the Wellbeing and Education Research Community. Previous to moving to Perth in September 2023, Narelle was Associate Dean Education in the School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, and is best known for her work in Pedagogy of Belonging. Narelle is an interdisciplinary scholar across the fields of arts, education, and positive psychology. Her research expertise is in fostering wellbeing literacy in education and community contexts. Narelle focuses on capacity building in wellbeing and self-care of proactive action across diverse areas of evidence-based wellbeing science in order to flourish. Narelle is the series editor for "Wellbeing and self-care in higher education: Embracing positive solutions" (Routledge), which has garnered significant attention for highlighting the importance of self-care in academia. She is currently leading an international project called the "Citizen Wellbeing Scientist" capturing multimodal everyday actions of self-care (https://www.exploreandcreateco.com/citizen-wellbeing-scientist) and the Western Australian government funded project in empowering women's wellbeing called SHESpeaks (https://www.shespeakswellbeing.com/). Narelle blogs, posts, grams and podcasts as a part of her networked scholar practices.

Chapter 16: Neuroaffirming supervisory practices in HDR

	**Jillian Blacker** Jill is an innovative administrative manager with over 15 years' experience in the higher education sector working across many different areas including action research projects focused on the widening participation agenda. She has extensive experience providing support to researchers, supervisors, and academic leaders on all aspects of higher degree research; and has a proven track record of resolving complex cases to ensure mutually agreeable outcomes. She is a confident mentor and coach and has been drawn to learning about mental health practices and strategies to provide support to researchers and supervisors. Building relationships and working collaboratively and creatively is a key component of her professional practice. She is a Fellow of Advance HE.
	**Anna Szorenyi** Dr Szorenyi is a gender studies and cultural studies academic published and recognised internationally for research challenging gendered and colonial dynamics in humanitarian representations. She has a strong interest in HDR Supervision and has received multiple awards in this area, including the 2022 Stephen Cole the Elder Award for Excellence in HDR Supervision. She currently serves as Co-Convenor of the HDR Supervision Community of Practice and Co-Lead of the School of Social Sciences HDR Portfolio, both at the University of Adelaide. She has pioneered research into Neurodivergence in HDR Supervision and published collaborative research on this topic in *Higher Education Research and Development* (2025).
	**Amy Webster** Amy is a Senior Disability Adviser committed to fostering inclusive pedagogy. She brings experience from roles in disability education and sport in the UK, including coordinating training and development at the National Autistic Society. In Australia, Amy has worked at the Queensland Human Rights Commission, developing and delivering training to ensure anti-discrimination and human rights legislation is understood and applied in practice. She champions neuroaffirming practices that are embedded, not added.

Chapter 17: "We need more people like you in the academy": Gender and HDR supervision

Alan McKee

Alan McKee was named by the *Australian* newspaper as the country's leading sex and sexuality researcher in 2025. He is an expert on digital intimacies. His most recent book reporting on sexually explicit material and its audiences is called *What Do We Know About the Effects of Pornography After Fifty Years of Academic Research?* (Routledge, 2022). He has published on digital entertainment and healthy sexuality in journals including the *New Media and Society, Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the *International Journal of Sexual Health*, the *Journal of Sex Research* and *Sex Education*.

Emma Phillips

Emma Phillips is an Assistant Professor in Visual Communication with the Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra.

Her PhD focused on the aesthetic components of the sexualisation debates and the ways that image-making might be informed by classist, sexist and gendered assumptions about women's sexuality. Emma has fourteen years experience as a professional photographer in Australian media and advertising and ten years experience teaching in communications and photography programs across Sydney and Melbourne. Her work merges her industry skills with traditional research to create unique, practice-based methodologies. She is passionate about collaboration and the elevation of marginalised voices.

Emma is interested in the representational politics of women's sport, issues of power and class in visual culture, beauty and objectification discourses and the interplay between women's sexualities and feminism.

Technical Team

Sincere acknowledgement and thanks are given to the following colleagues for their valuable contributions during the production of this eBook:

- Tanya Harden, Cameron Rutter, Sal Kleine, Eileen Salisbury and Catherine Radbourne (QUT Open Texts Team)
- Alice Luetchford, Claire Ovaska (Open Education Team, James Cook University Library)

PREFACE

Christine Bruce

Higher degree supervisory teams and the networks that support them are the most important influence on research candidates' experiences in our universities. Maximising support to supervisors is vital both for the well being and success of the supervisors and for ensuring they are able to support the well being and success of their candidates. These enduring values lie at the heart of the Confident Supervisor volumes.

In 2024 Confident Supervisors : Creating Independent Researchers, a book written by research supervisors for research supervisors was launched as an open access publication. The editorial and authorship team aimed to bring a sense of community and sharing of experience in a dynamic higher education environment to supervising colleagues seeking readily accessible contemporary resources. Within a few months these offerings to colleagues were widely read around the world, made downloadable and translatable upon request. To the surprise and delight of all contributors Confident Supervisors was also awarded an Open Education Impact award in early 2024, within a few months of publication.

Demand for open access resources for supervisors globally demonstrated through use of Confident Supervisors has led to both an updated edition of volume one, and a new volume Confident Supervisor 2. Confident Supervisor 2 brings a new and complementary set of chapters also intended to help us as supervisors to help our higher degree researchers to thrive, raise our awareness of our own supervisory experiences, and make confident supervision possible for all walking alongside others on their journey of becoming researchers.

I am privileged to have been able to journey with the editors and many of the authors in its production as they have all sought to articulate their own learnings for the benefit of colleagues seeking ideas, direction, strategies and food for reflection. Each chapter has been prepared by a colleague or team with expertise in the aspect they are considering, and has been peer reviewed by both other authors and the editing teams. All have been through several iterations of development.

I commend to you both volumes of Confident Supervisors, as exemplars of the Scholarship of Supervision, and heartily congratulate the editorial, author and publishing teams (JCU and QUT Library). These volumes will enrich our supervision and the supervisory communities we create, thereby making possible the excellent environments needed to shape the HDR experience and our higher degree graduate futures.

Professor Christine Bruce
Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow
Principal Fellow Higher Education Academy (PFHEA)
Member, International Federation of National Teaching Fellows
Editorial Advisor, JCU Advisor E-book project.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES - CO-EDITOR REFLECTIONS ON THE SELF-DETERMINED DOCTORATE: PERSPECTIVES ON LEADING THE DOCTORAL JOURNEY

Africa Hands and Shelly Buchanan


Shelly Buchanan, PhD


Africa S. Hands, PhD

Queensland University of Technology

As co-editors of *The Self-Determined Doctorate: Perspectives on Leading the Doctoral Journey*, we offer the following reflections on supportive supervisory strategies as shared through nine doctoral student narratives in our edited volume. The ideas shared here illuminate what supervision looks like when it is guided by care and respect for the whole scholar. The collective insight shared here offers powerful strategies for those who lead and accompany doctoral researchers and are interested in empowering learners and knowledge builders through acts of thoughtful, caring stewardship.

Across disciplines and continents, the doctoral graduates remind us that the most effective supervision

is relational rather than procedural. Advisors who treat their students as budding colleagues, not subordinates, foster confidence and connection. They make the doctoral journey a shared experience by co-authoring papers, demystifying peer review, and opening professional networks. Timely feedback is framed as dialogue and suggestion and not judgment, so students are more likely to respond with engagement and agency. In such relationships, the doctoral journey becomes a form of enculturation into the scholarly community, as students are treated as respected apprentices in shared thinking and knowledge creation.

Equally illuminated in the volume's narratives is the idea that doctoral guidance extends beyond research progress. Life has its twists and turns and inevitably intersects with the human endeavour of scholarly work. The writers describe supervisors who acknowledge life passages and support flexible pathways through them. Timelines are adjusted without disapproval, and personal crises are met with compassion. Supervisors who model empathy and encourage participation in peer-writing or "critical friends" groups help students maintain momentum and well-being. The successful graduates remind us that rigor and care are compatible with kindness and understanding.

Another shared lesson centres on healthy doctoral student identity development as they move between novice and expert. Constructive supervisors help students recognize this shifting identity as natural and necessary, guiding them to use reflection, journaling, and conversation to track their personal growth and development. By normalizing self-doubt and fostering open conversations about such, faculty mentors transform vulnerability and worry into a learning experience rather than a reason for departure from one's doctoral pursuit.

Taken together, the accounts form a coherent message: supervisory excellence is a culture of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students excel when advisors design and maintain programs and relationships that nurture independent inquiry while offering consistent feedback and authentic connection. A well-timed question, an open, honest critique, a shared publication, or a compassionate extension can make the difference between anxious endurance and empowering motivation. Students also excel when they feel connected to their supervisors, whether through shared interests or personal identity.

For supervisors shepherding students through doctoral study, the collective wisdom of the stories shared in our edited volume offers affirmation and invitation. To supervise well is to accompany another human being through an intellectual and personal passage that is both demanding and creative. When supervisors approach this role as a partnership, one built on trust, curiosity, and care, the doctoral experience becomes more than an individual achievement. It can become a shared act of scholarship, enriching the student and the supervisor, and the broader community of knowledge creators.

Hands, A. S., & Buchanan, S. (Eds.). (2025). *The self-determined doctorate: Perspectives on leading the doctoral journey* (Vol. 9). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004744431

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES - A JOURNEY WITH GUIDES AND COMPANIONS

Laura Anderson

Laura Challman Anderson

PhD in Information Ecology, Queensland University of Technology

Researcher in information utilization in collaboration

My experience as a higher degree research candidate with supervision in a cohort setting was amazing! I think back fondly on those experiences and still use many of them as models in my research work. The experience of cohort learning is immersive and multi-dimensional, and I highly recommend experiential learning as both powerful and memorable. I will first discuss comfort zones, followed by the dynamics of trusted people pointing the way, providing camaraderie, support, and a safe introduction to research life post-PhD. I close with some thoughts about the leadership of the supervisory team.

Support is critical to sustain us when we venture out of our comfort zones to explore new territories, such as a new domain, discipline, culture, or the development of new knowledge and skills. PhD study seemed to touch all of these as my own journey progressed: at the beginning, but also at various and surprising times as my journey progressed. A formal support structure within the PhD program was very important, augmented by personal relationships built with people within the program. The beauty of having both categories of support is that people in each category understood a great deal about whatever questions or issues I was experiencing and could provide their varying insights and wisdom to me.

Both peers and supervisors provided signposts and directions to point the way for me. Their differing viewpoints were very helpful and often enabled me to "triangulate" as I built my own directional sense. My supervisors and the other supervisors in the program that I came to know shared their judgment based on my situation, their experience, and their knowledge of the field and our institution. Their vantage points often gave them a broader view of my landscape. Members of the cohort ahead of me were also very helpful, because they had just recently gone through the milestones that I was encountering and had very good and current advice. They served as exemplars to me in modelling behaviours and

strategies, giving me the confidence to say to myself, “I can do what they did”, or “I should do what they do”. Finally, the camaraderie of my own cohort was foundational as we walked together. This was a microcosm and foreshadowing of collaborative life as a researcher in academia or industry and provided a “safe” introduction to post-PhD research relationships. This introduction also included peer review, collaboration models, and how to manage critical feedback.

I had a late epiphany, two years into my program (!), that I should be the leader of my supervisory team. I had been accustomed to leadership exercised in a hierarchical setting, so this realisation was somewhat of a shock. However, through PhD study it is important to develop the personal capabilities to define and pursue a research direction among many possibilities; define, redefine and explore research questions; and to work through the conflicts and problems that inevitably arise. I feel strongly that my PhD program prepared me well to handle all of these.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES - A UNIQUE SUPERVISORY TEAM

Heri Heriyanto

Heri Heriyanto

PhD in Information Literacy, Queensland University of Technology

Department of Library Science, Diponegoro University

Lecturer and Qualitative Researcher

Each member of my HDR supervisory team brought a unique approach, knowledge set, and focus for my journey. The supervisor with the most supervising experience was especially amazing in every way and critical to my degree completion. Although geographically separated from me as I worked in a mostly asynchronous mode, they always seemed very close to me. Any email I sent was always acknowledged promptly, even if additional work reviewing my writing or answering a question was needed. That excellent practice of responsiveness is one which I have adopted as a general communications practice, because it provides a sense of confidence and security that the email has been received. They also made it clear when they would be available and/or working, setting my expectations appropriately for when I could expect to receive a response.

The senior supervisor was always able to provide a broad perspective on my writing as it progressed, focusing with broad strokes on the big picture and not the correctness of each sentence. Another supervisor, though, tended to provide detailed copy editing of each draft, teaching me by example about deficiencies in my writing and the best techniques for scholarly, academic writing in my discipline. These two supervisors served in complementary roles that were both very helpful to the completion of my dissertation.

My supervisors also provided encouragement as well as frank critical feedback in their own way. There were multiple occurrences when they gave me contrasting viewpoints. These varying viewpoints needed to be reconciled by me, which was a dilemma for me in the early days of my study. I needed to build the skills to navigate these differences and determine my own direction. This type of experience provides an opportunity for personal growth of the HDR candidate that is needed to participate in professional and academic collaborations and peer review.

SUPERVISING THE CHANGING FACE OF THE HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCHER COHORT

1. THE SCHOLARSHIP OF SUPERVISION

Christine Bruce and Susan Gasson

Why read this chapter?

In this chapter, we discuss the emergence and role of the Scholarship of Supervision and how we can engage with it to inform our supervisory practice and roles within the broader collaborative research community. The chapter provides:

1. Background to the emergence of the Scholarship of Supervision.
2. Details about the relevance of the Scholarship of Supervision – for us as supervisors and researchers.
3. Ways of engaging in the Scholarship of Supervision to enhance our practice and the educational experiences of our higher degree researchers.
4. One strategy, based on a simple action research framework, for engaging with the Scholarship of Supervision.

Background

This brief description of the emergence of the Scholarship of Supervision (SoS) highlights its increasing relevance. In the current context, engagement with SoS can inform our response to the demands of building supervisor capacity and competency, as global geopolitical, technological, and environmental challenges continue to drive the massification of the higher education sector.

The concept of the Scholarship of Supervision (SoS) is most readily understood in relation to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the Scholarship of Research (Boyer, 1990). In many ways, the SoS may be seen as situated at the intersection of these two. It is typically focused simultaneously on research supervisors and their support of higher degree researchers and enrichment of the research education experience. Engagement in the SoS assists us as supervisors to adopt a scholarly frame as we apply and develop our supervisory practices. That frame may have a pedagogical' or 'researcher development' focus. Engagement with the SoS can involve activities ranging from the application of existing scholarship

to practice and engagement in scholarly processes that result in new peer-reviewed/endorsed insights into research education.

The SoS has largely been led by practising supervisors, academic developers, and deans and directors of graduate schools. The earliest and still influential work on the SoS in Australia was led by Ingrid Moses and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt in the 1980s and 90s (Moses, 1985; Zuber-Skerritt, 1987), and in the United Kingdom by Estelle Phillips (1980), emerging from a staff developmental perspective. The Improving

Research Supervision and Training website was developed as a cooperative activity between university-based scholars, and became a key open-access source for supervisor development (fIRST, 2001). Journals, conferences, eBooks, webinars, podcasts, and professional networks dedicated to research education have continued to emerge and develop since the first Quality in Postgraduate Research (QPR) conference held in 1994. QPR is dedicated to better understanding doctoral education and its processes, practices, pedagogies, and theoretical frameworks. Today, discipline-based and professional associations have established conferences, meetings, and online services dedicated to research education.

The term Scholarship of Supervision (SoS) is informed by earlier related concepts, including the scholarship of teaching, learning and supervision, scholarship of postgraduate supervision and scholarship of research supervision (Baptista et al., 2011; Baptista, 2015; Wilkinson, 2011). More recent literature is starting to use the term Scholarship of Supervision (SoS) and focus on the need for the abbreviation SoS about a range of supervisory contexts, including HDR supervision (Butler et al., 2023; Dineen et al., 2023; Perillo, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). McCulloch's review of the literature across Australia and the United Kingdom further evidences this body of work (McCulloch, 2025). Although the SoS has not yet achieved the same prominence as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), its importance to Higher Degree Research and research education is as great as the importance of the SoTL to coursework education.

The SoS interrogates a range of Higher Degree Research contexts, (e.g., the higher degree researchersupervisor relationship, supervision strategies and approaches, higher degree researchers' experiences of different phases of research education, different ways of experiencing research and researcher development, and engaging in research cultures). At the same time, many foci of the SoTL have relevance for the SoS, which are already beginning to be interrogated:

- The research higher degree researcher experience of learning
- The importance of transitions, both into research education and into research
- Information-based professional practice, whether in academia or industry
- Higher degree researcher and supervisor experiences of the learning environment and context
- The experience of becoming expert
- The identification of critical threshold concepts

The relevance of the Scholarship of Supervision

(SoS) for research education

The wealth of scholarship available in this field provides an important opportunity for supervisors to become familiar with an increasingly diverse range of supervisory approaches and issues. That scholarship can help us:

- respond to personal, academic and administrative issues faced by higher degree researchers across all stages of candidature and beyond.
- guide the creation of high-impact research and researchers.
- provide quality higher degree research education environments.
- create new knowledge about all aspects of research education.

A small part of the decades of research and open-access resources available have found their way into the volumes of Confident Supervisors, for use around the globe. For example, in Chapter 3, Taylor, Holley and Kiley reference their edited book on global research education (2025).

Supervisory and researcher support provided by our institutional libraries, graduate schools and researcher development units informs our practice. Networking and engaging with other supervisors within our institutions, disciplines, or professions provides another mechanism for building capacity and confidence. National and global networks are provided by professional associations, disciplinary councils, councils of graduate research, and national and regional consortia (see Additional readings below). Institutional networks are provided by graduate schools, faculty and academic boards. Together, these bodies provide conferences, webinars, journals and online communities to support supervisors and supervision. The appointment of discipline-based and institutionally based research education leaders, Scholarly Librarians, and higher degree researcher bodies enables the advancement and advocacy of research supervision and education in universities and research institutions.

Ways of engaging in the Scholarship of Supervision (SOS)

The SoS uncovers the unique terrain occupied by higher degree researchers, their supervisors, and their supporters. It seeks to illuminate a 'hidden' curriculum associated with research education (Elliot et al., 2020), and to support the vulnerability of both higher degree researchers and supervisors as they occupy unique spaces, together creating research capacity and significant and original contributions to knowledge. For example, the work of Angela Brew (Brew et al., 2017) explored the role of research education coordinators in building research cultures aligned with the notion of engagement. Gina Wisker's work on good supervisory practices (Wisker & Sutcliffe, 1999; Taylor & Wisker, 2023) supports the election and implementation of practice. Anne Lee's (2022) framework for analysing approaches to teaching and supervision allows for the evaluation and monitoring of practice. Christine Bruce and Ian Stoodley's research reveals a supervisory pedagogical framework (Bruce & Stoodley, 2009). Their supervisory research project, funded as part of a Teaching and Learning Fellowship, enabled one of the

first extensive research projects involving interviews and focus groups with supervisors (Bruce & Stoodley, 2013).

Those already engaged in the SoS do so using a diverse range of frameworks and strategies. Some examples of that diversity are provided in this volume. In Chapter 2, Rachel Spronken Smith builds on existing literature that draws on policy and practice to approach the SoS with a lens on graduate employability. In Chapter 4, Virginia Tucker's discussion of Threshold Concept Theory provides another way of engaging in the SoS. In Chapter 8, Kitano and Clegg approach the SoS from a relational lens, exploring the construction of supervisory teams and approaches to supervision. In Chapter 11, Lesley Woods provides a detailed description of the application of Action Research to supervision using a PALAR framework.

One engagement strategy – Scholarship of Supervision (SoS) Action Research Framework

The engagement strategy proposed below honours Zuber Skerritts ground-breaking work, reflected in her massive video archive. Our simple Action Research framework can be used to scaffold initial engagement by those new to the SoS. The SoSAR Framework is a mechanism for adapting or applying appropriate practices in diverse supervisory contexts.

For decades, Zuber-Skerritts work has demonstrated the application of Action Research (AR) in education contexts (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987, 2011, 2018). In the teaching and learning context, she and others (Leche, 2014) have shown how it can help educators to flexibly think, innovate and resolve problems (Pine, 1981) and increase the efficacy of peer communications about professional development (Simmons, 1985). Action Researchers are appreciated for conducting research in settings where their findings have quick and ready application in addressing identified issues or problems (Guskey, 2000).

The SoSAR Framework profiled here acknowledges that different candidates, phases of candidature, and research topics may require you as supervisors to adapt and apply different practices. The four domains of the SoSAR framework shown in Figure 1.1 can support you in applying and evolving your supervisory practices to enhance candidate's research education experiences and the research education environment.

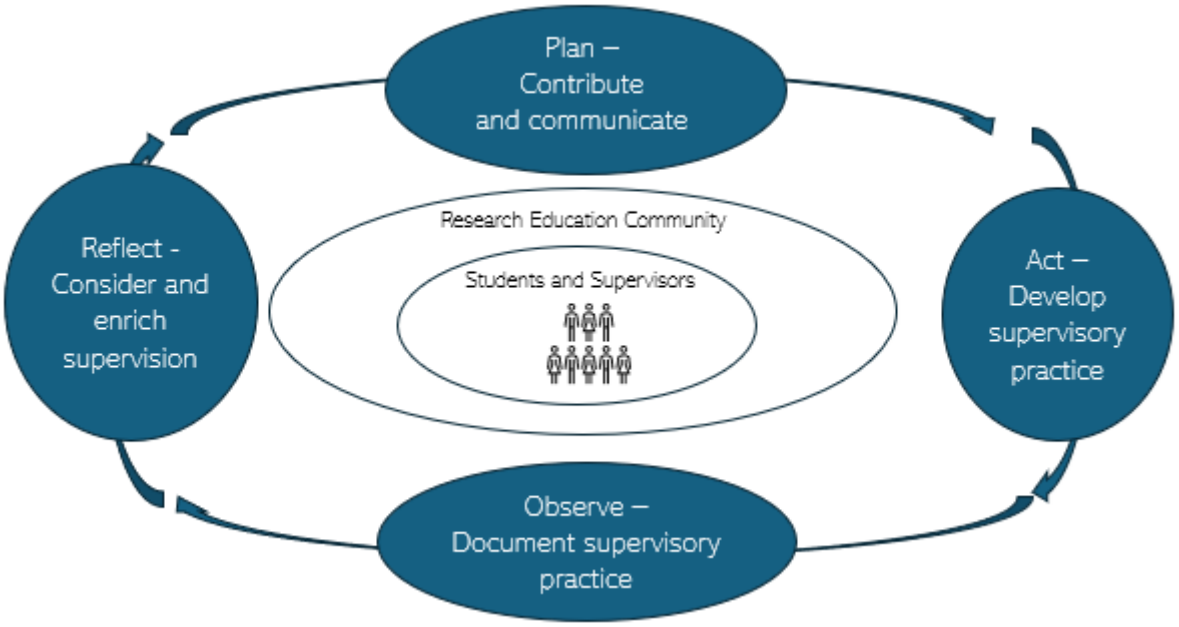


Figure 1.1 Scholarship of Supervisor Action Research (SoSAR) Framework

The SoSAR Framework assumes a holistic approach to supervision and proposes a developmental approach to supervisory practice. It represents a simplified version of Zuber-Skerritts spiral of action research cycles (2011), offering four points of entry to the framework. Moving through the four domains will inform our collaborative interactions and development of practice.

Each domain invites participation from the research education community, including higher degree researchers, supervisors, graduate schools, research services providers, industry, and the community, as well as policy leaders and higher education influencers. In occupying domains, stakeholders may build networks beyond their institution, with government and industry, and globally with professional associations and disciplinary councils. The framework opens up opportunities to access research grants and funding, networks, and share practices and knowledge informing the SoS.

Plan – Contribute and communicate

The first domain involves Planning – planning a project with a view to improvement, or innovation or ensuring best practice. Making a contribution to and communicating about the SoS is a research endeavour in its own right. Reading, creating a project around a supervisory direction, issue or problem, applying for a grant, writing an article, collaborating with research higher degree researchers, fellow supervisors, and others are all outcomes of this domain.

Self-reflective questions that those in the domain may pose include:

- What experience of becoming an expert and developing a research identity can I share with others, and how will I do that?
- What are the issues and concerns about supervisory practice and the research education community

that I can explore and share with others?
- Who are the players and audiences that I wish to support or inform about some aspect of the SoS?
- How can I use my knowledge, experience, and research to inform the SoS and its communities?

Operating in this domain allows us to defensibly demonstrate approaches to supervision, as well as research education experiences and environmental designs. The domain encourages and enables us to make systematic and peer-reviewed contributions to a well-established global discourse.

Act – Develop supervisory practice

The second domain of the framework is Act – Develop Supervisory Practice, in support of your plan. This domain prompts our thinking about the key stakeholders that inform the research education community and that we might 'act' with as we develop our supervisory practice to meet the needs of our research education community, including:

- The Higher degree researcher
- The Supervisors
- Deans and Directors and their Graduate Schools
- Research support service providers, including librarians, research managers, researcher developers, technical support staff, etc.
- Industry and community partners

As supervisors operating in this domain of the framework, we will be informed by our knowledge and experiences as higher degree researchers, and our roles in industry, community, or research. In occupying this domain and engaging with key stakeholders, we will receive support as our practices as a supervisor emerge. The domain prompts us to take a scholarly approach when determining:

- How often do we meet with higher degree researchers and supervisory teams?
- Who else is supervising our higher degree researchers, and how do we work with them?
- What role do industry and community partners play in our higher degree researchers' projects?

With experience, our supervisory identities evolve, and our engagements may become richer and more nuanced as we develop practices to meet the emerging demands of our research education community.

Observe – Document supervisory practices

As we continue supervising higher degree researchers, we occupy the Observe domain. When occupying this domain, we can make observations about our innovations and collect evidence to inform our practice by, for example:

- Looking at the practices of industry and community partners
- Seeking evidence of our higher degree researchers' activities and performance as researchers as they occur across different higher degree researcher cohorts (i.e., masters or doctoral, part-time or full-time, thesis by publication or thesis by creative works)
- Documenting the impact of our varied approaches to supervision (i.e., team supervision, cohort supervision, directive, consultative, collaborative, etc.)

Evidence we collect may be informed by our research identity, research culture, career or research goals and aspirations. Evidence collected from the plan and act domains may also be influenced by our role models or the institutional, disciplinary or professional standards that inform our supervisory practice. How we choose to use that evidence varies, but one option is to analyse it as we occupy the Reflect domain.

Reflect – Consider and enrich supervision

Those of us occupying the Consider and enrich supervision domain have chosen to invest time and thought in considering supervisory approaches used and available within our research education environments. Occupation of this domain may be influenced by our deep sense of responsibility toward our higher degree researchers, a desire to demonstrate excellence in our practice, and/or comments we receive about our supervisory practice (i.e., nomination for an award, feedback from others, etc.). Reflection is informed by the evidence collected from the plan and act domains. The questions that may arise when occupying this domain include:

- What are the supervisory experiences of my research higher degree researchers?
- What is the quality of the research education environment for my higher degree researchers?
- Do my supervisory practices meet the expectations of my higher degree researchers and my graduate school?
- How do my practices need to be modified based on the evidence I am collecting?

In this domain, we are likely to be prompted to re-engage with the broader literature on supervision and research education and the evidence collected in the Observe domain. We will be rewarded with a plethora of information as we begin to search for frameworks or models of supervision, survey tools or researcher resources to inform evaluation of our practice, or the performance of our research education environment in meeting the needs of higher degree researchers and realising positive graduate outcomes.

Those in, or seeking, leadership roles (i.e., research education coordinator, Director of graduate studies, etc.) will find this domain valuable in building capacity to inform the practice of those around them and guide the development of their research education culture. We will also encounter stakeholders beyond the supervisory community as we occupy this domain. Operating within this domain, we will find a rich body of literature to inform our practice as we seek to contribute to the research education environment.

Ultimately, we will use the outcomes of occupying this domain as we enter the planning domain and our next action research cycle.

The SoSAR framework is therefore relevant to realising good practice, higher degree researchers and scholarly outcomes. So, reiterating the domains of the framework in action, we can:

- Plan innovation and best practice strategies with a view to contributing to conferences and publications beyond this volume. Use existing literature or other resources to access support and ideas to inform our supervisory practice.
- Act, using the plan to develop practice and translate what is available to inform practice.
- Observe the practices engaged in through the plan and act domains to document alternative supervisory practices that may refresh, revitalise and respond to contemporary higher degree researcher and societal needs.
- Reflect, using observations made and other available scholarship to consider ways to enrich supervisory practice that can inform advancement of a future plan.

Evidence your practice

We can document our engagement with the SoS by creating a supervisor portfolio. This may include keeping records of our supervisory work and their outcomes, our professional engagement in conferences, leadership of doctoral consortia, contributions to research education innovations, receipt of unsolicited feedback, responses to requests to contribute to continuous improvement, personal learning, and mentorship of others. Many Confident Supervisor chapters end with a section called 'Evidence your practice' offering prompts, responses to which could also become material for your supervisor's portfolio. In this chapter, self-reflective questions are provided to assist our exploration of each framework domain.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have introduced the notion of the SoS and the SoSAR framework and sought to encourage you to consider engaging in the SoS to inform your developing supervisor identity. The SoS is intended to support our development as supervisors and participation in a global, dynamic and evolving community of practice.

The SoS can also lead to the development of scholarly expertise, enabling knowledge contributions to be made available locally and globally through the conduct of research. Our career advancement may be informed through grant funding, fellowships, teaching awards and travel grants in support of the SoS. For example, the editorial team of this volume are all fellows of the UK-based Advance HE.

That community continues responding to changing contexts and demands while maintaining and

enhancing the quality of our research education environments. Together we can realise the promise of future generations of researchers.

Acknowledgement

In preparing this chapter, we are indebted to the inspiration provided by Professor Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. Professor Zuber-Skerritt has generously and extensively contributed to the scholarship of supervision, including pioneering the use of Action Research in this context for many decades. Her impact and vision continue to influence our research, education and development environments.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Baptista, A. V. (2015). Quality of doctoral research supervision: Contributions of an integrative and fluid framework to evaluate and monitor the process. In F. Ribeiro, Y. Politis, & B. Culum (Eds.), *New voices in higher education research and scholarship* (pp. 85-106). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-7244-4.ch005

Baptista, A. V., Hue, I., Costa, N., & Jenkins, A. (2011). *Disciplines, pedagogies and c for SoTL.* The London Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 8th International Conference Proceedings, University of West London.

Boyer, E. L. (1990).*Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate.* Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. https://depts.washington.edu/gs630/Spring/Boyer.pdf [PDF 1949KB]

Brew, A., Boud, D., & Malfroy, J. (2017). The role of research education coordinators in building research cultures in doctoral education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *36*(2), 255-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1177812

Bruce, C., & Stoodley, I. (2009). *A pedagogical framework for the technology disciplines.* [Working Paper]. (Unpublished). QUT ePrints. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/28536/

Bruce, C., & Stoodley, I. (2013). Experiencing higher degree research supervision as teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(2), 226-241. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.576338

Butler, B. M., Burns, R. W., & Willey, C. (2023). Toward a renewal of supervisory scholarship and practice in teacher education: A collaborative self-study. *Journal of Educational Supervision*, *6*(3). https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.6.3.3

Dineen, K., Thelen, S., and Santucci, A. (2024). "Whose knowledge is it anyway? Epistemic injustice and the supervisor/supervisee relationship." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry, 12*(3). https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.12.3

Elliot, D. L., Bengtsen, S. S. E., Guccione, K., & Kobayashi, S. (2020). *The hidden curriculum in doctoral education*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41497-9

fIRST. (2001). for Improving Research Supervision and Training website. https://web.archive.org/web/20020829015559/http://wallace.iim.uts.edu.au/staging/first/

Lee, A. (2020). *Successful research supervision* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

McCulloch, A. (2025). Policy, regulation and pedagogy: a brief history of supervisor development and training in Australia and the United Kingdom. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2025.2584208

Moses, I. (1985). *Supervising postgraduates* (Vol. 3). Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Phillips, E. M. (1980). Education for research: the changing constructs of the postgraduate, *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*, *13*(1) 39-48. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7373(80)80034-4.

Quality in postgraduate research: Making it happen Conference. April 7-8, 1994, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia.

Taylor, S., Holley, K.A. and Kiley, M. (Eds.) (2025) *Global Perspectives on Graduate and Doctoral Education London,* Routledge.

Taylor, S. and Wisker, G. (2023) The changing landscape of doctoral education in the UK. Journal: *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 60(5): 760-775 https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2237943

Wang, J., Winter, K., & Moody, H. (2024). An unrecognized avenue for academia's most vulnerable: conceptualizing rescue supervision in the third space (pp. 110–123). In *Research handbook of academic mental health* (M. S. Edwards, Ed.). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803925080.00013

Wilkinson, A. C. (2011). Postgraduate supervision as an advanced teaching and learning practice: Exploring the scholarship link. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *25*(5), 902–920. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajhe/article/view/80694

Wisker, G., & Sutcliffe, N. (1999). Good practice in postgraduate supervision. SEDA.

Wisker, G. (2018). Different journeys: Supervisor perspectives on disciplinary conceptual threshold crossings in doctoral learning. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, *6*(2), 40–59. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/cristal/article/view/182300

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1987). Helping postgraduate research students learn. *Higher Education*, *16*(1), 75-94. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00139249

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2011). PALAR concepts, models and values. In *Action Leadership Towards a Participatory Paradigm* (1st ed., pp. 23-56). Springer Nature. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-90-481-3935-4_2

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2018). An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research*, *26*(4), 513–532. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1464939

Additional reading

Weblinks to Regional Responses

MSCA starts survey to collect best practice examples on supervision – https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/news/msca-supervision-survey

The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) – https://www.rsvp.ac.uk

Towards developing a collaborative PhD programme across African Research University Alliance (ARUA) member universities https://arua.org/wp-content/uploads/South-African-Report.pdf

Disciplinary references

Heyns, T., Bresser, P., Buys, T., Coetzee, I., Korkie, E., White, Z., & Mc Cormack, B. (2019). Twelve tips for supervisors to move towards person-centered research supervision in health care sciences. *Medical Teacher, 41*(12):1353-1358. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1533241

Kohout-Diaz, M. (2025). Advancing an inclusive research approach in humanities and social sciences: The crucial role of self-study and narrative enquiry in doctoral research experiences,

Social Sciences & Humanities Open, *11*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101256

Malekian, R. (2023). Effective Supervision for Enhancing Quality of Doctoral Research in Computer Science and Engineering. *Computer Science*, *4*, 5. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42979-023-02167-4

2. WHAT ARE YOU SUPERVISING FOR?

Rachel Spronken-Smith

Why read this chapter?

By reading this chapter and considering your own context, you will be:

1. More aware of your motivations for supervising
2. Encouraged to foster the holistic development of your research candidates
3. Able to assist the career development of your research candidates
4. Have a broadened awareness of successful outcomes beyond academic career pathways (and know how to avoid language and practices that privilege academic career pathways).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://qut.pressbooks.pub/confidentsupervisors2/?p=56#video-56-1

Introduction to chapter 2: What are you supervising for? [03m26s]

Introduction

If you are new to supervision, or perhaps refreshing your practice, ask yourself 'why am I supervising?' Is it something that is expected to gain tenure or a promotion? Do you supervise because you need help to keep your research programme (and outputs) going? Is it an enjoyable part of your job? Fortunately, many colleagues report supervision as the best aspect of their job – they love it!

Interrogating your motivations may give insight into your particular approach to supervision. For example, if you do supervision because you want to grow your research programme and your profile, you may tend to focus on the end products of your research candidate's journeys – their thesis and publications.

If, however, you supervise because you enjoy guiding candidates on a research journey, and seeing them become independent researchers, your approach will likely focus more on their journey and supporting their holistic development; outputs are less important. For most supervisors, it is likely motivations are multi-faceted – both in terms of wanting their candidates to develop as researchers, but also in terms of contributing to research programmes and outputs.

Another important question to ask yourself is 'What do you hope your doctoral candidates will achieve as a result of their journey with you?' What would you see as indicators of successful outcomes for your candidate? Are you focussing on the products of the candidature such as the thesis and research publications, or their process of becoming a researcher, or, ideally on both? Are you hoping they will find a career in academia? Or are you open to any career aligned with their interests? Would they know what you are thinking?

In this chapter, I will critique an often-held view by supervisors that academia is the only successful career outcome for a doctoral candidate. You will see that this narrow view can be quite pervasive in universities, implicit through supervisor, departmental and institutional practices. Yet we know that in western countries only about 30-40% of PhD graduates will enter jobs in higher education, with most in precarious roles (e.g., McCarthy & Wienk, 2019; OECD, 2021). Consequently, PhD graduates are entering a range of careers, but some feel unprepared for these, both in terms of their skills sets and awareness of career options (Spronken-Smith et al., 2024a,b). This is where you can make a difference! Through your conversations, guidance and actions, you can help your candidates be better prepared for career transitions, irrespective of where they are going. The next section discusses the need for the holistic development of your candidates, addressing a lack of awareness of the skills and attributes they have, and remedying some often-reported skill deficits. Doing so will boost their confidence and readiness for a range of careers. The following section then considers conversations about possible careers, and encouragement of your candidates to generate a personal development plan. The final section turns to how you can help change a culture in your lab, department and/or university, away from a view that academia is the only successful outcome for PhD graduates.

Fostering the holistic development of your candidates

When working with your doctoral candidate, it is natural to focus on their development as a researcher – this is after all, at the heart of doctoral study! But even when thinking about their research skill development, are you are aware of the broad range of skills and attributes this can encompass? One framework, very helpful when considering the progressive development of research skills from undergraduate to doctoral study is the Research Skill Development Framework [PDF 462KB], by John Willison and Kerry O'Regan (2007). This framework is very focused on the development of core research skills from developing questions to designing and conducting research, as well as communicating and applying research findings. However, at the doctoral level, a much broader suite of skills and attributes are developed, and these are captured in the widely used VITAE Researcher Development Framework or

RDF as it is known. This framework has four domains: Knowledge and intellectual abilities, Personal effectiveness, Research governance and organisation and Engagement influence and impact. But what about cultural intelligence? In some research contexts, this aspect is really important. Consequently, at the University of Otago, New Zealand, we generated our own set of expected graduate attributes from doctoral study, drawing on the VITAE framework as well as the work of Janine Senekal and colleagues (2022), but also taking into consideration expected knowledge of our Māori and Pacific Island contexts. Figure 1 illustrates the key domains of expected outcomes, with further detail provided in Spronken-Smith et al., (2024a).

Figure 2.1: Domains of doctoral graduate attributes (developed from Spronken-Smith, Brown and Cameron, 2024a).

When thinking about these broader skill sets, how can you encourage your candidates to develop and/or enhance such attributes? Remember that most doctoral candidates enter study having worked, so have likely developed a range of transferrable skills. The key is to get them to consider the expected attributes and reflect on their own skills and attributes to determine what might need to be developed and/or enhanced. My research exposed limited development of teamwork, oral communication and networking in doctoral graduates from US and New Zealand universities (Spronken-Smith et al., 2024a). Even those graduates who worked in teams in labs, wanted to learn more about how to work in teams, how to develop leadership skills and how to manage conflict. So, consider how you, or perhaps support services in your institution, can help foster these skills.

In recent years, there has been a push for the fostering of global or active citizenship attributes in doctoral graduates. Such attributes include being aware of injustice and social inequality, or having a social justice-oriented disposition (Senekal et al., 2022), noting others include digital, cultural and environmental/sustainability literacy (e.g., Spronken-Smith, 2018). The Hannover Recommendations 2019 for doctoral education (2019) included the desire to instil in doctoral graduates "social and ethical responsibility" and "a desire to stand up for their own ideas and to take them forward for the benefit of society" (7a). Indeed, in chapter 13 of volume 1 of this book, Wade Kelly and Lisa Given (2023) promote supervision to encourage societal impact, suggesting supervisors and candidates should discuss societal impact early on when planning research. Whilst it is possible some doctoral projects will inherently develop or enhance global or active citizenship attributes, how can candidates in more theoretical projects develop these attributes? This is where supervisors should encourage participation in so-called 'high impact activities' (Kuh, 2008) which develop a host of transferable skills. For example, taking an internship, doing outreach or volunteering can develop interpersonal and project management skills, as well as foster cultural literacy and knowledge of inequality and social injustices. Unfortunately, in my research, we heard about candidates having to "sneak around behind their supervisors back" to participate in these types of activities, as their supervisors saw them as a distraction from their study (Spronken-Smith, 2024b). We need to challenge this perception and instead get supervisors to encourage such participation, as part of building more holistic attributes in their candidates.

Assisting in the career development of your candidates

An important part of the 'Personal resourcefulness' domain in Figure 1, is 'Career management'. At the University of Otago, we hope that doctoral graduates will:

- Be proactive and self-aware in planning their professional and career development, capitalising on available support.
- Understand their work motivators, values and goals and use them to guide their career choices.
- Participate in relevant professional development opportunities (e.g., workshops, courses, attending a conference, etc.) for career development purposes.
- Research career options, plan, and present themself effectively through CVs, job applications and interviews.
- Articulate the nature of their transferable skill set and understand how they can apply these skills in work environments within and outside academia.
- Develop and maintain networks with supervisors, colleagues and peers within their institution and the wider research community.

My research has shown that doctoral candidates may have very poor self-awareness of their skill sets and limited knowledge of career options (Spronken-Smith et al., 2024b). So, as a supervisor, what can you do about this? I provide some suggestions below, but also see Chapter 11, Volume 1 of Confident Supervisors, where Alan McAlpine focuses on how supervisors can empower higher degree researchers' career planning.

First, regarding a lack of awareness of their own skills sets, encourage a self-evaluation, which becomes a foundation of a personal development plan. Get them to identify their current skills and strengths. This also helps them identify where further development might be needed. Ideally, they will share their self-evaluation with you, so you can assist in identifying possible professional development opportunities.

Second, you should have a frank conversation about their motivations for doctoral study and their career aspirations (see Chapter 11, Volume 1 on how to have career conversations). Some candidates do doctoral study as part of upskilling from an academic job, and plan to return that, while others may be studying while retired. For these candidates, career development is not a priority, unless, for the former group, they want to further develop teaching skills or learn how to obtain research grants and other research management skills. However, for those looking for a career upon completion, it is important to discuss possible options for them. We know that many doctoral candidates aspire to jobs in academia, despite the very slim prospects of obtaining a tenure track or tenured position. Are they aware of the difficulty of obtaining such positions, especially in the western world, and do they know that most pathways into them involve a series of precarious academic positions? Share what you know about obtaining academic jobs and also discuss the range of jobs available in universities such as teaching, research or support service roles; many are unaware of the range of options.

If your candidate is intent on an academic role, also encourage them to consider options beyond academia – again many are unaware that their skills sets are sought after and are highly transferrable to a range of jobs. As a supervisor you may not have experience of work in government or business etc., so encourage your candidates to talk to career advisers, and perhaps you know of alumni in roles beyond academia who you can connect them with.

These days, many candidates will not be considering academic roles, preferring roles in industry or government instead. If you are aware of this desire from the outset of their candidature, help them to develop an applied project, which may even entail an internship. For those wanting a government job, they could take an additional paper in writing policy. That is, you can help them identify appropriate professional and career development opportunities, which will better position them for their desired job.

Third, the key to supporting your candidates is to get them to generate a personal development plan, so they can have a personalised pathway through their doctoral journey. This begins with the self-evaluation, mentioned earlier, the setting of goals for their professional and career development, the identification of learning opportunities to achieve these goals, and taking action. Fortunately, there are many free online platforms to guide them through this process. For example:

- My IPD is a science disciplines centric PDP template tool
- imaginephd is a humanities centric PDP template tool
- No Limits toolkit is a career development tool for all disciplines

Finally, make sure they know what career services are available for them (doctoral candidates may assume

career services are just for undergraduates), and encourage them to see a career adviser and look out for career events – especially those with alumni as speakers.

Be part of a culture change to more broadly recognise 'successful' outcomes

Your candidates are immersed in an academic environment, and often the only successful outcome from doctoral study is seen as obtaining an academic position. Unfortunately, stories we heard from PhD graduates from both US and New Zealand universities, included a fear of admitting to their supervisors that they did not want to go into academia, as they felt supervisors would lose interest in supporting them (Spronken-Smith et al., 2024b). Then there were departments where only those graduates who obtained academic positions were posted on noticeboards, or those who were wanting to go into academia gained more assistance with preparing job applications. Seo and Yeo (2020), proposed that a culture shift is needed throughout the institution to "broaden the definition of 'successful' PhD career outcomes" (p. 627), and our research certainly reinforced this need. Successful career outcomes should entail positions across employment sectors such as in government, business, non-governmental organisations, industry, and education more broadly from school teaching to academic positions.

Think about your department. Are there any signals (blatant or subtle) which privilege academic careers? If you notice anything, call it out! Even the terminology we use is important – do you talk about non-academic or alternative careers? Such terms are denigrating jobs outside academia. Really, we should just talk about careers!

Figure 2.2 proposes a range of actions, including at the supervisor and department levels, which can assist your candidates to become better aware of their skill sets and career options. Consider your own practice, and that of your department and institution. Are there areas which could be improved?

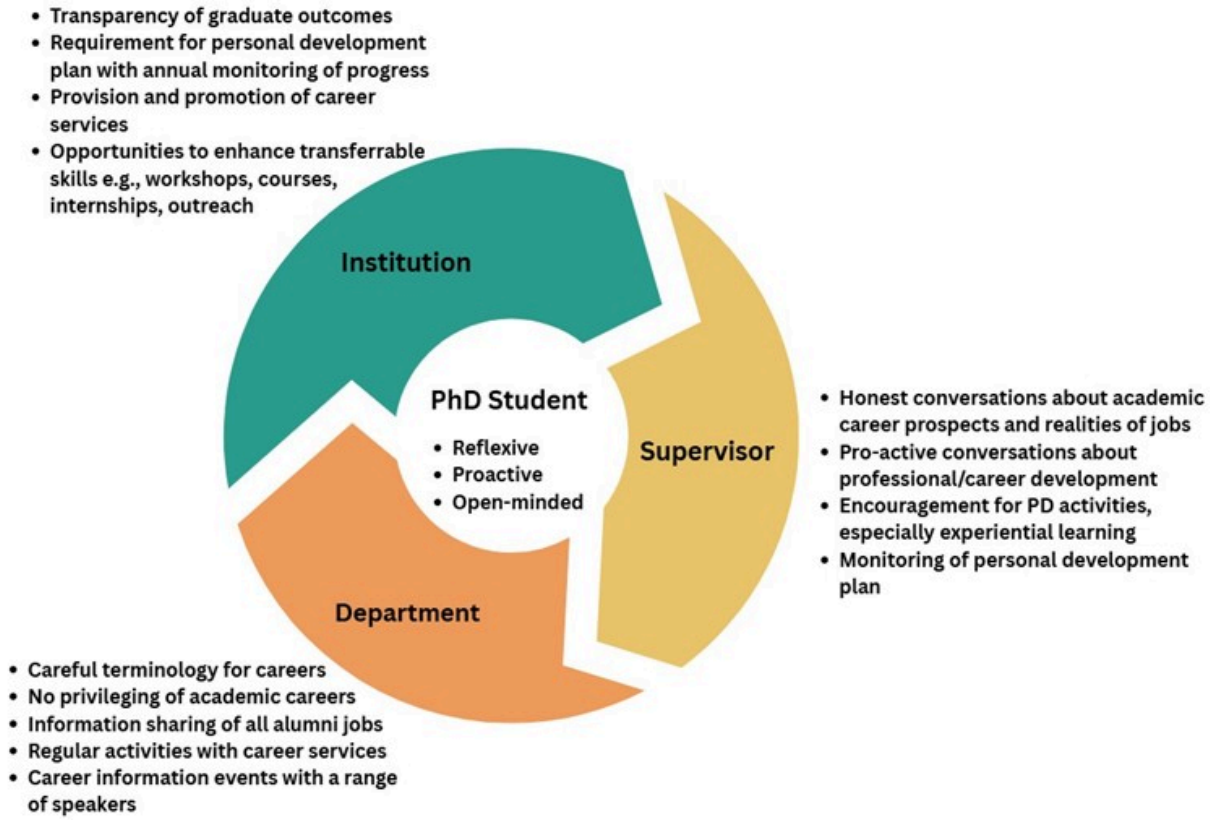


Figure 2.2 Key factors at the institutional departmental and supvisor levels to assist PhD candidates to develop self-knowledge and options-knowledge for careers (adapted from Spronken-Smith et al., 2024b, p.284).

Conclusion

So, what are you supervising your research students for? Hopefully you are wanting them to not only complete their thesis, but also develop a holistic set of attributes that will position them well for whatever career pathways they are considering. You may need to rethink your desire for them to produce co-authored research outputs. Sure, if they are wanting an academic or research-focused career, these will be important, but if seeking other pathways, other outputs may be more relevant. Beyond your candidates, think about the signals, both overt and subtle in your department and/or institution, which may be promoting academic jobs as the mark of success for doctoral graduates. Be part of a culture change to broaden the notion of success!

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Forces and Forms of Doctoral Education – Hannover Recommendations. (2019). https://www.doctoral-education.info/dl/Hannover-Recommendations-DocEd-2019.pdf [PDF 102KB]

Kelly, W. & Given, L. (2023). Supervising for societal impact: A holistic approach to higher degree by research support. In S. Gasson, J. Blacker, I. Stoodley, A. Winter, & C. Bruce (Eds.), *Confident supervisors: Creating independent researchers* (pp. 165-177). James Cook University. https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/confidentsupervisors

Kuh, G. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. https://navigate.utah.edu/_resources/documents/hips-kuh-2008.pdf [PDF 1412KB]

McAlpine, A. (2023). Empowering higher degree researchers' career planning. In S. Gasson, J. Blacker, I. Stoodley, A. Winter, & C. Bruce (Eds.), *Confident supervisors: Creating independent researchers* (pp. 144-153). James Cook University. https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/confidentsupervisors

McCarthy, P. & Wienk, M. (2019). *Who are the top PhD employers?* . The University of Melbourne on behalf of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute. https://amsi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/advancing_australias_knowledge_economy.pdf [PDF 3.9MB]

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). Reducing the precarity of academic research careers. *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, May 2021, No. 113. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2021/05/reducing-the-precarity-of-academic-research-careers_2d4e2194.html

Senekal, J.S., Munnik, E. & Frantz, J.M. (2022). A systematic review of doctoral graduate attributes: Domains and definitions. *Frontiers in Education,* 7, Article 1009106. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1009106.

Seo, G. & Yeo H.T. (2020). In pursuit of careers in the professoriate or beyond the professoriate: What matters to doctoral students when making a career choice? *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 15,* 615-635. https://doi.org/10.28945/4652

Spronken-Smith. R. (2018). Reforming doctoral education: There is a better way. *CSHE Occasional Research Paper Series*, 9.18. https://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/reforming-doctoral-education-there-better-way-rachel-spronken-smith-university-otago

Spronken-Smith, R., Brown, K. & Cameron, C. (2024a). Perceptions of graduate attribute development and application in PhD graduates from US and NZ universities. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *49*(1): 86-101, https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2182873

Spronken-Smith, R., Brown, K. & Cameron, C. (2024b). Retrospective perceptions of support for career development among PhD graduates from US and New Zealand universities. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, *15*(3): 273-289. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-05-2023-0048

Willison, J & O'Regan, K. (2007). Commonly known, commonly not known, totally unknown: a framework for students becoming researchers, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 26(4): 393-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360701658609

3. SUPPORTING INCREASED DIVERSITY AMONG CANDIDATES

Stan Taylor and Margaret Kiley

Why read this chapter?

Historically, doctoral candidates [1]were few in number, studied in their countries of origin, and were drawn from dominant societal strata. However, over the present century, there has been a massive expansion globally in the number of doctoral candidates which has led to the incorporation of hitherto un- or under-represented groups and transformed the composition of the population.

The implications for supervision of two major aspects of that transformation, namely the growth in international candidates and the increase in candidates from indigenous populations respectively, are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 of the first volume of 'Confident Supervisors'.

The present chapter focuses upon the implications for supervisors of other aspects of the diversification of the domestic candidate population. In particular, it seeks to

- Outline the key changes in the candidate population
- Review the benefits of wider participation
- Identify the key challenges which non-traditional candidates may face
- Look at what supervisors can do to support them
- Ensure that the notion of diversity is inclusive in that it addresses issues for all research learners.

Key changes

The major changes that have taken place relate to gender, social class, age, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation.

1.

Gender

At the start of the 21st century, males were in the majority of doctoral candidates across most of the globe. But, over the past two decades or so, women have overtaken them across the Northern hemisphere and Oceania, although progress has been slower in many countries in the Southern hemisphere (OECD, 2019).

Social class

Historically, doctoral candidates have studied in elite institutions which have recruited from a narrow range of upper or upper-middle class economic and social strata. But the massification of doctoral education has led to the recruitment of candidates from lower class backgrounds, many of whom are the first in their families to enter higher education (see Bhopal & Myers, 2023; Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Age

Historically, doctoral studies were undertaken immediately after completing a bachelor's degree, and the vast majority of candidates were in their early and mid-20s. But a combination of greater indebtedness after undergraduate studies, lack of availability of public research funding and more flexible university entry requirements have led to the postponement of doctoral studies until candidates have been in employment for some considerable time and can return to their studies, usually on a part-time basis. In consequence, in many countries the candidate profile has shifted with much higher proportions in the middle and older age groups (Kiley, 2017; Robertson, 2019).

Race/ethnicity

Traditionally, doctoral candidates have been drawn almost exclusively from white majority groups of the population, and racial and ethnic minorities have been significantly under-represented. However, in recent years, governments and/or institutions have made considerable efforts to attract more members of minority groups into doctoral education and with some degree of success, although there is some way to go before achieving equality, particularly for candidates of colour (Khan & Cowell, 2020; Okahana et al., 2016).

Religion

Reflecting the dominance of white majority groups, if doctoral candidates in the Global North have had religious orientations, these have generally been towards Christianity. But immigration, particularly from the Global South. has been associated with an increased presence of ethnic and racial minority groups who adhere to other faiths, including Buddhism and Islam (Mahmud, 2024).

Disability

In the past, the vast majority of doctoral candidates have not been recorded as having a physical and/or mental impairment. But, again as a consequence of massification, more candidates have been recruited to doctoral studies who have disabilities and this, in conjunction with higher disclosure rates, means that they now account for a larger proportion of the overall population (Disabled Students UK and Pete Quinn Consulting Ltd., 2023).

Neurodiversity

Doctoral candidates may be neurodivergent in the sense that their brains function in different ways from the majority, which may be associated with conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD. There is no historic evidence, but a recent study (Riby & Pearson, 2024) suggests that this is a significant factor for many current doctoral candidates.

Sexual orientations

Historically it was presumed that doctoral candidates were overwhelmingly heterosexual, although again hard data is lacking. But recent studies (English & Fenby-Hulse, 2019; Holmes et al., 2020) show that the contemporary population includes significant numbers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, or other (LGBTQIA+).

Intersectionality

It may be noted that doctoral candidates may, of course, belong to more than one of these groups, a phenomenon labelled in the literature as intersectionality (Yitman & Almusaed, 2022; Ressa & Danforth, 2023). The impact of this is well illustrated in a comment of a working-class Muslim Kashmiri female former doctoral candidate interviewed by Khan and Cowell (2020), who reflected on her experiences and said:

> I think when you have a number of multiple intersecting minority identities, you're carrying the burden of what each of those identities brings. And they combine and conflate and make it even more difficult for you.

The benefits of diversification

As numerous studies (Holley, 2013; McChesney, 2022; McCulloch & Thomas, 2013; Pasztor & Wakeling, 2018; Wakeling & Kyriacou, 2010) have suggested, diversification has many benefits including:

- accessing a larger pool of talent by broadening the catchment of the doctorate;
- enhancing of the quality of the next generation of researchers by ensuring that the brightest and best are able to enter the profession;
- broadening the composition of the academy and so widening perspectives and the knowledge base;
- through overcoming the introversion of the 'ivory tower', making the academy more relevant to society;
- through enabling doctoral candidates to achieve their potential, promoting social justice;
- through improving access to high status professions and occupations, promoting social enabling institutions, supervisors, and peers to learn from candidates with different perspectives and outlooks.

Challenges for non-traditional candidates

But, if they have much to bring to doctoral education, non-traditional candidates may face a range of challenges. Following Taylor and Kiley (2025), these challenges include lack of confidence, lack of role models, isolation, discrimination, multiple competing priorities, and limited access to resources including training, facilities, and funding.

Lack of confidence

Doctoral supervision has traditionally been based upon the assumption that candidates would arrive with the confidence to cope with the academic and social demands of their studies. In an era when candidates came from families with prior experience of university education, attended elite secondary and tertiary institutions, and were the best and brightest within the latter went on to doctoral programmes, candidates may have been confident to survive the slings and arrows of life as a researcher. But this is much less likely in an era when, as Yeatman (cited Johnson et al., 2000. p. 137) has put it:

> ... many supervisees are barely socialised into the demands and rigours of an academic scholarly and research culture. It is especially inadequate to the needs of many PhD aspirants who, by historic cultural positioning, have not been invited to imagine themselves as subjects of genius.

One well-known manifestation of lack of confidence is so-called 'imposter syndrome' where candidates doubt their abilities and feel that they are frauds to be on doctoral programmes for reasons relating purely to historic disadvantage. So, for example, one of the candidates interviewed by Gardner and Holley (2011: 84) reported:

> The hardest thing is thinking that someone is going to find out I shouldn't be here even though it is something I have worked so hard for. And I have to remind myself constantly that I have a right to be here. I have to keep telling myself.

Such a lack of confidence can be detrimental to candidates' academic performances as well as their wellbeing and mental health (Handforth, 2022).

Lack of role models

While the composition of the candidate population has changed dramatically over the past two decades or so, the composition of the academic population has changed much less; as Aksnes et al (2024) have pointed out, the current professoriate was recruited two decades or more ago from the then-PhD cohorts which were very different in composition from those of today.

Therefore, many supervisors are male, from upper socio-economic strata, white, non-disabled, neurotypical, and heterosexual, which provides role models for candidates with those characteristics, but obviously not for those who are female, from lower class backgrounds, persons of colour, disabled, neurodivergent, or LGBTQIA+. So, the latter are without the inspiration that can be provided through an identification with someone from a similar background who has successfully completed a doctorate and gone on to become a well-known researcher (Mattocks & Briscoe-Palmer, 2016).

Isolation

Isolation can be a problem for all doctoral students, but it can be a particular one for candidates from non-traditional backgrounds, depending upon how many others in the research environment share similar backgrounds. Where there are few compatriots, candidates can, as Taylor and Kiley (2025, p. 219) have put it, end up leading:

> ...a solitary existence, e.g. the lone female working away in the laboratory, the lone person of colour in the lecture theatre... or the lone LGBTQI+ candidate among the heterosexuals, the lone neurodivergent candidate among the neurotypical ones, or the lone disabled candidate among the non-disabled.

Isolation can also extend to work-related social life. So, for example, a respondent in a study of Muslim PhD candidates in the UK (Mahmud, 2024, p. 9) reported that:

> When there are social events, they generally are planned around some sort of very British-based culture, and that would exclude a lot of the Muslim students. For example, I was asked to have a supervisory meeting in a pub and ECR networking events nearly always involve drinking and are free-mixing events... (Rahima).

Discrimination

As Manathunga (2011: 368) reminds us:

> We do not leave our identities as raced, classed and gendered bodies outside the door when we engage in supervision; instead, our personal histories, experiences, cultural and class backgrounds remain present.

The most frequently occurring examples of discrimination relate to gender, with female candidates being treated less favourably than males and being subject to sexual harassment varying from leering and joking through to demanding sexual favours (Bloom et al., 2021; Chakraverty & Rishi,2021). But there is also

evidence of discrimination against candidates on the grounds of their ethnic or racial groups (Anderson et al., 2022; Khan & Cowell, 2020), religion (Mahmud, 2024), sexuality (English & Fenby-Hulse, 2019; Holmes et al., 2020), neurodivergence (Peters, 2023), and disabilities (Lundemo et al., 2023; Mattocks & Briscoe-Palmer, 2016).

Where candidates combine two or more of these characteristics, they can suffer multiple discrimination as in the case cited by Ressa and Danforth (2023, p. 154) of a black, African international doctoral candidate and wheelchair user who was subject to:

> ...racist, disability and origin microaggressions perpetrated by faculty and peers... Their intentional and unintentional behaviours included solemn and nervous facial expressions, body postures of evident distress, harsh words, and outright acts of complete avoidance. The comprehensive message across situations and events was solid rejection.

Multiple competing priorities

Historically, doctoral candidates were young, single, males, who studied full time and who could devote their entire attention to their research. However, the diversification of the population has meant that many contemporary candidates have additional responsibilities which compete for priority with their research.

So, for example, women candidates are often expected, in addition to their studies, to do the lion's share of child-rearing and domestic chores (Mason et al., 2024). Similarly, mature candidates are often still in jobs and additionally have responsibilities towards partners, children, and perhaps aged parents (Robertson, 2017). Candidates who are neurodiverse and/or have disabilities may have additional responsibilities in terms of maintaining their health, which may necessitate frequent medical treatment and absences from campus (Peters, 2023). In all of these cases, candidates have to juggle their doctoral studies with family or home or personal priorities, and this can be debilitating as illustrated by one of the respondents to O'Regan's (2020, p. 5) study of part-time PhDs:

> I describe being a part-time PhD student as a perpetual state of guilt in so far as I should be spending more time with my family and I'm not. I should be spending more time with my job and I'm not and you feel like you are doing everything badly, so you are in a perpetual state of guilt (Shane).

Access to funding, training, facilities, resources, and networks

In the past, candidates were often fully funded and worked full-time on campus and as such had complete access to facilities, resources, and networks.

But a combination of static or reduced public funding and additional demand for doctoral education has meant that many candidates are wholly or partly self-funding. This can be more of an issue for candidates

from less affluent backgrounds, and it can affect their confidence and self-esteem. So, as Ostrove et al (2011, pp. 765-66) found in their survey:

> ...students from poor and working class backgrounds were more likely to struggle financially during graduate school, which is associated with feeling less like they belong and having a lower academic self-concept...The reverse pattern is true of students from more privileged class backgrounds...

Access to facilities, resources and networks can be a major hurdle for candidates who are in employment and/or have other family responsibilities, particularly if it involves spending time during the working day on campus which many are unable to do because of other commitments (Skakni, 2018).

Additionally, for candidates with disabilities and particularly where their mobility is impaired, access to facilities and resources can be constrained (Disabled Students UK and Pete Quinn Consulting Ltd., 2023; Farrar & Young, 2007).

What can supervisors do?

A recent large-scale survey of supervisors in the UK (Clegg, 2024) asked whether they felt adequately equipped to support a diverse candidate population: only 35% said that this was the case. So, what can supervisors do?

Building candidates' confidence

Where supervisors suspect that candidates from non-traditional groups may be lacking in confidence, they may wish to be pro-active in building their confidence. In particular, in the early stages of doctoral studies, supervisors need to go the extra mile to show candidates that they have a genuine interest and concern for them as people and that they want them to do well in their studies (Gardner & Holley, 2011). So, they may adopt a more 'pastoral' style of supervision than would be the case with traditional candidates (Taylor & Kiley, 2025).

A further way of boosting the confidence of candidates is, obviously, where justified, to praise them for their work. Kind words, particularly in public, can do wonders for candidates' morale and self-belief.

Being or finding role models

The best case for candidates is that their supervisors themselves are role models, as for example in the case below of the candidate interviewed in Jairam and Kahl's (2012, p. 320) study who said:

> My advisor... is a single mother of two, and I think she really felt for me when I got divorced and left an emotionally abusive, unfaithful man, She ...was a role model for being a single mother and academic, and she guided me with time management.

Similarly, a respondent to Arday's (2017, p. 6) survey of Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) students said that:

> I have been fortunate...particularly in a predominantly...white department, to have two senior BME academics in a supervisory capacity who provide me with what I would describe as 'bespoke' support...

But of course, this is by no means always the case, but it may be possible to find a colleague with the department or the institution or even externally who is from a similar background and can provide such support.

Countering isolation

In order to counter isolation, it is important to include non-traditional candidates in both work-related and social activities relating to their doctoral studies.

With regard to academic inclusion, one strategy is not only to supervise candidates individually but also in groups. This gives candidates the chance to offer each other academic support, e.g., by sharing research materials, working their way together through 'blocks' together, and collectively problem-solving. This can be particularly effective where candidates further on in their studies can mentor those earlier in their research careers (Smith, 2022).

In terms of social inclusion, supervisors need to be at least aware of the potential issues for candidates from different religions and, where possible and appropriate, schedule events at times and in places which respect their values.

Avoiding discrimination

Fortunately, few supervisors are overtly misogynistic, classist, racist, or prejudiced against candidates who are LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, or have a disability, and direct discrimination is relatively rare. Here, then, the main concern needs to be the avoidance of indirect discrimination, where it is inadvertent.

Good advice to supervisors to avoid indirect discrimination is for them, as Han et al (2024, p. 2) have put it, to develop:

> ...a critical awareness of [your] position in relation to the social context and the world... Reflecting on what you bring...in terms of your identity, experiences and beliefs – and how those may differ from what your students bring – can help you find ways to better connect with and support your students.

So, they suggest that reflecting on their own positionality and its implications for their practice can illuminate potential biases and attenuate the potential for indirect discrimination.

Being empathetic

As Brown and Watson (2010, p. 402) have pointed out, 'Empathy is an important component of the supervisory relationship', i.e. supervisors need to understand and sympathise with the problems and issues that non-traditional candidates may experience.

One example of such empathy is provided by one of the respondents to English and Fenby-Hulse's (2019, p. 419) study of LGBTQIA+ doctoral candidates in the UK who reported that it was important that his supervisor was:

> ... aware of my sexuality...This affects my relationship... it means she offers me support in a different way to students who do not identify as LGBTQ and can be aware of any issues that may arise.

Being flexible

As well as empathy, supervisors need to be prepared to be flexible in order to accommodate the circumstances of non-traditional candidates. So, for example, Utami (2019, p. 86) gives the example of a candidate with a baby who reported that the:

> ... decision to bring my son during the doctoral program was discussed [with my supervisors] from the beginning of my study...Fortunately, both... are supportive [as] can be seen from the flexibility of time they gave during my candidature and the permission to bring my son occasionally to some academic events...

One final way in which supervisors can support non-traditional candidates is in knowing what support is available to them, particularly in terms of funding and institutional services.

With regard to funding, self-funding non-traditional candidates may be unaware of opportunities for scholarships; so, for example, a doctoral graduate of colour interviewed by Khan and Cowell (2020) noted that, while his white peers were given information about funding their doctorates, this was 'inaccessible to black and ethnic minority [candidates]' (and in his case he had to take several jobs to fund his doctorate). An important function, then, is for supervisors to be aware of sources of funding and to direct candidates towards them.

A knowledge of relevant services is also necessary, particularly for candidates with disabilities. One of the key complaints of respondents to the survey of disabled candidates by Disabled Students UK and Pete Quinn Consulting Ltd. (2023, p. 92) was, in the words of one of them, that:

> ...my supervisor is very accommodating and wants me to work in a way that is most efficient for me. But in terms of his knowledge of the services he lacks even the most basic information on who I should access to get support.

This can be particularly crucial for disabled candidates with needs in terms of physical access and assistive technology (see also Chapter 13).

Conclusions

Over the 21st century, as Blessinger and Stockley (2016, p. 8) have noted:

> ...the demographic student makeup of doctoral programs [has] become much more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, career aspirations, student backgrounds among other characteristics.

This has transformed the composition of the doctoral candidate population, and as Petersen (2012, pp. 1-2) has argued:

> [Diversification]... poses a whole set of pedagogical challenges to supervisors, not least ... because traditional supervisory pedagogy is based on the assumption of the traditional student...As such, we need a richer understanding of non-traditional doctoral students and their lived experience of doctoral studies, including the struggles and challenges they face.

These pedagogical challenges include building the confidence of non-traditional candidates, finding role models, countering isolation, empathising with their situations, avoiding discrimination, demonstrating flexibility, and being aware of available support. As such, they make the supervision of non-traditional candidates more complex than before, but in view of the benefits that such candidates can bring, potentially more rewarding.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Aksnes, D., Kahn, S., Reiling, R. & Ulvestad, M. (2024). Examining career trajectories of Norwegian PhD recipients: career progression for women academics but not a leaky pipeline. *Studies in Higher Education 50*(8), 1797–1820. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2400545

Anderson, P., Blue, L., Pham, T. & Saward, M. (2022). Indigenous Peoples and Higher Degrees by Research in Higher Education. In *Higher Degree by Research. SpringerBriefs in Education.* https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-5178-7_1

Arday, J. (2017). *Exploring black and minority ethnic (BME) doctoral students' perceptions of an academic*

career. University and College Union. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8633/BME-doctoral-students-perceptions-of-an-academic-career/pdf/JA_BME_doc_students_report_Jun17.pdf

Bhopal, K. & Myers, M. (2023). *Elite Universities and the Making of Privilege: Exploring Race and Class in Global Educational Economies.* London, Routledge.

Blessinger, P. & Stockley, D. (2016). Innovative Approaches in Doctoral Education: An Introduction to Emerging Directions in Doctoral Education. In P. Blessinger and D. Stockley (Eds.) *Emerging Directions in Doctoral Education* (Innovations in Higher Education Learning and Teaching, Vol. 6). Emerald. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120160000006009

Bloom, B .E., Sorin, C.R., Wagman, J.A., & Oaks, L. (2021). Employees, Advisees and Emerging Scholars: A Qualitative Analysis of Graduate Students' Roles and Experiences of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment on College Campuses. *Sexuality and Culture*, *25,* 1653-1672. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09841-w

Brown, L. & Watson, P. (2010). Understanding the experiences of female doctoral students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *34*(3): 385-404. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2010.484056

Chakraverty, D. & Rishi, M. (2021). Imposter Phenomenon and Discipline-Specific Experiences of Violence in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. *Violence and Gender*. https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2021.0025.

Clegg, K. (2024). Professional Recognition of Research Supervision. In K. Clegg, G. Houston, and O. Gower. *Doctoral Supervision and Research Culture: What We Know, What Works and Why*. London, Routledge: 74-82.

Disabled Students UK & Pete Quinn Consulting. (2023). *Improving the experience of disabled PhD students in STEM.* https://disabledstudents.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Improving-the-Experience-of-Disabled-PhD-Students-in-STEM-small-print.pdf

English, R. & Fenby-Hulse, K. (2019). Documenting diversity: The experiences of LGBTQ+ doctoral researchers in the UK. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *14,* 403-430. https://doi.org/10.28945/4328

Gardner, S.K. & Holley, K.A. (2011). "Those invisible barriers are real": The Progression of First-Generation Students Through Doctoral Education. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *44*(1), 77-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2011.529791

Han, J., Jin, L. & Yin, H. (2024). Supervisors' emotional regulation in research supervision: navigating dilemmas in an accountability-based context. *Higher Education*, *89*(3), 671-689. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01241-x

Handforth, R. (2022). Feeling "Stupid": Considering the Affective in Women Doctoral Students'

Experiences of 'Imposter Syndrome'. In M. Addison, M. Breeze, Y. Taylor, (Eds.),*The Palgrave Handbook of Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86570-2_18

Holley, K.A. (2013). How Diversity Influences Knowledge, Identity and Doctoral Education. *New Directions in Higher Education*, *2013,* 99-105. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20069

Holmes, P., Costa, N. & Lopes, B. (2020). The role of supervision in doctoral education: a transversal perspective. In M. Byram, & M. Stoicheva (Eds.), *The Doctorate as Experience in Europe and Beyond: Supervision, language, Identities* (pp.213-228). Routledge.

Jairam, D. & Kahl, D. (2012). Navigating the Doctoral Experience: The Role of Social Support in Successful Degree Completion. *International Journal of Doctoral Education, 7,* 311-329. https://ijds.org/Volume7/IJDSv7p311-329Jairam0369.pdf

Johnson, L., Alison, L., & Green, B. (2000). The PhD and the Autonomous Self; gender, rationality, and (post)graduate pedagogy. *Studies in Higher Education*, *25*(2):135-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/713696141

Khan, Y. & Cowell, J. (2020). Black applicants least likely to be offered PhD places. BBC Newsnight. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54934953

Kiley, M. (2017). Career professionals entering doctoral study: Advantages and challenges. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *54*(6) https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1377099

Lundemo, O., Mohr, W. & Lee, J. (2023). How ableism is working against students with disabilities. *University World News.* https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230425151501553

McCulloch, A. & Thomas, L. (2012). Widening participation to doctoral education and research degrees: a research agenda for an emerging policy area. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *32*(2), 214-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.662630

Mahmud, A. (2024). Exploring the experiences of Muslim doctoral students in UK higher education: challenges, implications and pathways to inclusivity. *Studies in Higher Education, 50*(4), 848-863. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2357718.

Manathunga, C. (2011). Moments of transculturation and assimilation: post-colonial explorations of supervision and culture. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *48*(4), 367-376. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2011.617089

Mason, S., Bond, M. & Ledger, S. (2024). Mothers in doctoral education: Who cares? An ecological-systems analysis of support for PhD mums. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education, 15*(3), 364-379. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-09-2023-0080

Mattocks K, & Briscoe-Palmer, S. (2016). Diversity, inclusion and doctoral study: challenges facing minority politics PhD Students in the United Kingdom. *European Political Science 15*(4), 476–492. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-016-0071-x

McChesney, K. (2022). A rationale for trauma-informed postgraduate supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education 29*(5), 1338-1360. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2145469.

OECD. (2019). What are the characteristics and outcomes of doctoral graduates? In *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators,* 246-260. https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en

Okahana, H., Klein, C., Allum, J. & Sowell, R. (2018). STEM Doctoral Completion of Underrepresented Minority Students: Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Participation in the Doctoral Workforce. *Innovative Higher Education*, *43,* 237-255. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-018-9425-3

O'Regan, M. (2020). Learning at a Distance but not a Distance Learner: Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Body of Students Post COVID-19. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education,* 12(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.62707/aishej.v12i2.447

Ostrove, J. M., Stewart, A.J., & Curtin, N.L. (2011). Social Class and Belonging: Implications for Graduate Students' Career Aspirations. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(6), 748-774. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2011.11777226

Pasztor, A. & Wakeling, P. (2018). All PhDs are equal but...Institutional and social Stratification in access to the doctorate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(7), 982-997. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1434407

Peters, L. A. (2023). Embracing neurodiversity to enhance the postgraduate researcher experience: reflections from a doctoral student. *Fields journal of Huddersfield student research 1(1).* https://doi.org/10.5920/fields.1295.

Petersen, E. B. (2012). Re-signifying subjectivity? A narrative exploration of 'non-traditional' doctoral students' lived experience of subject formation through two Australian cases. *Studies in Higher Education*, *39*(5), 823-834. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.745337.

Ressa, T. & Danforth, S. (2023). Disability, Race and Origin: Intersectionality in the Doctoral Program: Ableism in Higher Education. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 25*(1), 147-159. http://dx.doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.911

Riby, D. & Pearson, A. (2024, July 29). Developing neurodiversity-affirmative PhD supervision. *Supervising PhDs.* https://supervisingphds.wordpress.com/?s=Developing+neurodiversity-affirmative+PhD+supervision

Robertson, M. J. (2017). Trust: the power that binds in team supervision of doctoral students. *Higher*

Education Research and Development 36(7), 1463-1475. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1325853.

Robertson, M. (2019). *Power and Doctoral Supervision Teams*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429202162

Skakni, I. (2018). Doctoral studies as an initiatory trial; expected and taken-for-granted practices that impede PhD students' progress. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *23*(8), 927-924. https://doi.org/10:1080/13562517.2018.1449742.

Smith, K. (2022). Developing a signature pedagogy for doctoral education. *European Journal of Education, 57*(3), 438-451. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12520

Taylor, S., & Kiley, M. (2025). *A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors.* 3rd Ed. Routledge.

Utami, A. (2019). Walking a Tightrope: Juggling Competing Demands as a PhD Student and a Mother. In L. Pretorius, L. Macaulay, & B. Cahusac de Caux (Eds.) *Wellbeing in Doctoral Education: Insights and Guidance from the Student Experience* (pp.77-92). Springer. 77-92. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9302-0_8

Wakeling, P. & Kyriacou, C. (2010). *Widening Participation from Undergraduate to Postgraduate Research Degrees: A Research Synthesis.* National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and Economic and Social Research Council. York, University of York.

Yitman, I., & Almusaed. M. (2022). Rethinking in the Intellectual Zone of the PhD Supervision In O. Nooroozi & J. Sahin (Eds). *Proceedings of International Conference on Humanities, social and Education Sciences (iHSES) (Los Angeles, California, April 21-24, 2022)* (pp. 262-274). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED626711.pdf

4. SUPERVISORS' JOURNEYS: NAVIGATING THRESHOLDS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES WITH HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCHERS

Virginia M. Tucker

Why read this chapter?

Understanding one's own journey as a doctoral supervisor is key to building fully confident and effective supervisory teams. Explore the learning thresholds that we cross during our journeys, including:

- transitioning from domain experts into expert guides;
- fostering independence in your higher degree researchers (HDRs);
- building cohort community through peer mentoring and collaboration; and
- supporting HDRs in expanding their research networks and impact.

Two practices are essential to this journey: making time to pause for reflection and being mindful to focus on positivity. These two practices are reciprocal, reinforcing each other as we grow our capacity to develop successful doctoral researchers. Also essential to keep in mind is that these practices support you on journeys that are never-ending: there are always new thresholds, challenges, and new ways to apply and expand your knowledge.

This chapter includes five learning activities that support the crossing of these thresholds: four activities to share with higher degree researchers and one for you to contemplate.

1. 'Speed dating' to encourage peer interactions and discovery of research intersections
2. Building a 'critical friend' culture through practice at giving and receiving peer review
3. Learning to identify one's own 'stuck places' to help with moving forward
4. Strengthening the HDR community through peer mentoring
5. For supervisors, delayed problem-solving: cultivating your active presence and listening practices.

Introduction – Journeying towards confidence

While higher degree researchers are journeying towards becoming independent researchers, their supervisors are on journeys of their own, continuing to learn and to develop into more confident and effective guides. In this chapter, I explore the learning thresholds in becoming confident doctoral supervisors. These thresholds represent critical knowledge, as well as practices and traits that support growing your supervisory capability and confidence.

The broad objectives of this book emphasise how academics who become higher degree researcher (HDR) supervisors delight in the opportunity to share their expertise with new researchers and to broaden their own landscapes for engaging with new ideas. This enthusiasm cannot be understated. The potential synergies are abundant, yet so is the potential for fatigue and scattered attention when juggling supervision along with the demands of teaching, developing courses, researching, publishing, and serving the discipline or profession. This chapter takes the position that all these activities—indeed, the 'balancing acts' themselves—can contribute to our more energetic, inspired, and confident supervision. Scholar-educators discover that their research informs their teaching—and vice versa—and that both creative areas become richer and have more to say, because of this cross-pollination. Similarly, service to the discipline (as peer reviewer or conference planner, for example) raises our awareness of new trends and technologies, and it engenders connections with others having similar or complementary interests, creating space and potential for collaboration—leading to even more synergies and new ideas. Supervising likewise enriches all of our activities as scholar-educators, especially when supported by practices of being fully present, listening, and reflecting on our own journeys.

1 – Activity for HDRs: Encouraging peer interactions and discovery of research intersections

To help early researchers learn about and practice finding research connections with others, I have used an activity based on 'speed dating'. The cohort members pair up in rotation for three minutes, then move on to a new pairing. During each three-minute period, they discuss intersections in their research projects, exploring their methods, participants, theories, literature and potential implications. The excitement in the room (and the noise level!) mushrooms rapidly. By the end, the researchers are continuing their discussions and jotting down new ideas about their projects. HDRs have reported that this activity is invaluable for thinking in new ways about their work and in seeing potential for future collaborations. Further resource: Timmermans and Meyer (2017).

At the start of my journey to learn about supervising, I was aware of transitioning through a liminal space and into a new professional identity, one that required me to shed some misconceptions about the supervisor's role, particularly as learning about the team approach to supervision had been so transformative to my own doctoral journey. In addition, I began supervising soon after completing my final seminar (a.k.a. viva or oral defence). I had over 30 years of professional work experience, including as a training manager and master's degree advisor, but had not supervised a doctoral research project. Thankfully, I had benefited from being in a highly participative doctoral cohort focused on collaboration and 'critical friend' culture, discussed in more depth below. All of this boosted me a rung or two up the learning ladder for serving on a supervisory team. I was invited to fill a vacancy at a time when one supervisory team faced several challenges. I wanted to contribute to moving the HDR researcher forward in their journey, all whilst knowing that my own journey as a supervisor was just beginning.

Thresholds in becoming a confident supervisor

I am using a threshold learning lens in this chapter because threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003) are transformative, integrative, and irreversible. They help learners to acquire knowledge that is both essential and troublesome—consisting of concepts that are often counterintuitive initially and may require wholly new perspectives. This threshold knowledge makes it possible to move into a new level of domain understanding, and it is evident in changes in discourse and shifts in identity. As such, threshold concepts are both conceptual and experiential—and they are a keen fit to enlighten both doctoral experiences (Keefer, 2015) and supervisor journeys (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009).

This chapter is framed around thresholds in the supervisors' journeys towards confidence and around their roles as transient guides (Higgs & Cronin, 2013; Tucker, 2020) for HDRs in their transformative journeys towards becoming researchers. These parallel and intersecting journeys can deeply enrich each other. In my research into how expertise is acquired (Tucker, 2020), I described the educator's role as that of a transient guide in the hero's journey. The researcher who emerges from a transformative HDR experience, aided by their supervisors, is then truly "continuing as the 'hero of their own story' (McCarthy, 1961, p. 190)" (p. 241).

Threshold concepts theory was largely developed to create more effective curriculum (Cousin, 2006), and it has been used in a wide range of academic disciplines (Flanagan, 2018; Tight, 2014). Threshold concepts have several characteristics, with three characteristics of primary importance for our context of effective supervision: transformation, integration, and identity shift.

- Doctoral and supervisor journeys have vast potential to *transform*, and to activate liminal experiences for *integrating* new knowledge that sustains a *shift in identity*. HDRs and supervisors can experience transformation during their respective threshold learning journeys, and synchronous liminality is especially powerful (Land et al., 2010).
- Moving from researcher-educator into the *integrative* work of supervising involves *transformative*

experiences that require wrestling with new concepts and ways of thinking (Kiley, 2020; Wisker, 2020). These liminal experiences call for shedding old ideas to make space for new ones, further marking dramatic changes in how we think and in *shifts in identity* (Trafford & Leshem, 2009; Timmermans, 2010).

- Timmermans and Meyer (2019) have written about a framework of approaches that can facilitate the changes necessary to *threshold learning*, such as supporting learners in grasping their own potential, encouraging reflective practice, and cultivating care, all of which underscore that "emotion and motivation are core dimensions of learning" (p. 356).

One way that threshold learning is often manifested is through changes in discourse, that is, in how a learner speaks about their understanding of the domain. This deep understanding is also evident in affective ways, for example, in a supervisor's confidence and in an HDR's independence as a researcher.

Through my experiences, I have learned three primary practices for sustaining the role of guide to HDRs in their journeys: developing ongoing awareness of one's own transformation from domain expert to supervisor, being creative about activities for fostering independence in new researchers, and building community together as part of supporting their new sense of identity. In this chapter, I share ideas and activities for supporting these practices.

From domain expert to guide

Doctoral supervisors often begin their journeys as experts in a subject domain, but they do not necessarily have skills in teaching and supervision. These abilities are often acquired along the way. A book such as this can jump-start and facilitate this learning through shared lessons from others in supervision. Your domain expertise is the foundation for developing supervisory presence, much as your "teacherly presence" (Tucker & Simmons, 2024, p. 251) evolves over time. This presence and your confidence as a supervisory team member are outcomes of threshold learning and the transformative and integrative experiences that shape and renew your professional identity.

Fostering independence in a 'critical friend' culture

In much the same way that learning to swim involves both trust and a degree of risk-taking, so too does building independence as a researcher. Scaffolding activities so that an HDR continually builds on new knowledge and on expanding confidence is a well-established approach in education, and this is likewise effective within a doctoral cohort. For example, creating opportunities to learn about peer review through exercises in actually doing it—giving reviews and receiving them in the cohort—works effectively and fosters independence in early career researchers. This activity in a 'critical friend' culture is key to a strong foundation for building independence as a researcher.

2 – Activity for HDRs: Building a 'critical friend' culture through practice in peer review

Creating opportunities for independence in a higher degree researcher may take the form of asking for small bits of writing, then larger ones, in order to build confidence. Another way to foster independence is to ask an early researcher to critique an artilce using specific criteria, particularly if the criteria are aligned with what the supervisory team will apply to their writing in the later stages of their project or by external examiners. Having specifics about what to aim for constructs explicit mini-steps towards confidence and capabilities. Further resource: Boud and Lee (2005)

I vividly recall an experience that exemplifies my own growing independence as a researcher, something I call my "let it be" lesson—and it was one of the most difficult times in my own doctoral journey. I was doing thematic analysis of several qualitative datasets, and it felt like I was walking through mud up to my knees. One of my supervisors told me, "Yes, it might feel like that for a while, and it's okay—try to just be with it." It wasn't what I wanted to hear—I wanted a solution—but it was precisely what I needed. I learned that it was not time to overcome that uncomfortable stage, nor even to find relief from it; it was time to be with my datasets and to discover new ways to explore them. I was reminded of this several weeks ago on reading this advice from Carter and Doorley (2024): "The minute you move your data, ideas, or anything around in front of you with your hands, you activate your brain in a new way. New ideas will follow" (p. 214).

I have shared the story above with other supervisors and researchers, and many have found it reassuring. In acts of sharing, the leaps in the learning of early researchers can be times of learning for supervisors as well, especially if we then make time to pause, discuss, and reflect. Wisker (2025) underscored that these experiences are more likely to happen through "negotiation of roles, working practices [and] dialogues which encourage trust, knowledge building, sharing, and professional researcher independence and contribution" (p. 44). We journey together as supervisors and researchers, across thresholds and during 'stuck' times alike (Kiley, 2014).

3 – Activity for HDRs: Learning to identify 'stuck places' to help with moving forward

When I teach the skill – and emphasise its importance – of being able to identify one's own

'stuck places', this is preparation for grasping troublesome knowledge and true to the essence of threshold concepts curriculum design considerations (Land et al., 2010, p. xi). In fact, some wrestling with concepts – especially ones that initially seem counterintuitive and like obstacles – is fundamental to integrating them into one's understanding and identity (Tucker, 2016). Expressed in a more encompassing way, Chödrön (2019) advises, "What we call obstacles are really the way the world and our entire experience teach us where we're stuck," (p. 108).

Feeling stuck can take place at any stage during the doctoral journey: when crafting interview or survey questions, when analysing datasets, when preparing a conference talk, or when writing up results. It is not useful simply to endure these difficult times, however; they can be opportunities to invite feedback and guidance, whether from supervisors or from critical friends. They can also be times for the "being with it" lesson. This is part of threshold learning and transformation: dwelling with liminality (Morrison, 1982).

I created learning activities with specific questions for HDRs so that, for example, at the end of a short presentation, they would address questions like: What stuck places have you identified at this stage? For what aspects do you need specific feedback from your supervisors and your cohort peers? What self-directed questions are you using now to help with moving forward to the next stage?

Further resource: Kiley (2014).

Ongoing learning, giving and asking for help

The most engaged and effective supervisors are continually expanding and refining their supervisory abilities. Whether they are working with their fifth or fiftieth student, a supervisor who is committed to lifelong learning reflects this commitment in their own ongoing development. This includes being willing to reach out for help when encountering a thorny or unfamiliar situation. The supervisor community works best when kindness is a priority and when hope and optimism around solutions are woven into the community's interactions (hooks, 2003). This section illustrates ways to persevere through and then go beyond thorny situations as supervisors. Such situations are true to the nature of threshold learning, involving a level of wrestling with new knowledge, practices, and obstacles during liminal experiences (Kiley, 2014).

For several years, I served as the doctoral program coordinator in addition to being a supervisor. In both roles, I was frequently called upon to problem solve. At times, I spotted issues to address—or saw them approaching on the horizon—at other times, problems were presented to me. Other supervisors came for advice, but most often, early researchers reached out to me after encountering conflicts with their supervisory team members and feeling unable to communicate to them due to what they perceived as an imbalance of power. A particularly thorny situation can arise from the friction caused by a supervisor

inserting themselves into the communications of other supervisory teams, giving the impression that they are not doing their jobs well. If this outside supervisor does not have expertise in the methodologies, or has a different disciplinary focus, the aggravation is exacerbated. Power dynamics and faculty status among the supervisors can be complicating factors. The dynamics and personal sensibilities involved can mean that there is no perfect solution, but when this situation arose in our programme, we were able to develop a general policy about supervisor communications, specifically about inviting involvement from other teams, and this mitigated the negative effects of unwanted boundary crossing.

Balance, kindness, and reciprocity in team management

Co-supervision requires attention to balancing the structure of a supervisory team's priorities and responsibilities (Wald et al., 2023). To achieve the best outcomes, I am a proponent of supporting the researcher in learning to manage their own supervisory team, initially based on developing an understanding of the strengths of their co-supervisors (Pyhältö et al., 2023). This ability to manage naturally grows for most HDRs as the research work progresses and as the researcher's overall confidence likewise grows. As an example from one team, the HDR found it worked best in managing the team for one supervisor to take the lead on reviewing research design and methodology issues, another the literature scope and topical domains, and the third to serve as writing coach. In this broad division that reflected the co-supervisor's expertise, the cohort community then served as the next circle of support for the early researcher.

4 – Activity for HDRs: Strengthening the cohort community through peer mentoring

As discussed above, our doctoral cohorts have a culture of 'critical friends' which manifests as researchers providing feedback on small bits of writing and on short presentations within the cohort (Hands and Tucker, 2022). To strengthen this culture in the cohort community, peer mentors are assigned (or naturally emerge) so that HDRs a year or two ahead mentor the early researchers.

Building a mutual partnership model (Hooks, 2003) is based on kindness and on supporting members of the research and learning community; it is fundamental to a peer mentoring culture. Kindness is evident in how we listen, when we pose questions that move an HDR researcher forward, when we create space for them to share with peers, and every time we guide them according to possibilities in the doctoral journey.

Further resources: hooks (2003); Hands and Tucker (2022).

Peer mentorship is also practice for the doctoral researcher making connections in their larger communities later on, whatever they choose as their career pathway (Bruce & Stoodley, 2008, p. 35). Guiding them as they launch into the larger networks where their affinities and curiosities can flourish will then have a solid foundation from the experiences of building communities during their doctoral journey. Through networking, researchers can explore their own ideas but also their "connectional curiosities" (Zurn et al., 2022, p. 261)

Sustaining positivity through challenging times

Many aspects of supervisors' own journeys are fuelled by curiosity and the energetics of our purpose, but we also need to be mindful of sustainability and of the inescapability of the alternating principles of *expand* and *contract*. As someone who is mostly introverted, when I have been 'expanding' myself in intensely social situations, I know that I will need time to 'contract' to replenish my energies. There are simply times when positivity is difficult to sustain and when everyday challenges drain what I think of as our 'well of well-being'. It might be a conflict at work or at home, a strain on our health, or any number of ordinary or extraordinary obstacles that put us at risk of being at our best and able to be positive. Recently, after submitting an especially long research article, I started right in on another—and immediately (and predictably!) became horribly ill. From experiences like this, I have learned whenever possible to schedule 'down time' (at least one day, but two is better) after any big project deadline or the end-of-term, because it is inevitable that the level of my personal 'well' will be at its lowest ebb. I have learned that the only remedy to restore and refresh is setting aside time to be away from research and teaching, for me, time to be connected to music and cooking and plenty of walks. One of my previous HDRs, with whom I still collaborate, has reinforced this habit for me with her own well-established practice of weekends away with her husband after completing any big project. I am always learning, and it still seems, needing the lessons reinforced. Further evidence of such lessons recently came from resources on supervisors' well-being that were recommended to me by a peer reviewer, and I share them with you: Tikkanen et al. (2024) and Tikkanen et al. (2025). We learn to pass forward what we gain from our own experiences and from the generosity of others.

Building on positive learning experiences

Sharing positive learning experiences comes naturally to most people, and we can expand our sphere of learning in this way. The harder task can be to expand our world view and learning through the sharing of how we have managed—or not managed—negative experiences. Some of my most difficult supervisory experiences were with an HDR researcher who resisted any engagement with other cohort members, regardless how much they might have benefited or learned from their peers. After many attempts, by me and by other supervisors, it was clear that this resistance had deep and tenacious roots, and that it would not be resolved during their doctoral experience. Unfortunately, they missed out on the community building

and on grasping the value of cohort engagement. Their dissertation was completed, but chiefly as a solo endeavour.

Another experience was with an HDR researcher who entered the programme resistant to learning new ways to write—writing as a researcher. They had developed dependence on their supervisors for heavy editing. Complicating this resistance, they opposed the practice and value of peer reviewing, although this was practiced regularly within the cohort and is of course evidenced throughout the research literature. These traits limited their ability to develop as a researcher. Connecting back to threshold concepts, learning threshold knowledge that is transformative requires openness to new ways of thinking and often a shedding of old ways; without this, the learner, their capacity for research, and their transformation are constrained.

Pausing to reflect

The practice of pausing to reflect is part of the larger experience of being open to new ideas and being willing to dwell with them. Much as in the earlier illustration, during my research, I had to learn to 'be' with my datasets in order to see different meanings in them. As supervisors, there is a parallel to this learning-to-'be' practice. As we guide early career researchers, we learn to pause and listen fully to an early researcher, rather than to jump into problem solving. These practices are another way to foster independence.

5 – Activity for Supervisors with HDRs: Delayed Problem Solving: Cultivating Active Presence and Transformative Listening

It is in our nature to offer solutions when we hear someone tell us of a troubling concern, but another way to help is to listen, being fully present with them (Zigarmi & Grizont, 2025). After listening, a strategic and deeply helpful response can be to pose questions to the researcher that guide them in contemplation. Listening in this way can transform obstacles and 'stuck places' (see above) into leaps in learning and insights during an HDR's research project. This practice is another form of the 'teacherly presence' and highly effective for the 'supervisor presence' as well. This form of deep listening and questioning then requires being willing to leave those questions with them, encouraging them in reflective practice (Timmermans & Meyer, 2019). It is common to observe supervisors who hover when trying to be helpful, but this leaves the researcher little room for reflections of their own. Further resource: Timmermans and Meyer, 2019.

Our focus is on guiding the researcher towards questions that animate their thinking: "It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question" (Eugène Ionesco, *Découvertes* (1970), as cited in Wells, 1997, p. 15).

Insightful questions can help a researcher forward on a journey of many steps; a pat answer tends to help with but a single step.

In conclusion – Keeping curious and taking action

Supervisors play a crucial role in the journeys of higher degree researchers, not only as they move towards completing their degrees, but also as they explore what they are most curious about and the environments they believe might suit their post-degree careers. Curiosity is a powerful fuel for their research projects, and it should also be encouraged as the momentum to drive decisions during the journey. Zurn et al. (2022) stated, "we build our knowledge networks through curious practice" (p. 267) and, in being curious, "we create a scaffold of knowledge" (p. 269). As supervisors, we model curiosity, confidence, kindness, and reflective practices, often without being aware of it because it is deeply integral to our being. Yet oftentimes, it can be easier to focus on the methodologies and technical aspects of the research, the writing, analysing, and iterative processes so necessary to producing results. This chapter has provided illustrative lessons for other aspects, in the aim of journeying in confidence and in growing as supervisors on our own journeys, in what Vaidhyanathan (2018) has called a deliberate dance: "Teaching, I soon learned, was a deliberate dance, a constant running conversation, and a pleasure" (p. 23).

I invite you to make the time to reflect on and write about your journey, even for a few minutes now and then, to fully integrate the delights and to learn from and transition through the obstacles you encounter as supervisors. Writing down your reflections is powerful in the moment, but these writings can also be the seeds for future contributions to the scholarship of supervision, just as this chapter has its roots in some of my informal jottings from the early days of my journey when moving along from domain expert and teacher to HDR supervisor. We learn from each other, at each step and through each threshold along the way.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Amundsen, C., & McAlpine, L. (2009). Learning supervision: Trial by fire. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *46*(3), 331–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290903068805 🔒

Boud, D. & Lee, A. (2005). Peer learning as pedagogic discourse for research education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(5), 501-516. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500249138

Bruce, C., & Stoodley, I. (2008). *Towards a pedagogy of supervision in the technology disciplines: Resources for supervisors*. Australian Learning & Teaching Council. https://ltr.edu.au/resources/Bruce%2C%20C%20ALTC%20Fellowship%20report%202009.pdf [PDF 623KB]

Carter, C., & Doorley, S. (2024). *Assembling tomorrow: A guide to designing a thriving future*. Ten Speed Press.

Chödrön, P. (2019). *Living beautifully*. Shambala Publications.

Cousin, G. (2006). An introduction to threshold concepts. *Planet, 17*(1), 4-5. https://doi.org/10.11120/plan.2006.00170004

Flanagan, M. T. (2018). *Threshold concept bibliography: Subject index*. https://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/mflanaga/thresholds_subjects.html

Hands, A.S., & Tucker, V.M. (2022). Fostering doctoral student socialization and research expertise through writing pedagogy. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 63*(1), 64-79. https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis-2020-0115

Higgs, B., & Cronin, J. (2013). Threshold concepts: Informing the curriculum. In C. O'Farrell, & A. Farrell (Eds.), *Emerging Issues in Higher Education III* (pp. 161-176). Educational Developers in Ireland Network (EDIN). https://www.edin.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Emerging_Issues-final13th_Nov.pdf [PDF 3.1MB]

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203957769

Keefer, J. M. (2015). Experiencing doctoral liminality as a conceptual threshold and how supervisors can use it. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 52*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2014.981839

Kiley, M. (2014). Now I know why I have been knocking my head against a brick wall: Doctoral candidates and stuck places. In C. O'Mahony, A. Buchanan, M. O'Rourke, & B. Higgs (Eds.), *Threshold concepts: From personal practice to communities of practice* (pp. 73-77). National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558533.pdf [PDF 4.9MB]

Kiley, M. (2020). Strategies for assisting doctoral candidates to learn to be researchers. In J.A. Timmermans & R. Land (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts on the Edge* (pp. 189-198). Brill/Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419971_013

Land, R., Meyer, J. H. F., & Baillie, C. (2010). *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*. Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789460912078

McCarthy, M. (1961). Characters in fiction. *Partisan Review, 28*(2), 171-192.

Meyer, J. H. F. & Land, R. (2003). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (1): Linkages to ways of thinking and practising within the disciplines. In C. Rust (Ed.) *Improving student learning: Ten years on* (pp. 1–16). OCSLD.

Morrison, V. (1982). *Dweller on the threshold* [music recording].

Pyhältö, K., Tikkanen, L., & Anttila, H. (2023). The more the merrier? PhD supervisors' perspectives in engaging in co-supervision. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 61*(6), 1460–1471. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2258853

Tight, M. (2014). Theory development and application in higher education research: The case of threshold concepts. In M. Tight & J. Huisman (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research II* (pp. 224-240). Emerald Group. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3628(2014)0000010018

Tikkanen, L., Ketonen, E., Toom, A., & Pyhältö, K. (2024). PhD candidates' and supervisors' wellbeing and experiences of supervision. *Higher Education, 90,* 1451-1469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01385-w

Tikkanen, L., Anttila, H., & Pyhältö, K. (2025). How does supervision influence a doctoral supervisor's occupational wellbeing? *European Journal of Higher Education, 15*(2), 263-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2024.2314470

Timmermans, J. (2010). Changing our minds: The developmental potential of threshold concepts. In J. H. F. Meyer, R. Land, & C. Baillie (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, (pp. 3-19). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789460912078_002

Timmermans, J. A., & Meyer, J. H. F. (2017). A framework for working with university teachers to create and embed 'Integrated Threshold Concept Knowledge' (ITCK) in their practice. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *24*(4), 354–368. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2017.1388241

Trafford, V., & Leshem, S. (2009). Doctorateness as a threshold concept. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 46*(3), 305-316. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290903069027

Tucker, V. M. (2016). Learning experiences and the liminality of expertise. In R. Land, H.F. Meyer, & M.T. Flanagan (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts in Practice* (pp. 93-106). Sense Publishers. doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-512-8_8

Tucker, V.M. (2020). Curriculum design on the edge: A case illustration of liminal learning activities for

search expertise. In J.A. Timmermans & R. Land (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts on the Edge* (pp. 239-254). Brill/Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419971_017

Tucker, V. M., & Simmons, M.H. (2021). Identity transformation on becoming a teacher: Threshold concepts and professional praxes. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators, 10*(3), 275-295 https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1334857

Tucker, V. M., & Simmons, M.H. (2024). Analysing written and oral learner discourse: Methods to discern truly thorny thresholds and to enrich TCF theory. In J. Davies et al. (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts in the Moment* (pp. 240-256). Brill Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004680661_016

Vaidhyanathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial media: How Facebook disconnects us and undermines democracy*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190056544.001.0001

Wald, N., Kumar, V., & Sanderson, L. J. (2022). Enhancing co-supervision practice by setting expectations in a structured discussion using a research-informed tool. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *42*(3), 757-769. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2082390

Ionesco, E. (1970). *Découvertes*, In S. Wells, *Choosing the Future: The Power of Strategic Thinking* (1997). Butterworth-Heinemann.

Wisker, G. (2020). Diversity, hybridity and new revelations in conceptual threshold crossings. In J.A. Timmermans & R. Land (Eds.), *Threshold Concepts on the Edge* (pp. 297-309). Brill/Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419971_021

Wisker, G. (2025). Professional doctorates: Students and supervisors journeying alongside each other. *9th International Conference on Professional & Practice Based Doctorates*, 15 April 2025. United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education. https://ukcge.ac.uk/assets/pdfs/ICPPD9-Gina-Wisker.pdf [PDF 1637KB]

Zigarmi, L., & Grizont, S. (2025). When the best leadership skill is just being present. *Harvard Business Review*, 19 May 2025. https://hbr.org/2025/05/when-the-best-leadership-skill-is-just-being-present

Zurn, P., Zhou, D., Lydon-Staley, D. M., & Bassett, D. S. (2022). Edgework: Viewing curiosity as fundamentally relational. In I. Cogliati Dezza, E. Schulz, & C. M. Wu (Eds.), *The Drive for Knowledge: The Science of Human Information Seeking* (pp. 259–278). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026949.013

SUPERVISORY PRACTICES FOR DIFFERENT PHASES OF CANDIDATURE

5. SUPERVISORS' AND THE ADMISSION OF HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCHERS

Susan Gasson; Denise Dillon; and Michelle Redman-McLaren

Why read this chapter?

This chapter explores the role of the supervisor in the selection of research-ready applicants for HDR awards. The success of this process has significant implications for students, institutions and society (Kurysheva et al., 2023). Changing higher education priorities and demands continue to drive the evolution of graduate research policy, funding and admission processes. Globally, doctoral programs have responded to calls to cultivate high-quality and sustainable educational advancements, and many Western nations are calling for assurances about the employability of graduates. These trends influence our evaluation of applicants for admission to higher degrees. As the decisive initial decision point in the research journey, supervisors are encouraged to play a role in the selection of higher degree researchers for admission. In this chapter, you will come to more deeply understand the implications of the:

- Admission processes and criteria
- The role of supervisors in the admission process
- Factors contributing to the future success of Higher Degree Researchers.

Admission, processes and criteria

Admission processes are determined by a combination of institutional policies, admissions committees, and the supervisors. All these stakeholders contribute to the evaluation of potential applicants' research capacity, fit with proposed supervisors and research environments, and access to funding. The goal of the admission process is to select candidates who can complete within maximum time, produce examinable theses and research outcomes, and become independent and employable researchers (Gasson et al., 2023). Global competition for innovative and groundbreaking research and researchers has resulted in institutions standardising procedures, documentation reviewed, and interviews conducted when assessing doctoral applicants (Inouye et al.,2025). Applicants are routinely required to provide language, personality and

capacity test scores, transcripts, research proposals, personal statements, and letters of reference and participate in interviews.

Factors like state or federal policies, business interests, and professional requirements can also impact diverse admission processes, as evidenced in different nations, institutions, and disciplines (Littleford et al., 2018). A prioritisation of independent knowledge production, as seen in the humanities and social sciences (HASS), sees a deeper interrogation of the research proposal or personal statement. HASS applicants are often evaluated for their fit with the supervisors and research culture of the institution, and the alignment between the applicants' life stories, proposed project, and intrinsic motivations for doctoral studies. Fit and alignment are considered the best predictors of progress to timely completion and realisation of impactful research outcomes.

In contrast, science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical sciences (STEMM) assessors, with a stronger focus on the potential of applicants' research capacity and careers, prioritise transcripts, test scores and referee reports (Littleford et al., 2018). In the USA, assessment of STEMM applicants often includes consideration of general and subject Graduate Research Examination (GRE) scores. These are claimed to be strong predictors of success in first-year doctoral coursework. For STEMM applicants joining preexisting projects or research groups, little or no attention is paid to the research proposal.

The initial consideration of applications submitted involves an administrative evaluation process, screening out those applications that are incomplete or ineligible. Burford et al. (2024) recommend that all stakeholders would gain from paying further attention to pre-admission communications, currently dominated by email traffic. Generation of more standardised online advice and use of email templates are among the strategies that can be used to refine and enhance communications and ensure equitable consideration and quality engagement at this critical stage.

More effective communications can help in the preparation of complete applications. Complete applications can most easily and accurately be assessed. Initial administrative review will assess if applications meet admission criteria, quality review can determine applicants shortlisted for interview, and ranked for scholarship funding. Deeper and more consistent understanding of eligibility and quality criteria used will inform nuanced academic evaluations. Institutional services can assist with evaluations. Library expertise may be called on to inform a more detailed assessment of the quality of research outputs, including peer reviewed publications. Admissions staff can explain and advice on the equivalences of unfamiliar academic scores and qualifications.

The current literature explores the potential for selection bias (Posselt et al., 2023) in the assessment of applicants for admission. Knowledge of personal details (e.g., cultural, gender, socio-economic background, country of origin, etc.) can lead to selection and unconscious bias. Difficulty interpreting unfamiliar grading schemas and institutional repute can also result in a preference for applicants with academic profiles aligned with those of their assessors. In some contexts, accounting for GRE scores and university/college ranking can contribute to the over-representation of men, people who are White or Asian and middle and upper-class families in doctoral education programs, and the scientific labour force.

A holistic assessment process is proposed to address these potential biases and ensure balance in collective action and individual judgment (Posselt et al., 2023). Holistic processes include rubrics and criteria for applicant evaluation (Nicholas et al., 2022). Commonly shared, clear and transparent criteria and scoring schemas can potentially reduce unconscious bias, a source of concern in traditional admissions, and demonstrate to applicants that the assessment process will be fair. Scores and weightings of criteria will inform the allocation of available scholarship funding and student places. Increased competition and changes to the quality of applicants each year may also result in applicants receiving – or not receiving – offers compared to previous years or rounds.

Stipends and scholarships, as well as research infrastructure and activities, are used by institutions in attracting and competing for quality applicants (Bortz Wall et al., 2020). Strategies universities can adopt include accounting for students' individual needs (i.e., access to childcare, suitable housing, research and family support, etc.) as well as scholarship top-ups. These strategies can be used to realise attractive and sustainable research graduate programs (Bortz Wall et al., 2020).

Applicants also compete with their peers to gain admission to their preferred research education environment The may feature generousscholarship funding, supportive and accessible communities, high-performing laboratories and renowned professorial supervisors. Admission processes at each university ideally align with available funds, research activities, supervisory capacity and applicant quality.

The role of supervisors in the admission process

If you have access to few or no suitable applications, you may take time to consider where you may source new applicants. Within your institution, teaching into pathway courses, engaging in undergraduate researcher development activities, and participating in academic or research mentorship programs may raise your research profile and student awareness of the potential to work with you.

Outside the organisation, you may have networks that can assist. Discuss with colleagues in business and industry their interest in advancing research capacity within the workforce. Liaise with international higher education partners to explore institutional interest in cotutelle arrangements. Engage with disciplinary and professional bodies about contributing to newsletters, blogs, relevant social media, and professional or disciplinary meetings to raise member awareness of higher degree research possibilities.

Once potential applicants have been identified, and within the constraints of institutional policy and guidelines, supervisors are encouraged to account for the fit and suitability of the applicant, their capacity, and the research education and institutional context (see Figure 5.1):

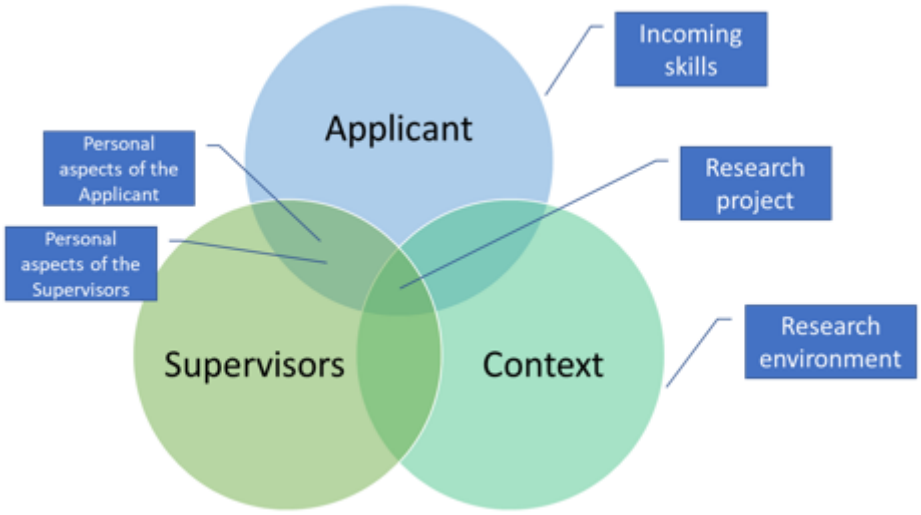


Figure 5.1: Three key elements in the admission of Higher Degree Researchers (Gasson et al, 2022)

Applicant

Applicants are likely to try to contact supervisors for support in submitting a formal application . In consultation with administrative services, you may save time by developing a standardised introductory email you can use in response to inquiries. This email can be used to explain your availability to supervise, describe possible projects (i.e., provide links to available and funded projects), funding and infrastructure available, and details of current research engagements or laboratory group work that may be relevant. The email can also explain or link to information about the admission and scholarship selection processes of the institution or academic group. Details will ideally allow applicants to self-assess their eligibility and plan to meet requirements (e.g., eligibility criteria, deadlines for submission, required documentation, etc.). Including advice for applicants who do not meet the criteria, explaining pathway programs, or alternative supervisors, research groups, or institutions may be helpful.

Assessing the suitability of the applicant involves consideration of the admission application, as well as assessing and evaluating the research readiness and fit of the applicant. You may look to the applicant's GPA scores, perhaps in particular subjects or year levels, to assess suitability. A written proposal may assist in the evaluation of academic writing, thinking capacity, and command of the literature. Test scores (e.g., English language, personality, GRE, etc.) may assist in verifying capacity. As supervisors, consider engaging with the applicant virtually or in person to discuss their application and research.

Informal discussions or interviews with applicants who meet the criteria may reveal additional information that can inform the selection process. This may involve discussing applicants' readiness and motivation for attending doctoral studies. Inviting mutual sharing of expectations may reveal consistency or conflict in research practices and potential compatibility of approaches. These discussions can also be used to identify and address expectations about funding, family or work commitments, and other life circumstances that may require consideration (e.g., health and well-being, etc.).

Describing the demands of the program and common hurdles may assist applicants in understanding more fully the commitment required. Discussion of research, theory, methods or literature may reveal common interests and passions, as well as validating levels of researcher development. In this context, applicants may more fully reveal their academic language or analytical capacity to further assist you in evaluating their potential. In some disciplines and in fields where there are large numbers of applicants, supervisors may set written tasks or short quizzes to more easily evaluate and compare applicants' levels of knowledge and research capacity.

For example, consider a health professional working full-time who contacts you as a potential research supervisor about completing a PhD following a recommendation by their work supervisor. It would be important to discuss motivations for higher degree studies, managing work commitments and the role of the PhD in pursuing career goals. A work-related topic, and familiarity with methods and methodologies suitable for the proposed research would build your confidence in the likely success of the candidate. This type of discussion would also provide an opportunity to discuss the realities of successfully completing research studies part-time while meeting work and family commitments.

In search of the most promising applicants, you may rely on your trusted networks (Posselt, 2018). Individual and institutional relationships provide trusted networks that augment existing sources of information. Difficulty in interpreting and comparing prior grades and lack of familiarity with referees can reduce confidence in predicting applicant success, resulting in weighting more highly applicants who come from quality institutions and with letters of recommendation from known academics. Complementing the use of trusted networks with consideration of the fit of applicants to your research can offer a richer and more complete picture.

Supervisor

As a supervisor, key considerations prior to selecting a new student are your current workload, student supervisory capacity, and teaching, research and service commitments. If you already have three students all in their first year or final years, are writing a book or leading a large research grant, designing a new course to be launched in the coming year, or taking on new committees or leadership roles you may not have capacity. Consider your priorities and research plans, and if they are complementary or compatible with the interests, capacity, and potential of applicants.

Consider the composition of the potential supervisory panel, and capacity of others to commit time and resources required for the applicant and their research. Engaging with a supervisory team can be a critical and informative experience in higher degree researchers' development of collaborative skills. Trust and respect are fundamental to building successful collaborations (Gasson & Bruce, 2019). Consider the alignment between your ways of working and research perspectives and those of your potential applicants. Explore your ability to work together and build a sustainable relationship. Use discussion to seek out mutually beneficial areas of interest. Here are a few questions to consider. Can you see mutual levels of confidence growing? Are you able to negotiate when alternative views and perspectives emerge? Can you

envisage introducing them to your networks into the future? Do you see potential for you to inspire them to innovate in areas of expertise aligned with yours in the future?

Context

Institutional-level planning and policy are key factors in the research education context. Consider again the alignment of your work and that of your applicants with institutional expectations. There may be professional or disciplinary-level factors that equally may inform your thinking. Consider how these may open or limit access to funding, resources, or research opportunities. More recent interest in inter- and trans- disciplinary research has led supervisors to pivot their research to ensure the eligibility and relevance of their work in a changing higher education and research context. Attendance at leadership forums or discussions with Deans or Heads of academic units may keep you up to date about shifting research and funding priorities.

Take time to understand the policies of your institution. Be aware of the resources offered to research students by the graduate school, learning and teaching advisors, library, research office, etc. In discussion with applicants and higher degree researchers, you can use this knowledge to answer concerns or questions they raise. Also explore, if available, the guidelines and advice offered by national authorities (e.g., the Council of Graduate Studies, Department of Education, Industry or Innovation), professional bodies and disciplinary bodies. Knowledge of the scholarship in the area provided by conferences, publications and networks may provide a broader and richer awareness of the context and how it is evolving. Awareness of these may support you in approach to supervision, supporting applicants, and the admissions process.

Use existing institutional tools to inform your networks and engagements to find, access and attract suitable applicants and co-supervisors. Perhaps there is funding to form a cohort, an internship or mentoring program, or an existing industry, professional or international funding agreement that you could access to enrich your research culture and actively attract preferred applicants.

Predicting the potential for success of future higher degree researchers

The first point to clarify is the current definition of success. Today's graduates are expected to demonstrate research competence, problem-solving skills, and leadership in interdisciplinary and intersectional contexts. They are expected to innovate and generate high-quality, impactful outputs. These expectations have affected the nature of the research education environment.

Admission processes that value high coursework GPAs and strong links to your institution can no longer be used to predict the success of the next generation of applicants (Zhao, 2024). Prior work experience and industry experience can bring a richness to the research education environment, giving access to

experienced leaders, problem solvers, collaborators, and critical thinkers. They can inform research processes, enable researcher development and promote cross-sectoral engagement. We are now looking to nurture researchers to make cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, and international contributions, which necessitates a diverse student body featuring a broad range of ages, experiences, socio-economic origins, genders, and ethnicities.

The availability and validity of tools available to enable prediction needs also to be critically examined. A literature review of the validity of selection criteria (Kurysheva et al., 2023) found that:

- While GRE predicted first-year GPA in graduate studies, it was weaker in predicting completion and productivity in terms of research publications, with potential bias against some equity groups.
- Letters of recommendation required interpretation by assessors with mixed views on their potential to predict performance and completion reliably.
- Interviews, while costly and time-consuming, were reported by some committees as vital in identifying and validating rejection of unsuitable candidates.
- Personal statements while providing student background were not considered valid indicators of personal qualities or ability with concerns for the validity of self-reports.
- Intelligence assessments correlated with prior experience and performance.
- Personality assessments were challenged because they were coachable and could involve false self-reports.
- English language tests with closely managed standards were considered controversial with concerns that standards were set too low, tests did not assess academic language capacity, and there was potential for results to be falsified due to inadequate administration.

The advice provided to admission committees by Kurysheva et al., (2023) is to:

1. exclude invalid selection instruments;
2. determine and account for criteria relevant to your program;
3. use valid selection methods to predict predefined criteria;
4. show accountability by reporting to your organisation selection outcomes for analysis and evaluation.

For additional assistance consider:

- GPA scores, and different grading schemas: check with your admission administrators who can provide advice on equivalence.
- Applicants' language and research capacity: engage them in discussion, and set tasks that evaluate their research, ability to work with the team, and capacity and potential; and
- Funding needs of potential applicants: check with your scholarship administrators or encourage applicants to conduct online searches to source funding within and beyond the institution (e.g., business, philanthropic, government, etc).

Demonstrate and document your admissions expertise

Having read this chapter, you are now more able to engage in the sourcing and selection of applicants. If you have experience of selection processes, consider how you may seek to refine your evaluation processes. Some questions to consider:

- What are the key qualities you require in applicants?
- Does your current admission process account for these?
- Could you propose refinements to the criteria, scoring or weighting of the criteria based on your experience of admission outcomes?

If you are new to admission, here are some questions for you to consider:

- How can you begin seeking out potential applicants?
- Can you prepare an admission template to send to applicants?
- What documentation would help you in evaluating applicants' eligibility?
- Is there a more experienced supervisor whom you could talk to about the admissions process?

Conclusion

As supervisors, you have a key role to play in the creation of the next generation of scholars. Through your engagement in the admissions process, you can more actively and directly inform those joining research studies and contribute to their progress toward careers as independent researchers.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Burford, J., Kier-Byfield, S., Dangeni., Henderson, E. F., & Akkad, A. (2024). Pre-application doctoral

communications: a missing dimension in research on doctoral admissions. *Educational Review*, *77*(5), 1627–1648. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2024.2306950

Gasson, S. C., & Bruce, C. S. (2019). Supporting higher degree research collaboration. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, *10*(3), 189-199. https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-04-2019-0040

Gasson, S. C., Dillon, D., & Redman-MacLaren, M. (2023, 6 September). *A Tripartite Framework for Inclusive Higher Degree Researcher Assessment: Applicant, Advisor, Context* Australasian Research Management Society, Sydney, Australia.

Inouye, K., Robson, J., Anaiz, P. R., Baker, S., & Ilie, S. (2025). Assessing the person or the project? How disciplinary ontological and epistemological assumptions shape doctoral admissions in elite UK institutions. *Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-025-01438-8

Kurysheva, A., Rijen, H. V. M. v., Stolte, C., & Dilave, G. (2023). Validity, acceptability, and procedural issues of selection methods for graduate study admissions in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics: a mapping review. *International Journal of STEM Education*, *10*(55). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-023-00445-4

Posselt, J. R. (2018). Trust networks: A new perspective on pedigree and the ambiguities of admissions. *Review of Higher Education*, *41*(4), 497-521. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2018.0023

Posselt, J., Southern, D., Hernandez, T., Desir, S., Alleyne, F., & Casey W. Miller Casey W. (2023). Redefining merit through new routines: Holistic admissions policy implementation in graduate education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *47*(1), 159–184. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231201612

Wall Bortz, W. E., Knight, D. B., Lyles, C. H., Kinoshita, T., Choe, N. H., Denton, M., & Borrego, M. (2020). A competitive system: Graduate student recruitment in STEM and why money may not be the answer. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *91*(6), 927–952. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2019.1706017

Young, N. T., Tollefson, K., Zegers, R. G. T., & Caballero, M. D. (2022). Rubric-based holistic review: A promising route to equitable graduate admissions in physics. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, *18*(2), Article 020140. https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.18.020140

Zhao, L. (2024). A theory of change evaluation of doctoral admission methods: A case study of a Chinese university. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *106,* Article 102471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2024.102471

6. SUPERVISING ACROSS A CULTURAL DIVIDE – CHINA AND AUSTRALIA

Xiang-Yu Hou and Susan Gasson

Why read this chapter?

This chapter considers the impact of differing social and research cultures in supervision. In response to the increasingly diverse doctoral cohort, there is a growing need to reconcile higher degree researchers to changing expectations and understandings of research education and supervision. Our focus is on supervisory practices and approaches supporting Chinese nationals who may be travelling independently for the first time to undertake research studies in English-speaking countries and universities. Even supervisors with prior experience of living or working in China may find value in this chapter. If you are currently working with applicants and higher degree researchers from China, this chapter will:

- Highlight the contrasting values and beliefs informing research education in China and Australia, and the potential barriers to Chinese researchers' engagement in Western doctoral studies.
- Provide case studies exploring barriers encountered and strategies for building cross-cultural research relationships and capacity building in Chinese higher degree researchers.
- Shares some strategies, developmental activities, and resources to support your developing cross-cultural research supervisory practice.

Values and beliefs informing the supervision of Chinese higher degree researchers

Every supervisory team, higher degree researcher, and project will inspire a unique relationship, but some common challenges are encountered when engaging Chinese higher degree researchers in Western research cultures. To appreciate these challenges, we share some contrasting features of the Chinese and Australian education systems and research cultures. You can use the values and practices shared to inform your developing cross-cultural research supervisory practice.

Chinese and Australian higher education and research cultures

China's 1978 economic reform spurred an average growth rate of higher education enrolment at 8.5% for two decades. The country, in transitioning from a manufacturing to a knowledge economy, saw its prosperity and global competitiveness as depending on the prioritisation of the knowledge market and human capital (Wang, 2011). Globalisation stood at the heart of its strategy for building human capacity, and it invested more heavily than other developing countries in research and development (Wang, 2011).

More than 50 million Chinese nationals have since been educated or worked overseas in more than 108 countries as it has sought world leadership in science and research by 2050 (Wang et al., 2017). Due to government support in attracting the best and brightest researchers back to China after their overseas experiences, the number of returning researchers is increasing (Wang, 2017). Therefore, students funded by the Chinese government intent on returning to China on graduation from doctoral studies overseas are more likely to carefully select a culturally relevant doctoral topic. An appropriate topic will help them to meet scholarship conditions and enable engagement with networks that can facilitate data collection and provide access to archives and fieldwork settings in China. An appropriate topic and a rigorous research project in the country will realise impactful research outcomes. Research outcomes (i.e., publications, grant funding, etc.) on appropriate topics are seen as vital for meeting criteria for academic positions and progressing toward other career opportunities in China (Xu & Chan, 2023).

By 1998, the Chinese government's massification of higher education in the country was a formal goal. It has since achieved higher education enrolments above 46 million and an estimated 9 million graduates from its 2,956 higher education institutions (Krishna et al., 2025). That massification is seen as a key strategy for growing the economy and developing and utilising human resources. China is now a leading country in the production of PhD graduates in science and engineering disciplines.

The students who emerge from this massive higher education system to enrol internationally can be a great asset to you as a supervisor. In selecting to supervise Chinese higher degree researchers, many have spent years intensely preparing to commence research studies. Their development in China is based on years of exposure to high-performing, massive university environments. Highly motivated to succeed and ready to pivot to their new environment, higher degree researchers from China coming to study in an English-speaking country for the first time are often very committed to realising timely research impact. Their readiness comes from years of intense competition in Chinese institutions.

Ensuring you can work together, share common approaches, and that they are able to engage with the research environment you and your institution have to offer is important. Many come from massive research communities with intensifying infrastructure. You can be confident they will work to give you access to and engagement with that community as they seek to extend their influence and profile.

Australia has also sought massification of higher education with similar goals of improving its standing

as a provider of education, with internationalisation being a core mission for universities globally (Wang et al., 2015). That massification led prior to COVID-19 to Australia being ranked among the top five host destinations for international students, with Chinese students representing 28% of that population in 2022 (Xu & Chan, 2023). Chinese students appreciate Australia's natural environment, quality of education, immigration policy and scholarship programs (Xu & Chan, 2023). Australian quality assurance frameworks require that higher degree researchers have access to experienced supervisors with the capacity to guide their research education experience, and introduce higher degree researchers to networks and experiences that may lead to future collaborations and job opportunities (see also Chapter 2).

Against that backdrop, the remainder of this introductory section focuses on three critical challenges that face Chinese higher degree researchers studying in Western educational institutions. Those challenges are critical thinking, academic English language proficiency, and social skills. Xing et al (2024) provide alternative strategies for supervisors seeking to move beyond the bounds of monolingualism (see also Chapter 9 of this volume). The differing qualities of the Confusion and Western education systems are discussed to enhance your understanding of how these challenges emerge and may be addressed.

Critical thinking – Challenge 1

Tight ideological control over teaching and research in Chinese higher education institutions limits debate on controversial issues and the expression of diverse positions. As a result, Chinese students need time to develop the critical thinking capacity central to doctoral research in the Western academic tradition (Xu & Chan, 2023).

Research literacy must be developed to enable independent analysis and the use of critical language. This literacy is encouraged in Western universities through practices such as interrogating or debating the received truth. This is not a practice in Chinese education where 'truth' is linked with institutional authority and mastery of received knowledge. Xu and Chan (2023) suggest that teachers are a barrier to critical thinking in Chinese educational institutions. Teachers' approaches to learning, including rote and instructive methods seen in Chinese education, can be contrasted with Western student-centred approaches. Australia's self-directed learning models and facilitation of peer-to-peer learning approaches encourage critical thinking and independent analysis. Such approaches are unfamiliar to Chinese students, and can leave them shocked, lost and feeling disempowered (Evans, 2010; Guan & Jones, 2011).

Supervisors are invited to consider how they can account for differing Chinese educational approaches, values and roles, such as face, harmony, humbleness and respect for authority. Awareness of these may assist you in appreciating students' different learning styles that inhibit their ability to question supervisors and engage in academic debate (Wang et al., 2015). Inviting a Chinese speaker with cultural familiarity onto the supervisory team may be a useful strategy. Shared language and cultural understandings may enable a strong immediate connection that will allow a more nuanced support of the student as they transition to a different supervisory relationship and research education environment.

Academic English language proficiency – Challenge 2

While English language testing systems are extensively used in assessing the English language proficiency of international students for admission to higher education, they are not designed to test academic language skills and research writing capacities (Xu & Chan, 2023). Supervisor-directed admissions practices may address this deficit. You might consider providing readings and encouraging critical engagement with these as a way for applicants to demonstrate their academic language ability before admission. Working closely with researchers to support their language development early in candidature is encouraged, building on the competencies demonstrated in language testing (Xu & Chan, 2023).

Writing challenges faced when conducting research studies in a second language culture can relate differing language proficiency and cultural and educational value. These differences may prompt use of different rhetorical tools and reader awareness. Students may need time to refine what was acceptable Chinese English, primarily influenced by American and UK English, in response to the unexpectedly distinct qualities of Australian English (God & Zhang, 2019). Distinct qualities that can impact communication can include accent, language use, rhetorical approaches, etc.

Supervisors may wish to discuss with researchers alternate strategies available for building language capacity. Aligning a strategy to complement the student's job motivations or personal interests may increase their engagement. Use discussions to demonstrate to your students that you recognise your responsibility as their supervisors for capacity building, thereby validating this development as part of their research experience. Options may include taking on work or industry placements, joining social groups, or enrolling in formal advanced academic writing and language classes. These experiences can develop their sense of agency, confidence, engagement in research, and access to communities and cultures (Xu, 2012). While encouraging independence, there is also a place for cooperation and a level of engagement as researchers come to understand supervisor, doctoral, and institutional expectations that form part of the doctorate's hidden curriculum (Goode, 2007).

Social skills – Challenge 3

International students face a range of cultural and linguistic challenges that can impact their academic and social integration, and their ability to access and make the most of new experiences and opportunities. They may feel alienated by unfamiliar accents, styles of humour, and a lack of inclusion due to discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping (Xu & Chan, 2023; Yu et al, 2023). Enabling higher degree researchers' engagement with local communities can improve their language and communication skills while also strengthening their sense of belonging (Wang et al., 2015).

A range of academic stressors can result from difficulties experienced in mastering social skills as students seek to engage with supervisors, their discipline, peers, and future employers. You may need to make time to help higher degree researchers understand your expectations as supervisors, develop sustainable and effective levels of self-discipline, manage peer pressure, meet the demands of research directions taken,

and address concerns about future employability (Jia, 2023). Institutional or discipline-based programs providing peer mentors or cohort events and activities are some strategies that may build social skills. Cross-cultural training and better support mechanisms may also assist.

Showunmi (2024) identified inclusive collaboration as a strategy for overcoming five supervisory challenges: power dynamics and feedback, lack of belonging and support, a racial lens on academic competence, misunderstanding of cultural differences, and communication and language barriers. Social skills are required to realise inclusive collaboration between researchers, you as their supervisory team and the broader research and social community. This level of collaboration is assumed in Australia but contrasts with the familial style of supervisory relationship common in Chinese Confusion cultures. You may again need to take time to explain the value of this approach and guide the higher degree researcher in taking this approach. Higher degree researchers may be persuaded by explanations of this practice as a strategy for building capacity for inter and transdisciplinary research that may be key for sustainable career pathways. Finding space and time to encourage development of new social skills as well as language and critical thinking can be challenging for you as a supervisor, but will lead to positive outcomes for you, your student and their research.

Case Study: Supervising A Chinese PhD student in an Australian university

Introduction

Supervising international PhD students presents unique challenges, especially when there are different cultures, academic expectations, and personal circumstances. This fictional case study explores the experiences of Meng-Lian Lin (林梦莲, known as Olivia), a young Chinese PhD student, and her Australian supervisory team. Through Olivia's journey, this study demonstrates how cultural differences influence academic supervision and offers actionable insights to address these challenges.

Student and Supervisory Team Profiles

Olivia, a quiet, shy and intelligent student, began her PhD journey in biomedical sciences at an Australian university. Her supervisory team included:

- **John**, a white male Head of School (HoS) with extensive academic experience and a heavy workload.
- **Damien**, a male early-career researcher (ECR) with deep technical expertise but little supervisory experience.
- **Maree**, a female professor from another university who provided access to

specialised lab resources.

The Arrival: Cultural and Practical Challenges

Upon arriving in Australia, Olivia faced significant cultural and practical challenges.

Navigating everyday tasks such as renting, grocery shopping, and public transport became sources of stress. Her struggles were compounded by social isolation and her adherence to the Chinese cultural norm of waiting to be invited to meetings, which left her unsure about how to engage with her supervisors.

Damien met with Olivia during John's absence as John was travelling for university business. While Damien's technical guidance was helpful, his inexperience with supervising international students left some of her cultural and social-emotional challenges unaddressed.

Early Meetings: Unclear Expectations and Miscommunication

Olivia's initial interactions with her supervisors were marked by unclear expectations. Influenced by her cultural background, she viewed supervisors as authority figures who would dictate her tasks, not only tell her what to do but also how to do things in John's way. She waited for explicit instructions, unsure of when and how to initiate meetings. John's schedule and Maree's remote involvement encouraged Olivia to take meetings very seriously and use team meeting time well.

Damien's enthusiasm for providing technical guidance was valuable, but his lack of experience in handling cultural and emotional nuances limited his effectiveness.

John recognised the need to address these gaps. He implemented regular check-ins and encouraged face-to-face meetings to build rapport. He also advised Olivia to connect with other PhD students in the school, fostering a sense of belonging and peer support.

To address Olivia's hesitancy to take initiative, John explained the importance of autonomy in the Australian academic system. Drawing on examples from previous students' work, he highlighted the iterative nature of research and writing.

Case studies examining developing relationships

The following supervisory case studies explore the developing cross-cultural supervisory relationship in action. Case studies, while accounting for the impact of barriers and cultural differences outlined above, take a more holistic and real-life approach to the practice of supervision. Olivia's experiences are based on

Professor Hou's years of experience as both a Chinese international student and a supervisor of Chinese doctoral students in Australian universities.

Developing the Research Proposal: Navigating Power Dynamics

The development of Olivia's research proposal revealed tensions in supervisory

relationships. Input from all three supervisors led to differing priorities and opinions, leaving Olivia unsure about whose guidance to follow. In Chinese culture, supervisors are often seen as "parental" figures, leading Olivia to defer decisions to them or unable to make a decision when needed.

Feedback on Olivia's writing, though constructive, was sometimes perceived as personal criticism due to her emotional attachment to her work. Her feeling of "I'm not good enough" was one of the main barriers for her to progress. To mitigate this, John encouraged Olivia to view revisions as opportunities for growth. This approach helped Olivia develop emotional resilience and separate herself from her work, a critical competency for navigating the PhD journey.

The Confirmation Seminar: A Milestone of Transformation

Olivia's confirmation seminar marked a significant milestone. She answered questions with confidence, demonstrating her growing independence as a researcher. This moment reflected her transition from a hesitant and passive student to an emerging academic, underscoring the transformative potential of supportive and nurturing supervision.

Mid-PhD Crisis: Personal Loss and Institutional Support

During her data collection phase, Olivia experienced a personal tragedy: the loss of her mother. Isolated from her family, she struggled to cope, unaware of the university's free counselling services. Maree, noticing Olivia's declining communication and lab productivity, raised concerns with the supervisory team. This situation highlighted the importance of addressing higher degree researchers' mental health, a growing concern in academia all over the world.

John suggested compassionate leave, balancing institutional deadlines with empathy. Maree guided Olivia to seek counselling, emphasising the importance of prioritising well-being over academic progress. This collective effort fostered a deeper trust between Olivia and her supervisors, exemplifying the value of a nurturing approach to supervision.

The crisis marked a turning point in Olivia's research journey. Her openness about her struggles allowed the supervisory team to adapt their mentoring styles. This phase

underscored the importance of creating a supportive environment that acknowledges students' vulnerabilities while fostering their growth as researchers.

Authorship Negotiations: Balancing Cultural and Academic Norms

As Olivia prepared to publish her findings, she expressed concerns about first authorship, which is an official requirement for PhD recognition in China. This situation highlighted the tension between meeting institutional requirements and accommodating cultural expectations. John's sensitivity to this ensured that the publication strategy aligned with both academic standards and Olivia's graduation needs. This reflects good practices for supervisors working in culturally diverse contexts with international students.

The Final Seminar: A Confident Researcher Emerges

By the time of her final seminar, Olivia had transformed into a confident, independent researcher. Her presentation demonstrated not only her academic achievements but also her personal growth. This outcome validated the supervisory team's efforts to balance academic rigour with cultural sensitivity and social-emotional support.

Conclusion

Olivia's PhD journey illustrated the complex interplay of cultural, academic, and personal factors in international PhD supervision. By fostering open communication, cultural sensitivity, and social-emotional support, her supervisory team created an environment where she could thrive. This case study underscores the importance of adaptive and holistic supervision in enabling international students to succeed academically and personally, paving the way for inclusive and transformative HDR education.

Strategies for building supervisory relationships

1. Demonstrate trust and respect by acknowledging there will be differences.
2. Create safe spaces for sharing concerns and expectations, and explore where these may need to be managed, and which are the priorities.
3. Starting with short and easy conversations (even before arrival) while establishing expectations.
4. Use pre-arrival time to begin critical engagement with key literature and build academic English language writing proficiency.
5. Involve students with peers who model informal conversations with supervisors.
6. Provide exemplars of past students' theses and outcomes to reinforce next steps and highlight key shared understandings and values.

7. Set up check-in points to evaluate progress toward goals that allow you to identify and address concerns early.

Evidence your practice

Document key discussions with your students to capture the trajectory of your developing research relationships. Consider the evolving independence and research collaborations you achieve with your domestic and international students. Talk with other supervisors to identify key breakthrough experiences in cross-cultural supervision that may be relevant for your future practice. Explore the literature shared below and consider how it may inform you and your research education community.

Conclusion

From this chapter, we hope you have come to a greater appreciation of the strategies you can use to assist Chinese higher degree research students overcome barriers faced during their studies. You are also encouraged to take account of the strengths, capacities and values that they bring to their studies and how these may benefit you and your research community.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

God, Y. T., & Zhang, H. (2019). Intercultural challenges, intracultural practices: how Chinese and Australian students understand and experience intercultural communication at an Australian university *Higher Education*, *78*, 305–322. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0344-0

Goode, J. (2007). Empowering or disempowering the international Ph.D. student? Constructions of the dependent and independent learner. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *28*(5), 589–603. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690701505409

Jing, S., Ma, Q., Wang, S., Xu, H., Xu, T., Guo, X., & Wu, Z. (2024). Research on developmental evaluation based on the "four abilities" model: evidence from early career researchers in China. *Quality and Quantity*, *58*, 681–704 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-023-01665-0

Krishna, V. V., Zhang, X., & Jiang, Y. (2025). The Rise of Chinese Universities: Research, Innovation and Building World-class Universities. *Science, Technology and Society*, *30*(1), 162-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/09717218241257716

Wang, C. C., Andre, K., & Greenwood, K. M. (2015). Chinese students studying at Australian universities with specific reference to nursing students: A narrative literature review. *Nurse Education* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2014.12.005

Wang, C. C., Whitehead, L., & Bayes, S. (2017). The real 'cost' of study in Australia and the ramifications for China, Australia, and the Chinese nursing students: what do these three players want? A narrative review. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *15*(5), 590-606. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1195727

Xing, C., Mu, G. M., & Henderson, D. (2022). Problematising English monolingualism in the 'multicultural' university: a Bourdieusian study of Chinese international research students in Australia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *45*(6), 1851–1863. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2026366

Xu, J., & Chan, W. V. (2023). Doing and supervising China studies PhD projects in Australia: Experiences of Chinese PhD students and Australian supervisors *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, *63*(2), 165–184. https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.246186095480780

Yu, M. L., Brown, T., Hewitt, A., Cousland, R., Lyons, C., & Etherington, J. (2023). Exploring emotional and social competencies in undergraduate students: Perspectives from CALD and non-CALD students. *The Australian Educational Researcher 50*, 601–624. https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00507-6

Additional reading

Campbell, E. (2022). *Govt tweaks ministerial sign-off rule for international students*. Campus Review. Retrieved 15 July 2022 from https://www.campusreview.com.au/2022/07/gov-tweaks-ministerial-sign-off-rule-for-international-students/

Chen, S. (2023). China: Quality assurance, internationalisation, doctoral employment, and COVID-19. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *60*(5), 646-655. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2237938

Liu, C., Campbell, N., Gerstner, E., Lin, A., Li, P., Pincock, S., Gibbons, C., Zhou, Y., Gilloch, C., Huang, K., & Phillips, N. (2015). *Turning Point: Chinese Science in Transition*. Springer Nature.

Scott, J. (2014). Memoir as a form of auto-ethnographic research for exploring the practice of transnational higher education in China. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *33*(4), 757-768. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.863844

Seeberg, V., & Qiang, H. (2012). Sustainable international cross-cultural collaboration: Transcending "brain drain" In K. Mundy & Q. Zha (Eds.), *Education and Global Cultural Dialogue. International and development education*. PalgraveMacmillan.

Tight, M. (2021). Globalization and internationalization as frameworks for higher education research. *Research Papers in Education*, *36*(1), 52-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1633560

Today, 35(4), 609–619.Wit, H. d. (2019). Internationalisation of Higher Education, a critical review. *SFU Educational Review*, *12*(3), 9–17. https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i3.1036

7. SUPERVISING STUDENTS THROUGH LODGEMENT AND SUBMISSION

Jillian Blacker; Abbe Winter; and Sandra Gattenhof

Why read this chapter?

The key learnings from this chapter are:

- Role of supervisors during thesis examination and beyond
- Enhancing your supervisory practice through thesis examination
- Importance of the thesis examiner's role.

This chapter guides you through the external examination process, from planning through to lodging the thesis for external examination (and beyond); and especially the connection between the researcher, supervisor, and examiners.

As you explore this chapter you may find that elements of the discussion resonate with you; perhaps you are an experienced supervisor and your professional practice aligns with that in the chapter, or you may be seeking guidance to undertake your first higher degree researcher supervision, or first thesis examination. This chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on your academic professional practice, and your own thesis examination experience and how it worked for you.

Introduction

Submission of a thesis for external examination is a key point in the higher degree researcher's journey, but it is merely a pause, a precursor to the final stages of candidature. Many people think supervision is most intense in the first year, but that's not necessarily true. Higher degree researchers need guidance and support in their first year of candidature, to build foundational skills, but HDRs will need as much, if not more, supervisory support in the later stages of candidature – through thesis examination, responding to examiner feedback, and submitting their final thesis. Throughout candidature, there is a lot of university support; for example from research developers (including administrative support to help navigate

candidature), academic writing support staff, library staff and personal support staff, to assist HDRs and their supervisors. During early candidature and into the more independent phases, the HDR needs to take over the "driving" of the thesis, and the balance of power gradually shifts from a hierarchical to a collegial relationship. However, when a higher degree researcher's expectations of their supervisor increase around examination, it can feel challenging to find the time or capacity to meet these expectations. It is important, however, to factor this in (even when the candidature is in the early planning stages), so that you can provide invaluable assistance to your HDR when it is most needed. As noted, HDRs can get institutional support, as well as that from critical friends, but supervisors play a fundamental role in helping them successfully navigate this process. Exploring and adopting the practices within this chapter can help to make the final stages of candidature positive for you and your higher degree researcher.

Becoming a supervisor of a higher degree researcher also brings with it expectations of reciprocal collegial activities, such as examining HDR theses. While being a thesis examiner is voluntary, it can be a valuable exercise that enhances your professional practice as a supervisor. The role of both HDR supervisors and HDR examiners will be discussed in more depth throughout this chapter.

Recognising the impact of supervision in thesis examination

The thesis is the most significant output from a higher degree research candidature, and while it is the HDR's work and is a tangible demonstration of the expertise that they have developed in their discipline area, the impact of the supervisor's guidance is felt throughout it. Every chapter carries traces of dialogue, negotiation, and influence—echoes of meetings, marginal comments, and quiet redirections that have shaped the research journey. In this sense, examination reports can seem to critique the supervisory relationship as much as the thesis itself. When examiners point to conceptual gaps, uneven argumentation, or unclear framing, they are often—consciously or not—commenting on the guidance that has framed the higher degree researcher's intellectual development. The examination phase also reveals the deeper relational and intellectual dimensions of doctoral authorship. For the HDR, the thesis represents an act of scholarly identity-making; for the supervisor, it becomes an exercise in professional reflection.

Supervisors are therefore encouraged to simulate the perspective of an external examiner (who will be seeing the thesis for the first time) when reviewing the final draft, by objectively scrutinising structure, argumentation, clarity, and scholarly contribution. This includes discussing potential questions, *explaining the anonymous nature of external examination*, and helping the HDR to understand the roles and expectations of examiners (Tinkler & Jackson, 2024).

Preparing for examination

Supervisors play a critical role in guiding higher degree researchers as they prepare for examination. Central

to this responsibility is working collaboratively with the HDR to determine when the thesis is genuinely examinable. This involves careful evaluation of the coherence of the argument, the clarity of the research design, and the extent to which the thesis demonstrates an original and significant contribution to knowledge. Supervisors should engage HDRs in explicit discussions about what examiners typically expect, including whether the manuscript would benefit from professional editing, whether methodological decisions are sufficiently justified, and whether the contribution is articulated with precision and scholarly depth. A confident, coherent thesis often signals consistent mentorship and mutual trust, whereas fragmented writing may reflect uncertainty, miscommunication, or conflicting expectations. The thesis therefore, functions as a mirror of the partnership behind it: the supervisor's commitment to cultivating independence and the HDR's capacity to translate that guidance into scholarly voice.

Supporting your HDR to prepare for thesis examination begins well before the examination is due to be undertaken. Looking at examiner guidelines and making sure these are incorporated into the thesis development is one important aspect, incorporating feedback from milestones or progress reviews to strengthen the thesis is another, as is the process of selecting thesis examiners.

As a supervisor, you choose the examiners, typically based on your combined knowledge of the field. the thesis and the potential examiner's expertise in the discipline area. Sometimes, though, the selection of examiners can be tied to our own academic identity – we may select examiners who are aligned to us, but not the best for the HDR. For example, it's possible you're looking for someone to simply pass the thesis to finalise the candidature. While this may be well-intentioned it can create more complications than it appears to solve. Thesis examiners should have the relevant knowledge and disciplinary expertise to impartially assess the thesis, and its contributions to knowledge. An examiner who may just pass the thesis, and a supervisor who supports a thesis to be sent out for examination before it is truly ready, weaken its contribution to the discipline and potentially risk damaging the reputation of the HDR, their supervisors, and ultimately the university.

Protecting the integrity of the examination process

An important aspect of this is ensuring that impartial and independent thesis examination remains a cornerstone of academic credibility. Australian universities require examiners to formally declare potential conflicts of interest. At most Australian institutions, at least one examiner must be external to the university. The examiner should remain anonymous to the HDR during the appointment and period of examination, and, if preferred, can remain anonymous after the delivery of the examination report. However, most examiners are willing to be identified with the higher degree researcher after the award has been confirmed by the university.

Conflict of Interest management is about perceived as well as actual conflicts. It is not about being critical of nominated examiners or about questioning anyone's integrity; it is about ensuring an impartial and unbiased examination process. To that end, the Australian Council of Graduate Research Conflict of Interest Guidelines (2016) state:

> *the presence or perception of possible conflict of interest between the examiner and the higher degree researcher or other parties should not necessarily and automatically preclude the use of that examiner. What is important is that a fair and transparently "unconflicted" examination can take place. With responsible management of a declared conflict, it may be possible to achieve this aim.*

Equally, serving as an examiner can substantially enhance a supervisor's capacity to set clear and rigorous benchmarks for their own HDRs. Examination experience exposes supervisors to a wide spectrum of scholarly standards, methodological approaches, and common pitfalls, thereby sharpening their ability to articulate expectations regarding research design, academic writing, and contribution to knowledge. It also clarifies the criteria by which examiners typically evaluate originality, coherence, and methodological rigour. This, in turn, strengthens the alignment of expectations between supervisor and higher degree researcher by enabling more explicit discussion of progress milestones, evidence of independent scholarship, and acceptable levels of theoretical and empirical sophistication. Moreover, understanding examiner perspectives encourages supervisors to coach HDRs in anticipating critical scrutiny, refining argumentation, and presenting research with clarity and integrity. Ultimately, acting as an examiner not only reinforces the supervisor's own evaluative judgement but also supports the development of transparent, equitable, and academically robust supervisory practices.

Additionally, the advent of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT has prompted universities to develop explicit guidelines for both HDR's and examiners. Higher degree researchers are often required to disclose the nature and extent of AI use in the thesis—for instance, in language polishing or diagram generation. Conversely, examiners are increasingly prohibited from using AI to produce or summarise examiner reports. These guidelines aim to maintain academic standards while acknowledging the evolving nature of research practices in the digital age (Monash University, 2024).

During examination

Once the thesis has been submitted, supervisors can support HDRs in making effective use of the waiting period by encouraging ongoing professional development, conference participation, or reflective preparation for possible revisions. The period between thesis submission and return of examiner reports should be used productively rather than being treated as a fallow time; undertaking activities that help them remain engaged in the research space and maintain momentum while further developing their skills and knowledge to prepare for forthcoming employment.

The liminal space that occurs during the examination period can be used to support the HDR to prepare for the oral defence (if this is a required mode of examination) by facilitating mock presentations, anticipating likely questions, and ensuring the HDR is confident in articulating the significance and rigour of their work. For HDRs whose thesis is examined as a monograph (possibly alongside creative output), the time can foster the development of journal articles through purposeful and ethical co-authorship. By modelling scholarly writing practices, supervisors can guide HDRs in transforming thesis chapters and data that may not have been included in the thesis into publishable manuscripts. Co-authorship further

enables supervisors to mentor higher degree researchers in navigating the publication process, including journal selection, responding to reviewer feedback, and meeting standards of academic integrity. Through this partnership, HDRs gain confidence and proficiency in scholarly communication, while supervisors help cultivate a research culture that values mentorship, collaboration, and high-quality dissemination of knowledge.

When examiner reports are received, the supervisor's role extends beyond procedural guidance to encompass interpretive and reflective support. Supervisors assist higher degree researchers in reading critiques constructively, helping formulate a systematic and proportionate response, and prioritising revisions in ways that strengthen the coherence and contribution of the thesis. Supervisors also oversee the administrative requirements of the examination process, ensuring that documentation for lodgement and final submission is completed with accuracy and timeliness.

Meeting university expectations and guidelines

Examiners are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the formal requirements and expectations for HDR theses at the institution where the researcher is situated, and this information is provided as part of the examination materials. These requirements typically include originality, contribution to knowledge, methodological rigour, and the ability to engage critically with the literature (Wellington, 2010). *In Australia, these requirements are commonly outlined in national frameworks, such as the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF, 2013) and the Australian Council for Graduate Research Guidelines for Thesis Examination, which define required outcomes including autonomy, expert judgment, and significant contribution to knowledge.* Supervisors should also be familiar with these requirements, as understanding these benchmarks allows supervisors to ensure the thesis is aligned with disciplinary and institutional standards before submission.

Wee Chun (2024, p. 1) notes that, "while considerable resources are often invested in research supervision, the professional development of examiners receives less attention". Engaging with university and governing body guidelines can assist in supporting and developing examiners.

Examination is collegial not adversarial

An examiner plays a pivotal role in the life cycle of the HDR thesis process, both for the HDR and the supervisory team. Best practices in examining an HDR thesis should be centred around objective engagement, alignment with institutional criteria, developmental feedback, and working with ethical integrity.

Examination should be a collegial and supportive process, grounded in respect for the HDR's intellectual effort and commitment. As an examiner, the role is not about inserting your voice or preferences into the thesis, but engaging carefully and critically with the work on its own terms. The purpose of examination

is not to impose your scholarly preferences, but to assess how effectively the higher degree researcher has framed, developed, and evidenced their research questions within the conventions of the discipline. Collegiality, however, does not mean indulgence. A supportive process requires honesty, transparency, and academic rigour. Where a thesis falls short—whether through weak argumentation, insufficient engagement with literature, or lack of methodological clarity—it is the responsibility of the examiner to articulate those concerns clearly and constructively. The researcher deserves an informed, professional judgement that identifies both the strengths and limitations of the work, and that provides a fair basis for any recommended revisions. Examiners should provide detailed, specific, and reflective feedback on the thesis that addresses both macro-level concerns (e.g., coherence of argument, contribution to the field) and micro-level issues (e.g., citation style, grammar) (Kamler & Thomson, 2014).

While supervisors are invested in the success of their HDRs, examiners must adopt a critical stance when reviewing the thesis to avoid over-familiarity or confirmation bias (Lee, 2008). When providing comments on a thesis, an examiner should try to imagine how they will read from the researcher's point of view. The examination process can be daunting, and written feedback carries weight — it can either clarify a path forward or leave the HDR feeling adrift. The examiner's responsibility is to make their comments clear, specific, and genuinely useful.

The easiest way to construct a response to the thesis is to use the chapter framework of the thesis as the meta-structure; that is, move through the thesis chapter by chapter, ensuring that the comments are anchored in the structure of the work. Every chapter has its own purpose, and examiner feedback should reflect that. For each chapter, examiners may like to begin with something that has been done well — whether it's the clarity of the introduction, the organisation of the literature review, the design of the methodology, or the insight shown in the discussion. Recognising what works well is not simply a courtesy; it helps the higher degree researcher see where their strengths lie and how those strengths might support further development.

Constructive critique follows from that foundation of acknowledgment. The thesis examiner's role is to provide direction, not discouragement — to identify weaknesses without diminishing the achievement.

As a supervisor, it is essential to cultivate a clear understanding of what constitutes an examinable doctoral thesis and how examiners engage with an HDR's work. An examinable thesis demonstrates conceptual coherence, methodological rigour, and a significant/original contribution to knowledge. It must present an argument that is both intellectually robust and situated within relevant scholarly debates, while reflecting the HDR's capacity for independent, critical inquiry.

Golding, Sharmini and Lazarovitch (2013) note that examiners tend to favour a thesis that is coherent, with a convincing approach that engages with the literature and the findings, but they require a passable thesis to be publishable research. The guidelines provided by the university should support examiners and supervisors in determining what constitutes a passable thesis.

Examiners play a pivotal role in evaluating what is often the HDR's first—and frequently their most

substantial—piece of independent academic work. Their assessment is not merely a procedural requirement but a scholarly dialogue through which the HDR's identity as a researcher is recognised, tested, and affirmed. This evaluative process is a rite of passage, marking their transition from supervised researcher to emerging disciplinary peer.

Supervisors, in turn, help shape this experience by preparing HDRs to meet disciplinary standards, anticipate critical scrutiny, and present their work with clarity and integrity. By framing examination as both an academic milestone and an induction into the broader research community, supervisors support HDRs in navigating the intellectual, professional, and personal dimensions of this transformative stage. Ultimately, examination is a collaborative act of scholarship. It connects the examiner and higher degree researcher through a shared commitment to knowledge, inquiry, and intellectual honesty. Exercising professional judgement means engaging with the thesis as a serious contribution to the field, acknowledging its achievements, and being forthright where it does not yet meet the required standard. In this way, the process remains both exacting and humane, ensuring that the award of a degree genuinely reflects the higher degree researcher's attainment of scholarly independence and excellence.

A Reflection: Supporting HDRS through the final stages of examination and completion

When I finished my PhD back in 2013, the biggest support my supervisor gave me in responding to the examiners' comments was in how to create a response table. I hadn't been the lead author on any publications at that point, so I had never needed to respond to comments. As a result, my supervisor's advice that I didn't have to act on every comment was mind-blowing. The autonomy that academic permission gave me to choose what to respond to and what to not add into my thesis was freeing. So now, in working with HDRs myself, I make sure to pass on those freedoms and permissions – make the table of what the reviewers said (clustered together where you can, so that it's less of a long list and more an organised list of improvements to make), and how you're going to respond (including with a polite "Thank you, but no action taken on this suggestion" where relevant). That was particularly helpful for me, because one of my examiners suggested adding a lot of nursing literature to my education thesis. So, I read a few of their recommendations and incorporated a couple of the references. But it was an empowered, informed choice thanks to that just-in-time support from my supervisor when the examiners' comments came back to me.

Reflecting on the support that I needed but didn't receive, the one thing I didn't know was that my university had a student research fund that I could have used. By not knowing, I didn't get a printed hardcopy of my PhD thesis until several years after I finished, when I had some spare money to pay for it. It also meant I didn't go and present my research at any conferences or

publish any articles from my thesis, which I now regret. HDRs don't know what they don't know, so it is important for supervisors to check in and advise them of available support.

The biggest support that I now see a need for is to assure HDRs that it's normal for this part of the research process to feel a bit like a never-ending process. It's normal for there to be "just one more" thing to do several times, over and over. So supporting their resilience and wellbeing at this stage can be vital. Chapter 16 of this book has more information on supervision and student well-being.

Providing further connection

The examination process should be understood as more than an endpoint; it is an opportunity to create further connections for the higher degree researcher. Examiners occupy a privileged position, having read the thesis closely and understood both its scholarly contributions and its potential for growth. Rather than viewing examination purely as evaluation, it can become an act of academic hospitality—an invitation into broader conversations. Use the examination process to provide further connections for the higher degree researcher. Refer the researcher (and their supervisors) to journals and conferences they could submit to, or to scholars whose work aligns with their emerging research identity. Such gestures not only extend the life of the thesis but also affirm the higher degree researcher's place in an intellectual community. Beyond feedback and assessment, consider collaboration. Invite them to collaborate on publications, panels, or projects that draw from shared interests. These small acts of inclusion can have lasting effects on their academic trajectory, transforming examination from a final hurdle into the beginning of collegial engagement.

Equally, it is worth pausing to reflect on the nature of this new scholar. Think about whether you would be happy to employ this person as a colleague—a teacher, post-doctoral student, or research assistant. Would you be comfortable welcoming them into your department, your seminar room, your research team? Would you be happy to have their book on your bookshelf? These questions encourage us to see examination not only as critique but as recognition of potential. In the best cases, the work earns a place in our professional and intellectual circles, reminding us that every successful examination contributes to the renewal of the discipline itself.

The rise of the oral defence

HDR education in Australia adheres to rigorous standards, with thesis examination forming the cornerstone of quality assurance and academic legitimacy. Historically, Australian PhD assessments have relied primarily on external, written evaluations. Recent shifts in pedagogy, academic integrity, and technology have catalysed substantial changes in these processes. A significant departure from traditional

assessment methods, which have historically relied on paper-based assessment, is the introduction or reintroduction of the **viva voce** (oral defence). While oral defences have historically been rare in Australia, recent developments point to a growing interest in implementing or formalising viva voce exams. These are seen to improve assessment transparency and HDR engagement, with institutions such as the University of Melbourne introducing formal oral components in 2025 (GradResearch, 2025). However, concerns persist regarding HDR stress, examiner consistency, and the purpose of the viva (Harris & Hill, 2025). Notably, the University of Melbourne has mandated that from January 2025, all higher degree researchers must undergo a viva unless a formal waiver is granted (University of Melbourne, 2024). This change reflects a broader shift toward dialogic assessment, allowing for deeper engagement with the HDR's ideas and improved examination robustness. The practice also aligns Australian processes more closely with European and North American models of doctoral examination.

Conclusion

The landscape of HDR thesis examination in Australia is evolving toward greater standardisation, transparency, and fairness. The introduction of oral exams, although controversial, represents a major shift, aligning Australian practice more closely with international norms. At the same time, persistent challenges remain around examiner calibration, disciplinary variability, and workload implications. Best practice reflects a commitment to academic rigour balanced with support and institutional efficiency. As a supervisor, this means that your practice should also continue to evolve. Whether you are new to HDR supervision or an experienced supervisor and/or examiner, it is important to both remain reflective about your practice and maintain your awareness of shifts by reading both guidelines and publications on the examination process, similar to the recognition of academic conversations in your own discipline. From the introduction of oral defence to updated policies on AI, the Australian HDR examination system is evolving to address contemporary challenges and align with international standards. These changes reflect an ongoing commitment to academic excellence, integrity, and fairness. As the landscape continues to shift, supervisors' and examiners' research could expand to explore how these reforms affect HDR experiences, academic workloads, and the overall quality of higher degree research.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Australian Qualifications Framework Council. (2013). *Australian Qualifications Framework*. https://www.aqf.edu.au

Golding, C., Sharmini, S., & Lazarovitch, A. (2013). What examiners do: what thesis students should know. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *39*(5), 563–576. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2013.859230

GradResearch. (2025). *Oral examinations in PhD assessment*. University of Melbourne. https://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/examination/overview

Harris, A., & Hill, T. (2025). The viva voce in Australian PhD assessment: Emerging trends and tensions. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 50(2), 145–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2025.2566652

Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2014). *Helping doctoral students write: Pedagogies for supervision*. Routledge.

Lee, A. (2008). How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(3), 267–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802049202

Monash University. (2024). *Guidance on generative AI for thesis examiners*. https://www.monash.edu/graduate-research/support-and-resources/resources/guidance-on-generative-ai

Tinkler, P., & Jackson, C. (2004). *The doctoral examination process: A handbook for students, examiners and supervisors*. Open University Press.

University of Melbourne. (2024). *Examination Overview*. https://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/examination/overview

Wee Chun, T. (2024).Empowering examiners to develop doctoral assessment literacy: a situated learning perspective. *Frontiers in Education, Vol 9.* https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1345661

Wellington, J. (2010). *Making supervision work for you: A student's guide to research and writing*. SAGE Publications.

Additional Reading

Websites, blogs and vlogs

Australian Council of Graduate Research. (2016). *ACGR Conflict of Interest in Examination*

Guidelines. https://www.acgr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ACGR-Conflict-of-Interest-in-Examination-Guidelines.pdf [PDF 265KB]

Australian Qualifications Framework Council. (2013). *Australian Qualifications Framework*. https://www.aqf.edu.au

8. ENABLING EFFECTIVE TEAM SUPERVISION

Natasha Kitano and Karen Clegg

Why read this chapter?

An extended team approach to Higher Degree Research (HDR) supervision is becoming increasingly popular in Australia and the UK. Providing higher degree researchers (HDRs) with a wider range of perspectives, experience, expertise, and introductions to networks is key to good research practice. Drawing on empirical data we believe that a collaborative approach to team supervision is a viable and sustainable model for modern higher degree researchers and programs. We define the remit of a 'core supervisory team' to be people who work together to support the wider ambitions of the researcher and the successful achievement of the doctorate and support of the researcher. The core supervisory team may include (HDRs, principal and co-supervisor, assistant supervisor/postdoctoral researcher, external supervisors and increasingly, external industry supervisors). The team is commonly supported by a broader collaborative support community (i.e., peers, family and friends, and professional support) who provide additional and complementary support to the researcher. This outer layer of distributed support cultivates a more sustainable, inclusive, and researcher-centred approach to doctoral research education and development.

The key learnings from this chapter are:

- deeper insight into your own strengths and the contribution you make to the core supervisory team. To support this, we offer a new model for conceptualising team supervision
- a checklist to support conversations about the roles and responsibilities of core team members. Who should do what, and when?
- an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and contributions that a wider team approach can make to the production of novel, trusted research and to the development of independent higher degree researchers.

Introduction

In this chapter, we invite you, as supervisors, to reflect on your own practice and examine the contribution you and your peers make. To support this reflection, we provide two tools. Firstly, we have created the Collaborative Supervision Model which captures the contributions of the core supervisory team together with broader support communities of peers, family and friends and professional support. Secondly, we provide a Team Supervision Checklist which guides conversations about roles and responsibilities for those within the core team. The checklist is followed by practical areas based on our personal experiences as supervisor developers where core supervisory teams can make meaningful and immediate differences to HDR supervision.

Our aim is that by using these tools, you will gain greater insight into your supervisory practice. Furthermore, we highlight the impact broader research communities, and the core supervisory team can have on the shape and impact of the research outputs, enabling supervisors to better support HDRs in gaining independence.

As authors based in the UK and Australia, we acknowledge the differences in the nomenclature around research supervision. We note terms such as *main* or *principal* supervisor, and *co-* or *associate* supervisor are often used interchangeably across institutions. In the UK, the term *assistant supervisor* is broadly equivalent to *postdoctoral researcher* in Australia. We are using *Higher Degree Researchers (HDRs*); feel free to substitute this for d*octoral candidate* or *postgraduate research student (PGR)*, as is appropriate to your context. We use *industry supervisor* as an umbrella term to denote those people based in business, creative industries, heritage and charities who contribute to a core supervisory team. Although *industry supervisors* are indeed external to a university, we define *external supervisors* as supervisors from another university. Similarly, we define our Collaborative Supervision Model as an extended team approach that recognises the contributions from the core supervisory team, peers, family and friends and professional support. We acknowledge that this may not necessarily reflect your current practice. However, we invite you to consider and reflect on how, and whether, this collaborative model could work for you.

Higher Degree by Research (HDR) supervision has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, evolving from the traditional one-to-one model to increasingly collaborative supervisory team approaches. This evolution is well documented in the work of Grant (2008), Park (2006) and Taylor, Kiley and Humphrey (2019). The change to a team approach has been influenced by several factors, including an increase in the overall demand for HDR programs and an increase in the number of higher degree researchers (Altbach et al., 2019). This shift also reflects the growing complexity of contemporary research, the need for interdisciplinary expertise, and today's higher degree researchers' diverse academic, cultural, and professional needs. Guerin et al (2011) note a range of structural and operational types of team supervision, from "pyramidal hierarchy" (p. 146) with the principal supervisor at the top of the pyramid retaining most of the control compared to the base of the pyramid where a more horizontal multi-pronged collaborative approach exists "dispensing with many of the notions of supervisory mastery and control" (p. 147). There is an increasing recognition that no single academic can meet all the roles and

requirements of an HDR project, especially one rooted in interdisciplinarity, practice, or performance-based approaches (Clegg, 2024). There is also a growing trend for higher degree researchers and supervisors to rely on broader support networks, including "departmental communities of practice, peers, graduate research schools, national societies and collaborators" (Sharmini & Spronken-Smith, 2020, p. 827).

What is team supervision and how common is it?

UK perspective

In the UK, team supervision typically refers to two supervisors, often with one principal or main supervisor and one co-supervisor (Smith-McGloin & Wynne, 2022). In many cases, the main supervisor sets the 'academic direction' and takes responsibility for the administrative tasks associated with candidature (Gower et al., 2024). However, data from the second national survey of supervisor experiences, the UK Research Supervision Survey (UKRSS) 2024 report (Gower et al., 2024) revealed that in some cases, these administrative tasks were delegated to junior members of the team. A dyadic, one to one, model still exists, for example, in some arts and humanities, but team supervision is increasingly the norm. The UKRSS also reveals that 76% respondents said they frequently or 'always' took part in team supervision. This is up from 71% reported in 2021. Just under a fifth (18%) said they worked in teams of three or more people. A similar percentage of supervisors reported being part of a team with an industry supervisor.

Australian perspective

In Australia, supervising in teams of at least two supervisors has been widely practiced for decades. It has become the sector-wide standard with the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR), a key national organisation of university representatives overseeing HDR programs, providing guidance on HDR training and articulating expectations around supervisory arrangements (ACGR, 2018). The updated ACGR Principles for Graduate Research Supervision (2024) now include a sub-principle that states that at least two academic staff members must provide supervision for the duration of each candidature. However, even though all universities in Australia have adopted some form of team supervision following this announcement, the way it is implemented varies enormously (Kumar & Wald, 2024) and the interpretation of what constitutes a 'team' remain broad (Robertson, 2017).

Why is team supervision needed?

Team supervision can be useful for the following reasons:

- Interdisciplinary research (which is becoming more prominent) requires multiple perspectives to tackle society's big problems. Teams with diverse expertise come together to address complex

research challenges while navigating the benefits and obstacles of crossing disciplinary boundaries (Kumar & Wald, 2023).

- Practice-based research requires a combination of academic, scholarly input, and expertise from those actively involved in practice, whether that is clinical, medical, STEM, or creative and heritage industries. The inclusion of an industry supervisor in the team is gaining prominence as academic and industry priorities converge (Wrigley et al., 2021).
- A doctorate is no longer just a license to practice in universities. It is a passport to employment in organisations where creative solutions are needed. The focus over the last two decades on the importance of transferable skills requires supervisors to be confident in their ability to signpost, to mentor, to support careers etc. The list goes on. Supervisors are expected to know and be able to support all aspects of the doctoral lifecycle and the individual researcher. In addition, the skills needed by higher degree researchers are also very different to even five years ago. For example, literature reviews can now be produced in a matter of minutes by AI. Supervisory teams need to be able to recognise and support the appropriate use of AI, and this may be more easily achieved through a multi-disciplinary and/or industry component.
- Supporting the HDRs mental health and wellbeing may also benefit from a collaborative approach. The UKRSS 2024 data highlights that 20% of supervisors cited mental health and wellbeing as an issue for their supervisees. 75% of supervisors agreed with the statement that it "falls within their remit to respond to the mental health and wellbeing of HDRs and to signpost where appropriate" and 76% felt confident in their ability to do this. Therefore, a quarter of respondents do not see it as part of their remit, nor are they confident in their ability to offer support. In this context, higher degree researchers need support from elsewhere.
- The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2024 (Neves) attracted 12,123 responses from HDRs in 61 institutions, 57 in the UK and four Australian Universities. The data indicates that HDRs 'sense of belonging' and 'opportunities to discuss my work with other researchers' were significantly lower than other areas. 63% of HDRs said that the "research community in my area influences my work" (dipping to 44% if the interaction was online). In addition, just 11% reported having the opportunity to engage in a placement or internship. This lack of opportunity to learn from others and gain experience of industry supports the move to embrace a collaborative approach to supervision, ideally including an industry representative.
- The design of doctoral programmes too requires a different, team-based approach. The growth of Cotutelle programs which bring together academic teams from multiple institutions, offers higher degree researchers' unique opportunities for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration. In the UK, collaborative doctoral awards funded partly by industry commonly include a placement element. This provides the higher degree researchers with opportunities to work alongside and learn from industry practice and to gain an insight into the pace, breadth and application of research.

Who might be involved in a collaborative approach to supervision?

Vitae's Researcher Development Framework 2025 illustrates the student/researcher at the centre of the doctoral process, surrounded by their research and supported by research communities. We identify these communities as three interconnected groups:

1. Core supervisory team: main and co-academic supervisor, assistant supervisor/postdoc researcher, and, in some cases an external supervisor or an industry supervisor, who, between them, might provide support for the academic direction of the research and mentorship for the higher degree researcher in gaining independence.

> The UKRSS reports from 2021 and 2024 show that in the UK, postdoctoral researchers (and technicians in STEM fields) may contribute informally to the supervisory team. These highly skilled and experienced colleagues are often closer to the doctoral experience than the supervisors. They can assist not just with the technical aspects of the project but also act as mentors. In addition, they are often familiar with the local context and processes and can help the researcher develop independence. Recognising their contribution as assistant supervisor benefits everyone, as it adds to the team's capacity and enhances their own professional development and employability.

2. Professional and technical support staff: researcher development teams, technicians, careers advisors, librarians, open research teams, IT, mental health and wellbeing advisors, and cultural advisors who collectively support the development of skills, knowledge, conduct, and the ability to conduct research. These people can offer specialised knowledge, intelligence and support to the researcher and provide a critical role.

3. Peers, friends, and family: also play a vital role in supporting and encouraging the higher degree researcher. The contribution of informal networks to the higher degree research experience cannot be underestimated. Peer communities, including writing groups or cohort-based networks, can be powerful spaces for intellectual exchange, accountability, and solidarity. Though typically outside academia, family and close friends provide crucial stability and validation that sustains researchers' motivation and wellbeing. They can provide additional emotional support, re-assurance and stability, especially during periods of isolation, self-doubt, or increased stress. This is particularly important since in the UK, "responsibility for pastoral care varied hugely – sometimes it was seen as the responsibility of the primary supervisor, but in other cases delegated to others." (Gower et al., 2024, p. 57). Recognising the value of these support systems is essential to understanding the holistic nature of the researcher experience.

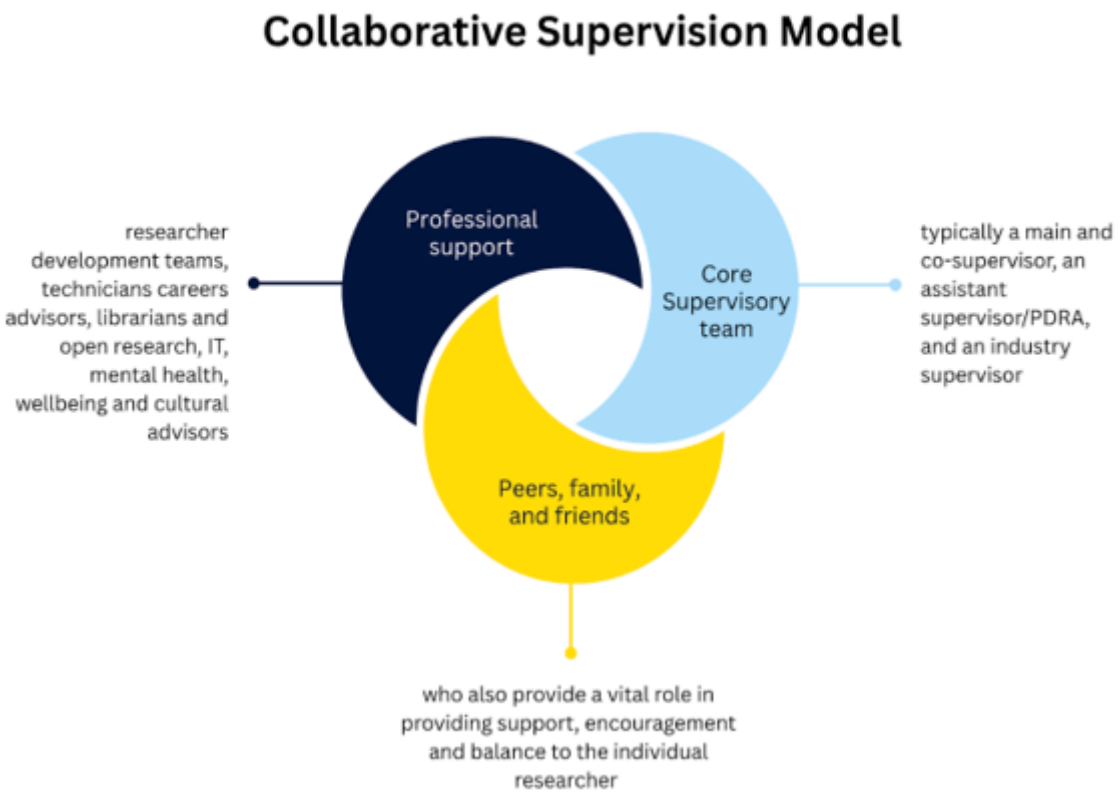


*Figure 8.1: Collaborative Supervision Model: core supervisory teams and extended research communities. Clegg K and Kitano N as part of the RSVP project.**

This collaborative approach respects the value of the multiple sources of expertise and guidance that ideally support the higher degree researchers' journey. In our model (Fig. 1), there is no hierarchy. Some higher degree researchers will need more from one group than another and draw upon them at different times. An effective core supervisory team will recognise this and signpost and actively encourage their higher degree researchers to access support from the other communities of professional support colleagues, peers, family, and friends.

Who belongs to the professional support group and what do they do?

Professional support staff, including researcher development teams, technicians, librarians, careers advisors, mental health professionals, and IT and open research specialists, offer essential expertise and services that complement supervisory guidance. Higher degree researchers may benefit from targeted workshops, one-to-one consultations, or advisory services related to publishing, data management, ethics, career planning, or wellbeing at different stages of candidature. This domain of support provides both practical skills and institutional scaffolding that help researchers navigate complex systems and build

confidence as independent researchers. An effective supervisory team will actively refer researchers to this broader support ecosystem, helping them access the right expertise at the right time.

Why work in a core supervisory team?

As a supervisor, you can probably answer this question in a heartbeat. Most supervisors agree that it adds richness, benefits their own research, provides new perspectives, and enables collaborations, all of which are common responses. More benevolently, three-quarters of supervisors agreed that 'team supervision offers a better experience for the higher degree researchers than single supervisors' (Gower et al., 2024).

Team supervision brings together people with varied perspectives and expertise, offering higher degree researchers a richer, more robust support system. Manathunga (2012) suggests that many universities introduced team supervision to offer higher degree researchers increased support during candidature and to reduce the burden of solitary supervision. Unlike dyadic supervision, team supervision provides protection for both higher degree researchers and supervisors by ensuring transparency in the process and accountability through agreed actions. It can also give the researcher and their research project a safety net for academic guidance, emotional support, and continuity in the event of a supervisor's absence or departure (Taylor & Clegg, 2021). There is literally safety in numbers.

The core supervisory team

In workshops on supervision, we, the authors, commonly ask academic supervisors what skills and qualities good supervisors should possess. Responses typically include communication skills, availability (time and mindset), leadership (usually in the field), followed by a range of behaviours: respect, openness, empathy, and care. The answers tend to focus on *what they can bring and add to the research and the researcher's experience*. As Gasson et al (2023) highlight, "building collaborative capacity in your higher degree researcher will empower the student and build their confidence, giving them tools needed to realise research independence". This call for more opportunities for HDRs to feel part of a wider community is echoed in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2024, where it was identified that "creating the right kind of community for researchers is one of the key areas for improvement" (Neves, 2024, p. 4).

Industry supervisors as part of the core supervisory team

As part of the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project we conducted focus groups with supervisors based in industry (including creative industries, heritage and charities) and asked them how they perceive their role. Similar to academic supervisors, they echoed the need to be available, respectful, and to care and engage with the researcher. The idea of connectivity and networking was as significant for them as it was for academic supervisors.

In contrast, however, when asked about their role, they reflected on "*what they can bring out of the*

researcher rather than what they contribute". They recognise their role in helping the higher degree researcher to "*see the bigger picture*", to draw them away from the minutiae, to develop an appreciation of beneficiaries, impact and outputs, and value propositions. The term 'applied research' wasn't explicitly mentioned, but central to the discussions was a focus on helping researchers apply knowledge and original research to issues, whether in nuclear fuel, curating an exhibition, or high-performance sport. Industry supervisors also identified that they are able to provide opportunities for collaboration, to connect their research to practice, and to meet potential employers. As one respondent reflected: *"we should bring in the relevance, the impact and those dimensions that industry and society care about."* In addition, our work with supervisors indicates that support from an industry partner can help the researcher to connect to wider network of applied, practical, artistic, and research expertise, exposing them to different perspectives. It also provides higher degree researchers with access to a broader pool of people who can contribute to and support their work in the future.

Establishing a core supervisory team that includes industry supervisors improves the experience for the higher degree researcher and enriches the programme. Projects co-designed by industry externals are more likely to build in impact from the start. At the recruitment stage, industry supervisors can help to identify skills gaps more objectively. Many industry supervisors we spoke to also give higher degree researchers the opportunity to present to employers and, in doing so, gain insight into how their research benefits wider society and real-world applications. Externality, in the form of industry supervisors, offers significant enhancements to the higher degree researcher experience (by providing feedback from a wider range of sources); to quality assurance (by providing exposure to industry quality and standards); and to the management of the programmes (by providing additional capacity and reducing the potential for conflict of interest between subject specialists). Externality can also be provided by supervisors bases at other HE institutions, but their contribution may complement rather than provide a point of difference to the HDRs allocated principal and co-academic supervisors.

There are, of course, other issues to consider when leaning on the expertise of industry supervisors. This includes time, clarity of roles, knowledge of academic terminology, and the structure of key milestones in candidature, which are obvious examples (CSIRO, 2022). As Wrigley et al. (2021) highlight, industry partners and supervisors may sometimes have differing perspectives on the research's purpose (and outcomes), and managing these tensions is a crucial yet important part of effective team supervision.

How do we develop an effective team?

In identifying how to develop an effective supervisory team, we lean on Hutchinson and Guccione's (2021) interpretation of Proctor's seminal model of clinical supervision (2010) to help us think about what experience is needed of team members:

Firstly, assess the needs of the PROJECT and PROCESS and identify the knowledge and skills required to complete it (these are what Proctor calls the 'Formative' areas). *What methodological, theoretical, and*

specific technical knowledge will the researcher need from their supervisors? Who is best suited to oversee the PhD process and lifecycle?

Secondly, what support does the PERSON (HDR) need to conduct responsible research (Proctor's 'Normative' areas)? *How will the student develop and practice ethical conduct, data management, research integrity, and pathways to impact (IP, commercialisation, and a value proposition if relevant)?*

Thirdly, how will the higher degree researcher's PASTORAL needs be identified and met (Restorative)? *Who will oversee induction and onboarding? Who will provide emotional pastoral care, including support for mental health, wellbeing, resilience, and employability?*

We argue that it is unlikely that one supervisor can manage all three elements without compromising either the quality of support in some areas, or their own health and wellbeing.

To support core supervisory teams in identifying how best to provide support, we have developed a Team Supervision Checklist aligned to the three areas: Formative (Project related), Normative (Person related) and Restorative (Pastoral related). The checklist can be used to support conversations with prospective members of the core supervisory team, including the higher degree researcher. Discussing the different aspects of the project can help teams identify who is best suited to support each area at appropriate times. It will also help highlight strengths in expertise and potential gaps. Additionally, it shows how an industry supervisor and/or assistant supervisor might contribute to the core team's effectiveness.

Ideally, this needs assessment should be conducted at the pre-recruitment stage to ensure that the team can adequately support the project and the individual throughout the duration of the project. Thinking through the three elements can help to open up dialogue about supervisory styles and approaches, and can help to build trust between supervisory team members. Recognising that each team member brings something valuable to the PhD experience at different times is an essential part, not just of recruitment and onboarding of all parties in the team, but also of recognising the complexity of doing research.

0. Recruitment of higher degree researchers

☐ Consider the use of holistic review to support equity in the selection of higher degree researchers (see YCEDE Overview of Recruitment Criteria)

☐ Recruit higher degree researchers who can be properly supported in all areas (project, person and pastoral care)

1. Building Strong Foundations

☐ Conduct a joint project scoping with the higher degree researcher and core supervisory team

☐ Clarify research aims and scope collaboratively

☐ Map each supervisor's expertise to the project needs

☐ Define team expectations and set key milestones

☐ Ensure mutual understanding of supervisory commitment and capacity

2. **Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities**

☐ Clearly define roles (primary/principal, co-, associate, industry)

☐ Assign supervision responsibilities based on strengths (e.g., methods, writing, discipline)

☐ Avoid duplication and role ambiguity

☐ Revisit role clarity regularly, especially when team members change

☐ Include broader support network (e.g., writing advisors, industry mentors) where appropriate

3. **Cultivating Collaborative Practices**

☐ Use structured meeting agendas and shared documentation tools

☐ Agree on communication channels and expectations (email, online platforms, frequency)

☐ Schedule regular supervision meetings and check-ins

☐ Maintain shared records (meeting notes, decisions, action items)

☐ Adopt and model the use of technologies to support and model effective collaboration (e.g., Google Docs, OneDrive, project management tools and referencing software)

☐ Allocate draft reviews according to expertise

☐ Set realistic and clear feedback turnaround times

☐ Empower the higher degree researcher to request specific feedback and take responsibility for revisions

☐ Discuss and agree on authorship and publication practices early

☐ Use Contributor Roles Taxonomy Credit (CRediT) taxonomy to identify and agree contributor roles

4. **Navigating Challenges in Team Supervision**

☐ Acknowledge and address power dynamics within the team and with the higher degree researcher

☐ Promote shared responsibility and remove potential hierarchies

☐ Use peer observation of supervision as a professional development tool. The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) has tools to support this (rsvp.ac.uk)

☐ Prepare for conflict by creating shared conflict-resolution protocols

☐ Discuss and agree how to handle differing disciplinary or epistemological views

☐ Ensure institutional mechanisms support team supervision effectively (especially in joint or Cotutelle contexts)

5. **Enhancing Team Dynamics**

☐ Engage in team-based professional development on supervision, culture, leadership. Effective supervisory teams thrive when they prioritise ***ongoing professional development*** to refine their collective mentoring, leadership and cultural competence

☐ Access supervisor networks and peer learning opportunities

☐ Celebrate milestones and achievements as a team (e.g., confirmation, publications)

☐ Build a culture of mutual respect and encouragement

6. **Supporting the HDR Journey through the Wider Community**

☐ Recognise and support the broader research community (professional staff, peers, family)

☐ Encourage higher degree researcher's engagement with non-academic networks (policy, industry, community)

☐ Reflect on how team supervision supports higher degree researcher agency, leadership, and employability

Where you can make a (relatively quick) and positive difference in your core supervisory team

In addition to the checklist, we wish to highlight certain areas where our own experience and preliminary data from the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project suggest that targeted interventions can substantially enhance the supervision of higher degree researchers.

Reviewing and feedback processes should be well-defined within the core supervisory team to prevent conflicting guidance. Assigning draft reviews based on the supervisor's expertise and establishing clear expectations for turnaround times promotes consistency and clarity in feedback. It is important that feedback is communicated consistently among all supervisors, ensuring that the higher degree researcher receives coherent, non-contradictory advice that boosts their confidence rather than causes confusion. The higher degree researcher can play a vital role here by identifying the type and level of feedback they want

on drafts and ideas, as well as from which individuals. This has the potential to reduce workload, minimise competing ideas, and place responsibility on the higher degree researcher to review and act upon feedback, thereby developing independence.

Equitable authorship and publication practices are critical to everyone in the core team feeling that their contributions are recognised. Establishing a publication plan early on will help provide structure for the project, ensure ethical ways of working, fair contributions, and support the higher degree researcher in developing their academic publishing skills. Supervisors set a precedent for fair and transparent academic practice by approaching co-authorship as a collaborative, team-based process. The Contributor Roles Taxonomy Credit (CRediT) (NISO, 2025) is a community-managed 14-role classification that describes the main types of contributions usually made to the production and publication of research outputs, such as research articles. Using the taxonomy ensures that all those involved in producing original research receive proper recognition for their contributions, promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Flexibility and adaptability are crucial in responding to changes in project direction, team composition, and institutional constraints. Core supervisory teams must remain open to adjusting their roles and approaches as the HDR project evolves. This could include redistributing supervisory responsibilities, reassessing workload expectations, or refining feedback practices to support the researcher better. A responsive and adaptable team dynamic strengthens the resilience of the supervision process, ensuring that unforeseen challenges do not hinder the higher degree researcher's progress.

Appreciating contextual and subject nuances in core team supervision is essential for effective team supervision. Different disciplines and institutional cultures shape supervisory expectations and team dynamics. For example, in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, collaborative lab environments may require careful coordination of supervisory input, balancing hands-on guidance with researcher independence. In Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) disciplines, where diverse research methodologies and theoretical perspectives are common, supervisory teams must navigate interdisciplinary complexities while maintaining coherence in feedback. Furthermore, cultural values shape supervisory relationships, emphasising the importance of developing an inclusive and context-aware team approach. Recognising these variations allows teams to develop supervisory strategies that are tailored, equitable, and effective.

Enhancing supervisory team dynamics. Effective supervisory teams thrive when they prioritise ***ongoing professional development*** to refine their collective mentoring, leadership, and cultural competence. When supervisors engage in continuous learning, such as workshops on supervision strategies, intercultural awareness or research leadership, they not only enhance their individual expertise, but also strengthen the team's ability to provide well-rounded support to higher degree researchers. Encouraging team-wide participation in professional development fosters consistency in supervisory styles, ensuring researchers receive cohesive guidance. Additionally, leveraging institutional resources, such as supervisor networks, mentorship and peer mentoring programs, and training sessions, enriches the team's collective capacity, reinforcing a shared commitment to academic and professional growth.

Challenges of enabling team supervision at the institutional level

We recognise that enabling a collaborative approach to supervision is not simple. It takes strong leadership and a commitment to greater communication, coordination and collaboration across all aspects of the institution.

Communication: It is essential to set and agree on expectations for all supervisory team members at the outset. Without clearly defined roles, there is a risk of duplicated work, mixed messages, and contradictory feedback.

Coordination: Doctoral Training Entities (DTEs), as they are known in the UK, are agreed and formalised collaborations between universities that work together to provide a robust environment and supervision model for researchers. Cotutelle programs offer combined doctoral awards, allowing the researcher to work at two or more institutions. Both initiatives provide opportunities for cohort learning, professional development, and research experience in different contexts. In addition, industry-sponsored doctorates, where the organisation helps define the research scope, also provide opportunities to work in a different, application-focused setting and provide HDRs with valuable placement and internship opportunities. The coordination of team supervision in all these contexts is extensive but necessary and impactful.

Collaboration: The value of working with people who think differently and can agree on a common goal — supporting the researcher and enabling the conduct of good, responsible research — cannot be underestimated. The achievement and novelty of outputs created as part of a team greatly surpass the frustration of the transactional elements. Industry and academia are interdependent; they need each other, which means each team member, including the researcher, must translate the learning between sectors.

Making the team work

"It is possible, perhaps even preferable, that more distributed PhD supervision could become the norm" (Clegg, 2024).

Like all researchers, higher degree researchers are part of wider research communities. The constellation metaphor, used by Kram (1985) in the context of mentoring, is both useful and evocative. It illustrates the dynamic nature of the support network surrounding the higher degree researcher, the way different individuals and roles assume varying levels of prominence over time, and how patterns of support develop through changing roles and evolving connections. A collaborative approach to supervision respects the value of the multiple sources of guidance that orbit the HDR journey: the professional support teams, peers, family, and the core supervisory team. Relationships with these groups and individuals contribute a different kind of light, offering intellectual, emotional, cultural, or practical guidance. These are the

formative, normative, and restorative elements of Proctor's model and form a constellation designed to help orient the higher degree researcher through the doctoral lifecycle. By navigating this constellation, supervisory teams not only ease the burden on individual supervisors but also cultivate a more sustainable, inclusive, and researcher-centred approach to research training.

Higher degree researchers need a team that can help them develop independence and translate and apply their research to industry, policy, practice stakeholders, and beneficiaries. For this, they require skills and opportunities to practise mentoring, taking responsibility, and demonstrating leadership and teamwork, as outlined in Vitae's new Researcher Development Framework 2025. It is logical that if the higher degree researcher's doctoral journey is designed and carried out as a team experience, they will develop teamwork skills through practice and firsthand experience, rather than through a contrived, costly team-building workshop, which, as authors, we have both facilitated and participated in.

As we've argued throughout, in our experience, effective HDR supervision requires a collaborative approach. Teams of supervisors are, by design, more inclusive. They embed mutual dependency within their work. They bring people together across different structures and disciplines to work towards a greater good, and they promote exposure to different contexts and knowledge development (Clegg et al., 2024). Supervisory teams that actively engage with these wider support networks promote a more holistic and sustainable research environment, ensuring that higher degree researchers receive guidance that is both discipline-specific and transferable beyond academia.

Conclusion – Best practices for team supervision

In this chapter, we have emphasised that enabling effective HDR supervision in a team-based environment requires institutional commitment to communication, coordination and collaboration. The Collaborative Supervision Model and the Team Supervision Checklist were introduced as practical tools to help supervisory teams reflect on their collective roles, responsibilities and expectations and to support HDRs as they navigate the complexities of their research journey.

Our own experiences, and the emerging evidence from the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project, suggest that meaningful improvements often come from small but well-targeted changes. Best practices in team supervision encompass a broad spectrum of strategies from establishing strong foundations, cultivating collaborative practices, navigating challenges, improving core supervisory team dynamics, to supporting higher degree researchers in accessing the wider constellation of institutional, disciplinary, and professional connections who form part of the wider research community. By fostering open communication, adaptability, and shared responsibility, supervisory teams create an environment where higher degree researchers are empowered to thrive. These practices complement the structure provided by the model and the checklist.

As the landscape of research and higher education continues to evolve, ongoing reflection and innovation

in team supervision will be essential to ensuring a responsive, inclusive, and sustainable model of doctoral support.

***With acknowledgement to Roisin Astell for graphics (visual creation of model 8.1) and proofreading.**

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2019). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. Brill.

Australian Council of Graduate Research. (2018). *Graduate research good practice principles*. https://www.acgr.edu.au/good-practice/graduate-research-good-practice-principles/

Australian Council of Graduate Research. (2024). *Graduate research good practice principles (updated July 2024)*. https://www.acgr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ACGR_Good-Practice-Principles.pdf [PDF 839KB]

Clegg, K. (2024). *A team approach to PhD supervision*. WONKHE. https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-team-approach-to-phd-supervision/

Clegg, K., Houston, G., & Gower, O. (2024). *Doctoral Supervision and Research Culture*. Routledge.

CSIRO. (2022). *CSIRO Industry PhD Program Supervisor Guide*. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. https://www.csiro.au/iphd

Gasson, S., Blacker, J., Stoodley, I., Winter, A., & Bruce, C. (2023). *Confident Supervisors: Creating Independent Researchers*. James Cook University. https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/confidentsupervisors/

Gower, O., Clegg, K., & Cleaver D. (2024). *UK Research Supervision Survey Report 2024*. UK Council for Graduate Education. https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/ukrss2024#heading424824

Grant, B. M. (2008). Agonistic struggle: Master—slave dialogues in humanities supervision. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, *7*(1), 9-27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022207084880 🔒

Guerin, C., Green, I., & Bastalich, W. (2011). Big love: Managing a team of research supervisors. In V.

Kumar & A. Lee (Eds.), *Doctoral education in international context: Connecting local, regional and global perspectives* (pp. 138-153). Universiti Putra Malaysia Press.

Hutchinson, S., & Guccione, K. (2021). *Coaching and Mentoring for Academic Development*. Emerald Publishing.

Kumar, V., & Wald, N. (2023). Ambiguity and peripherality in doctoral co-supervision workload allocation. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *42*(4), 860-873. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2115984

Kumar, V., & Wald, N. (2024). *Global Perspectives on Enhancing Doctoral Co-Supervision*. Springer.

Kram, K. E. (1985). *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*. Scott, Foresman.

Manathunga, C. (2012). Supervisors watching supervisors: The deconstructive possibilities and tensions of team supervision. *Australian Universities' Review, 54*(1), 29-37. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ968516.pdf [PDF 163KB]

Neves, J. (2024). *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey*. Advance HE. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/postgraduate-research-experience-survey-2024

Park, C. (2006). *The end of the secret garden: Reframing postgraduate supervision*. Routledge.

Proctor, B. (2010). Training for the supervision alliance, attitude, skills and intention. In T. Butterworth, J. R. Cutcliffe, & B. Proctor (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Clinical Supervision* (pp. 25–46). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843437.ch3

Robertson, M. J. (2017). Team modes and power: Supervision of doctoral students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *36*(2), 358-371. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1208157

Sharmini, S. & Spronken-Smith, R. (2020). The PhD – is it out of alignment? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39:4, 821-833, https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1693514

Smith-McGloin, R., & Wynne, C. (2022). *Structures and Strategy in Doctoral Education in the UK and Ireland*. UK Council for Graduate Education. https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/structures-and-strategy-in-doctoral-education-in-the-uk-and-ireland

Taylor, S., Kiley, M., & Humphrey, R. (2019). *A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors* (2nd Ed). Routledge.

Taylor, S., & Clegg, K. (2021). Towards a framework for the recognition of good supervisory practice. In *The Future of Doctoral Research* (pp. 224-238). Routledge.

Wrigley, C., Wolifson, P., & Matthews, J. (2021). Supervising cohorts of higher degree research students:

Design catalysts for industry and innovation. *Higher Education*, *81*(6), 1177-1196. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/204528/

Additional Reading

Gower, O. & Clegg, K. (2021). *UK Research Supervision Survey Report*. UK Council for Graduate Education. https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/uk-research-supervision-survey-2021-report

Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)

NISO. (2025). *Contributor Role Taxonomy Credit (CRediT)*. https://credit.niso.org/

UK Research Supervision Survey (UKRSS) 2024

Vitae. (2025). *Vitae Researcher Development Framework*. https://vitae.ac.uk/vitae-researcher-development-framework/

Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE). (2024). *Rubrics and Holistic Review in Doctoral Admissions*. https://ycede.ac.uk/toolkit/pgr-recruitment-selection-and-admissions/recruitment-selection/rubrics-and-holistic-review-in-doctoral-admissions/

SUPERVISING DIVERSE METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

9. DOING A SUCCESSFUL QUALITATIVE PHD: EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION AND EFFECTIVE RESEARCH

David Silverman

Why read this chapter?

In this chapter, readers will hear from a global leader in qualitative research, sharing experiences based on supervision of around 30 students. Readers will discover:

- How should PhD supervision work.
- Good practice in doing a qualitative PhD.

Introduction

I have supervised around 30 students who have successfully completed their PhDs. I don't know the exact number because the hard disk on my PC crashed not long ago, and I lost my CV (a lesson to all of us about the need to back up files!).

I am sure that some students have been happier than others about my supervision. Equally, the enjoyment I derived from the supervision experience varied. In the best cases, the student's work would so stimulate me that I seemed to come up with lots of bright ideas and sparks would fly. On other occasions, I felt quite stupid, bereft of good ideas – even a little bored.

I like to think that the quality of my supervisions improved over the years as I became more experienced and also more selective about which students I chose to supervise. Towards the end of my career, I simply refused to take on anybody who I had not supervised for their MA dissertation. That way, I could ensure that my new PhD students had already learned the way I liked (them) to work.

Now my supervisions are limited to one-off meetings during my PhD workshops in British, Scandinavian, French, Australian, Sri Lankan and Tanzanian universities with business, sociology, social policy, education

and community medicine students. The students simply send me a brief summary of their research and a few questions which I try to answer. I hope to stimulate them but, of course, a lot will depend on whether any new ideas will work (or even be appropriate) in their home university and discipline.

In this chapter, I want to put my experience to work for you. It is organized in two parts:

- How should PhD supervision work.
- Good practice in doing a qualitative PhD.

Effective PhD supervision

What does effective supervision look like?

The effective supervisor

- Providing satisfactory guidance and advice during the planning of research projects.
- Being responsible for monitoring the progress of the student's research program.
- Establishing and maintaining regular contact with the student and ensuring his/her accessibility to the student when s/he needs advice, by whatever means is most suitable given the student's location and mode of study.
- Having input into the assessment of a student's development needs.
- Providing timely, constructive and effective feedback on the student's work, including his/her overall progress within the program.
- Maintaining a balance between providing guidance and encouraging a candidate's independence.
- Fostering and facilitating the candidate's development of academic skills and self-direction.
- Assistance with the candidate's accessing of specialist expertise (e.g. statistics, computing, language).
- Ensuring that the student is aware of the need to exercise probity and conduct his/her research according to ethical principles, and of the implications of research misconduct.
- Ensuring that the student is aware of institutional-level sources of advice, including careers guidance, health and safety legislation and equal opportunities policy.
- Providing effective pastoral support and/or referring the student to other sources of such support, including student advisers (or equivalent), graduate school staff and others within the student's academic community.
- Helping the student to interact with others working in the field of research, for example, encouraging the student to attend relevant conferences, supporting him/her in seeking funding for such events; and where appropriate to submit conference papers and articles to refereed journals.
- Maintaining the necessary supervisory expertise, including the appropriate skills to perform all of the roles satisfactorily, supported by relevant continuing professional development opportunities.
- Effective arrangements made during supervisor absences.

Source: adapted from McCulloch (2010).

The above list shows the many attributes that a supervisor should possess. However, different supervisors will have certain expectations of their higher degree researchers. A good guide to how the land lies in this area is found in the list below.

Supervisors' expectations of students

- To work independently.
- To not usually submit first drafts.
- To be available for 'regular' meetings.
- To be honest about their progress.
- To follow advice.
- To be excited about their work.
- To be able to surprise the supervisor.
- To be fun to be with.

Source: adapted from Phillips & Pugh, 1994: Chapter 8.

I suspect that the second list will contain some items that you may never have thought about. As supervisors you want to establish a relationship that makes meetings fun for everyone. It is reasonable to want to be stimulated by and, indeed, to learn from your students.

Be familiar with the kind of research your students are planning. While it would be nice to have substantive interests similar to your student, it is vital to be familiar with their proposed methodology. If students are going to do qualitative research, it is not helpful if you are a quantitative specialist. Moreover, since qualitative research itself contains many divergent approaches, try to find students who are interested in using your preferred method of data analysis, e.g. thematic analysis, discourse analysis, etc.

Consider how you might respond to Claire Maxwell's suggested key questions to ask a prospective supervisor:

> How will you be able to support me if your area of expertise is not fully related to my own research?
>
> How many students have you supervised?
>
> How do you see your role as supervisor?
>
> What can I expect, e.g. likely number of supervisions in my first year?

(quoted by Churchill and Sanders, 2007: p. 35).

After the first crucial three to six months of a research degree, begin to gradually wean your student from total dependence. As they become more confident and independent, your role is to encourage them to

believe that they know more about the topic than you do. At these later stages, the following issues become important:

Shaping students' writing in a professional manner

Supervisors should help student move their style of writing to the kind expected in the journals in your field. For instance, this may mean encouraging them to cut down the kind of tedious literature reviews they wrote as an undergraduate and to use concepts 'economically'. A few concepts (even just one) applied to their data are generally much more productive than data analysis that is all over the place.

Self-confidence

To be economical in this way, students need self-confidence, and this is what you as supervisors should provide. Where appropriate, tell them that their work is 'up to standard' for the degree they are seeking.

Setting deadlines

Deadlines and targets can be a source of neurosis for students. However, without them, I guarantee students will be lost. Therefore, at the end of each supervision, supervisors should work with students to set a reasonable target and agree a date by which it can be reached.

Working with other students

Tell students not to be confined to your supervision. They can expect to be advised about relevant conferences and websites. It is helpful for them to meet other students during their research training. Suggest they find out which ones have similar topics or are working with similar concepts and/or data. Students may organise discussions themselves. Even better, as supervisors, you can set up data sessions involving all your students.

Learning 'tricks'

Based on a long career of supervision, the American ethnographer Howard Becker (1998) has suggested a number of useful 'tricks' that supervisors can employ for the benefit of students. As he puts it: 'a trick is a specific operation that shows a way around some common difficulty, suggests a procedure that solves relatively easily what would otherwise seem an intractable and persistent problem' (1998, p. 4).

Advising on publications

Towards the later stages of your work, supervisors can be proactive as good sources of advice about which

journals are appropriate for submission of students' work and about how to organise a presentation for such settings.

Giving a 'mock' viva

Finally, it is entirely reasonable for supervisors to provide a practice dry run for the oral examination that is required in UK universities and many other countries.

Beyond the supervision – Five rules

None of the above is meant to suggest that supervisors spoon-feed students. Good supervision is not just about the transmission of knowledge but involves *enabling* students to work successfully. As Danby and Lee (2012) put it:

> Doctoral pedagogy is not so much [about] what an educator 'transmits' but what they 'enable' by 'setting up a critical exchange' between the student and the discipline, field or domain of the research. (Danby and Lee, p. 6)

Part of that enablement is encouraging students to work collaboratively with other research students either within your institution or by virtual contact. Ideally, this should be with students working upon similar data and also using the same body of concepts. It can begin by offering mutual assistance to improve transcription of recorded data. That can then lead naturally to making new observations about what is present in your data.

Finally, as supervisors be aware that while many people doubt they have the ability to complete a PhD, a minority feel that it is all a piece of cake. In our contemporary digital age, this minority will need to learn to resist the temptation to believe that all knowledge can be immediately obtained by searching the internet. As Nicholas Carr (2010) puts it:

> The Net's interactivity gives us powerful new tools for finding information, expressing ourselves and conversing with others. It also turns us into lab rats constantly pressing levers to get tiny pellets of social or intellectual nourishment. (Carr, p. 117)

Just as the internet has developed through such affordances as Chat GPT, the number of students registered for courses involving a research dissertation has increased hugely over the past few decades. One good consequence of this has been that supervision has increasingly become recognised as a professional skill that requires proper training and monitoring.

Of course, getting a PhD, or even an MA, should never be achieved via any methods resembling factory mass production. I hope that there will always be a place for inspiration and lateral thinking. It is important to distinguish relatively easy activities from the really tough ones and to concentrate your efforts on the latter. For instance, writing a literature review should be relatively easy after completing an

undergraduate degree. Equally, obtaining data does not need to be too difficult if students work with documents or digital data.

By contrast, the really tough issues tend to concern *data analysis*. In this final section, I want to provide a snapshot of the issues involved in the form of five rules to encourage effective qualitative research for supervisors to discuss with students. Here are the rules:

1. Keep it simple.
2. Do not assume that we are only concerned with subjective experience.
3. Take advantage of using qualitative data.
4. Avoid drowning in data.
5. Avoid 'journalistic' questions and answers.

I will now review each rule in turn. But one word of warning: none of us can escape our intellectual biography. I have been influenced in more ways than I can realize by my training and experience as (one kind of) a sociologist. Therefore, if any of my rules look a little odd in the light of your own discipline, please discuss them with your fellow supervisors. Even if you differ, at least you will have a point of departure!

1. Keep it simple

Student research projects should not be over-complicated. Try to guide students to minimise the cases studied and the range of methods used. The best research says a lot about a little.

In my book *Doing Qualitative Research* [Chapter 6], I identify a 'kitchen sink' mentality. Kitchen-sinkers attempt to study very broad problems, using many concepts and methods as well as large sets of data. Explain to your students that such a wide-ranging approach is unlikely to impress examiners and often will prevent you from finishing your study.

In doing student research, simplicity is not a drawback but a necessity. Here are some ways to keep it simple:

- Narrow down your research problem.
- Use one model only (e.g. positivist, naturalist or constructionist).
- Use concepts which fit your model to ensure that you are consistent.
- If you want to use mixed methods, delay resorting to quantitative data till you have identified some phenomenon in your qualitative data.
- Analyse a small dataset (you can always add comparative data later – if you have time).
- Recognise that the comparative method can be used within a small dataset.

2. Do not assume that we are only concerned with subjective experience

Qualitative research is sometimes just associated with studying 'experiences' usually through interviews. Talk to your student about designing research to study what people actually do in specific situations, say on social media or in a classroom.

Many people are attracted to qualitative research because they assume that it offers them a special opportunity to peer into the human psyche. For them, qualitative research is always about how people perceive the world, their emotions and 'lived experience'. Indeed, in a sense, they are right. The interview study is common in much contemporary social research. For instance, when I reviewed one qualitative journal recently, I found that 16 out of 18 research papers used interview data (see Silverman, 2013). One possible reason for this may not derive from methodological considerations. Think, for instance, of how much interviews are a central (and popular) feature of mass media products, from 'talk shows' to 'celebrity interviews'. The method of questioning used in the interview reproduces many of the features of the Catholic confessional or the psychoanalytic consultation. Perhaps we all live in what might be called an 'interview society' in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman 2017). It is then hardly surprising that so many beginning researchers assume that qualitative research is only about 'experience' and that the optimum method is the interview.

Telling someone our experiences is not just about emptying out the contents of our head, but is about organising a tale told to a proper recipient by an authorised teller. In this sense, experiences are "carefully regulated sorts of things" (Sacks, 1992, p. 248). For instance, Peräkylä and Silverman (1991) have shown how, in family therapy clinics, spouses respond to questions about their partner's current concerns. Through talk and gaze, both spouses and partners make it clear who 'owns' the 'experience' being described.

So, while it is perfectly alright to use interviews, you need to be aware of two things:

- For Constructionists, interview data gives access to narratives jointly constructed between interviewer and interviewee (only Positivists want to use interviews to obtain 'facts' about interviewees' perceptions, beliefs, etc.).
- Interviews hardly exhaust the wide variety of qualitative data. Why not study naturally occurring situations such as face-to-face behaviour or interactions on the internet? Why not work with visual or digital data or documents? Why assume that what people (say they) think is more interesting than what they actually do?

3. Take advantage of using qualitative data

Many research students attending my workshops set out their research in ways that make me wonder why

they have not chosen instead to do a quantitative study! For instance, they format their research plan in terms of hypotheses and variables. By contrast, in qualitative research, we often work *inductively* and generate and test hypotheses during the course of study. This means that phenomena such as participants' accounts and actions should not be predefined. Instead, your research proposal should make it clear that these are the sort of things you hope to discover *after you have entered the field*.

Of course, it takes courage to tell your department graduate committee that your only real research question is: 'What is going on here?' However, this does *not* mean that your research proposal need be a blank sheet of paper! You should describe what you know about the setting you intend to study, outline the data you intend to gather and discuss how you intend to analyse your data. You should also demonstrate the way your thinking about methods has been shaped by theoretical models (e.g. naturalism, constructionism) and how your proposed analysis will employ one of the existing qualitative models (e.g. grounded theory, narrative analysis or discourse analysis). It is also useful to discuss a previous study which has inspired you.

Sometimes students elect to use qualitative methods because (they feel) they are not very good at statistics. This is not unreasonable (assuming they are right). However, qualitative methods are not appropriate for every research problem. In research student workshops, I regularly come across PhD topics that could more effectively be researched using quantitative rather than qualitative methods. The former approach could focus on the relation between a set of variables, and employ reliable, standardised operational definitions of the variables studied. It could also work effectively with large datasets to establish correlations between these variables.

Of course, it is possible to transform such projects into workable qualitative research studies, for instance by avoiding the language of 'variables' and studying whether participants themselves use concepts like 'effectiveness', when and how they do so, and with what local consequences. These are interesting research issues but they take us on a very different path to that envisaged by the original formulation of the research problem.

Considerations of this nature suggest that, if we want to do qualitative research, there are a set of strategies to *avoid:*

- Beginning with variables that you wish to relate.
- Beginning with problems that are already defined by members of society (e.g. social or administrative problems).
- Making assumptions about where things take place (e.g. is 'efficiency' a state of mind, a set of behaviours or a common-sense category employed in many different ways?).
- Searching for explanations: 'why' questions are usually best answered by quantitative methods.
- Working with normative assumptions (e.g. what is 'effective' communication?) and with prior versions of policy outputs.

However, we do not need to be entirely negative. Taking advantage of qualitative data means using some or all of the following strategies:

- Asking 'what', 'how' and 'when' and delaying (or avoiding) 'why' questions.
- Wherever possible (and it usually is possible) working with naturalistic data.
- Studying the categories actually employed by participants (and when and how they are used – and with what effect).
- Studying what is unremarkable, the routine and the 'ordinary'.
- Recognising the interconnectedness of categories and of activities so that we always study how each is laminated upon another.

4. Avoid drowning in data

If you delay your data analysis until your final year of study, you are courting disaster. By contrast, I suggest:

- Start data analysis from day 1; if you have no data, then work with other people's data or use other publicly available material, e.g. texts of all kinds.
- Begin with the intensive analysis of a small amount of data. Seek to generate hypotheses which you can test when you have more data.
- In ethnographic research, one case is usually enough, providing you use internal comparisons; delay other cases and then try to sample theoretically.
- Keep to small targets; recognise that the student researcher is usually an apprentice and that learning from your mistakes is a key to success.
- Write above your PC the following motto: 'The point of qualitative research is to say a lot about a little'!

5. Avoid journalism

Journalism is a trade which, like any other, has good and bad features. In suggesting that you should avoid journalism, I do not mean to disparage what journalists do; I simply wish to underline that qualitative research should not be the same thing as journalism.

Given the daily nature of most newspapers, journalists tend to focus on unusual, out-of-the-ordinary events which often involve 'celebrities'. When they describe public rather than private issues, the journalistic focus, quite understandably, is on social problems as generally conceived, e.g. the economy, health policy, international relations.

My message to student researchers is: let journalists get on with what they do best. Your job is somewhat different. Now is the time to display the skills which you have learnt through years of training. As an apprentice qualitative researcher, your research will differ from most journalism in the following ways:

- You will formulate a problem in an analytic manner, e.g. you will not begin from a social problem but will often seek to study something that is quite unremarkable, even 'obvious' to participants.
- Your data analysis will not rely on identifying gripping or spectacular stories; instead it will reveal the various ways in which apparently 'obvious' phenomena are put together.
- You will not rush to conclusions even when you have some compelling instances; instead, you will carefully sift all the evidence, actively seeking out deviant cases. So avoid prefacing your data with a phrase like 'one interesting example of this was'. Good research tries to generalise by critical analysis of its whole dataset. It tries not to make claims based on illustrations.
- You will employ the analytical resources of your discipline, working with your data in the context of a coherent model and set of concepts.
- You will unashamedly theorize about situations and events, but this will not serve as mere window-dressing; instead, you will theorise with your data and build new theories.

Wrapping up

This chapter has been written to offer you practical ways to cope with some of the doubts that affect most novice qualitative researchers. Apart from what I can offer, I suggest that you turn to your fellow supervisors. If you do so, I guarantee that nearly all of them will have been through many of the same doubts about their research students and their capacity to supervise.

If your students remain worried that they do not have enough data, my message has been that they probably have too much! If they believe that their work is not particularly original, I ask: 'Whose is?' Just referring them to some of the more pedestrian journal articles in your field should convince them of my argument.

Success in student qualitative research can be achieved by helping them to demonstrate that they are a 'professional'. We all know that professions contain people with varying capacities. So, the bar is really quite low. However, I hope your students will aspire to something higher.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera's immortality: The interview society and the invention of self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 324–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300304.

Becker, H. (1998). *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carr, N. (2010). *The shallows: How the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember*. Atlantic Books.

Churchill, H. & Sanders, T. (2007). *Getting your PhD: A practical insider's guide*. Sage.

Danby, S. & Lee, A. (2012). Framing doctoral pedagogy as design and action. In A. Lee & S. Danby (Eds.), *Reshaping doctoral education*, (pp. 3-11). Routledge.

McCulloch, A. (2010). Excellence in doctoral supervision: competing models of what constitutes good supervision. In M. Kiley (Ed.), *Proceedings 9th Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference: Educating Researchers for the 21st Century* (pp. 175–86), 13–15 April, Adelaide.

Peräkylä, A. & Silverman, D. (1991). Owning experience: Describing the experience of others. *Text*, 11(3). 441–80.

Phillips, E. & Pugh, D. (1994). *How to Get a PhD (*2nd ed). Open University Press.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation* (Volume 1). Blackwell.

Silverman, D. (2013). *A very short, fairly interesting, reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*, (2nd ed.). Sage.

Silverman, D. (2017). How was it for you? The interview society and the irresistible rise of the [poorly analyzed] interview. *Qualitative Research* 17(2), 144–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116668231.

Silverman, D. (2021). *Doing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage

10. ENABLING STUDENTS TO CAPITALISE ON THEIR LINGUISTIC-CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH

Karen Dooley and Michael Mu

Why read this chapter?

Research Director: How have you fallen so far behind since getting back from Laos?

Dara: It took a year to translate my interviews with the ambulance providers in Vientiane.

Research Director: Why so much translation?

Dara: I thought all raw data had to be translated into English. Also, my supervisor can't speak my language.

(Fictional vignette inspired by Karen's time as faculty director of higher degree research.)

Although Dara shared a language with her interviewees, her study was cross-language (Holmes et al., 2013) because her Australian supervisor did not. Scholars have observed that full translation of data sets in such studies not only guzzles time and labour but might also erode meaning and validity (Holmes et al., 2013; Mpamhanga, 2025; Santos Jr et al., 2015; Yunus et al., 2022). Here we focus on (i) educational injustices experienced by students like Dara who were (self-) compelled to do more work than monolingual peers, thereby missing a high stakes candidature deadline; and (ii) social injustices arising from impactful studies when these have been constrained by standard English and Euro-American theory.

Multilinguality in higher degree research

Languages and in justice in research education

Some research students bring a wealth of resources from multiple languages and dialects to their studies. Where English and Euro-American theory are dominant, however, multiple questions of justice arise for

these students and their studies. These are addressed variously in scholarship on supervising students to 'research multilingually' (Holmes et al., 2016), develop 'post-monolingual research methodology' (Singh, 2017), or conduct 'cross-language research' (Santos et al., 2015). Here we focus a sociological lens onto how emergent supervisory practices created by such scholars are promoting justice for multilingual students—and their communities—during and through their studies.

Using concepts developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986/2006), education researchers have explored dynamics of language and other cultural resources in *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalised* forms (Dooley et al., 2023; Luke, 2008/2019). As an embodied resource, language is integral to cognition and affect, especially through voice and pronunciation. The value accorded those resources in a given educational field constitutes the *embodied linguistic-cultural capital* of the student. Such fields operate as linguistic markets (Bourdieu, 1977). When standard English sits atop the hierarchical linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1977) of the academy—and not only in English-dominant western countries (Liu & Zheng, 2024)—those most proficient in standard English are endowed with the greatest capital, and those less proficient may misrecognise its symbolic value.

During research education, embodied resources are objectified as texts: research proposals, ethics documents, instruments and data, theses and publications; and supervisory meetings, data collection procedures, and presentations. To the extent those written and oral texts are valued by the field, the student gains *objectified linguistic-cultural capital*. That capital is converted into *institutionalised linguistic-cultural capital* when the texts are awarded coursework marks, thesis examination results, a research degree, or an outstanding thesis or best conference paper award. Depending on the rules of exchange between academic and other fields, these capitals can be tendered for social goods such as employment (Dooley et al., 2023; Luke, 2008/2019). In short, multilingual students' linguistic resources can be converted into multiple forms of valuable capital to the extent they are recognised by others in relevant social fields and enjoy favourable exchange rates across fields.

The concept of *translanguaging* (Garćia et al., 2017) gives purchase on the place of multilinguality in the capital dynamics of research students' candidatures. Translanguaging occurs when the whole linguistic repertoire of multilingual students can be used in learning (Garćia et al., 2017). The concept has been applied to the practices of highly proficient multilingual students in China and Australia who bring resources from research traditions and language beyond the Euro-American and English-dominant to the capital conversions of their research studies (Liu et al., 2025; Shen, 2023; Shen & Singh, 2024). Educators pursue justice by intentionally encouraging those practices (Garćia et al., 2017). That justice is usefully understood multi-dimensionally as economic, cultural, and political (Fraser, 1997, 2014).

Distributive justice involves economic resources—linguistic-cultural capital exchangeable for income included. Maldistribution of economic resources is implicated in deprivation, exploitation, and marginalisation (Fraser, 1997). As candidature time is an economic resource in the neoliberal university (Xing et al., 2022), the expectation that students like Dara who are researching multilingually do more work than others within the same candidature period is a distributive injustice. So, too, is the systematic

maldistribution of valued knowledge and skills through research education which favours native English speakers, for example, when these students enjoy more opportunities for research assistant work because of their standard English.

Recognitive justice is cultural and symbolic. Language-cultural domination and the invisibility and denigration of non-dominant languages and cultures in linguistic and cultural markets create injustices of misrecognition (Fraser, 1997). The dominance of linguistic-cultural capital – standard English and Euro-American theoretical resources – constitutes many moments of misrecognition in research education (Singh, 2017). They construe multilingual students as deficient; render the additional labour of multilingual researcher-translators invisible (Mpamhanga, 2025); and produce research that might not be epistemically adequate to the empirical worlds of multilingual Australian communities with First Nations, immigrant, refugee, and international student members (Qi et al., 2024) or the empirical worlds of international students' home countries. An example would be insistence that the student use 'evidence-based practice' in a health study where the evidence base has not systematically addressed cultural and linguistic biases in test instruments.

Representative justice is political; it denotes parity of participation in forums in which decisions are made (Fraser, 2014). Given the intent to impact policy and practice, research that excludes the linguistic-cultural resources of multilingual research students might be implicated in injustices of epistemic misrepresentation. In research on housing for migrants affected by poverty, for example, this could happen if only community members fluent in English were included in community consultations.

Practices enabling students to capitalise on their linguistic-cultural resources

Scholarship on researching multilingually, post-monolingually or in a cross-language fashion has identified many moments in candidature where supervisors of multilingual students might loosen or break the constraints of standard English language and Euro-American theorisation (Holmes et al., 2016; Qi et al., 2024; Santos Jr et al., 2015; Singh, 2017). Here we look at two of these: (i) the production, preparation and analysis of data; and (ii) reporting. In doing so, we have focused on practices of supervision that might be applicable in a diversity of disciplines.

Translation and interpretation in the production, preparation and analysis of data

Do Bhutanese teachers talk like this?

Panellist: "This participant sounds like a researcher. I've interviewed hundreds of teachers and while they might use some concepts from their teacher education—motivation or self-efficacy or cultural capital or whatever—they just don't talk like this. I certainly didn't when I was a schoolteacher! How did you talk before you started your PhD?"

Tshering: "Like a teacher."

Student and panellist laugh.

Panellist: Who did the translations?

Tshering: Me?

Panellist: When did you do them?

Tshering: Before the thematic analysis.

Panellist: Did you transcribe the interviews into Bhutanese and then translate them?

Tshering: Yes.

This fictional vignette was inspired by Karen's experience as a panellist for doctoral seminars in education, health and creative industries. What might have gone wrong in the data translation? What makes you think that? How might the problem have been avoided?

From marking many theses in Education and reviewing manuscripts derived from them, we have observed that it is during data production/collection that the most fulsome use seems to be made of students' multilingual resources. Students commonly conduct interviews, observations and surveys or collect policy documents and other artefacts in languages other than English or in non-standard English dialects. In doing so, they work as "researcher-translators" (Mpamhanga, 2025, p.3). Here, we canvass matters relating to timing and methods of translation (of written text) and interpretation (of oral text). In doing so, we highlight practices by which supervisors might enable language transformations during the research process that are conducive to rigorous meaning-making.

Criteria for ensuring rigorous translation and interpretation have long existed but receive curiously little attention during research education and in students' theses. More than a decade and a half ago, fourteen criteria were synthesised from the cross-language research literature and tested through content analysis of 40 qualitative studies in nursing and allied health (Squires, 2009). The criteria concern *conceptual equivalence of original and translated or interpreted text*; the *credentials of translators and interpreters;* the *role of the translator or interpreter during the conduct of the research;* and *research methods*. From the findings of the content analysis, the researchers articulated a concept of 'cross-language trustworthiness'. Subsequent research has continued to develop ways of enhancing that trustworthiness in studies in areas that include obesity, primary care and medically unexplained symptoms and chronic pain experienced by refugee women (e.g., Santos Jr et al., 2015; van Nes et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2022).

To help their students attain cross-language trustworthiness, supervisors might make language

transformation processes in students' research an overt object of research practice. They might open up discussions about when translation and interpretation should take place and why, by whom they should be undertaken, and with what procedures (Mpamhanga, 2025; Santos Jr et al., 2015; Squires, 2009; van Nes et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2022). Consider the problems picked up at Tshering's doctoral seminar. What assumptions about translation does the scenario reveal? What might the supervisors have done differently?

Supervision might have enabled Tshering to avoid problems of cross-language trustworthiness. Tshering had not only done the translations but had also conducted the interviews; moreover, he had created the conceptual framework for the study. Those conceptual terms had been 'put into the mouth' of the participants when the interview transcripts were translated. This problem of *conceptual equivalence* (Squires, 2009) might have been avoided if the translations had been checked by a suitably qualified bilingual with intercultural competence, independent of the data production. The lack of information about the *role of the translator* (Mpamhanga, 2025; Squires, 2009) that sparked the panellist's questions about when the translation occurred, and the language used for analysis, could have been avoided by detailed reporting in the thesis. With respect to *methods* (Squires, 2009), limitations of the way that translation had been conducted might have been articulated in the thesis.

Several dimensions of injustice were interwoven in Tshering's seminar experience. There was the maldistribution of discursive resources that might have enabled him to attain cross-language trustworthiness; there was the misrecognition of the linguistic and cultural particularity of his research; and, to the extent that his study had impact as he intended it to do in his Bhutanese school context, there was the potential for representative injustice given questions about the epistemic adequacy of the knowledge produced in that first draft of his thesis. These are educational and social injustices that might have been pre-empted by multilingually-aware supervision.

Reporting multilingually

Am I allowed?

Karen: "Why don't you put the data into the thesis in Hindi as well as English?"

Radha: "Am I allowed?"

Karen: "Well, the rules say theses must be in English, but that doesn't mean you can't include Hindi. There are good reasons to do so. First, …."

Finish the last sentence of this fictional vignette. The vignette was inspired by Karen's experience chairing faculty panels that assess research students' theses. What assumptions about the place of English in global scholarship does the vignette demonstrate?

Writing about reporting on cross-European health research disseminated in English as the global academic *lingua franca*, some scholars have articulated a standard for the trustworthiness of interpreted or translated research objects: "findings should be communicated in such a way that the reader of the publication understands the meaning as it was expressed in the findings, originating from data in the source language" (van Nes et al., 2010, p. 314). To achieve that standard it is recommended that researchers work in the original language as long as possible; use fluid and wordy translations before locking one-word translations in; and cooperate with professional translators (and now AI-powered translators), especially for metaphoric language and data quotes. These practices potentially enhance the epistemic adequacy of research with implications for recognitive justice for research students and representative social justice for worlds impacted by their research.

Institutional policies about what language is allowable in the body of the thesis and the appendices, and thesis word length, can constrain multilingual reporting (Holmes et al., 2013). Some researchers suggest pushing back against those constraints (Andrews et al., 2019; Qi et al., 2024; Rolland et al., 2023) – as indeed we have in our supervisory practice. To that end, supervisors are urged to encourage students to write their theses at least partly in First Nations or immigrant languages and to create a network of academic, industry and community thesis examiners with the capacity to assess such (Qi et al., 2024; see also, Rolland et al., 2023; Shen & Singh, 2024). In this spirit, one of our own students wrote their thesis in Aboriginal English and Language (Davis-Warra, 2018). Others have incorporated more or less of their first languages into their theses (e.g., Gao, 2023)—a practice of 'weak translanguaging' whereby boundaries between named languages are softened (de la Piedra & Esquinca, 2021). These language practices create recognitive justice for research students by valuing their embodied linguistic resources and the oral and written research objects they produce when drawing fulsomely on those resources. They create representative social justice to the extent that students' reporting is more accessible in the worlds it impacts.

While multilingual reporting practices are 'visible', much multilingual practice is not (Mpamhanga, 2025; Holmes et al., 2013; Qi et al., 2024). Many reports on what must have been cross-language research do not tell what language was used, and how it was used, in the research. This omission reflects the dynamics of hierarchical linguistic markets that marginalise language practices other than those of standard English. It is an omission that prompts questions about the trustworthiness of oral and written research objects when the language transformations or translations involved in their production are obscured (Point & Baruch, 2023; Santos Jr, 2014; Squires, 2009; van Ness et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2022). In the interests of recognitive justice for students and representative justice for worlds impacted by research, the translanguaging practices integral to the production of research knowledge should be reported in detail and with linguistic reflexivity (Holmes et al., 2013; Mpamhanga, 2025; Qi et al., 2024; Rolland et al., 2023). Language use should be visible in reporting—and critically so.

Apply these ideas in your practice

One way of enabling research students to capitalise on their linguistic-cultural capital is to embrace their

extant practices. A "*translanguaging corriente*, produced and driven by the positive energy of students' bilingualism, flows throughout all classrooms" (Garćia et al., 2017, p. xi, emphasis added) – or contexts of research education. Like a river current, that *corriente* cannot necessarily be seen or felt, but is always there, re-shaping the linguistic-cultural fields on its banks. This idea need not apply only to research on Education. When supervision of higher degree research itself is viewed as having both a research and a teaching and learning dimension (Connell & Manathunga, 2012), the notion of *corriente* is applicable to the supervision of multilingual research projects irrespective of discipline and topic. Supervisors can follow their students' lead by harnessing the learning and knowledge-producing energies of the translanguating corriente beneath the surface of the pedagogy (Shen & Singh, 2024). For example, students and supervisors who share a language might move back and forth between that language and English and the attendant research cultures (Shen & Singh, 2024); those who do not share a language other than English might engage in two-way learning across languages and cultures (Li & Exley, 2019).

More proactively, supervisors can go beyond harnessing to strengthening translanguaging corriente. Several heuristics are available, providing:

- reflective prompts for helping students to become aware of multilingual possibilities, consider the complexities of these, and make informed and purposeful decisions (Holmes et al., 2016)
- ten ways of engaging and reflecting critically on language and research design, process and practice in higher degree research (Qi et al., 2024)
- the jiāo/jiào 教 pedagogic framework (Shen, 2023) for *exemplifying* (jiāo 教) or imparting knowledge, skills and values about multilingual theorising; as well as *teaching* or showing students how to translanguage; and *demanding* (jiào 教) by using supervisory authority to probe and verify students' multilingual research practice
- a framework for systematic guidance through generic queries about translation decisions (Abfalter, Mueller-Seegar & Raich, 2021).

Supervisor's Quick Guide

1. Open up conversation about language use from the outset of the project. Suggest possibilities and listen deeply and respectfully to student preferences.
2. Provide the student with some 'starter references' on multilingual research from the outset.
3. Talk with colleagues to find exemplar multilingual theses that will be informative for students in your discipline even if they are not on their exact topic. Search your university's thesis repository for exemplars. Put your own students into contact with

each other to discuss their multilingual approaches to their research.
4. Ensure that the use of multiple languages is written into ethical approval documents (including use of human and AI transcription and translation).
5. Record linguistic decisions in methods while conducting the fieldwork, analyses and thesis-writing phases of the candidature.

Evidence your practice

1. Identify relevant performance criteria. What performance or achievement criteria does your university apply to supervision of higher degree research students? Relevant criteria might include:

    - producing high-quality research
    - providing research-informed student experiences
    - creating equitable and socially just student experiences
    - internationalising the curriculum or research
    - building academics' capabilities for international or transnational research.

2. Analyse how your practices enable multilingual students to capitalise on their linguistic and cultural resources. Take inspiration from research on researching multilingually (Holmes et al., 2016), 'post-monolingual research methodology' (e.g, Qi et al., 2024; Shen, 2023) or conducting 'cross-language research' (Santos Jr et al., 2015).

3. Write it up! Show how your work in enabling multilingual students to capitalise on their linguistic and cultural resources indicates achievements valued by your university.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Abfalter, D., Mueller-Seeger, J., & Raich, M. (2021). Translation decisions in qualitative research: A systematic framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory & Practice, 24*(4), 469–486. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805549

Andrews, J., Holmes, P., Fay, R. & Dawson, S. (2019). Researching multilingually in applied linguistics. In H. Rose & J. McKinley (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 76-86). Taylor & Francis.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information, 16*(6), 645-668. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847701600601

Bourdieu, P. (1986/2006). The forms of capital. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J. Dillabough, & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Education, globalization and social change* (pp. 105–118). Oxford University Press.

Connell, R. & Manathunga, C. (2012). On doctoral education: How to supervise a PhD, 1985-2011, *Australian Universities' Review, 54*(1), pp. 5-9. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ968490.pdf [PDF 100KB]

Davis-Warra, J. A. (2018). *Durithunga: Growing, nurturing, challenging and supporting urban Indigenous leadership in education.* Unpublished PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/115810/1/Johnathon_Davis_Thesis.pdf [PDF 9.1MB]

de la Piedra , M. T., & Esquinca, A. (2021). Translanguaging and other forms of capital in dual language bilingual education: Lessons from la Frontera. In M.T. Sánchez & O. García (Eds.), *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx students and their teachers Rompiendo Fronteras Sin Miedo* (pp. 146-169). Multilingual Matters.

Dooley, K., Briant, E., & Kimber, M. (2023). Shadow education in literacy for migrant students learning in English as an additional language in Australian primary schools. In W. H. K Yung & A. Hajar (Eds.), *International Perspectives on English Private Tutoring: Theories, Practices and Policies* (pp. 251-266). Palgrave Macmillan.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical reflections on the postsocialist condition*. Taylor & Francis.

Fraser, N. (2014). Publicity, subjection, critique: A reply to my critics. In K. Nash (Ed.), *Transnationalizing the public sphere* (pp. 129-156). Polity Press.

Gao, D. (2023). *Are you what you speak? A sociological analysis of the family language policy of internal migrant réncái in China.* [Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology]. QUT ePrints. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/238968/1/Danwei+Gao+Thesis.pdf [PDF 3.9MB]

García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Carson.

Holmes, P., Fay, R., Andrews, J. & Attia, M. (2013). Researching multilingually: New theoretical and methodological directions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 23*(3), 285-299. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12038

Holmes, P., Fay, R., Andrews, J. & Attia, M. (2016). How to research multilingually: Possibilities and complexities. In Z. Hua (Ed.), *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide* (pp. 89-102). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Jin, J. (2023). The relevance and dissonances of 'class' in China. An imaginative dialogue with Bourdieu and Bourdieusian studies. In M. Mu & K. Dooley (Eds.), *Recontextualising and recontesting Bourdieu in Chinese education: Habitus, mobility and language* (pp. 64-79). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003327301-6

Li, M. & Exley, B. (2019). Benefits of translanguaging and transculturation exchanges between international higher degree research students and English medium research supervisors. In T. Walker & I. Liyange (Eds.), *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2019: Media of instruction and multilingual settings* (pp. 121-135). Springer. https://doi.org.10.1007/978-3-030-14386-2_7

Liu, W., Han, J., Singh, M., & Wright, D. (2025). A translanguaging approach to doctoral supervision: Leveraging students' multilingualism as intellectual resources. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. https://doi.org.10.1111/ijal.12748

Liu, J. & Zheng, Y. (2024). The emergence of epistemic agency in researching multilingually: An autoethnography of a Chinese researcher's academic publishing practices. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12617

Luke, A. (2008/2019). Using Bourdieu to make policy: Mobilising community capital and literacy. In A. Luke (Ed.), *Educational policy, narrative and discourse* (pp. 173-189). Routledge.

Mpamhanga, K. (2025). Making translation visible in translingual doctoral research: A call to action for doctoral supervisors. *Teaching in higher education: Critical perspectives*. https://doi.org/13562517.2025.2581971

Qi, J., Manathunga, C., Raciti, M. & Gilbey, K. (2024). Community linguascapes and epistemic linguascapes: making a case for multilingual doctoral education in Australia. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2024.2431030

Rolland, L., King, H. M., & Lorette, P. (2023). Methodological implications of participant and researcher multilingualism: making language dynamics visible. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 44*(8), 645-656. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2224774

Santos Jr, H. P. O; Black, A. M., & Sandelowski, M. (2015). Timing of translation in cross-language

qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 25*(1), 134-144. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732314549603

Shen, H. (2023). Jiāo/jiào 教Chinese bilingual doctoral researchers to theorise translingually: A pedagogy for intercultural doctoral education. *Linguistics and Education, 77*, 101217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2023.101217

Shen, H. & Singh, M. (2024). A translanguaging approach to bilingual theorising in postgraduate researchers' education. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(9), 3926-3945, https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2134876

Singh, M. (2017). Post-monolingual research methodology: Multilingual researchers democratizing theorizing and doctoral education. *Education Sciences, 7*(1), 28. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci7010028

Squires, A. (2009). Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: A research review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 46*(2), 277-287. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2784094/

van Nes, F., Abma, T., Jonsson, H., & Deeg, D. (2010). Language differences in qualitative research: is meaning lost in translation? *European Journal of Ageing 7*, 313–316. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-010-0168-y

Xing, C., Mu, G.M., & Henderson, D. (2022). Submission or subversion: Survival and resilience of Chinese international research students in neoliberalised Australian universities. *Higher Education, 84*(2), 432-450. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00778-5

Xing, C., Mu, G.M., & Henderson, D. (2024). Problematising English monolingualism in the 'multicultural' university: a Bourdieusian study of Chinese international research students in Australia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(6), 1851-1863. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2026366

Yunus, N. A., olde Hartman, T., Lucassen, P., Barton, C., Russell, G., Altun, A., & Sturgiss, E. (2022). Reporting of the translation process in qualitative health research: A neglected importance. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*, 16094069221145282. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221145282

Resources for deeper understanding of micro-level language policy and the nature of language

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge

Liddicoat, A. (2023). Language policy and planning as a discursive accomplishment. In D. Yaden & T. Rogers (Eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Education: Literacies and Languages Education* (pp. 123-129). Elsevier Science.

11. APPLYING THE PALAR PARADIGM AND PROCESS TO THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Lesley Wood

Why read this chapter?

This chapter argues that the supervisory relationship should be collaborative and relationship-centred, rather than directive and instrumental. It explains the paradigm of participatory action learning and action research and how it can be applied to foster the learning and development of the postgraduate researcher beyond the mere acquisition of the degree. For supervisors who care about the holistic professional development of these emerging researchers, this chapter offers a framework that democratises knowledge creation, challenges hierarchical learning, promotes critical thinking, and ensures the knowledge generated is applicable beyond the academic degree.

Key learning:

- Supervision is an opportunity to promote professional learning and development to equip HDRs with transversal skills needed to meet the fast-changing work and life contexts.
- The PALAR framework provides a safe space for critical, collaborative, and reflective learning.
- Socratic questioning fosters deep learning by encouraging individuals to examine their own beliefs and assumptions.

Introduction

Globally, there is a shift toward educational research with a social justice intent, based on the principles of inclusion, authentic participation, and democratic decision-making (Dedding et al., 2021). This trend is reflected in various forms of **action research** designs, all of which share a common interest in improving

the capabilities of those involved, in addition to bringing about change in the problem under investigation (Wood, 2020). Action research goes beyond the mere answering of the research question, having three main intents: 1) a political intent (changing policies and systems), an educative intent (shifting mindsets, developing capacity and capabilities), and a theoretical intent (drawing on local knowledge to supplement and contextualize propositional theories) (Wood, 2017). But as Wadsworth (2016) maintained, action research is not just a methodology – it is a paradigm and a way of life. Grounded in values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity and the planet (Whitehead, 2024), action researchers strive to embody these values in their everyday interactions and relationships, including the supervisory relationship between professor and aspiring academic. The process of supervision should be based on a transformative, collaborative and democratic paradigm. By *transformative* I mean based on thinking that is continually open to change, and constantly in search of new ideas, innovations and improvements; by *collaborative*, I mean actively sharing perspectives, to create a synergy to broaden thinking to the possibilities for change; and, by *democratic*, I mean that all parties to the relationship should have equal say in decision-making about the what, why, how, who and when of the collaborative learning process.

I want to state from the outset that the word 'supervision' does not fit well with the discourse on action research, as it implies a skewed power relationship that negates the values of democracy and equality. When I consulted the thesaurus on the term supervision, I found two opposing connotations of the word – the first used synonyms like management, direction, regulation, control, while the other suggested words like care, protection, guidance and guardianship. I consider the second option to be more in line with the paradigmatic assumptions I put forward here.

However, in today's neoliberal and performative higher education landscape, 'getting the HDR through' can become more important than their holistic development as an emerging academic and/or professional. The traditional model of postgraduate supervision is often a hierarchical relationship, rather than a collaborative endeavour, where both professor and emerging researcher bring valuable knowledge to the table. I suggest that the supervisory relationship should be based on critical, collaborative, and reflective learning, to create a space where the emerging professional can flourish, developing knowledge and skills that will equip them to be leaders in their current or future professional worlds. The expected result of the supervisory relationship is, of course, the successful completion of the degree, but it should not be the only focus. We need a holistic and participatory approach to supervision to counteract its instrumental nature and challenge the hierarchic power dynamics. If we conceptualise supervision as a journey of professional learning and development, I believe that not only will the HDR produce a good piece of research, but they will also emerge from the process able to actively and positively contribute within their spheres of influence through their advanced knowledge and skills, while prioritising the well-being of others and the common good. Therefore, I oppose the idea of 'supervision', based on traditional hierarchical power relations, preferring instead to talk about the professional learning and development of postgraduate HDRs, which goes deeper than the desire to 'just get through' that HDRs (and supervisors) can have on admission to the degree. This is not a new idea – others have written about the supervisory relationship as a site for identity formation (Wilkin et al., 2023), where learning is not only about learning to do, but also learning to be a professional. My contribution here is to explain how a participatory action learning and action research

(PALAR) paradigm for guiding postgraduate learning creates the relational and reflective space for the critical and dialogical conversations vital to the supervision process, to equalise traditional power relations and democratise knowledge creation.

So, here I propose that the participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) paradigm and process can also serve as a framework for the postgraduate research journey. PALAR fosters a relational and reflective learning environment and empowers HDRs to take charge of their learning, critically evaluate mental models, seek support, and collaboratively construct knowledge relevant to their goals (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The PALAR framework democratises knowledge creation, challenges hierarchical learning, promotes critical thinking, and ensures that knowledge is applicable beyond academia to enable adaptation to a complex world. I now explain the basic terms and principles underpinning PALAR before turning to how to use it to develop the supervisory relationship. I then offer a tool to guide thesis/dissertation design, based on Socratic questioning, which aims to develop independent, critical and creative thinking.

Explaining PALAR

Participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) was first introduced by Zuber-Skerritt (2011) as a paradigm, methodology and process of facilitation within the field of higher education, for the purpose of professional development in teaching and research. She also applied it in the field of organisational development, and later developed it, with me and others, as an approach to community-engagement. In South Africa, I have supervised many PALAR studies in different contexts, using the process to also build relationship between myself and the emerging researchers. Box 11.1 explains the key terms that make up PALAR.

Action learning: An open, cyclic learning process which requires collaboration, sharing of ideas and active engagement of diverse stakeholders to solve their real practical problems through critical conversations and continuous reflections on their praxis with the purpose of bringing about transformative learning and development.

Action research: The aims of action research are to improve practice and make changes to the environment, context and conditions in which that practice takes place, and which impede desirable improvement and effective development. Thus, action research is an approach to social science research that is *practical* (change in the initial situation); *emancipatory* (frees participants from self-limiting thinking); *critical* (challenges and changes assumptions that limit change and development). When it is conducted with others, it is **participatory action research.**

The main difference between Action Learning and Action Research is that although both

include reflection and action, problem-solving and experiential learning, action research follows a more systematic and detailed research design indicating the methods used to recruit participants, generate and analyse data validate the findings and adhere to ethical requirements.

Box 1 1.1 Key terms that make up PALAR

PALAR as a framework to build a democratic and collaborative research relationship

Figure 11.1 represents the process of PALAR as a figure eight, where the upper half represents the formation and negotiation of the working relationship and the focus of the study, and the lower half the systematic and empirically sound action research inquiry. The intersection in the middle of the figure eight indicates that the work of the top part is continuous, as relationships and goals need to be renegotiated throughout due to the dynamic nature of action research. Although this was designed as a framework for participatory action research projects, I suggest the relationship component can be used to guide the supervisory process in a collaborative way that encourages deep learning and development, whether done with a group of higher degree researchers or on a more individual basis. I now explain how the different elements can be used to guide supervision. I also give some suggestions for how to discuss these issues in a participatory way, that can be adapted as needed. I have found they work very well for group supervision but can be just as effective with individuals. I wrote an article with Ina Louw (Wood, & Louw, 2017) that provided empirical evidence of the impact of using PALAR to guide group supervision, but I also use the framework for supervision of individual researchers as I now explain.

Figure 11.1 Figure eight of the PALAR process (Wood, 2020)

Defining a mutual purpose

Both supervisor(s) and higher degree researcher(s) (HDR) should share their interest in doing the post graduate degree. This is an opportunity for the supervisors to get to know more about the higher degree

researchers' life outside of the study. Showing genuine interest in the person helps to put them at ease and reduce the power relations.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: 1. Each person should draw a picture/diagram to represent how they are feeling at the start of the study and what each wants to achieve. 2. Share the drawing and explain it in detail.

Personal development

To further reduce power relations, both HDR and supervisors can share what knowledge/skills/networks they bring to the relationship. This helps the HDRs to realise that they do possess assets, knowledge and experience and that not all the expertise resides in the supervisors. By highlighting their learning needs (e.g. knowledge about specific research methods; writing skills; specific subject knowledge), steps can be taken to arrange opportunities for development.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: To give the HDRs/supervisors an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills and receive positive feedback to improve self-esteem, self-awareness and relationship.

- Draw yourself (stick figure will do) and indicate knowledge (head); skills (hands/feet) and attributes/characterstics/values (heart) you possess.
- Share your drawing with each other. Each person should add some positive feedback about what they see/know about the other.
- Discuss the collective knowledge and skills that have been highlighted to enable you to achieve your mutual purpose. Identify the gaps in knowledge and skills that might hinder you in reaching your mutual purpose.

Forming the team

Even in the case of one-on-one supervision, it is important to negotiate roles and responsibilities for each party in doing the research.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: Often there is an institutional guide for this purpose that can be discussed and adapted as needed. If not, each should write down what they regard as their responsibilities and then use this to guide discussion to come to a consensus.

Context analysis

It is important to understand the context in which the HDR lives and works. Many postgraduate HDRs are working full time so they need to consider potential barriers that might impinge on their ability to keep to timelines; most have family responsibilities that may distract them from their studies. However, the identification of support systems can help to minimise the barriers.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: Construct a SWOT (inherent strengths/weaknesses of HDR; environmental opportunities or threats) or PEST (policy, environmental, social and technological aspects) analysis together to identify both potential barriers and supports to successful completion of a postgraduate study.

Setting broad research goals

At this stage the broad focus and goals of the research should be agreed on to suit the needs, desires and expertise of both HDR and supervisor.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: The first question of the Socratic questioning template (see Table 1) could be discussed at this stage to determine the focus and goals of the study.

Negotiating an ethical contract

In a supervisory relationship this is more of an agreement on what each considers a respectful relationship should be like and what boundaries should be set around behaviour. Supervisors and HDR should discuss what behaviour they would be comfortable with in terms of timeframes for submission of work before meetings, how feedback will be given, what should happen if either party has an issue, and so on.

Exercises

Suggested exercise: Each party can reflect on the following questions before meeting:

1. **Power and Autonomy:**
    - How should decisions (e.g., research direction, methods, publications) be made and negotiated?
    - How can both parties ensure the HDR maintains academic autonomy while receiving appropriate guidance?
1. **Boundaries:**
    - What personal or professional boundaries should be respected?
    - How should communication be handled (e.g., response times, working hours)?
2. **Conflict and Feedback:**
    - How should disagreements or misunderstandings be handled?
    - What does ethical, constructive feedback look like to you?

Then they should discuss and come to an agreement that they can summarise. It is good to revisit this from time to time.

The research component of the PALAR process is the same as the HDR would follow in any form of action research and the cycles can be repeated as necessary. The findings of my 2018 study provided evidence to support the use of PALAR as a framework for postgraduate supervision to promote the development of self-directed, critical, democratic and lifelong learning. We found that HDRs learnt to make their own decisions about what they considered important learning for their purposes; critical thinking was developed through cycles of collaborative reflection and action; and they learnt how to critique in a way that promoted the learning and dignity of others which positioned them well for future professional relationships and leadership roles. They felt valued and welcomed in the supervision group and provided evidence that they were able to translate this learning into their daily lives, thus choosing what knowledge was important to them and applying it in a relevant and contextualised way. We concluded that if more postgraduate researchers were exposed to a PALAR approach to learning and development, they would be able to learn vital skills that would enhance their capabilities not only for research, but also for life.

Apply these ideas in your practice

A Socratic approach to thesis development aligns with a PALAR approach to learning and development of post graduate researchers.

The Socratic method enables the questioner, or supervisor in this case, to challenge ideas and assumptions, stimulate thinking and help the HDRs to think out of the box. It is based on four steps:

> *I cannot teach anyone anything. I can only make them think. (Socrates)*

1. **Receive:** Listen to what the person is saying and reflect it back to them.
2. **Refine:** Ask for evidence to support their reasoning; challenge assumptions.
3. **Re-state:** Ask them to reformulate and restate their thinking.
4. **Repeat:** Continue this cycle until consensus is reached.

This approach does require the supervisors to have good listening skills and be disciplined enough to withhold comment and judgement until the HDR has finished. When used with supervisors for capacity development, it helps them to become more aware of how they may be too directive, imposing their ideas on HDRs, rather than developing HDR's capacity to think for themselves.

Try the exercise as detailed in Table 11.1. You can use it with a group of post graduate researchers/ supervisors where they take turns in doing it with each other, or in a one-on-one situation. The rules are:

1. Only ask the questions and do not interrupt or interject your own ideas. You may reflect what you have heard back to ensure you understand (**Receive**)

2. When all questions have been answered, or at the end of each set of questions, you may ask them to explain more or justify their opinions and thinking (**Refine**).
3. Then ask them to **re-state** their answers.
4. **Repeat** this cycle until you and the HDR come to agreement.

Table 11.1 Socratic approach to thesis design

Guiding Questions	Define
1. What? • What do you want to focus on? • What is your central issue?	**Focal question**
2. Why? • What has and has not been done previously in this area? • What is the gap in literature? • Why are you doing this? • What's the purpose of your work? • What will you do differently or new? • Why is it important and who will benefit from it?	**Significance**
3. What? • What will be your original contribution to practical and theoretical knowledge in the field? • What is the international relevance of your proposal?	**Contribution to theory, practice?**
4. How? • How will you address your central research question? • What research methods will you use? • Who will you work with, how will you gather and analyse data? • How will you validate your findings?	**Methodology**
5. When? • When do you start and finish your work? • What is your timetable from start of research to submission of your paper/thesis? • Is your research project realistic and manageable in that timeframe? Or what could you change? • What are the milestones in your timetable?	**Timetable**

Adapted from Zuber-Skerritt (2009)

Evidence your practice

PALAR is grounded in what Zuber-Skerritt (2011) termed the 7 Cs – symmetrical and dialogical *communication*; *commitment* to the outcome and process; the development of *competence* of both supervisor and post graduate researcher; *critical reflection* on feelings, actions and intentions, as well as progress and process; *collaboration* toward mutual goals; *coaching* to enable people to identify and realise their own potential; and *compromise* to embrace various perspectives and needs. Figure 11.2 indicates how these characteristics are embedded in relationship, reflection and recognition of the contributions of all to the creation of the research process and product.

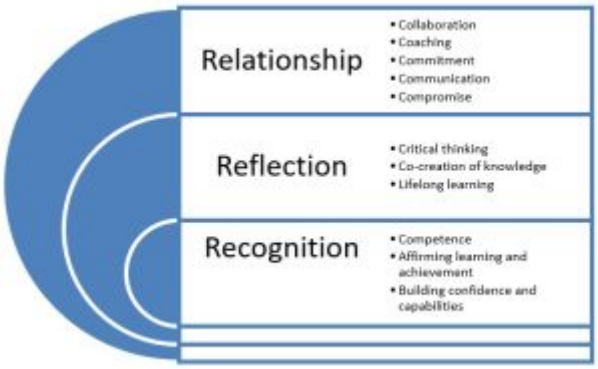


Figure 11.2 – 7 Cs and 3 Rs (Adapted from Wood & Louw, 2018)

To evaluate your practice as a supervisor, you can use the questions in Table 2 to see how well you are adhering to the principles of a participatory paradigm. Reflect on each question and document your responses. I have found it helpful to do this at least once a year, because it is very easy to revert to a more directive form of supervision due to work and time pressures – see Wood et al., (2023) for an article on this very issue. As supervisors who wish to embody the foundational principles of action research, we need to hold ourselves accountable and practice the habits of lifelong learning. This will also be useful to include in a professional portfolio for promotion purposes.

Table 11.2 Questions for reflecting on supervision

The 7 Cs of PALAR	**Consider the following questions: How well do I live out these characteristics in the supervision process? What do I need to change in my thinking, acting? How can I improve these aspects?**
Communication	How dialogical, how symmetrical, and how inclusive is my communication?
Commitment	How committed am I to the relationship, and the outcome?
Competence	As facilitator of the process, and as researcher, what do I need to learn?
Compromise	How willing am I to listen to other points of view and reach mutual agreement?
Critical reflection	How do my feelings, thoughts, motives, and values impact the research relationship?
Collaboration	How collaborative is the process? What role do I and co-supervisors play? Who holds the power at each stage?
Coaching	How directive am I? How can I improve my mentoring/facilitation skills?
3 Rs	
Reflection	How can I help the candidate to reflect on their own learning?
Relationships	How can I improve the supervisory relationship?
Recognition	How do I recognise and value the candidate's achievements?

Adapted from Wood & Louw (2018)

References and Resources

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔓 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Dedding, C., Goedhart, N. S., Broerse, J. E., & Abma, T. A. (2021). Exploring the boundaries of 'good' Participatory Action Research in times of increasing popularity: Dealing with constraints in local policy for digital inclusion. *Educational Action Research*, *29*(1), 20-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1743733

Wadsworth, Y. (2008). Action research for living human systems. In B. Boog, M. Slager, J. Preece & J. Zeelen (Eds.),*Towards quality improvement of action research* (pp. 45-60). Brill. 🔓

Whitehead, J. (2024, September 8-12). *How am I contributing to Living Educational Theory Research as*

an epistemology for practice with values of human flourishing. [Symposium contribution]. Conference of the British Educational
Research Association, Lancaster, United Kingdom. https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/bera2024/jwsympbera2024.pdf

Wilkin, C. L., Khosa, A., & Burch, S. (2023). Identity in doctoral supervision: Perspectives on agency and structure. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *94*(2), 139-173.

Wood, L. (2020). *Participatory action learning and action research: Theory, practice and process*. Routledge.

Wood, L. (2017). The ethical implications of community-based research: A call to rethink current review board requirements. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917748276

Wood, L., Kahts-Kramer, S., Waddington, R., & Neethling, M. (2023). Lessons learnt from facilitating action learning with youth facing multiple adversities. *Educational Research for Social Change*, *12*(2), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2023/v12i2a1

Wood, L. & Louw, I. (2018). Reconsidering postgraduate "supervision" from a participatory action learning and action research approach, *South African Journal of Higher Education, 32*(4), 284-297. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-10c4c8f60b

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2018). An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research*, *26*(4), 513-532.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2011). *Action leadership: Towards a participatory paradigm*. Springer International.

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Dick, B., Farquhar, M., Hall, S., Kalliath, T., Laske, S., Murphy, J., Santos, D., & Teare, R. (2009). "Songlines of a PhD course: How to assure quality in postgraduate research and thesis writing". In *Action learning and action research*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087909543_011

Additional Reading

Articles

Wood, L., Louw, I., & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2017). Enhancing postgraduate learning and development: A participatory action learning and action research approach through

conferences. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, *14*(2), 120-135. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2017.1295361

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (01 Jan. 2009). Action Learning and Action Research. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087909543

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Dick, B., Farquhar, M., Hall, S., Kalliath, T., Laske, S., Murphy, J., Santos, D., & Teare, R. (2009). "Songlines of a PhD Course: How to Assure Quality in Postgraduate Research and Thesis Writing". In *Action Learning and Action Research*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
href="https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087909543_011" target="_blank" rel="noopener">https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087909543_011

Books

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Fletcher, M. and Kearney, J. (2015), *Professional learning in higher education and communities: Towards a new vision for action research.* Palgrave.

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Wood, L., & Louw, I. (2015). *A participatory paradigm for an engaged scholarship in higher education: Action leadership from a South African perspective*. Brill.

Website

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (n.d.) *Resources for Learning, Teaching and Research* https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lPo0svwMUcogYkd9AagNtGsr0nuQhOeuGtawBvI6Abc/edit?tab=t.0

TECHNOLOGICALLY INFORMED SUPERVISION

12. WRITING CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE LIMITATIONS: TECHNOLOGY AS BOTH A SOLUTION AND AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

Rifka Pratama

Why read this chapter?

In this chapter, you will read the perspective of a university lecturer who also supervises students writing their theses, most of whom do not speak English as their first language. Both supervisors and higher degree researchers (HDRs) face a range of challenges in academic writing. However, recent advances in technology offer practical solutions to language-related limitations, though these too often raise ethical concerns.

The key learnings from this chapter are:

1. The circumstances and challenges related to limited English language proficiency
2. Technology as both a solution and a source of dilemma in its use
3. The integration of writing technologies into classroom-based learning

Introduction

For some people, writing is a thing of its own. When I say "a thing of its own," I mean writing is a complex task, not something that can be done in one go. Some people find writing challenging. In academic terms, this is "a thing in itself," and it is connected to other careful stages. This process encompasses steps such as selecting a topic, determining a title, gathering and analysing data, interpreting the results, and reviewing them. These stages are only related to the content of the writing. Other aspects related to the format of the writing will be "something else." As I mentioned, it is a series of stages, each with its own concepts and resources. I am not trying to deter anyone, rather this is a brief introduction to how academic writing is a skilled profession. For non-native English speakers, these stages may involve

additional challenges, such as understanding complex vocabulary, grasping the nuances of grammar, and structuring sentences in a way that is both coherent and persuasive. A lot of ESL students, including higher degree researchers, have trouble writing because their first language affects their English. This can cause them to make mistakes in syntax and grammar when they write in English (Magaba, 2023). However, there are technological advances that offer programs and software that can assist HDRs and their supervisors to navigate these challenges. This chapter will explore the challenges for HDRs and the technology that can help provide assistance and support in more depth. Becoming familiar with this technology and understanding both how you can incorporate it into your practice to support your higher degree researcher, and the considerations that come with using this technology can enhance your supervisory practice.

The challenges of writing in English for non-native English speakers

Writing is a skill in itself, so having to write in a language that is not your mother tongue, like English in this case, adds to the number of stages involved in completing a piece of writing. Since 2015, I have been assisting undergraduates in the English Literature programme at a university in Indonesia with various writing activities. To note, our programme offers three specialisations in English Literature: Linguistics, Literature, and American Studies. This means students can choose topics that align with their interests and strengths.

I have provided writing help in various situations, from basic writing and grammar lessons in English classes to assisting students and HDRs in writing individual theses or final projects in the form of scientific articles. When you are teaching writing to more than thirty students in a classroom, you have to come up with creative ways to make it fun and engaging.

During my tenure as a lecturer and thesis supervisor, I have observed a diverse range of abilities among students and HDRs. I have come to realise that undergraduate-level study might not be sufficient for non-native English speakers to write well in English. But do not worry, it is not all doom and gloom. When I say "insufficient," I mean that students need creative methods for their class projects and eventually their research theses. Some people, in fact, have had great success with English writing tools or apps. These tools can help with grammar and spelling checks, provide suggestions for improving sentence structure, and even assist in generating ideas for research topics, thereby making the writing process more manageable and less daunting.

On the other hand, drawing on my experience as both a supervisor and a higher degree researcher, I have observed that many higher degree researchers struggle to complete their writing projects, as they often find it difficult to identify topics that truly engage their interest. Muryani et al. (2024) and Ningrum et al. (2023) say that a lot of Indonesian students have trouble putting their ideas in a logical order and making sure that their writing runs well. To respond to this, HDRs need to understand that everything is

interesting and can be researched. At first, this answer might motivate them. However, to be honest, it does not always provide the desired help. For some HDRs, not knowing what to write about can cause delays or even bring the entire academic writing process to a standstill. The stagnation we, as research supervisors, are discussing here is not just a short-term issue; it can be ongoing for weeks. Sometimes, HDRs only just get the inspiration for their writing ideas or topics a few semesters before approaching their graduation deadline. This is a cause for concern, especially when you consider that at most universities in Indonesia, graduation is mainly based on the completion of HDR theses.

As a supervisor, I would try to actively engage in helping students find their topics and titles through our discussions. I don't mean for these sessions to take over, but rather to ensure they are thinking through their topics in a structured way, including the English phrasing of their titles. When we have a theory discussion in class, I often ask them to jot down one or two things they find interesting, as these might be helpful for topics for their final research in the seventh or eighth semester. This approach helps higher degree researchers overcome one of their main writing challenges: choosing a topic. However, while this approach is practical in the short term, it is not the most effective way to help researchers develop their academic independence. When it comes to writing theses or dissertations, HDRs are expected to be able to choose their research topics, with their academic advisors available to guide them. This independence is crucial as it fosters critical thinking, research skills, and a deeper understanding of the chosen topic.

After addressing the issues of topic search, selection, and development, HDRs also face other problems, particularly in this context, namely language. When it comes to research theses in the English Literature program, all students are required to write in the English language. A lot of HDRs say they have trouble explaining complicated ideas and finding a strong academic style, both of which are necessary for good writing at this level (Hyland, 2016). Language is a tool that enables us to communicate effectively. Many HDRs struggle to express their thoughts effectively in English class. If it is an emergency, I let them use Indonesian, which is our native language. Higher degree researchers can easily and clearly explain a phenomenon or the application of a theory in discussion sessions by using their mother tongue. In this situation, English presents a challenge.

The challenges related to writing skills in English can include aspects such as grammar, sentence structure, tone, paragraph development, and the coherence of ideas. A higher degree researcher might not have any issues with grammar. However, they might struggle with sentence tone. It is not always easy for non-native speakers to tell the tone of a sentence. Scientific writing often requires a formal and academic tone, which can be challenging when considering the prevalence of casual social media exposure. Some HDRs' scientific papers often still have a casual tone. It is not always easy for them to model academic writing in English.

Non-native English speakers indeed face challenges when writing academic English, including limited vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as a lack of confidence in their writing abilities. However, there are technologies available to assist with these issues. There are lots of digital tools that can help HDRs write more effectively and independently. Apps like Grammarly, QuillBot, and DeepL, as well as AI platforms like GPT and Gemini, are great for helping HDRs (especially those who are still getting to

grips with written English) improve their grammar, rephrase sentences, and better understand academic texts. Nevertheless, using these technologies can also create problems for lecturers and supervisors. On the one hand, technology can accelerate the learning process and enhance the quality of writing. However, using these tools excessively could hurt the HDRs' ability to think critically and may raise some ethical concerns in an academic setting. This problem encompasses issues such as automatic paraphrasing without the writer's knowledge or instant answers from AI chatbots without any critical thought. Therefore, it is essential for lecturers and supervisors not only to allow or encourage the use of technology but also to ensure they utilise it effectively in the learning process. To encourage responsible use of AI in study, academics need to be trained in all areas of AI ethics right away (Miao et al., 2023).

Using tech to help higher degree researchers write

So far, we have discussed various topics, including the complexity of writing, the challenges of writing for non-native English speakers, and the delicate issue of using technology concerning academic ethics. Even if restrictions are necessary, utilising technology or AI can be beneficial for writing. This is not about practical matters, such as graduation, but rather about the idea that language limitations should not hinder the sharing of ideas. We have seen people struggling to express themselves in a certain way, which ultimately limits their intellectual output. In the context of education, HDRs often are not ready for the demands of academic talk, which can make them feel stressed and lower their self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2024)

The next question is, how can technology assist HDRs with English writing, and to what extent can it help? I will try to offer a few different ways to use technology as writing tools. The first model focuses on understanding content, data, and references. It is common for HDRs to struggle to grasp a theory, because the textbooks are written in English or another foreign language. When it comes to writing, it is crucial to understand a problem, concept, or theory before starting to write scientific content. If a HDR student can understand all of these things, it will help them to analyse research problems. As a supervisor, I will suggest that HDRs utilise a few AI platforms that allow them to rewrite or upload English-language material they do not understand. They can utilise platforms and apps like ChatPDF or AI tools, such as GPT and Gemini.

These platforms enable users to request explanations or summaries of uploaded texts. If someone uploads English-language text, they can then request information in their language. These platforms can go into more or less detail about the information. The amount of information available will depend on who is uploading or asking the questions. Some chat models give the user basic questions to get them thinking, and then ask more from the uploader. These platforms allow users to access specific text-based information. Some chatbots even indicate the location of answers based on page numbers in the material, so that the platform provides answers based on the source rather than general answers from various sources that may be incorrect. When it comes to learning, it is evident that using this platform is not the aim or an attempt to indulge the intellect. It is a learning aid. Lecturers and supervisors can continue to encourage discussions to

gauge how well HDRs understand the material they are learning. Also, AI chat like this will become more exploratory, depending on the important input from the people who upload the material.

Just to highlight, some PDF chat models can be a bit more sophisticated. PDF chat models like SciSpace let users listen to a podcast version of an uploaded English-language material. However, this podcast version primarily highlights the fundamental issues in the uploaded material. Interestingly, these chat models can be helpful for English listening skills courses. This is an example of how the AI platform can help to understand texts. I use the term "critical productive utilisation of AI" to emphasise this model of platform or AI utilisation. The image below is AI-generated, but the content and descriptions originate from me. I directed Gemini to formulate a guide on how HDRs can tackle English limitations, focusing on the critical productive utilisation of AI[1]

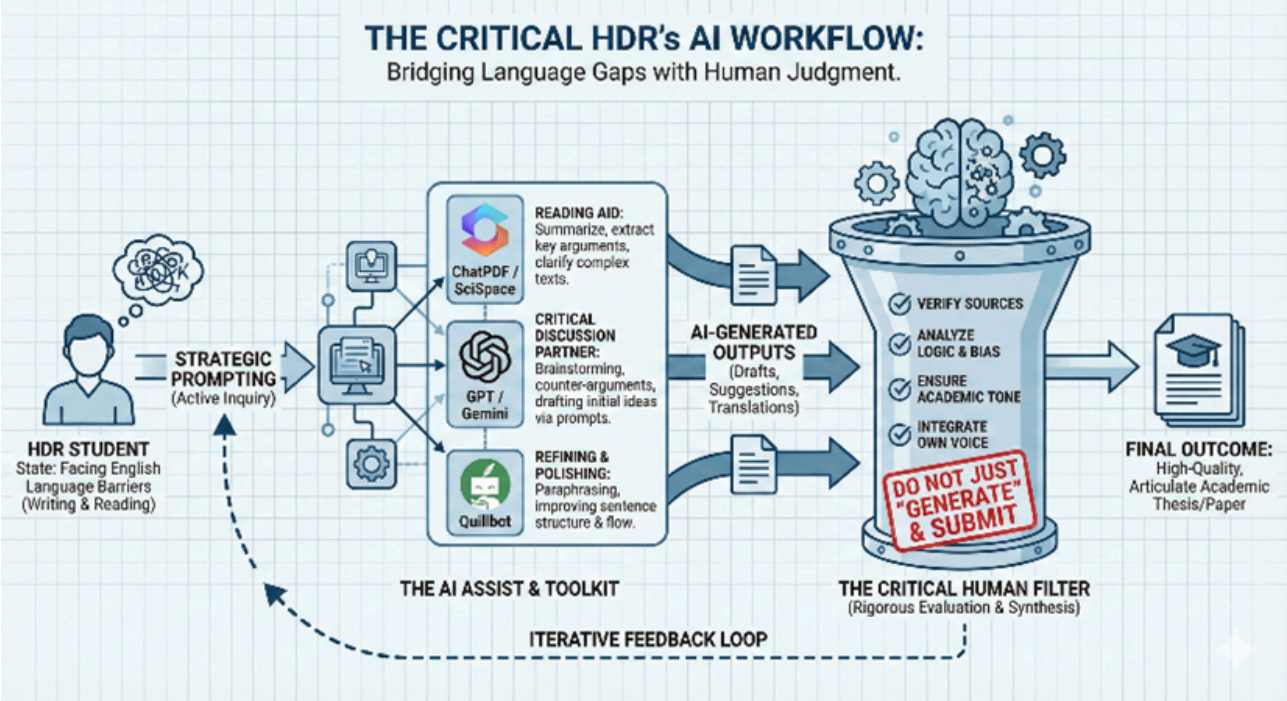


Figure 12.1. A Critical Model of AI Utilisation (Gemini generated picture)

The second model utilises AI to generate ideas for a piece of writing. Once HDRs have finished that, they can move on to the idea generation stage. It is worth noting that the long-term use of generative AI in education is not recommended. As I said before, AI is a tool, not a replacement for the brain or creative thinking. In this situation, a HDR can start with an outline or draft that usually includes:

1. **My prompt to Gemini:** *Create an image reflecting the following scenario: an HDR student facing difficulties with the English language (primarily written and reading comprehension). In this context, AI tools such as ChatPDF, Gemini, GPT, SciSpace, and Quillbot can serve as solutions for critical discussion using prompts from the HDR, acting as translation media, refining writing, etc. However, it is necessary for the HDR to remain a critical user, not merely 'generating' output from these tools. Please generate the image and ensure the content within it is in English.*

- Introduction
- things to be written or researched, and
- outline of the discussion.

HDRs must also pay close attention to privacy. They need to learn how AI protects their intellectual property, for instance, by reviewing feature settings related to privacy or using temporary modes for sensitive content.

Then, HDRs can get feedback from tools like GPT or Gemini. To clarify, these comments should only be used to discuss ideas. Essentially, higher degree researchers are advised not to use the information directly from the platform. Usually, AI platforms will give a long reply to the outline provided to them. This brainstorming can include chats about choosing an English title. Higher degree researchers can input English titles they have already prepared and request AI feedback on aspects such as readability, word choice, and grammar. In this case, HDRs should limit their feedback from the AI to just the appropriateness of the diction in an academic writing context, readability, and grammar.

To help HDRs develop language skills, they should ask the AI platform for an explanation of why, for example, AI thinks a particular English word is not suitable. Then, they can try inputting another title with similar errors and make corrections. The goal is to ensure they maximise the benefits of their learning experience.

The third model of using writing assistance technology focuses on translation. Some HDRs have a background and experience in languages other than their mother tongue. This includes HDRs who are already proficient in English before they begin their university studies. These skills can differ in terms of level and focus. English as a language for general or practical purposes is not the same as that required for academic purposes. So, just because a HDR is good at English does not mean they are great at using it in a research setting. Also, we need to define English language skills more specifically.

A HDR may be proficient in speaking the English language. Some people are exceptionally skilled at writing, while others excel at both writing and speaking. Then, we need to examine the skills more to determine if they are proficient in academic or general language. Supervisors should encourage higher degree researchers to persevere, even if they are not yet confident in their English skills. In this situation, various translation tools and grammar checkers can be utilised to assist HDRs in expressing themselves in the target language.

When using tools for language translation and grammar checking, it is essential to ensure the source sentences are in good condition. Higher degree researchers will need to confirm this at the start, as the source language will have a significant impact on the target sentences. If the substance is not clear in the source language, then the content of the target language is likely to be unclear as well. When I work with my HDRs on their theses, I always ensure that the meaning of any sentence they write is crystal clear. Revisions may be necessary at times, for example, to make a sentence more effective. Often, the content is straightforward, but the wording is too long. HDRs and their supervisors should be aware that the

translation will be performed using a non-human tool, so there is still a possibility of shortcomings, such as issues with sentence structure and aesthetics. To mitigate bias in AI translations, HDRs need to set technical constraints for example, explicitly forbidding the AI from adding a single new idea, and ensuring the translation focuses strictly on diction, structure, and readability.

In addition to ensuring the source text's input is correct, someone must also verify the grammar after the text has been translated. There are tools like Grammarly that can help spot mistakes and suggest ways to improve. This will be a big help to writers and higher degree researchers when checking the translation results produced by translation software. Additionally, it is worth noting that machine translations serve as a starting point and can be considered "raw" material.

Using academic writing tools in the classroom

Supervisors should not avoid using modern technology to help HDRs write academically in English. Actually, given the limits on vocabulary, sentence structure, and the pressure of schoolwork that non-native students face, digital tools can be an advantageous solution. In the future, this type of technology, as we have seen before, will make it easier for higher degree researchers to receive writing practice as academics, and it will also increase their confidence in tackling English-language assignments. But whatever tools they use to help with their writing, they have to make sure they are following the academic ethics rules, especially when it comes to originality. It is important to carefully review AI-generated drafts because AI systems can make mistakes and introduce biases if they are not guided by human experts (Kirov, 2023; Ugwu et al., 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, supervisors must ensure that HDR's writing is based on their thoughts, rather than merely repeating what they have heard. We should ensure that technology does not hinder the distinction between technical support and critical thinking skills. We should utilise technology for tasks such as word choice, sentence translation, grammar checking, and punctuation correction. However, the most important part of an academic paper —the section that includes the main ideas, arguments, analysis, and synthesis —must be the writer's or higher degree researcher's work. This means that technology will continue to be a tool to support the learning process, not a shortcut that gets in the way of people's ability to think for themselves. Most importantly, do not let English become a barrier for HDRs to convey scientific ideas.

AI acknowledgement

In the drafting of this text, the author utilised AI tools such as Gemini and GPT to ensure readability and grammatical accuracy. The DeepL application was employed to translate the text from Indonesian into Australian English, where its vocabulary refinement features were also used. Furthermore, Grammarly was

utilised for additional corrections and synonym selection. However, this process does not detract from the originality of the source language writing, the main ideas, or the authentic details of the events drawn from the author's experience.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Hyland, F. (2016). Challenges faced by second language doctoral student writers in Hong Kong and their writing strategies. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, *39*(2), 158–180. https://doi.org/10.1075/ARAL.39.2.04HYL

Kirov, B. (2023). *Artificial Intelligence in Creation of Scientific Written Works: Weighing the Benefits and Ethical Dilemmas – Should We Use It? 2023 International Scientific Conference on Computer Science (COMSCI),* 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1109/comsci59259.2023.10315821

Magaba, V. (2023). English Writing Challenges of First-Year Students: A Case Study of a University in the Eastern Cape. *Athens Journal of Philology*, *10*(1), 35–52. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajp.10-1-2

Miao, J., Thongprayoon, C., Suppadungsuk, S., Garcia Valencia, O. A., Qureshi, F., & Cheungpasitporn, W. (2023). Ethical Dilemmas in Using AI for Academic Writing and an Example Framework for Peer Review in Nephrology Academia: A Narrative Review. *Clinics and Practice*, *14*(1), 89–105. https://doi.org/10.3390/clinpract14010008

Muryani, R. N., Galuh, M., Romadhon, E., & Mustofa, M. (2024). An Investigation into the Challenges and Strategies Utilization in Academic Writing: A Case Study of Indonesian Postgraduate Students. *VELES (Voices of English Language Education Society)*. https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v8i1.25330

Nguyen, T. N. C., Trinh, T. T., & Nguyen, N. A. (2024). Exploring Factors Influencing Students' Challenges in Academic Writing: A Qualitative Analysis Based on Student Perspectives. *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies 4*(3), 32-37. https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049x.2024.4.3.2737

Ningrum, R. W., Hamamah, Sahiruddin, & Rohmah, Z. (2023). Academic writing difficulties for

Indonesian students in pursuing postgraduate studies abroad. *Premise: Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics, 12*(1), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v12i1.5271

Ugwu, N. F., Igbinlade, A. S., Ochiaka, R. E., Ezeani, U. D., Okorie, N. C., Opele, J. K., Onayinka, T. S., Iroegbu, O., Onyekwere, O. K., Adams, A. B., Aigbona, P., & Ojobola, F. B. (2024). Clarifying Ethical Dilemmas of Using Artificial Intelligence in Research Writing: A Rapid Review. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, *14*(2). https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v142.1549

13. TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED HDR SUPERVISORY PRACTICES

Yuli Rohmiyati

Why read this chapter?

Supervising higher degree researchers (HDRs) from diverse socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds can be challenging. You can overcome cross-cultural communication issues and time, space, and resourcing constraints by effectively applying technology in your supervisory practices.

The key learnings from the chapter are:

- Cognitive and affective capacity in HDR supervision.
- Computer mediated communication and Social Presence Theory in HDR supervision.
- Benefits and limitations of using technologies in HDR supervision.
- Technology-enhanced HDR supervision practices.

Introduction

Communication problems (Chen et al., 2021) can emerge during supervision due to infrequent meetings and delayed feedback on work in progress. Lack of clarity in feedback about research objectives and the stages that must be passed can also cause confusion and frustration for higher degree researchers. These issues, coupled with differences in communication styles and the challenges of cross-cultural communication, can lead to misunderstandings and feelings of discomfort during the supervision process.

Space, time and resourcing limitations can also significantly affect the progress of studies and the quality of research (Stanciu & Nistor, 2025). Limited and poor interactions due to lack of time, space and resources can hinder the development of good relationships and mutual trust between HDRs and their supervisors. High-quality interactions are very important in developing HDR's skills and knowledge as they strive for self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to develop significant and original contributions to knowledge. In this chapter we discuss how you can use technology in your supervision to enhance interactions.

Cognitive and affective capacity in supervision

The cognitive and affective capacity of higher degree researchers can impact the effectiveness of supervision (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2024). Stress can influence the ability to concentrate, as problem solving can create a sense of success and build self-confidence. These capacities influence learning, processing of information, analytical and problem solving and communication with supervisors. Building these capacities can help create a learning environment that supports the success of higher degree researchers. Understanding these capacities may assist you in creating such environments online and virtually.

Cognitive capacity is related to mental processes involving thinking and problem solving (Forbrig, 2020). Supervisors play a role in conveying information clearly and helping HDRs engage in analytical and critically thinking to evaluate literature, design research, analyse data and draw valid conclusions. Supervisors can encourage analytical and critical thinking through challenging questions, in-depth discussions and training researchers to defend arguments.

Affective capacity is related to the emotions, feelings, motivations and attitudes of researchers (Alves et al., 2024; McCormick & de Rivera, 2024). HDRs affective capacity can impact their engagement, resilience and, persistence as they progress their doctoral studies. Internal motivation, such as the desire to graduate and advance career goals, can build resilience and persistence when facing learning and research challenges. External motivation, such as success in completion of a paper or presentation, can also supports increased motivation and study progress. Self-efficacy, belief in their ability to succeed in studies, helps researchers continue to strive to achieve a series of small goals that can lead ultimately to degree completion.

Mutual trust and respect displayed through the HDR-supervisor relationship supports HDR's in maintaining emotional wellbeing and motivation (Razaque et al., 2022). Positive supervisory support can help maintain students' interest and engagement in enriching discussions. Technological tools and resources can help supervisors create empathetic and supportive online and virtual learning environments.

Computer-mediated communication and Social Presence Theory

For those supervising higher degree researchers unable to attend campus the value of technology-enhanced practice emerges. Higher degree researchers with heavy work and family commitments often experience difficulty in attending on campus. Disability or temporary illness can also be a hurdle to attending meetings face-to-face. The increasing presence of external study options may mean higher degree researchers are located in geographical isolation from their supervisors.

Accounting for these theories as you consider use of technology in your supervisory practice will assist you in realising its benefits and overcoming its limitations. Concepts drawn from Computer-mediated

communication and Social Presence Theory can assist you in bridging the gap between online and face-to-face communication.

Computer-mediated communication can eliminate the time and geographical constraints of in-person communication. Applications include electronic resource sites, remote databases and information managers. Text messaging, chat rooms, video conferencing, web-based forums, and other functions of these applications can assist to maintain meaningful connections with geographically separated people (Maíz-Arévalo, 2015).

Social presence theory states that each media gives rise to a different degree of reception of message material in an interaction (Short, et al., 1976). The affective component of social presence is dealing with emotions generated through virtual interactions. While the cognitive component deals with the ability to form and identify meaning in relationships with people in other environments. If these two components are not present in communication, knowledge sharing is limited (Kang & Lee, 2018).

Short's theory promotes a virtual environment that fosters learning through three main elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and instructional presence (Whiteside, 2015). When working in a virtual environment, trust is crucial (Esmaeili et al., 2020). A framework of five integrated elements is provided to enhance social presence. Those elements are affective engagement, community cohesion, instructor engagement, interaction intensity, and knowledge and experience.

Accounting for these theories as you consider use of technology in your supervisory practice will assist you in realising its benefits and overcoming its limitations.

Benefits of technology in supporting HDR supervision

Technology can assist supervisors in overcoming some of the issues faced by HDRs, especially those who may have difficulty meeting their supervisors in person. Check with your university to see what platforms are available, and what support is available for new users.

Video conference platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Skype allow HDRs to meet virtually with their supervisors overcoming geographical distances. Screen sharing allows for the synchronous viewing of documents to enable discussion of dissertation drafts, presentations and research data.

Online document sharing platforms such as Google Docs and Microsoft Word Online allow asynchronous collaborations as track changes allow teams to see one another's contributions to a shared document. Higher degree researchers can receive feedback and track changes in real time. Use of virtual whiteboards during video conferenced meetings can allow brainstorming of ideas, visualisation of concepts and interactive discussions.

Many advancing technologies are transforming the practices of all researchers. Data analysis software

programs such as SPSS, NVivo and ATLAS.ti accelerate the processing and analysis of research data. Citation management applications such as Mendeley, Zotero and EndNote automate the management and storage of reference collections. Based on in document citations, these can automatically generate reference lists in various styles. Most university libraries provide these applications and advice on their use to facilitate HDRs use of them in their research work (See Volume 1: 10. Developing Information Literacy in Higher Degree Researchers).

As supervisors, you can use virtual meetings to support your higher degree researchers to build networks, engage in communities of practice and develop relationships with other researchers in related disciplines and complementary projects. You can also assist them in adopting rigorous online data gathering methods and methodologies that may save time and resources while generating high-quality data.

Recently, artificial intelligence developments have been widely discussed. Large-language models and generative AI platforms can help in searching for relevant literature, analysing texts and brainstorming research ideas; but their application should be cited and their output thoroughly checked.

Limitations of HDR Supervision with technology

Although various technologies continue to be developed to support the learning and supervision of HDRs, these technologies require skilled application and have limitations. Video conferencing platforms offer limited interaction and communication due to the absence of nonverbal cues. Lost or limited body language can confound the interpretation of emotions that would be clear in a face-to-face context.

Limited visibility of the broader environment can make participants unaware of the circumstances of others (e.g., different time zones; climatic conditions, poor access to power or internet services, etc.). These circumstances can impact the ability of participants to hear or engage in online discussions. Circumstances can distract and interfere with the concentration of both HDRs and supervisors. An imminent deadline not shared can lead to participants engaging in offline work during a video conference session, reducing their focus and comprehension. Meetings scheduled at 3 am can lead to participants having difficulty engaging.

Apply technology-enhanced supervisory practices

Online learning has three components that need to be considered: (1) educational media, (2) research materials, (3) online learning media. These three components are inter-related and enable the use of technology as a strategy to facilitate the higher degree research process (Dabbagh & Ritland, 2005).

Technology-based learning has indeed been implemented into the education system in Indonesia in recent years and became significantly more important as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected almost all corners of the country and the world. Online supervision can help researchers foster learning independence and encourages active interaction between individuals. The main characteristic of online supervision is

that it makes it easy and flexible for higher degree researchers and their supervisors to work collaboratively (Gunawan, Suranti, & Fhatoroni, 2020) e.g. through a platform such as Zoom which enables supervisors and researchers to meet online.

In practice

The Covid-19 pandemic has been affecting all parts of the world since 2019. The education sector has also been impacted by this pandemic. Campus policies urge all universities to implement online learning methods, requiring all educational components to implement distance learning. Supervisor guidance via Zoom can be a unique and effective experience. The first step that must be agreed upon is the meeting time. Differences in time zones in various parts of the world sometimes mean that guidance meetings are held at night or early in the morning. HDRs access online meetings via links and feel anxious about slow internet connections. HDRs sometimes have to prepare backup internet connections to ensure smooth supervision meetings. Obstacles still arise, such as malfunctioning microphones, inaudible sound, blurry cameras, and finding a quiet place at home. Despite the limitations, supervision in online meetings supports smooth learning. Despite the physical distance, interactions can be very personal. Video features allow for virtual eye contact, body language, and facial expressions to be visible, which are important for building rapport and trust. Supervisors can use features like screen sharing to show documents, presentations, or other online resources in real time to help facilitate discussions and provide support and guidance on the development of research outputs.

Resources such as laptops and smartphones can guarantee movement that allows higher degree researchers to conduct research and work with their supervisors almost anywhere. Laptops and smartphones have internet capabilities so that HDRs can attend meetings virtually. However, virtual or online supervision has its own challenges in Indonesia, for example the availability of internet service facilities. It can be difficult for higher degree researchers to engage with the supervisors online because not all areas where they live get a good cellular signal. Lack of internet facilities and internet networks in remote areas may also hamper research progress.

While internet accessibility can be an issue, another problem is the cost constraint for example video conferencing using the zoom application uses up a lot of internet, but online activities or discussions using alternative instant messaging applications do not drain a lot of quota.

(see also Volume 1 Chapter 6. Creating Successful Higher Degree Researcher Pathways in a Developing Country – Papua New Guinea)

In practice

Undertaking a higher degree by research and engaging with supervisors can lead to costs that are sometimes overlooked. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, HDRs had to purchase double internet data to ensure smooth supervision meetings. Supervision, which was previously conducted face-to-face, was now conducted online, limiting access to free discussions with supervisors. The advent of technology, which seeks to adapt to real-life situations with elements designed to enhance communication makes meetings between supervisors and their HDR students much easier, but it also has some limitation that contrast with being able to meet face to face. Communication difficulties and time constraints ultimately led to the practice of sending research progress files via email.

Case Study

The morning sun wasn't as bright as Rara's laptop screen. Every Monday at 9:00 a.m., Rara, a higher degree researcher in a metropolitan city, had to struggle to attend her thesis guidance meeting with her supervisor via Zoom. Distances between countries were measured not only in kilometres, but also in megabits per second.

Internet access in Indonesia was an unstable luxury. Cellular networks were often like the wind, sometimes strong, more often a gentle breeze, or even completely absent.

"Rara, how's the progress on chapter two?" the voice of Rara's advisor, her patient lecturer, was cut off by static.

On Rara's screen, her advisor's face froze into a mosaic of pixels. "Yes, Sir, chapter two... I've revised the thesis framework section..."

Suddenly, the Zoom app displayed a "Reconnecting..." notification. Rara panicked. She immediately raised her phone high, searching for the best signal in the corner of the room she had marked with tape on the floor—the only spot where a 4G signal would occasionally reach.

Sweat began to pour, not from the heat, but from stress. The Zoom window displayed the lecturer's face again, this time with the microphone automatically muted.

"Rara, I can't hear you. Could you repeat that?" my supervisor asked, his voice clear for a moment.

"Sorry, sir, the network here is a bit..." Again, the connection was lost. This time, Zoom kicked Rara out of the meeting entirely.

Rara took a deep breath. This limited access not only hampered the guidance but also drained

her mentally. She felt left behind by her friends in other countries who could hold smooth discussions for hours.

She tried to contact her supervisor via WhatsApp message.

Rara: Sir, sorry, it's been cut off again. The signal is completely gone. Can I just send the revisions via email and you provide written feedback?

Supervisor: Sure, Rara. I understand your constraints. Just send them.

The supervision meeting, which was supposed to be interactive and take an hour, and guidance/feedback was to be provided via slow email exchanges over the next two days.

Limited access forced Rara to adapt. She couldn't rely on real-time communication. She learned to summarize her questions into concise and clear bullet points in emails, maximizing every character she typed. She became more independent in her research, as instant assistance from her supervisor was impossible.

Rara's story is a vivid illustration of how technology, which is supposed to bridge distances, instead highlights the gaps in digital infrastructure. Zoom tutoring is a modern solution, but its effectiveness relies heavily on a stable network, a privilege not enjoyed equally by everyone.

Face-to-face supervising can enable effective communication because mutual access to nonverbal messages, such as hand gestures or shoulder shrugs can be more easily captured (Hidayat & Noeraida, 2020). Your skills as a communicator can greatly influence how higher degree researchers receive and respond to your suggestions and feedback. Indonesian students agree that online supervision using Zoom is more student-centred. It allows them to bring up issues of student responsibility and autonomy in learning (Bastola and Hu, 2024; van der Goot *et al.*, 2024)**.** However it can be more complicated in comparison to face to face when the nuances of non-verbal communication can be lost.

In practice

Case Study: A Helpful Screen

That day, at 10 a.m., my meeting with my advisor, an academic known for being very meticulous, began. My heart had been pounding since morning. I had prepared all my materials, my laptop was on, and I sat at my desk with mixed emotions.

At 9:55 a.m., I joined the Zoom meeting. My advisor's face appeared on the screen, her reading glasses ready.

"Good morning, Rara. Shall we begin?" she greeted kindly, but the expression in her eyes still felt intimidating.

"Morning,. Yes," I replied, trying not to sound shaky.

At that moment, I was so grateful that we were meeting via Zoom. Behind my laptop screen, my feet were already cold, my fingers were fidgeting under the table, and a cold sweat was forming on my temples. However, on my advisor's screen, all I could see was my calm face (trying to be as calm as possible) and my focused gaze on the presentation material.

I began explaining chapter one. A few times, I faltered slightly due to nervousness, but I quickly regained control. Another advantage of Zoom is that I can pin small notes to the edges of the screen that aren't visible to the camera. These notes act as a life preserver when I start to panic.

"Your explanation is quite structured, Rara," commented my mentor after I finished my presentation. "There are a few points that need revision, but overall, it's good."

I immediately breathed a sigh of relief. She had no idea how chaotic I'd felt during the 30 minute meeting.

Only after the guidance was over, after pressing the "Leave Meeting" button, was I able to release all my tension. I laughed to myself, realizing how my screen had become the perfect shield to hide my nervousness. Technology can truly be a lifesaver in critical moments.

Conclusion

Technological advancement has allowed for the development of tools and resources that enable online connections between higher degree researchers and their supervisors. Incorporating technology into your professional practice can enable flexibility in the ways you engage with, and support, your HDRs. They can offer you opportunities to be more responsive when unexpected events occur, such as a global pandemic. These technologies can also support research activities such collecting and analysing data, generating reference lists as well as developing and reviewing dissertation drafts.

Coupling use of these resources with understanding of the key components of Computer Mediated Communication and Social Presence Theory can help you to foster a sense of community and develop meaningful relationships without having to mitigate issues related to space and location.

Accounting for the cognitive and affective capacities of your supervisory team and HDRs can help you create high quality online research education environments. Building cognitive capacity enables HDRs to critically to evaluate literature, design research, analyse data, draw valid conclusions and defend arguments.

Accounting for affective capacity means that feelings, motivation and attitudes can used to build solid foundations for positive relationships and successful higher degree research projects. Exploring the technological resources available, especially if you are not that familiar with them, can not only enhance your professional practice but provide you with effective tools to develop the skills and knowledge of your higher degree researcher.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Aliabadi, K., & Zare, M. (2017). The social presence theory in distance education: The role of social presence in web-based educational environment. *Future of Medical Education Journal, 7*(4), 53–54.

Alves, P., Lopes, A., Cruz-Correia, R., & Menezes, I. (2024). Predictors of emotional engagement in doctoral education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *50*(6), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2369704

Barton, H. J., Pflaster, E., Loganathar, S., Werner, A., Tarfa, A., Wilkins, D., Ehlenbach, M. L., Katz, B., Coller, R. J., Valdez, R., & Werner, N. E. (2023). What makes a home? Designing home personas to represent the homes of families caring for children with medical complexity. *Applied Ergonomics*,*106*, Article 103900. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2022.103900 🔒

Basic, G. (2021). Ethical issues in doctoral supervision: An analysis of inherent conflicts and roles in supervision practice. *Advances in Education Science*, *3(2),* 17-48. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7492713

Bastola, M.N. and Hu, G. (2024) Engagement with supervisory feedback on master's theses: Do supervisors and students see eye to eye? *Assessing Writing*, *60*, Article 100841. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100841 🔒

Bhattacharjee, A., & Sarkar, A. (2024). Abusive supervision: A systematic literature review. In *Management Review Quarterly*, *74*, 1-34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-022-00291-8 🔒

Cale, A. S., & McNulty, M. A. (2022). An Exploration of metacognitive practices in gross anatomy

educators. *The FASEB Journal*, *36*(S1), 1485–1494. https://doi.org/10.1096/fasebj.2022.36.s1.r2386

Chen, J., Chan, C., Man, V., & Tsang, E. (2021). Helping students from different disciplines with their final year/capstone project: Supervisors' and students' needs and requests. In B. Morrison, J. Chen. L. Lin, & A. Urmston (Eds.), *English across the curriculum: Voices from around the world* (pp. 91- 106). University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/INT-B.2021.1220.2.05

Esmaeili, L., Mardani, S., Golpayegani, S. A. H., & Madar, Z. Z. (2020). A novel tourism recommender system in the context of social commerce. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *149*, Article 113301. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2020.113301

Forbrig, D. (2020). What keeps them interested? Influences on the stability of research career intentions in the course of academic qualification. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *15*, 217–235. https://doi.org/10.28945/4537

Hou, Y., & Yu, Z. (2023). A bibliometric analysis of synchronous computer-mediated communication in language learning using VOSviewer and CitNetExplorer. *Education Sciences*, *13*(2), Article 125. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020125

Holloway, E. L., & Neufeldt, S. A. (1995). Supervision: Its contributions to treatment efficacy. J*ournal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 63*(2), 207–213. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.63.2.207

Jacobsen, M., Friesen, S., & Becker, S. (2024). Learning doctoral supervision in education: A case study of on-the-job development of effective mentoring practices. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *19*, 1–24.https://doi.org/10.28945/5375

Jia, R., Li, R., Yu, M., & Wang, S. (2017). E-commerce purchase prediction approach by user behavior data. *2017 International Conference on Computer, Information and Telecommunication Systems (CITS), 1–5.* https://doi.org/10.1109/CITS.2017.8035294

Kang, Y. J., & Lee, W. J. (2018). Effects of sense of control and social presence on customer experience and e-service quality. *Information Development*, *34*(3), 242–260. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666916686820

Kreijns, K., Xu, K., & Weidlich, J. (2022). Social presence: Conceptualization and measurement. *Educational Psychology Review*, *34*(1), 139-170. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09623-8

Lamerichs, J., & Te Molder, H. F. M. (2003). Computer-mediated communication: From a cognitive to a discursive model. *New Media and Society*, *5*(4), 451–473. https://doi.org/10.1177/146144480354001

Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2015). Typographic alteration in formal computer-mediated communication. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *212*, 140–145. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.311

Martin, A. E. R., & Kayingo, G. (2025). Doctoral education for physician assistants/associates: trends and characteristics in the U.S. *BMC Medical Education*, *25*(1), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06606-5

McCormick, A., & de Rivera, L. (2024). Love and pedagogy in doctoral supervision: aA duoethnography navigating complex positionings within decolonising contexts. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, *33*(5), 1705-1725. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2024.2386046

Nielsen, M. I. S. W. (2017). Computer-mediated communication and self-awareness – A selective review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *76*, 554–560. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.08.015

Panda, S., Dash, M., John, J., Rath, K., Debata, A., Swain, D., Mohanty, K., & Eustace-cook, J. (2021). Challenges faced by student nurses and midwives in clinical learning environment – A systematic review and meta-synthesis. *Nurse Education Today*, *101*, Article 104875. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.104875

Razaque, A., Rizvi, S., Jaro, M., Almiani, M., & Al, A. (2022). State-of-art review of information diffusion models and their impact on social network vulnerabilities. *Journal of King Saud University – Computer and Information Sciences*, *34*(1), 1275–1294. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jksuci.2019.08.008

Richardson, J., & Lowenthal, P. (2017). Instructor social presence. In L. Whiteside, A. Garrett Dikkers, & K. Swan (Eds.), *Social presence in online learning: Multiple perspectives on practice and research* (pp. 86–98). Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447023

Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications.* John Wiley & Sons.

Stanciu, I. D., & Nistor, N. (2025). Doctoral capstone theories as indicators of university rankings: Insights from a machine learning approach. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *164*, Article 108504. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2024.108504

Sunarsi, D., Djulius, H., Affandi, A., Priadana, S., Narimawati, U., & Sudirman, I. (2025). Exploring strategies to manage expectational knowledge in higher education after COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *19*(2), 699–710. https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i2.21784

van der Goot, W.E., Ven Yperen, N. W., Albers, C. J., Jaarsma, A. D. C., & Duvivier, R. J. (2024) Effects of (de)motivating supervision styles on junior doctors' intrinsic motivation through basic psychological need frustration and satisfaction: An experimental vignette study. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, *30*, 401–426. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-024-10344-0

Wang, J., Liardét, C., Lum, J., Riazi, M., Wang, J., Liardét, C., & Lum, J. (2024). Co-authorship between doctoral students and supervisors: Motivations, reservations, and challenges. *Higher Education Research & Development, 43*(7), 1615-1631. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2354253

Whiteside, A. L. (2015). Introducing the social presence model to explore online and blended learning experiences. *Online Learning Journal*, *19*(2), 4–5. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v19i2.453

Yao, M. Z., & Ling, R. (2020). "What Is Computer-Mediated Communication?"—An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *25*(1), 4–8. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmz027

14. HELPING HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCHERS NAVIGATE OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING

Kylie Pappalardo

Why read this chapter?

Open access publishing seeks to remove barriers to the free circulation of knowledge for several reasons, including:

- Equitable access to research for *all* researchers.
- Supporting research collaboration and translation.
- Enhancing research integrity by ensuring that research is underpinned by the best available evidence and ethical practice.
- Delivering value for money to the taxpayers who fund public research.

This chapter explores the relevance of open access publishing for higher degree researchers and provides guidance for supervisors who are helping higher degree researchers to navigate the landscape of academic publishing.

This chapter covers:

- What is open access?
- The benefits of open access publishing.
- The challenges that higher degree researchers may face in open access publishing.
- How supervisors can support higher degree researchers in making their research open access.

Open access publishing – benefits

Many higher degree researchers (HDRs) will express an interest in publishing during their research degree. HDRs may want to publish their research not only to contribute to the social good by sharing their

research findings, but also to build a "track record" of their research achievements within their scholarly community. A strong research track record can help HDRs be more competitive for jobs, establish their reputation in their field, and build their research networks.

Open access has been an integral part of the academic publishing landscape for at least 20 years (Catterall et al., 2025), but it is still poorly understood. This is partly because publishing – and all that goes with it – is not a formal part of research training in many academic institutions. How and where to publish, and what inclusion in a journal means for future circulation of a research paper, are matters that are often left to a supervisor's guidance. Consequently, higher degree researchers may have questions for their supervisors about whether open access publishing is the right choice for them.

What is open access?

At its core, open access is the principle that the results of research – particularly research that has been supported by public funds – should be free to access. In academic publishing, open access implies that "research articles should be freely, immediately and permanently available online to anyone, rather than locked away in subscription journals as many currently are" (Corbyn, 2009).

There are several methods or models for achieving open access:

- **Green open access** occurs when researchers publish in traditional, closed-access journals, but secure permission from the publisher to make a version of their article openly accessible. This is usually achieved by uploading the article to an online open access repository, such as the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) or a university repository. Often, the version of the article uploaded is the document as accepted for publication but prior to the publisher's editing, formatting and layout.
- **Gold open access** is open access facilitated by publishers. Essentially, publishers shift the costs of publishing from the reader to the author; instead of charging subscription fees to end-users, publishers charge "article processing fees" (APCs) to researchers.
- **Diamond open access** is publication in an open access journal that does not charge fees to either authors or readers. These journals are usually supported by an academic institution or a learned society.

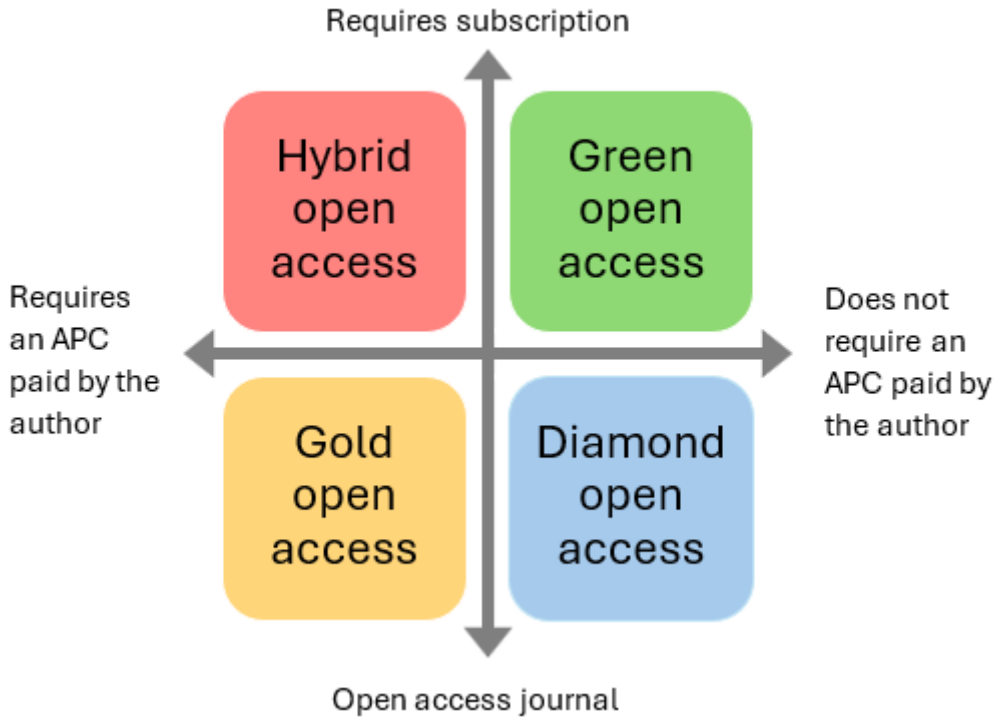


Figure 14.1: Open access models for journal publishing. Adapted from: Berkesand (2021, p.7), CC BY 4.0.

Journal publishers have employed successful marketing strategies to promote gold open access as the preferred model, with the result that for many researchers, the concept of open access has become synonymous with the need to pay APCs (Bowrey et al., 2025). APCs are notoriously variable, ranging from several hundred dollars to over $10,000 USD for a single article (Bowrey et al., 2024). Publishers are generally not transparent about how APCs are calculated, and it is not clear why some journals charge so much. This has caused some researchers to become sceptical of the gold open access model or open access more broadly.

Why publish open access?

There are enormous potential benefits from open access to research outputs, both for researchers and society. There are many reasons why supervisors might want to support higher degree researchers to consider open access publishing.

For the public, open access seeks to distribute knowledge equitably among all who can make use of it, even if they cannot afford to pay. This is especially beneficial for researchers and communities at poorly funded institutions or in low-income countries, and for professionals, practitioners and general readers who do not have access to subscription databases. When all researchers have comprehensive access to the results of the work of others, it is less likely that research will be unnecessarily duplicated. Additionally, where research is government-funded, there is a strong argument that the responsible spending of public money requires the

results of that research to be available to all. In short, open access treats knowledge as a public good rather than a financial commodity.

For higher degree researchers, open access can extend the reach of their research. There is considerable evidence that open access publishing – whether through the green, gold or diamond models – increases citations to journal articles (Wang et al, 2018). Increasingly, researchers are evaluated (for jobs, promotions, grants) not just on whether their research is good, but on whether it is impactful. In what has become known as the impact and engagement agenda (Gunn & Mintrom, 2018; Smith et al., 2020), governments and universities encourage or require researchers to demonstrate how their research is used in the world beyond the scholarly context. Wide dissemination of research beyond the limited subscriber base of closed-access journals can facilitate the broader uptake and impact of research (Bowrey et al., 2025). It also increases individual markers of research impact, such as h-index measures, which indicate numbers of article citations.

Figure 14.2 Benefits of open access publishing CC BY 4.0.

It is important to note that HDRs may be subject to university or – where their research is supported by grants or scholarships – funding body policies that require researchers to make their publications available open access. For example, the Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom and the Gates Foundation in the United States have long required the published research they fund to be made open access (Gates Foundation 2025; Wellcome 2025). University policies are most likely to point researchers to the green model of open access, so that HDRs may be encouraged to deposit their work into an institutional or discipline-specific online repository.

Open access publishing – challenges

Higher degree researchers are at a unique point in their research careers: they may have strong ambitions to publish and to establish themselves in their research fields, but the means to do these things are likely unfamiliar to them. They may lack the knowledge or confidence to successfully disseminate their research through established channels. Where they want to pursue open access publishing, they have less access to funding for APCs and less power than more established researchers in pushing back against any closed-access publishing norms that exist in their institution or research discipline. This is where the role of supervisor is paramount in supporting and empowering HDRs in their pursuit of open access publishing.

HDRs may receive conflicting messages about publishing priorities

Early career researchers (ECRs) who have gained their research degree within the last five years and higher degree researchers are particularly susceptible to the pressure to achieve "quality" publications to establish their research track record. HDRs are likely to receive advice that to achieve career success, they should publish in prestigious journals. For example, in fieldwork conducted across Australian universities between 2020 and 2022, a range of researchers including HDRs and ECRs participated in interviews where they responded to questions concerning their experiences with and opinions about research policies and practices in Australian higher education. These participants, who included ECRs and HDRs, reported feeling consistent pressure to publish, and that the message received from university management was to publish in "high-ranking journals" even if those journals were closed access (Bowrey et al., 2025).

HDRs may receive conflicting messages about whether to pursue open access publishing. These messages can come from a range of sources – mentors, friends and colleagues, fellow HDRs, and university administration. Higher degree researchers may struggle to reconcile the tension between aiming for real-world impact and publishing in a high-quality journal.

Vignette

Holly is an ECR who recently completed her PhD. She has a one-year teaching and research contract at a university and hopes to turn that into an ongoing position. She is anxious about impressing the Head of School and Dean of Faculty, who make hiring decisions. Holly seeks advice from several people about establishing her research track record to be competitive for ongoing employment.

Her PhD supervisor, a professor, tells her: "Just get into the best journal you can, it doesn't matter whether it is open access or not".

Her friend, a fellow ECR, says: "What the university cares about now is impact and engagement. You get more engagement if you publish open access."

The university commercialisation office thinks that Holly's research may have commercial value and be of interest to industry. They advise Holly not to publish too openly, because it might impact her ability to get a patent (which is based on the novelty of information).

The university librarian tells her that open access publishing will expand the reach of her work, resulting in more citations and ultimately a higher h-index for Holly.

Holly is not sure how to balance this conflicting advice. What should she do?

Supervisors are well placed to help HDRs navigate these tensions. The reality is that for HDRs trying to establish themselves, open access publishing may be a lower priority than being published in the top journal in their field. If better public access to research is the goal, then I argue that it is more established researchers who should take up the mantle of open access publishing. For established researchers, there is less at stake in pushing back against closed access publishing norms. At this early stage of their academic career, HDRs should be encouraged to publish in the outlets that best further their career goals. However, it is a good idea to speak to HDRs about open access so that they understand their options. As explained below, there are ways to support HDRs who value open access publishing that do not compromise their career aspirations.

HDRs may not have access to funds for APCs

Many well-regarded journals offer open access publishing options to their authors. Often, this requires payment of an article processing charge (APC). These charges vary from journal to journal but can be significant. Universities generally do not have clear or steady budgets for APCs, especially for higher degree researchers. Researchers must often cobble together funding for APCs from multiple different sources, such as external research grants, Faculty and School research budgets, and library budgets.

Trying to find money to pay for APCs is likely to be stressful for HDRs. Where they do have access to research funds, paying for APCs might mean making the difficult choice between getting published in an open access journal or using research funds for other opportunities, such as attending conferences. In the same Australian fieldwork discussed above, interviewed researchers told stories of early career and higher degree researchers paying for APCs from their own personal finances (Bowrey et al., 2025). This is not something that HDRs should have to do to succeed in their research careers.

Supervisors may have access to pots of funding that higher degree researchers do not to pay for APCs. In some cases, this may mean co-authoring with HDRs to ensure that publications are eligible for funding. Alternatively, supervisors can support HDRs by directing them to relevant diamond open access journals in their field, or by recommending green open access models that are free to researchers.

HDRs may have less negotiating power with publishers

Green open access models, which involve depositing a version of the published article in an online open access repository, are likely to be more accessible to higher degree researchers than paying APCs for gold open access. However, this model requires the researcher to have the necessary legal rights to deposit the article online. Researchers will, in general, own the copyright in their own work, at least before any interactions with a publisher. Publishers will frequently require the transfer of copyright ownership prior to publication, though, and this may leave researchers without the residual rights for green open access. Once copyright ownership is transferred, the author is extremely limited in what they can do with their own work unless they have the publisher's permission.

Publisher's contracts set the terms by which research can be accessed and disseminated. These tend to be standard form contracts, and there is little opportunity for researchers to negotiate the terms. There is a definite power imbalance between publishers and HDRs, particularly because publishers control the means by which researchers' work is validated within their research communities. The bargaining disparity is exacerbated by automated systems that require authors to accept a publishing agreement in order to submit their work or proceed with the publication process. Higher degree researchers may click the "accept" button even if they have concerns about the publishing agreement, simply because they perceive that they have no other choice.

Supervisors can advocate for HDRs in various ways. They may do so directly with the publisher in relation to the higher degree researcher's article. Journal editors may respond more favourably to a senior researcher than to a junior one. To pursue green open access, a researcher needs at least the right to "self-archive" or deposit a version of their article into a university or discipline-specific open access repository. It is common for publishers to agree to a version that does not have the publisher's formatting, layout and page numbering. Even where publishers agree to a pre-formatted version of the article being made open access, it is also beneficial to seek agreement for the published version of the article to be made available after a delay. Again, publishers will often agree to a 12- to 24-month "embargo period", after which the published version can be made open access. Supervisors can also advocate for these permissions when publishing their own work or, more strongly, refuse to transfer copyright ownership altogether, instead granting the publisher a limit right to publish the work (but not to control all interactions with the work). The more researchers that seek open access rights, the more likely it is that publishers will adjust their standard contracts to permit these practices.

HDRs may be susceptible to predatory publishers

An unfortunate consequence of gold open access has been the rise of predatory publishing. Predatory journals charge authors to publish but do not provide the quality assurance services of traditional scholarly journals. For example, articles may not be peer reviewed. In 2019, leading scholars and publishers from ten countries agreed on the following definition of predatory publishing: "Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or

misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices" (Grudniewicz et al., 2019). It can be detrimental to a researcher's reputation to publish in a journal that other researchers know to be predatory and therefore of lower quality (Kinde, 2021).

Higher degree researchers may struggle to distinguish between predatory journals and reputable open access journals, for many reasons. One reason is that HDRs are generally less familiar with the established journals in their research field. Other reasons include that predatory publishers may target HDRs with marketing emails and offers to publish their work, that predatory publishers may lie about a journal's impact factor, and that predatory journals sometimes have titles that are deceptively close to those of reputable journals (Kinde, 2021).

Supervisors can support HDRs by having conversations with them about any intended outlets for publication, and by showing them how to search for journals in bibliographic and indexing databases like Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science and the Directory of Open Access Journals. Supervisors can also refer HDRs to helpful online resources for combatting predatory publishing, such as the *Think, Check, Submit* website, which provides researchers with a checklist for determining whether journals are legitimate. The checklist includes questions such as: have you read papers in this journal before? Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses? Is it clear what fees will be charged? And: are articles indexed or archived in an easily discoverable database? The website was formed with contributions from the Association of University Presses, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and the ISSN International Centre, among others.

Indigenous knowledges may not be suitable for open access

Special considerations can arise where a higher degree researcher is a First Nations person, or where their research concerns Indigenous knowledges. In these situations, it is important to consider carefully whether open access publication is appropriate for the researcher and their work. Open access publishing can benefit Indigenous researchers and communities – for these communities, the costs of accessing closed-access research publications are typically prohibitive. But open access can undermine the principle of self-determination and the right that Indigenous Peoples have to be consulted about uses of their knowledge and resources (Bowrey et al., 2022). Care must be taken that culturally sensitive information is not widely circulated, and that Indigenous persons involved in research have authorship and agency in the resulting research outputs. Indigenous research participants should be properly consulted before decisions about open access publishing are made. It is important to speak frankly and openly with HDRs about these considerations when their research involves Indigenous persons or knowledges.

Apply these ideas in your practice

Open access publishing is a rising tide that is designed to lift all boats. It ensures that public funds for

research are spent responsibly and that scholars and the public can access important research that can benefit them and society. Ways that supervisors can support HDRs in their open access goals include:

- Be a good role model and academic citizen by publishing your own work as open access wherever possible. Be aware, though, that it may not be reasonable to expect the same from HDRs who are experiencing different pressures to establish their research track record and who may not have access to funds to pay for article processing charges.
- Speak to HDRs about the benefits of open access and remind them that gold open access is not the only way. Help them to explore what diamond open access journals exist in their research field and point them to open access repositories for depositing their work online.
- Get to know your university librarians and encourage HDRs to do the same. Librarians are a fount of knowledge about open access publishing – they can assist with finding appropriate open access journals and repositories for research publications. Librarians will also know if your institution has pre-existing arrangements with publishers to enable affiliated researchers' articles to be made automatically open access, without payment of an APC, in certain journals. These arrangements between universities and publishers bundle subscriptions and APCs across groups of journals, so that the costs are borne by the university and not individual researchers. They are known as "Read and Publish" agreements. HDRs can also consult the University Copyright Officer if they have questions about publishing agreements. Sometimes, university libraries have budgets to assist with APC payments.
- Think about the ways that you can change publishing culture in your university and discipline. Lend your voice in support of open access where you can – speak up at university and faculty meetings, question publishers about their standard practices, and prioritise peer review for diamond or affordable gold access journals.

Focus questions

- Do you understand the different avenues of open access publishing?
- What are the benefits of open access?
- How can you tell the difference between a reputable open access publisher and a predatory publisher?
- How do you feel about the payment of article processing charges (APCs) and what do you consider to be a reasonable fee?

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Berkesand, P. (2021). *Organising and launching a scholarly open access journal*. Linköping University Electronic Press. https://doi.org/10.3384/9789179296490

Bowrey, K., Watson, I. & Hadley, M. (2022) Decolonising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. *Australian Universities Review*, 64(1), 54-64. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4220370

Bowrey, K., Cochrane, T., Hadley, M., McKeough, J., Pappalardo, K. & Weatherall, K. (2024). Managing ownership of copyright in research publications to increase the public benefits from research. *Federal Law Review*, 52(1), 3-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0067205X231213676

Bowrey, K., Cochrane, T., Hadley, M., McKeough, J., Pappalardo, K., Watson, I. & Weatherall, K. (2025). "Just tick the box": Researcher understandings of intellectual property and open access research policies in publication practices at Australian universities. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 13(1), eP18403. https://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.18403

Catterall, J., Barbour, V., Tairi, K., (2025). Filling the basket with knowledge: The evolution of open access in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, 12(2). https://doi.org/10.31274/jlsc.18317

Corbyn, Z. Learning to share. *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12 November 2009, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/learning-to-share/409049.article

Gates Foundation. (2025). Open access policy. https://openaccess.gatesfoundation.org/open-access-policy/

Grudniewicz, A., Moher, D., Cobey, K., Bryson, G., Cukier, S., Allen, K., Arden, C., Balcom, L., Barros, T., Berger, M., Buitrago Ciro, J., Cugusi, L. Donaldson, M., Egger, M., Graham, I., Hodgkinson, M., Khan, K., Mabizela, M., Manca, A., Milzow, K., Mouton, J., Muchenje, M., Olijhoek, T., Ommaya, A., Patwardhan, B., Poff, D., Proulx, L., Rodger, M., Severin, A., Strinzel, M., Sylos-Labini, M., Tamblyn, R., van Niekerk, M., Wicherts, J. & Lalu, M. (2019) Predatory journals: No definition, no defence. *Nature,* 576, 210-212. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03759-y

Gunn, A. & Mintrom, M. (2018) Measuring research impact in Australia. *Australian Universities' Review*, 60(1), 9-15. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1169172.pdf [PDF 141KB]

Kinde, A.A. (2021) Avoiding predatory journals and publishers: A cross-sectional study. *European Science Editing*, 47. https://doi.org/10.3897/ese.2021.e52348

Smith, K.E., Bandola-Gill, J., Meer, N., Stewart, E. & Watermeyer, R. (2020) *The impact agenda: Controversies, consequences and challenges*. Bristol University Press.

UNESCO (2021). *Recommendations on Open Science*. https://doi.org/10.54677/MNMH8546

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Sustainable Development Goals*. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Wang, Z., Glänzel, W. & Chen, Y. (2018). How self-archiving influences the citation impact of a paper: A bibliometric analysis of arXiv papers and nonarXiv papers in the field of information science and library science. *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Science and Technology Indicators* (STI2018). https://hdl.handle.net/1887/65329

Wellcome. (2025). Open access policy. https://wellcome.org/research-funding/guidance/ending-a-grant/open-access-guidance/open-access-policy

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

15. SUPERVISORS WHO SUPPORT: BUILDING WELLBEING LITERACY IN HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH

Narelle Lemon

Why read this chapter?

Higher degree research presents unique wellbeing challenges due to its prolonged timeline, independent nature, and often isolating experience. The supervisor-higher degree researcher relationship is central to the higher degree research experience, with its quality directly influencing wellbeing, satisfaction, and academic progress. This chapter explores how building a shared wellbeing literacy between supervisors and higher degree researchers can create supportive environments that promote both academic excellence and personal flourishing.

Key learnings from this chapter:

- Understanding wellbeing literacy as a concept for supporting higher degree researchers.
- Exploring five dimensions of self-care (self-compassion, mindful awareness, time, habits, and empowerment) as a framework.
- Practical strategies for supervisors to support higher degree research wellbeing.
- Tools for fostering wellbeing conversations in supervision that build a wellbeing literacy.

The unique wellbeing challenges in higher degree research

Wellbeing in higher degree research presents distinct challenges that set it apart from other educational contexts. Unlike structured coursework, higher degree research programs require researchers to engage in sustained, independent research, often in isolation. This prolonged timeline, which can span several years, contributes to heightened stress, uncertainty, and the risk of burnout (Barry et al., 2018). One of the defining aspects of higher degree research programs is the supervisor-researcher relationship. Unlike traditional teacher-learner interactions, this dynamic is often less structured, more personalised, and deeply

influential on the researcher's academic and emotional experience (Fetherston et al., 2021; Lemon & Salmons, 2021; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013). The quality of supervision has been linked to researcher satisfaction, progress, and overall wellbeing (Cotterall, 2013). The high-stakes nature of original research, coupled with pressures to publish and develop as emerging scholars into early career researchers who secure funding, and establish academic credibility, further exacerbates stress levels (Lemon & McDonough, 2024; Levecque et al., 2017). Attrition rates in higher degree research programs highlight the severity of these stressors, with psychological distress and lack of adequate support contributing significantly to non-completion rates (Sverdlik et al., 2018). The responsibility for wellbeing in higher degree research contexts is dual-faceted: while higher degree researchers must develop self-care strategies, supervisors also play a critical role in fostering supportive environments and modelling positive wellbeing practices. Not all supervisors are equipped or prepared to talk about, support, or scaffold wellbeing, just as not all higher degree researchers are able, want to, or know how to discuss their wellbeing. These contextual nuances are also coupled with institutional support, policy, and structures varying across the sector.

Building a wellbeing literacy in higher degree research

Wellbeing matters, but wellbeing is not understood by everyone in the same way. Nor is wellbeing a one-size-fits-all scenario. Researchers agree that wellbeing is dynamic, context-dependent, and focused on flourishing and what is good in life. Flourishing refers to a multidimensional state in which individuals feel good and function well, characterised by meaning, virtue, positive relationships, health, and personal growth (Logan et al., 2023; VanderWeele, 2017). It captures living a life that realises one's potential in ways that are both personally fulfilling and socially or morally good, reflecting philosophical traditions of eudaimonia and contemporary psychological perspectives (Arthur et al., 2024; Symons & VanderWeele, 2024). This is why building a wellbeing literacy is important. Wellbeing literacy represents a significant advancement in our understanding of the relationship between language and wellbeing. Originally defined as "the mindful use of language about and for wellbeing" (Oades & Johnston, 2017), this concept has evolved into a comprehensive capability that encompasses how individuals comprehend, compose, and intentionally employ wellbeing-related language across various contexts. Wellbeing literacy can be understood as the capability (incorporating knowledge, vocabulary, and language skills) of comprehending and composing wellbeing languages, sensitive to contexts, used intentionally to maintain or improve the wellbeing of oneself or others (Oades et al., 2020). This capability comprises five necessary components:

1. **Vocabulary and knowledge about wellbeing** – Possessing words and basic facts about wellbeing
2. **Comprehension of multimodal text related to wellbeing** – Reading, listening, and viewing about and for wellbeing
3. **Composition of multimodal text related to wellbeing** – Writing, speaking, and creating about and for wellbeing
4. **Context awareness and adaptability** – Awareness of differences across contexts and adapting

language use accordingly

5. **Intentionality for wellbeing** – Habitual, intentional use of language to maintain or improve wellbeing for self or others

Wellbeing literacy differs from health literacy and mental health literacy in significant ways. While health literacy focuses primarily on physical health and the skills needed to maintain it, and mental health literacy emphasises knowledge about mental disorders, wellbeing literacy concentrates on the flourishing end of the mental health continuum (Oades et al., 2021, 2025).

In the context of higher education, particularly in higher degree research, a wellbeing literacy is essential for both supervisors and researchers (Lemon et al., 2024). Not every supervisor is wellbeing literate, and not every higher degree researcher lacks wellbeing literacy. The irony is that supervisors are often expected to be leaders in wellbeing regardless of discipline, experience, or background. What we know is that wellbeing has significant impacts on the higher degree research experience, and at some stage a significant life event will likely occur and influence study progress and impact wellbeing. Thus, building a wellbeing literacy is essential within this context.

Self-care: A framework for wellbeing literacy in higher degree research

Building a wellbeing literacy is crucial, and in this chapter, I use self-care as an intentional term to build a common language for both supervisors and higher degree researchers. I draw on my work in this space and align with a non-medicalised definition of self-care as "anything you do proactively that helps you develop, protect, maintain and improve health, wellbeing or wellness. It is about meeting yourself each day, learning who you really are and continuing to be present with your needs to help you be the best version of yourself today. It is a process of self-discovery, not perfectionism or comparing yourself to others" (Lemon, 2025, p. 51). Being proactive is key; that is, taking action before wellbeing challenges arise. There are different actions within the approach to self-care (develop, protect, maintain, and improve) that support the natural ups and downs of life. And indeed recognise that every moment in time is different, can be paused, and we can begin again or reset when we are feeling unwell, emotionally fragile, exhausted, stressed, anxious, confused, or experiencing any other challenging state. Underpinning this definition is a reconceptualising of self-care practices, specifically interrupting the 'self' from selfishness and self-centred messages to one of self-compassion, -love, -awareness, and -regulation while also shifting to the relational; that is, we care for self in order to care for others. Self-care draws on diverse, evidence-based wellbeing strategies or approaches that support us to move towards flourishing rather than languishing.

To help apply this diversity in practice, the toolbox theory offers a valuable framework (Lemon, 2024). This approach conceptualises self-care strategies as a collection of tools we develop, maintain, and access throughout our lives. Just as no single tool can address every home repair, no single self-care strategy can address every wellbeing challenge we face in higher degree research. A well-stocked self-care toolbox

contains varied tools for different purposes, with strategies that might help during research setbacks, supervision challenges, writing blocks, or periods of isolation. The toolbox theory emphasises several principles particularly relevant to higher degree research contexts: proactively developing strategies before they're urgently needed; adapting our approaches as research phases shift; implementing practical rather than idealistic solutions; and balancing personal responsibility with recognition of systemic factors. For higher degree researchers and supervisors, this might mean having well-worn tools (regular strategies), specialised tools (for specific challenges like dealing with reviewer feedback), and borrowed tools (practices learned from peers or mentors).

Conceptualising the toolbox approach – metaphorical framework

The toolbox serves as both conceptual framework and practical metaphor for understanding self-care. Within this construct:

- Tools represent specific strategies or practices that support wellbeing
- The toolbox itself represents the collection, storage, and accessibility of these tools
- Tool selection represents the intentional, context-responsive choice of appropriate strategies from diverse areas of wellbeing science that support your wellbeing, wellness and health
- Tool maintenance represents the ongoing development and refinement of one's practices
- Tools change and grow over time as you do
- You may have many versions of the same tool, but they do ever so subtly different things

Key Principles

- Diversity and breadth: Rather than relying on limited strategies, develop a broad repertoire across diverse areas of wellbeing science, recognising that singular approaches prove inadequate for complex wellbeing challenges.
- Contextual responsiveness: Different tools serve different purposes in different contexts. What sustains wellbeing during ordinary workloads may differ from what supports recovery during crisis periods.
- Proactive accumulation: The approach emphasises building one's collection during periods of relative stability, creating resources accessible during more challenging times—what might be termed a "current self helping future self" mechanism.

- Evolving development: The toolbox is never complete but continually evolves as you learn, grow, and encounter new circumstances throughout your career.
- Balanced responsibility: While emphasising individual agency in wellbeing practices, the approach acknowledges that systemic factors may necessitate structural changes beyond personal strategies.

This metaphorical framing of a toolbox offers several advantages. First, it positions self-care as practical and actionable rather than abstract or aspirational. Second, it normalises the need for multiple approaches rather than singular solutions. Finally, it acknowledges that different tools serve different purposes under different conditions, avoiding simplistic prescriptions for complex challenges. To approach to how of this what (a collection of tools from diverse areas of wellbeing science for self-care), a framework of 5 dimensions strongly connected to the proactive action of self-care has been developed: self-compassion, mindful awareness, empowerment, time, and habits (see Table 15.1). Each dimension is equally valued with no prescribed order of application; rather, they are intersecting and often paired or grouped.

Table 15.1. Lemon's Framework of 5 Dimensions of Self-Care

Dimension	What It Means	Why It Matters	Simple Example
Self-Compassion	Being kind to yourself during difficult times, just as you would support a good friend	Reduces burnout and helps you bounce back from setbacks Interrupts the unhelpful self-talk or unproduction coping strategies	Saying to yourself "This is really hard right now, and that's okay" instead of "I should be handling this better"
Mindful Awareness	Paying attention to the present moment without judgment; noticing thoughts and feelings without being overwhelmed by them	Helps identify stress early and make conscious choices rather than reacting automatically Focus is on being in the present moment, acknowledging each moment can change or restart again	Taking a moment to notice tension in your body during a challenging conversation or when ideas are not flowing at the moment. Notice this, name this, and just be in that moment non judgmentally before pausing and stepping away
Time	How you relate to, allocate, and experience time in ways that support wellbeing	Time variables influence how we engage with our wellbeing – time short, time poor, or time rich; spare time, free time, focused time, etc.; 1 second, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 hour, half a day, etc. Daily, micro-moments, weekly, often, annual, etc. Creates space for both productivity and recovery	Building short breaks into your schedule rather than working non-stop until exhaustion
Habits	Small, regular actions repeated often that collectively shape your wellbeing and have a positive impact	Small actions compound over time to create significant impacts	Applying a habit success framework of: Cue: Finishing work for the day; Craving: A sense of closure and readiness for tomorrow; Response: Spending five minutes planning—setting intentions, preparing notes, and scheduling writing time; then Reward: Feeling organized, reducing stress, and making it easier to start writing the next day
Empowerment	Having a sense of choice, agency, and capability in managing your wellbeing	Transforms wellbeing from something that "happens to you" to something you actively shape	Identifying one aspect of your workday where you can make a choice that benefits your wellbeing

The "how" of self-care – applying the 5 dimensions

The five dimensions framework doesn't just identify what self-care is but crucially provides the "how" of putting self-care into practice. These dimensions—self-compassion, mindful awareness, time, habits, and empowerment—represent the practical mechanisms through which individuals can tune into their

specific needs and implement appropriate self-care strategies. Rather than prescribing universal solutions, these dimensions provide flexible pathways for both supervisors and higher degree researchers to recognise, assess, and respond to wellbeing needs as they arise. Each dimension offers a distinct lens through which to approach self-care, allowing individuals to identify their most accessible entry points and develop personalised practices that resonate with their unique circumstances, preferences, and challenges within the higher degree research journey.

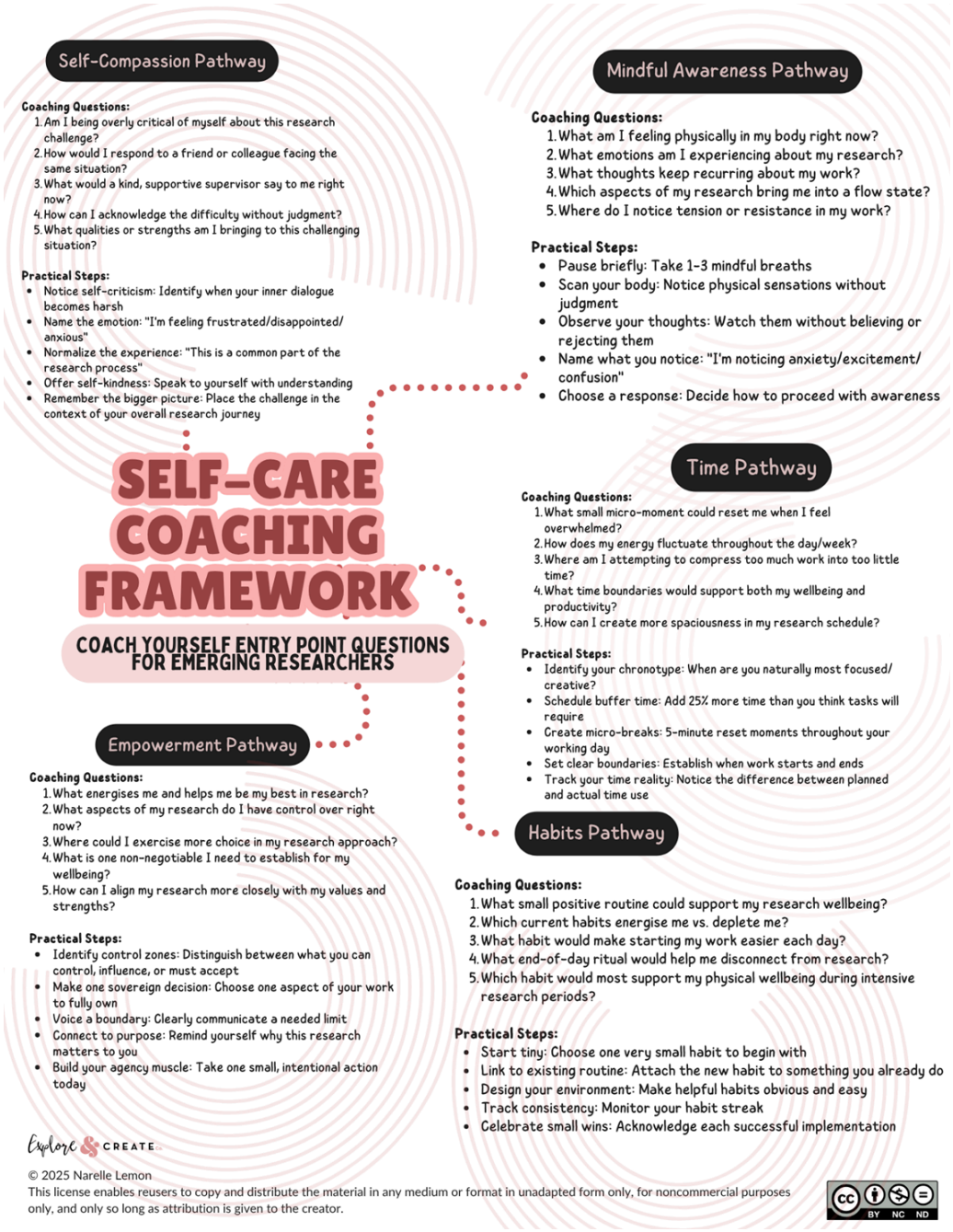


Figure 15.1 Self-Care Coaching Framework Questions and Steps for Each Dimension by Narelle Lemon used under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence

Five dimensions of self-care in higher degree research

The five dimensions framework can be specifically applied to the higher degree research context to support

both higher degree researchers and supervisors. Table 15.2 outlines practical applications for each dimension to get you started**.**

Key is remembering that this framework acknowledges both individual agency and contextual influences, offering a balanced perspective that avoids the pitfalls of overly individualistic or deterministic approaches to wellbeing. By emphasising flexibility, personalisation, and evidence-based strategies, the five dimensions framework contributes to the evolving understanding of how individuals can develop, maintain, and protect their wellbeing resources through intentional practices across various life domains.

Table 15.2. Applications of Self-Care Dimensions in HDR: Examples to get you started

Dimension	General Meaning in HDR Context	For HDR Students to Consider	For Supervisors to Support Students
Self-Compassion	Treating oneself with kindness and understanding when encountering research challenges, setbacks, or perceived failures; recognising that struggle is part of the universal research experience.	• Recognising imposter syndrome as common in research • Developing healthy responses to feedback and criticism • Setting realistic expectations for research outcomes • Viewing research setbacks as learning opportunities, not personal failures • Practicing self-kindness during periods of slow progress • Building resilience for publication rejection or experimental failure	• Normalising struggle and validating emotional responses • Sharing personal stories of research challenges and failures • Providing balanced feedback that acknowledges strengths • Discussing how criticism in academia is about the work, not the person • Modelling self-compassionate responses to setbacks • Creating a supervision culture where vulnerability is acceptable
Mindful Awareness	Being present and attentive to the research process; non-judgmentally observing thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to research without overidentifying with them.	• Noticing early signs of burnout or overwhelm • Developing awareness of personal research rhythms and optimal working conditions • Practicing presence during research activities rather than anxious future-focusing • Recognising when perfectionism is impeding progress • Cultivating awareness of how research affects emotional state• Noticing when comparison with peers is affecting wellbeing	• Being fully present during supervision meetings • Noticing non-verbal cues that may indicate student distress • Checking in about wellbeing, not just research progress • Helping students notice patterns in their research habits • Creating reflective opportunities in supervision• Modelling mindful approaches to academic pressures
Time	Acknowledging the unique temporal aspects of research work; developing sustainable approaches to time management that respect wellbeing across the research journey.	• Creating realistic research timelines that include buffer periods • Establishing boundaries between research and personal time • Breaking long-term research goals into manageable units • Allocating specific time for deep work versus administrative tasks • Planning for recovery time after intensive research periods • Adapting time management approaches across different research phases	• Helping students develop realistic project timelines • Discussing the rhythm of academic life and sustainable pacing • Setting reasonable expectations for meeting preparation and frequency • Respecting students' personal time boundaries • Discussing productivity fluctuations as normal • Supporting time management strategies specific to research stages

Dimension	General Meaning in HDR Context	For HDR Students to Consider	For Supervisors to Support Students
Habits	Establishing consistent research and self-care practices that support wellbeing and productivity; creating rituals that sustain the research journey.	• Developing consistent writing routines • Establishing regular exercise, sleep, and nutrition habits• Creating rituals that signal transitions between work and rest • Building regular connection with peers into schedule • Developing habits for organising research materials • Creating reflection habits to track progress and learning	• Encouraging sustainable work habits through example • Discussing helpful research routines and rituals • Normalising the need for breaks and recovery • Supporting regular progress review habits • Helping students identify and address unhelpful habits • Establishing predictable supervision patterns
Empowerment	Developing agency, autonomy, and confidence within the research process; feeling capable of making meaningful choices about research direction and personal wellbeing.	• Identifying areas where personal choice and control exist • Voicing needs and boundaries within supervision • Making informed decisions about research direction • Connecting research to personal values and purpose • Building networks beyond the supervisor • Developing identity as an independent researcher	• Explicitly discussing supervision expectations and boundaries • Creating opportunities for student decision-making • Acknowledging and respecting student expertise • Supporting student voice in determining research direction • Connecting students with wider academic networks • Gradually transferring ownership of the research process

The intersecting nature of self-care dimensions

The five dimensions form an interconnected system where each dimension supports and enhances the others. There's no prescribed "starting point" or hierarchy; individuals may naturally gravitate toward different dimensions based on their personal preferences, current challenges, or contextual factors.

For example, when self-compassion intersects with mindful awareness, supervisors or researchers can notice self-critical thoughts (mindfulness) and respond with kindness rather than harsh self-judgment (self-compassion). Similarly, empowerment combined with time management allows supervisors or researchers to make meaningful choices about research timelines based on personal values and priorities.

The interconnected nature of these dimensions means there are multiple valid entry points to improving wellbeing in the higher degree research journey:

1. **For those drawn to structure**: Beginning with habits or time management may provide concrete steps that gradually support development in other dimensions.
2. **For those with high self-criticism**: Starting with self-compassion may create the emotional foundation needed to engage effectively with the other dimensions.
3. **For those feeling overwhelmed**: Mindful awareness may offer immediate relief while building

capacity to engage with other dimensions.

4. **For those feeling constrained**: Empowerment might be the natural starting point to create space for developing the other dimensions.

Apply these ideas in your practice

Conversation starters for supervisors

These prompts can help initiate wellbeing conversations in supervision meetings:

1. **Self-Compassion Focus**: "Research has its ups and downs for everyone. How are you responding to yourself when things don't go as planned?"
2. **Mindful Awareness Focus**: "What parts of your research are you finding most engaging right now? Where do you notice your attention naturally drawn?"
3. **Time Focus**: "How are you finding the pacing of your research? Are there aspects that feel rushed or places where you feel stuck?"
4. **Habits Focus**: "What routines or practices are supporting your research progress? Are there any habits you'd like to develop or change?"
5. **Empowerment Focus**: "Where do you feel you have the most agency in your research right now? Are there areas where you'd like more autonomy?"

Wellbeing check-in framework

Consider implementing a brief wellbeing check-in at the beginning of supervision meetings:

1. **Acknowledge**: Begin by acknowledging the importance of wellbeing to research progress
2. **Ask**: Use an open-ended question about current wellbeing
3. **Listen**: Provide full attention without jumping to solutions
4. **Respond**: Validate feelings and experiences
5. **Support**: Offer relevant support or resources if needed
6. **Transition**: Shift to research matters while maintaining awareness of wellbeing context

Supervisor self-assessment checklist

To assess how you're supporting higher degree research wellbeing literacy, how do you approach self-care?

[ ] I model self-care practices in my own academic life

[ ] I use language that normalises research struggles and setbacks

[ ] I explicitly discuss wellbeing as part of the research process

[ ] I provide balanced feedback that addresses both strengths and areas for growth

[ ] I respect higher degree researchers' time boundaries and help them establish realistic timelines

[ ] I create space for higher degree researchers to express concerns or difficulties

[ ] I am familiar with institutional wellbeing resources available to researchers

[ ] I acknowledge the emotional aspects of research alongside the intellectual components

[ ] I encourage higher degree researchers to develop their own wellbeing strategies

[ ] I recognise and support different individual approaches to wellbeing

Evidence your practice

Reflective practice activity for supervisors

This activity helps you demonstrate your development of wellbeing literacy in supervision:

1. Document Current Practice: Spend 10-15 minutes noting how you currently address wellbeing in supervision. Consider:

- How explicitly is wellbeing discussed?
- Which dimensions of self-care do you tend to emphasise?
- What language do you use around research challenges?

2. Identify Development Areas: Select 1-2 dimensions from the framework that you'd like to strengthen in your supervision approach. What will this look, feel and sound like?

3. Action Planning: For each selected dimension, identify:

- A specific change to implement in your next supervision meeting
- Language or questions you'll introduce
- How you'll assess whether it was effective

4. Implementation and Reflection: After implementing your changes for 1-2 months, write a brief reflection (300-500 words) addressing:

- What changes you made to your supervision practice

- How higher degree researchers responded to these changes
- What impacts you observed on the supervision relationship
- How your own understanding of wellbeing in HDR has evolved

This reflection can serve as evidence of professional development in your supervisory practice for performance reviews or promotion applications.

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon 🔒 beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Arthur, J., Goodman, D., & Clemente, M. (2024). Towards an anthropological perspective on human flourishing in education. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 73*, 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2401035

Barry, K. M., Woods, M., Warnecke, E., Stirling, C., & Martin, A. (2018). Psychological health of doctoral candidates, study-related challenges and perceived performance. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(3), 468-483. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1425979 🔒

Cotterall, S. (2013). More than just a brain: Emotions and the doctoral experience. *Higher Education Research & Development, 32*(2), 174-187. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.680017 🔒

Dhiman, S. (2020). Being good and being happy: Eudaimonic well-being insights from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In S. Dhiman (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of workplace well-being*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02470-3_1-1 🔒

Fetherston, C., Fetherston, A., Batt, S., Sully, M., & Wei, R. (2021). Wellbeing and work-life merge in Australian and UK academics. *Studies in Higher Education*, *46*(12), 2774–2788. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1828326

Fowers, B., Novak, L., Calder, A., & Kiknadze, N. (2024). Can a theory of human flourishing be formulated? Toward a science of flourishing. *Review of General Psychology, 28*, 123–142. https://doi.org/10.1177/10892680231225223 🔒

Hsu, W., Huang, N., Li, C., & Hu, S. (2024). Exploring determinants of flourishing: A comprehensive

network analysis of retirees in Taiwan. *BMC Public Health, 24*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-19466-x

Lemon, N. (2024). *The 'How' of self-care for teachers: Building your wellbeing toolbox*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/The-How-of-Self-Care-for-Teachers-Building-your-Wellbeing-Toolbox/Lemon/p/book/9781032727493

Lemon, N., Francis, J., & Baker, L. M. (2024). Wellbeing literacy in the academic landscape: Trioethnographic inquiry into scholarly writing. *Brock Education Journal*, *2024*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v33i1.1120

Lemon, N., & McDonough, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Exploring time as a resource for wellness in higher education: Identity, self-care and wellbeing at work*. Routledge.

Lemon, N., & Salmons, J. (Eds). (2021). *Reframing and rethinking collaboration in higher education and beyond: A practical guide for doctoral students and early career researchers*. Routledge.

Levecque, K., Anseel, F., Beuckelaer, A. D., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy, 46*(4), 868-879. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008

Logan, A., Berman, B., & Prescott, S. (2023). Vitality revisited: The evolving concept of flourishing and its relevance to personal and public health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20065065

McAlpine, L., & McKinnon, M. (2013). Supervision – the most variable of variables: Student perspectives. *Studies in Continuing Education, 35*(3), 265-280. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2012.746227

Moradi, S., Van Quaquebeke, N., & Hunter, J. (2018). Flourishing and prosocial behaviors: A multilevel investigation of national corruption level as a moderator. *PLoS ONE, 13*. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0200062

Novak, L., & Kiknadze, N. (2024). Does the good life feel good? The role of positive emotion in competing conceptions of the good life. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1425415

Oades, L. G., & Johnston, A. L. (2017). Wellbeing literacy: The necessary ingredient in positive education. *Psychology and Behavioral Science International Journal, 3*(5), 1-3. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_13

Oades, L. G., Ozturk, C., Hou, H., & Slemp, G. R. (2020). Wellbeing literacy: A language-use capability relevant to wellbeing outcomes of positive psychology interventions. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(5), 696-700. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1789711

Oades, L. G., Siokou, C., & Slemp, G. R. (2021). Wellbeing literacy: Conceptualisation, measurement and

preliminary empirical evidence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(16), 8212. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041485

Oades, L. G., Lemon, N., Francis, J., & Lomas, T. (Eds.). (2025). *Wellbeing literacy theory and practice through multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary lenses*. Routledge.

Robertson, S. (2020). *Nietzsche and contemporary ethics.* Oxford university Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198722212.003.0010

Schmidt-Sane, M., Cele, L., Bosire, E., Tsai, A., & Mendenhall, E. (2023). Flourishing with chronic illness(es) and everyday stress: Experiences from Soweto, South Africa. *Wellbeing, Space and Society, 4*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2023.100144

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*, 361-388. https://doi.org/10.28945/4113

Symons, X., & VanderWeele, T. (2024). Aristotelian flourishing and contemporary philosophical theories of wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00723-0

VanderWeele, T. J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114*, 8148–8156. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1702996114

Additional Resources

Websites and resources

Book Series: Wellbeing and Self-care in Higher Education: Embracing Positive Solutions (series Editor: Narelle Lemon)

19 books and growing of researchers proactively discussing self-care in the academy

https://www.routledge.com/Wellbeing-and-Self-care-in-Higher-Education/book-series/WSCHE

About the book Series

The *Wellbeing and Self-care in Higher Education* series reveals the stories of those working in higher education and illuminates the constant reconstruction of identities and work practices that places self-care at the centre of the work we do. Highlighted through image and word

narratives (visual narratives) are realities, the voice of our colleagues, and (re)positioning of a shift into what is possible when we care for ourselves and others.

This series places academic wellbeing and self-care at the heart of discussions around working in higher education and provides a diverse range of strategies for how to put in place wellbeing and self-care approaches as an academic. It contributes to the conversation on ways that wellbeing and self-care can be positioned in the work that those working in higher education do and highlights new ways of working in higher education that disrupt current tensions that neglect wellbeing. Including both edited and authored collections, the lived experiences shared and practical strategies offered within will be vital reading for all those working in academia.

16. NEUROAFFIRMING SUPERVISORY PRACTICES IN HDR

Jillian Blacker; Amy Webster; and Anna Szorenyi

Why read this chapter?

The key learnings from this chapter are:

- The key differences between neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- Relational approaches to supervision.
- Understanding inclusive research supervisory practices.
- Reflections on practical applications for neuroaffirming supervisory practices.

This chapter is informed by the lived experiences of researchers who currently supervise higher degree researchers (HDRs) or support neurodivergent higher degree researchers and supervisors. Our exploration of this research education context is intended to contribute to broader discussions of inclusivity, equity, and diversity in the higher education sector. Our chapter recognises the growing needs of the neurodivergent cohort and considers how best to provide support, without necessarily requiring the HDR to disclose a diagnosis or formally request accommodations.

Introduction

> *Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment? (Blume, 1998 as cited in Armstrong, 2015).*

Mewburn (2025) notes that it is safe to assume people who identify as neurodivergent continuously commence higher degree research; moreover, increasing numbers of researchers approach the HDR space with exposure to neurodivergence and diagnoses. While it can be difficult to quantify exactly what proportion of HDRs are diagnosed as neurodivergent, it's expected that this number is continually growing. This is reflective of experiences in broader society as more knowledge and acceptance are leading people to feel supported to seek out diagnoses.

There are competing interpretations of neurodivergence. While it is often seen as an individual deficit, the social model of disability reminds us that disability is not an individual problem but the product of a mismatch between abilities and environment (den Houting, 2019). Mewburn and Palmer (2024) surmise that there is value in understanding neurodivergence as an identity rather than seeing it as a 'condition'. This approach is consistent with the broader strength-based 'neurodiversity movement', which seeks to value diversity in ways of thinking, particularly as individuals experience their 'conditions' in varied and functionally different ways (den Houting, 2019).

> *Universities tend to treat neurodivergence as an individual problem requiring individual accommodations rather than recognising systemic barriers. This puts the burden on students to disclose, request support, and advocate for themselves – precisely the executive function and communication challenges many neurodivergent students struggle with (Mewburn, 2025).*

It can be difficult for HDRs to disclose their diagnosis to their supervisory team for a variety of reasons, but most often it is fear-based (Szorenyi & Payne, 2025). Throughout this chapter we explore different neuro-affirming approaches, that can equally apply to all HDRs, without prompting the need for disclosure of a diagnosis. It is important to note that being neurodivergent is not limited to higher degree researchers; many HDR supervisors are also neurodivergent. Incorporating these approaches to supervision into your practice can therefore support the needs of both higher degree researchers and supervisory teams as a whole.

Szorenyi and Payne (2024) explain that knowledge creation can come together in unexpected ways; there is not only one way to think and one way to know. The intention of this chapter is to encourage supervisors to embrace this concept and be willing to consider customising their supervisory approach to their higher degree researchers.

Neurodiverse or neurodivergent?

'Neurodiversity' is the umbrella term used to describe neurological variation in the ways that people process information (Australian Disability Network, 2024). This includes both neurodivergent and neurotypical people, but what is the difference between these two terms?

Neurodiversity is the diversity of thought in all people. This concept does not assume that there is a 'normal' against which some people are 'other'. However, given that society is organised around the needs of the 'neurotypical' it is often useful and important to name 'neurodivergence' – a difference from the norm.

Neurodivergence is when the neurological ways information is processed in our brains is different from the majority of the population. Neurodivergence can vary, but examples include:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism

- Dyscalculia
- Dyslexia
- Development co-ordination disorder (DCD) – also known as dyspraxia.

Awareness of neurodiversity and neurodivergence is important, but this should not dictate your practice as a supervisor; this instead, should be driven by the rapport that you have built with your HDR as part of the supervisor/higher degree researcher relationship.

Relational approach to supervision

We suggest that a 'relational' framework for supervising HDRs can be most helpful. A relational framework is based on the understanding that supervision is a mutual and reciprocal process that arises from relationships within the research team. As outlined by Hickey & Riddle, "the relational pedagogical dynamic is one of encounter, in which teachers and students come into relation from their respective positions, and from where education proceeds at this interface" (2024, p. 3274).

An approach that centres this relationality recognises that what happens in the relationship can be crucial for how teacher, student, and knowledge emerge and transform. Indeed, because "subjectivities emerge *through* relations," the pedagogical relationship can be crucial to who both teachers and students can become (Healy & Mulcahy 2021, as cited in Hickey & Riddle 2024, p. 3274). Such a relational approach can be especially helpful in the HDR supervision context, both because supervision is already such an important part of how the research proceeds, and because there is usually a high degree of flexibility in how the supervisory relationship can be set up.

Szorenyi and Payne (2025) suggest that a relational approach is especially helpful for neurodivergent HDRs. Because the focus is on the particular relationship in its particular context, this approach can allow higher degree researchers to discuss their particular needs without being 'pigeonholed' into assumptions about how their neurodivergence works, or perhaps without even naming a diagnosis.

Opening up questions about working methods, and when answers are not clear, taking a guess, and "experimenting", can be excellent ways of creating a supervisory environment where higher degree researchers, neurodivergent or not, can feel accepted and supported to do their unique best (Szorenyi & Payne, 2024, p. 13).

In practice, this approach can look much like a "Universal Design for Learning (UDL)" approach; especially as UDL is best described as a framework to develop learning environments and experiences that are accessible, inclusive, equitable and challenging for every learner (Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training [ADCET], 2025). Indeed, the early UDL idea was that people have different ways of thinking and learning, and this is an insight shared with the neurodiversity advocacy movement. However, the UDL approach is often criticised for (a) being too focused on designing a 'one size fits all' approach, which is not always possible, and (b) for focusing too much on predefined 'learning styles'.

These criticisms do not necessarily apply to UDL in practice, where it becomes obvious that flexibility is more important than following set definitions. A 'relational' approach adds to the UDL framework, in that it emphasises that the point is not to define needs in advance, but to focus on the present and the changing needs and identities of the particular participants involved. In essence, especially in the HDR space, it is about developing a tailored approach to both support the needs of the higher degree researcher and incorporate the dynamics of the supervisory team, as some or all may be neurodivergent.

In practice

An expectations document (e.g. Student and Supervisor Expectations document or Expectations in Research Supervision document) outlines the responsibilities and expected behaviours of both the HDR and their supervisors within an academic research environment. It helps to clarify roles, promote effective communication, and prevent misunderstandings. It can promote discussions about how people work best and helps to manage the HDR's expectations of their supervisors and vice versa.

Using these resources to normalise these types of conversations about how to get the best out of people by accommodating how they prefer to work benefits all HDRs and supervisors irrespective of whether they are neurodivergent or not. It is likely that your institution will have a variation of this type of document; if not, they can be developed relatively easily. It is worthwhile investing the time to complete these documents at the beginning of candidature, but it is equally important to review these documents throughout candidature. The needs of both HDRs and supervisors change throughout candidature, and keeping these expectations documents updated helps to ensure that these needs are being met and all parties are able to work at their best. In some universities, particularly in Australia, it is mandatory to complete an expectations document by the HDR's first milestone.

Some useful items that can be added to a checklist (or simply asked about in meetings) to better support HDRs with disabilities or neurodivergence (without necessarily naming any diagnosis) can include discussing preferences and needs related to:

- (a) Communication and feedback (e.g., written or verbal, direct or encouraging, text size or colours).
- (b) Meetings (e.g., length of meetings, online or in-person meetings, preferred sensory environment, time of day, recorded or not).
- (c) Deadlines: strict or flexible? Who should decide them and who should chase them?
- (d) Community and networking: Do you want to be introduced to colleagues or make your own connections?

(These items are adapted from the University of Adelaide School of Social Sciences *Working Relationships and Environmental Preferences in HDR Supervision* checklist, developed by Anna Szorenyi, Natalie Thomas and Bella Wheatland, 2024).

Neurodivergence in research

Neurodivergence and reasonable adjustments

All educators and education providers in Australia have obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* to support students with disability. These obligations include:

- making reasonable adjustments which allow those with disability to participate and learn on the same basis as others without disability
- preventing harassment and victimisation of those with disability
- consulting regularly with students and higher degree researchers with disability to develop reasonable adjustments and address concerns as they arise.

HDR supervisors are often the primary contact for their researchers throughout the duration of their candidature, and are likely to receive requests for reasonable adjustments to be made. This, then, raises the question: does this obligation under legislation require that HDRs must gain a diagnosis and be prepared to disclose it before they can be considered eligible for reasonable adjustments?

As Dolmage (2017) points out, despite attempts to provide accessibility, universities remain very ableist institutions. This can mean that disclosing a diagnosis can be a risky act for many HDRs, who understandably don't know what the response might be. Even well-meaning supervisors can sometimes take a diagnostic label as a source of knowledge, believing that they can then determine an HDR's needs without actually asking them. This goes against the insights of neurodiversity advocates, who point out that no two people experience their condition in the same way. With this in mind, this is an opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of a relational approach, rather than diagnosis having to be a contributing factor.

In practice

A HDR contacts their supervisor to request that all supervision meetings be recorded, on the basis that this is a better way for them to process information and remain present in the meeting itself. A recommended approach would be for the supervisor to agree or if this is not feasible to discuss with their HDR, without the need for them to disclose diagnosis or have to request a formal document outlining reasonable adjustments.

The role of disability advisers: Going beyond reasonable adjustments

While supervisors are the main support for their HDRs there are a number of other resources available to help navigate through candidature. This can include Student Services and Disability and Equity Services, including Disability Advisers who can provide advice and information on the ways to support your higher degree researcher.

The role of a Disability Adviser (DA) is an interesting one. Often the role will be occupied by someone with a background in allied health, education (not necessarily disability specific), or someone who has experience in working in the disability sector.

A DA plays a vital role in supporting students with disabilities, promoting inclusion, and ensuring compliance with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. How this is done can differ between education providers. Historically, the role of a DA will have seen Advisers predominantly spending their working hours meeting with students to discuss and recommend reasonable adjustments to ensure that they can access their education on an equitable basis, or a 'level playing field'. Today, the role has evolved into more of a consultancy and educative position, while still maintaining the important work of meeting with students and recommending reasonable adjustments.

A day in the life of a DA is a difficult one to summarise; often, no two days are the same. To share the experience of one Disability Adviser, a week can involve the following commitments:

- Meeting with HDRs to discuss the impacts of disability, injury, or health condition and what, if any, reasonable adjustments they may require.
- Delivering training to staff across the university on topics such as disability awareness and Universal Design for Learning.
- Hosting 'lunch and learn' style sessions to discuss accessibility
- Delivering Hidden Disability Sunflower training/information sessions.

In the HDR space the evolution of the role is even more apparent and necessary, as the need for certain types of reasonable adjustments varies considerably in comparison to those that may be recommended

for an undergraduate student. Often the 'adjustments' offered by a Disability Unit are designed for undergraduate students (Szorenyi & Payne, 2025), so this may require some creative thinking on the part of DAs, HDRs, and supervisors.

Inclusive research supervision: Moving past the paper trail

The evolution of the DA role is welcome and necessary: contributing to both the improvement of accessibility and the promotion of Universal Design for Learning principles. There is often the misconception that, in order to make reasonable adjustments HDRs are required to have a formal document provided by a DA, which outlines their specific needs. Whilst useful, this is not actually the reality. Supervisors can, and are encouraged to, tailor the shape and design of research projects to allow for meaningful engagement. This is fundamentally where the DA can assist, through consultation to explore adaptations to research design and delivery, and modifications to supervisory practice for current and future higher degree researchers.

In practice

A HDR Supervisor is uncertain about how best to work with and include an autistic higher degree researcher. The Disability Adviser can be consulted and support the supervisor to rethink the way in which the HDR can conduct their research, whilst still achieving the required outcomes.

Typically, the HDR in this example is likely to have a document outlining reasonable adjustments required; however, due to the ever-changing nature of the research environment, it would be impossible to recommend in one document everything that is needed for them to be able to undertake their research equitably.

Evidence your practice

The following are some areas that may be useful to discuss with your HDRs, both at the beginning of, and during candidature, especially as the needs of higher degree researchers and supervisors can change.

Firstly, as meetings are generally an important part of the supervision process, they are worth considering from various angles. Will you use agendas and minutes? Who is responsible? Will students take notes or make audio recordings? Will they be in person or online? Some Graduate Schools already have guidelines

on these practices, but consider what will work best for your team. Meeting time and location can make a difference: some may work better in the morning or later in the day or may communicate better on a walk by the river rather than in a fluorescent-lit office; some may prefer a quiet, uncluttered space and others a vibrant, busy location; others may prefer to meet online. These considerations can also apply to office and lab environments; lighting, sound, scents, and touch can make the difference between a productive working day and a frustrating one.

Communication is another important topic to discuss, and particularly feedback on work. Do you prefer written or verbal communication? Do you want a supportive feel, or to stay task oriented? Should feedback be gentle and kind, or blunt and direct? Should processes be spelled out step by step? Similarly, approaches to deadlines need to be considered: should they be strict and scary, or flexible and supportive? Who will be responsible for checking that deadlines are met?

Communication also extends beyond supervisors. It can be useful to discuss how supervisors can best assist with building networks and finding an academic community. Are introductions preferred, or would they like to go at their own pace?

And finally, it is important to remember that university bureaucracies are complex, and that supervisors are likely to be more familiar with this environment than HDRs. Where appropriate (and with permission), supervisors can often encourage efforts to gain support from the wider university.

We recommend holding such conversations close to the commencement of candidature (after the HDR has had some time to become comfortable but before habits are established). Conversations can begin while completing any expectations documents, or can be introduced with a general statement that everyone has particular working methods and needs, and you would like to know more about each other's. That way the conversation need not be explicitly about neurodivergence at all, as we have recommended above.

It is also good practice to check in regularly, possibly through a standard question at the end of meetings about whether supervisory practices, research environment, and processes are working for everyone (and being prepared to accept feedback and address any issues that arise).

Documenting your practices in this area could include asking HDRs whether they are happy to share meeting notes or documents that you could use to support your story in promotion or teaching award applications. If students are thriving under your supervision, you could ask them to write some testimonials. You can also ask co-supervisors to write something about your practice, as they witness it firsthand. It is also a good idea to keep notes about your own reflection on your practice: what problems have you noticed, what did you do to try to address them, how well did it work? In all documentation, it is, of course, important not to disclose identities or diagnoses without permission, but you could explain your story in more general terms.

In practice

Creating a shared resource, which communicates working preferences, motivations, and needs is a positive tool to assist supervisors and HDRs to understand how to work well together, and manage expectations throughout candidature.

This is me: [Name]

You get the BEST of me when...

You get the WORST of me when...

You can COUNT on me to...

What I NEED from you is...

Activity

You may like to reflect on your preferred working habits:

- Imagine (or reflect on) that these needs are crucial and make the difference between being able to do your work or not.
- How might you raise these preferences within a work/research team? What would you be worried about?
- How might you make it comfortable for others to do so?
- Think about how this can be incorporated into a Student and Supervisor expectations document and how you can support your HDR to pursue the same process of reflection.

Overall, it is good to remember there is more than one way to go about doing research – the fact that it can look different does not mean that it's wrong. Neuroaffirming supervisory practices can encompass a wide range of elements including explicit discussions around working methods, acknowledgement of the changing needs of higher degree researchers and their supervisors during candidature and perhaps most importantly building a foundation of mutual respect and empathy (Szorenyi & Payne, 2025).

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Armstrong, T. (2015). The myth of the normal brain: Embracing neurodiversity. *AMA Journal of Ethics, 17*(4), 348-352. https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/myth-normal-brain-embracing-neurodiversity/2015-04

Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training. (2025). *ADCET*. https://www.adcet.edu.au/

Australian Disability Network, 2024, 'What is Neurodiversity', https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/What-is-neurodiversity.pdf [PDF 210KB]

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). Disability discrimination, https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_disability_discrimination.pdf [PDF 1043KB]

den Houting, J. (2019). Neurodiversity: An insider's perspective. *Autism*, Vol 23. Issue 2. Pages 271–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318820762

Dolmage, J. T. (2017). *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. University of Michigan Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvr33d50

Healy, S. & Mulcahy, D. (2021). Pedagogic affect: Assembling an affirmative ethics. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 29*(4), 555- 572. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2020.1768581.

Hickey, A. & Riddle, S. (2024). Proposing a conceptual framework for relational pedagogy: pedagogical informality, interface, exchange and enactment. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 28*, 3271–3285. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2259906

Lee, C. (n.d.). *Neurodiversity and reasonable adjustments – Is there a better way?* Neurodiverse Safe Work Initiative. https://www.neurodiversesafework.com.au/neurodiversity-and-reasonable-adjustments/

Mewburn, I. (2025, May 1). Is your PhD supervisor neurodivergent? *The Thesis Whisperer.* https://thesiswhisperer.com/2025/05/01/neurodivergentphdsupervisors/

Mewburn, I, & Palmer, N. (2024). On Beyond Sheldon Cooper. https://www.qpr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/QPR2024-Conference-Book-v12_DIGITAL.pdf [PDF 3.8MB]

Szorenyi, A., & Payne, C. (2025). Supporting neurodiversity in higher degree research supervision: a relational approach. *Higher Education Research & Development,* Online First, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2025.2493248

Szorenyi, A., & Payne, C. (2024). Centring neurodivergence in HDR research Supervision. https://www.qpr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/QPR2024-Conference-Book-v12_DIGITAL.pdf [PDF 3.8MB]

Szorenyi, A, Thomas, N, and Wheatland, B. (2024). *Working Relationships and Environmental Preferences in HDR Supervision checklist.* University of Adelaide.

Additional Reading

ADCET – https://www.adcet.edu.au/

- UDL Plus-One Pledge – https://www.adcet.edu.au/inclusive-teaching/universal-design-for-learning/get-involved-in-the-conversations/udl-plus-one-pledge
- Australian Human Rights Commission – Disability Discrimination – https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_disability_discrimination.pdf [PDF 1043KB]
- Hidden Disabilities Resources – https://hdsunflower.com/row/insights/post/sunflower-icons
- Neurodiversity and Reasonable Adjustments – Is there a better way? Neurodiverse Safe Work Initiative – https://www.neurodiversesafework.com.au/neurodiversity-and-reasonable-adjustments/
- Research SuperVision Project and the University of York Resources to support Postgraduate Research Supervisors – https://www.berst.hosted.york.ac.uk/pgr-wellbeing/supervising-pgrs-from-diverse-backgrounds/supervising-neurodivergent-pgrs/
- The UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) and the RSVP project seminar – 'How Supervisors can support PGRs with Neurodiversity'.
- University of Durham Centre for Neurodiversity and Development – https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/neurodiversity-development/
- University of Oxford Equality and Diversity Unit Neurodiverse conditions – https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/neurodivergent-conditions

17. "WE NEED MORE PEOPLE LIKE YOU IN THE ACADEMY": GENDER AND HDR SUPERVISION

Alan McKee and Emma Phillips

Why read this chapter?

Gender and situated power are often not explicitly addressed as considerations in a research supervisory relationship. This chapter presents a narrative conversation between the authors that unpacks these issues and more, modelling a way for supervisors and their research students to have these conversations as a normal part of their work. Learnings will include:

- A brief history of gender in higher education
- How students may present themselves in order to 'fit'
- Why care is the most crucial part of the supervisory relationship.

Introduction

Research on the supervision of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students has identified a number of ways in which gender may become an important issue.

First, as Johnson et al. (2000) note, the model of the ideal HDR student leans into what are traditionally understood to be stereotypically masculine characteristics. HDR training is often presented as supporting – or perhaps better, expecting, or forcing – students to become "independent, autonomous" learners (Johnson et al., 2000, pp. 137-138). As they note, this focus on succeeding as an individualised researcher downplays the importance of social relationships in knowledge production, the human and embodied side of knowledge work, and the importance of relationships to mental health, not to mention career progression:

> Traditional practices of PhD supervision, whether they be the neglect and indifference recalled by Andrew Riemer or ... tough-minded but more carefully targeted regimes ... assume 'autonomy' – in the form of

> the exemplary figure of the independent scholar – to be the desired outcome. Our analysis suggests that this figure is a problematic one for the profoundly gendered character of the assumptions of Reason and autonomy it invokes (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 141)

Lindley et al. study how women PhD students manage the often conflicting, often emotionally-charged demands of candidature:

> the growing literature on students' experiences of the PhD indicates emotion is an integral part of doctoral studies... Using Hochschild's (1983) concept of 'emotional labour', we examine how the women actively managed two sites of emotional investment during candidature; writing and personal relationships. We show how they purposively managed their public and private emotions to inform their responses and actions to build commitment and resourcefulness as students (Lindley et al., 2024, p. 281)

Apart from the fact that men are socialised into the conventional qualities associated with PhD candidature earlier and more systematically than women, this lack of interest in the human and embodied nature of researchers also disadvantages women, who typically retain higher levels of caring responsibility – for children, for aging parents, and for male partners who refuse to learn how to use a washing machine – than do male HDR students. The research shows that we cannot be confident that HDR supervisors have high levels of emotional intelligence; will demonstrate a good understanding of the emotional, embodied, and relational challenges of HDR student; or will have the necessary skills to support an emerging researcher to face these challenges.

Researchers have insisted on the need to develop different models for HDR supervision, a form of "praxis [that] involves a learning alliance between multiple institutional agents grounded in a relational ethics of mutual responsibility" (Halse & Bansel, 2012, p. 377). As Seagram et al. put this, "a key factor in the successful and timely completion of a doctorate is the supervisory/mentoring relationship" (1998, p. 320).

Second, research still identifies a number of forms of gendered discrimination that female HDR students can face. Schnaas notes that "female postgraduates do not feel as included as their male peers within the department as a whole" (2014, p. 2). Seagram et al. found that "males were ... more likely to collaborate with their supervisors in the preparation of research papers" (1998, p. 319). Grealy found evidence that "a female graduate is more likely than her male equivalent to have an appointment or other success cast in doubt in relation to her physical characteristics" (Grealy, 2016, p. 348).

Given this data, it is perhaps not surprising that female HDR candidates "experience higher levels of stress compared to their male peers", are "more critical towards the working relationship with their supervisors" (Schnaas, 2014, p. 2) and "significantly less likely than men to rate an academic career as appealing" (Crabb & Ekberg, 2014, p. 1099).

At the same time, it is worth highlighting the fact that in a survey of the criteria that are important for being a good supervisor, HDR students listed "Gender similarity/relatability" as eighth out of ten possible criteria; supervisors listed it as ninth out of ten. The number one criteria, for both cohorts, was "specific discipline/focus area knowledge". Number ten was "Age similarity/relatability" (Lindley et al., 2024, p. 45).

So, what can I do as a supervisor?

- Discuss caring responsibilities (your own and your students').
- Talk about inclusion and acceptance in a cohort, and make it an expectation of all of your students to be welcoming and inclusive of new students.
- Talk with your students about your similarities and differences.

This chapter aims to respond to, and think through, the implications of this data in the form of a conversation between a male HDR supervisor and a female former HDR student. The supervisor was Alan McKee, a 53-year old white cisgender male, Scottish and queer. The student was Emma Phillips, a 47-year old white cisgender female, Australian and queer. The supervisory relationship took place between 2018 – 2022 in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney. Since Emma graduated, Alan is now Head of School of Art, Communication and English at the University of Sydney, and Emma is now an Assistant Professor in Visual Communication at the University of Canberra. We present this data in the form of a conversation to allow differences in perspectives to emerge, rather than trying to synthesise them into a single voice that performs objectivity. The exchange below originally took place as a series of emails between the authors, which have been revised and updated for this chapter.

Alan McKee

As you know, men don't have gender ... which is to say that the privilege of being a (middle class white) man means that we don't experience "being gendered" in the same way. White people have no race. Straight people have no sexuality ... And, of course, they (I, we) do – but "exnomination" (McKee, 2003, p. ???) and privilege mean that we more rarely are aware of it. What I'm saying is that I look at our HDR supervisory relationship and I don't see how gender affected it ... but is that because I'm a man who's comfortable in his masculinity? I'm not the best person to be talking about this. I should be listening. So how about if we run the conversation on this topic with me asking you questions and listening/responding to your answers? (Or does that just reproduce the fallacy that men don't have gender? ... hmmmm)

I've done a quick trot through the literature on gender and HDR supervision, and found the following points that I could ask you about:

- Women are stereotypically more emotional – and the PhD is an emotional journey
- Women are stereotypically more emotional – and the PhD student is ideally a brain without a body or emotions (supervisors often aren't great mentors, aren't kind, aren't supportive)
- Women tend to retain more responsibility for family and domestic management while working on a PhD (as with everything else)

- Discrimination – "Female postgraduates do not feel as included as their male peers within the department as a whole" (Schnaas, 2014, p. 2)
- Discrimination – "Males were also more likely to collaborate with their supervisors in the preparation of research papers" (Seagram et al., 1998, p. 319)
- Discrimination – "A female graduate is more likely than her male equivalent to have an appointment or other success cast in doubt in relation to her physical characteristics" (Grealy, 2016, p. 348)

Only a pitch – very happy to do something completely different.

My notes attached [including]:

- The fact that we're both queer
- The fact that the thesis was about gender, power, class, representation
- Power is key in the relationship. I clearly had power over you while I was a supervisor – I had control over whether you could submit
- Did I have that power? Tell me about that?
- And how does gender fit into that?
- The gender of the relationship
- The gender of the expectations of academic work – disembodied, no children to look after …
- In our project at UTS, gender was less directly important than primary caregiving responsibilities – there's a massive overlap there, but they're not identical – women with no kids (some), men with primary caregiving responsibilities (fewer).

So, what can I do as a supervisor?

- Normalise discussions of emotion.
- Find ways to collaborate with all students.
- Think and talk about the power relationships within the supervisory relationship and beyond.

If I dig enough, I think perhaps the only significant way that gender may have factored in, is with my own preconceived ideas about the limitations of being a cis-gendered woman in the academy (and possibly in life generally). None of this was conscious at the time and it's only with reflection that I can see how I might have shifted and shaped my own behaviour to accommodate an environment which values 'masculine sensibilities' (loaded, I know) more than feminine ones (as if it's binary, gah). With you as a cis-gendered male and highly accomplished academic, I suspect I was inclined, particularly in the beginning, to behave in ways which I think might ingratiate me with 'the man with power'. It's hard to pinpoint what this looks

like, but my initial thinking is things like ensuring that I seem highly competent and capable of working on my own; that I might appear inclined towards a kind of classic intellectualism (for lack of a better phrase); that I don't come across as too gentle nor vulnerable, lest you think me an emotional-feminine creature (!); that I am in control of things; and that I am free from domestic interference (shit phrase, but by that I mean I wish to be seen as unencumbered by children or household duties in the way that many women seem to be (said without judgement)). And this was a major challenge for me throughout the candidature. Other than that, my choice of clothing and probably posture, at times, plays into this same desire to appear less conventionally feminine so that I can be IN with male power. I realise when I say that, that I am a long way from the classic butch dyke look, but I will always choose pants and boots over a skirt and heels! Which is ridiculous in so many ways and seems like such old thinking now.

I think there is a lot more I could write on this, but I'm aware also that much of this is probably an internalised misogyny almost, but may also be a reflection of my queerness (at least some of it) in wanting to smash up gender scripts by 'being male' sometimes. God this stuff is so loaded. So how much can I say is about our relationship or the way that gender figured in it? Hard to say – I brought all this with me so it may be what appears for me in most professional contexts.

Your point about us both being queer I think is an important one, as it removed any potential for sexual tension or whatever else plays out between straight men and women in terms of culturally ascribed difference. I liked that a lot and it obviously made relating with you easier (which helped to ease some of the gendered anxieties I described above). I don't feel at all strongly that gender was a major factor in our relationship. Yes, there was a clear power imbalance, but might this have been the same or very similar if you were a cis-gendered woman? Probably, though it's hard to say. 'Masculine ways' are more valued in an institution like the academy, particularly whilst it remains hierarchical, patriarchal, and colonialist in nature. Am I self-limiting in my thinking? Maybe. Am I doing feminism a disservice by thinking and behaving this way? Probably!

The TLDR version of this:

Your power and status means you can potentially influence my career in significant ways so I'm sure I had a level of gendered code-switching going on and attention to ensuring that I appear as a favourable candidate. What does gender have to do with this, if anything? I brought a lot of it myself.

Also, for what it is worth, you made me feel comfortable quickly and when the family issues hit hard, you were wonderfully supportive and understanding. You didn't, in fact, do any of the things I had thought a man with power might do in such moments (think of me as weak, too feminine, not capable). You helped me to understand it to be a normal part of being human and that 'life shit' happens over a 3+ year candidature. At times you let me see your vulnerabilities (at risk to you I assume) and this was a gift. Not only because it brought me comfort through relatability, but it helped me to begin to break apart those narrow, limited views I had of men always appearing to be 'put together' and therefore pressuring us women to be the same in order to succeed. I am grateful for that.

I don't think I've answered any of your questions really. Going through the lit review you sent over, I feel very little of it applies to me (it need not, I get that). The way gender played out for us I think was very different to these responses, and likely more about my own narratives and encounters with patriarchy that have nothing to do with you. Have I just skewered the whole thing??

So, what can I do as a supervisor?

- Make discussing with students what support they need a regular part of every supervisory conversation.
- Life happens to everyone – normalise changing circumstances across the research journey.
- Don't make assumptions about your students – be curious, talk to them.

This is really useful. And honest and insightful. I strikes me that this is the perfect format for responding to the topic of this chapter, because we're putting questions of affect, relationships, and embodiment at the front of our responses to the issue of gender and HDR supervision. Which challenges exactly the model of disembodied rationalism that researchers in this area have critiqued.

I also think this approach is useful for keeping in play the tension between structure and agency. I think we both acknowledge that, at a structural level, there are clearly particular challenges facing female HDR students (and, I would posit, female undergraduate students, and junior female academics, and senior female academics). And we can insist on that fact – and the importance of that fact – while thinking through the extent to which it affected our own relationship during your HDR study.

I think about attending to intersectionality in this area (Crenshaw, 1989). We've talked so far about the relevance of the fact that we're both queer. I know that for myself our class background also became important in building our supervisory relationship. We're both from backgrounds that can be described in some ways as working class. Personally I'm very aware that universities are profoundly classed institutions that are set up (to varying degrees, depending on the particular university) to serve the middle classes, promote middle class values, and reproduce class privilege (Brim, 2020). As I reflect on the time we spent together, I think that – certainly on my part – there was a feeling of camaraderie in my relationship with you from sharing an outsider perspective that could laugh at the pomposity and self-regard of many university processes and attitudes. Does that ring any bells with you?

Emma Phillips

Absolutely! There was something you said to me early on that stayed with me and helped me to feel

more of a camaraderie with you; and greater sense of belonging in the university – and at this level of study: "we need more people like you in the academy." It related both to my gender and to my working-class upbringing and it had a big impact, largely because I suddenly felt valuable to an institution (higher education, not UTS specifically) which has a history of marginalising, at least to some degree, women and working-class people. Again, this probably wasn't a completely conscious thought at the time, but the fact that it's stayed with me makes it incredibly meaningful. In my teaching role, I often look at students from non-traditional (in higher ed) backgrounds and think, "the academy needs more people like you"! At the right time, I tell them. So there's a nice paying-it-forward that's occurring, I think. It's also given me another little way to help in the great project of dismantling some of those structures we so rail against: tell people who don't fit the mould that they're f**king valuable in this institution!

You know, working-class people have, of course, been typically characterised as the opposite of that model of disembodied rationalism that has been foundational to notions of success in academia. I'm thinking of the work that you've done on this (McKee 2012) and also Kipnis (1999) and Skeggs (1997) (amongst others), who highlight how working class people are persistently associated with ill-discipline, flightiness, and basic emotion. Women get tarred with a brush that's not too dissimilar, and as I reflect on our working relationship during the PhD – and my encounter with the university more broadly – I realise how much these narrow conceptualisations may actually have been at play (particularly early on). I think mostly it existed as some kind of internalised sense I had of what I needed to do to 'make it' in the academy: to become more middle class and to become more 'male'. To escape, at least somewhat, my working-class 'basicness' (forgive the term – see, you can take the girl out of the borough, but..!) and my femaleness. And I cringe as I say this because I don't feel ashamed of either of these aspects of myself, but I do want success and acceptance in spaces that have been traditionally dominated by middle class, cis-gendered, straight men. So I've learned, I think, to speak some of those languages in the hunt for the same kinds of capital that said men have largely enjoyed in the world. BUT – and here is the joy – you helped me to see that those things which I was born with (or into) and for which I've been told so often don't fit/aren't right for the kinds of things I wanted to do, could actually be assets. And you're right, I think we related on matters of class and a general desire to break down hierarchical and exclusionary ways of operating in the academy, and this was of enormous benefit both to my sense of self/belonging and to a healthy regard for my own work, if that makes sense. And you made it ok for me to be in a caring role at home and still be taken seriously as a researcher. Being a woman and being known professionally to be a carer felt frighteningly risky to me – to my career.

So if our way of relating, and the way that you led me in the PhD work is antithetical to some of the less supportive traditions of doctoral research, then may it stand as a model for some form of intervention into limiting and old academic structures. If it reads as something that is less 'detached-masculine' and more humane and caring, then perhaps we 'gendered' the relationship in a positive way! While our respective genders perhaps didn't have much bearing on the relationship or outcomes of the doctoral work, it might be fair to say that we brought forward some ways of working which might be regarded as gendered (in the feminine sense), and an alternative to those ideals of masculine disembodied rationalism. And just to be clear, you know I resist ideas of gender essentialism, so these notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'

need not tether to men or women, nor any other gender. I suppose I'm riffing off dominant cultural understandings of masculine and feminine traits and trying to crack open the ways that value is ascribed to each set of traits, in the context of higher education – and the ways that you and I resisted them, more to the point.

And it's probably worth noting that you maintained a clear professional boundary with me, whilst also allowing for that camaraderie you speak of. It was collaborative, fun, emotional at times, difficult, intellectually rich, and caring. Not words much associated with the Serious and Robust work of the doctoral project. I love that you, 'the man with power', put care at the centre – and scuppered my preconceived ideas of what it takes to find success in the academy. I'm still hoping to pull-off looking like a fine man in a suit someday though... 😉

Alan McKee

I'm so glad we're having this conversation – we haven't done it in this way before and being able to think about what we were doing in that supervisory relationship, and make it explicit, feels both useful, and very ... emotionally satisfying?

So, given that we're at our word limit, how should we conclude? Maybe by thinking about what practical advice we can give to people about to start on supervisory relationships based on our experiences?

How about:

Ways to evidence your practice

- All of the team – supervisors and students – read this chapter
- Have a conversation about it
- Acknowledge that there are obstacles to people who are not male, middle class, heterosexual and white entering and succeeding in the academy (structures) ...
- ... while being open to the fact that we don't know how those obstacles will play out in any particular situation (agency; complexity; intersectionality)
- Aim to build supervisory relationships that are based on care, while (as you note above) remaining professional (at least until graduation – I think that we're friends now. We can go for a beer at the queer pub and do queer trivia together now, but while we were supervising I was aware that I was the one who had to sign off on your paperwork so the care was in a professional context) And – most importantly? – "tell people who don't fit the mould that they're f**king valuable in this institution".

Emma Phillips

I'm glad we're having this conversation too. I had an incredibly positive experience doing my PhD and it is lovely to reflect on what kinds of things made it so good. We both know too many stories of people who had a terrible time doing their doctoral studies so yes, maybe what we've got here can help, even if in a small way, students and supervisors to consider how they might build a better, more caring relationship – in the interests of better doctoral outcomes and expanding the diversity of voices in the academy. I appreciate that you've brought this to a point of practical suggestions. It helps to ground the idea of care in this context and, I hope, take it beyond old gendered tropes.

I think the strength of our supervisory relationship lay in its humanity – caring, collaborative, and unafraid to challenge the rigid traditions of academia (the support you gave me on this actually felt fundamentally caring). If we want a truly inclusive academy, then let's reimagine doctoral studies as a space where care is not an exception but a fundamental principle. And now I've pushed us over the word limit... Can't we just keep going??

References

While most of these sources and additional readings are freely available, some are not. The lock icon beside an entry indicates that the source *may* be available from your library.

Brim, M. (2020). *Poor Queer Studies: confronting elitism in the university.* Duke University Press.

Crabb, S., & Ekberg, S. (2014). Retaining female postgraduates in academia: the role of gender and prospective parenthood. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(6), 1099-1112. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.911251

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In A.M. Jaggar (Ed.), *Living with contradictions: Controversies in feminist social ethics* (pp. 139-167). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499142

Grealy, L. (2016). Cliché, gossip, and anecdote as supervision training. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 38*(4), 341-359. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2016.1203682

Halse, C. & Bansel, P. (2012). The learning alliance: ethics in doctoral supervision. *Oxford Review of Education, 38*(4), 377-392. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.706219

Johnson, L., Lee, A., & Green, B. (2000). The PhD and the Autonomous Self: Gender, rationality and postgraduate pedagogy. *Studies in Higher Education. 25*(2), 135-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/713696141

Kipnis, L. (1999). *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the politics of fantasy in America.* Duke University Press.

Lindley, J., Brown, N., & Quinn, L. (2024). What makes a great HDR supervisor in Law? Perceptions from HDR students and their supervisors. *Western Australian Law Teacher's Review, 2*, 37-56.

McKee, A. (2003). *Textual Analysis: a beginner's guide.* Sage.

McKee A (2012). Pornography as entertainment. *Continuum 26*(4), 541-552. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2012.698034

Schnaas, U. (2014). Addressing a gender perspective in postgraduate supervisors training in a scholarly way–an example from Uppsala University, Sweden. *ICED 2014: Educational Development in a Changing World*, 1-9.

Seagram, B. C., Gould, J., & Pyke, S. W. (1998). An Investigation of Gender and Other Variables on Time to Completion of Doctoral Degrees. *Research in Higher Education, 39*(3), 319-335. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018781118312

Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: becoming respectable.* Sage.