Developing shared know-how in doctoral supervision: Writing reflexively through 'critical moments' that shape student-supervisor relations

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Abstract

Despite the increase in supervisor training courses~~, emphasis on mentoring/coaching~~ and student workshops to support the PhD process~~ within universities~~, little attention is paid to the complexity of supervision relationships~~ as a dynamic pedagogic process~~. In this article we develop a creative analytic piece about the PhD supervision process where we weave together different voices, as students and supervisor, to create a dialogue about what we have learned (and unlearned) through the pedagogic relationship. We start from the theoretical assumption that the supervision relation is an improvisation that is performed through power-knowledge relations and everyday practices (reading, writing, feedback, questioning, dialogue) and hence significantly shapes the process whereby students 'become academics'. ~~The growing critical literature on supervision pedagogy has begun to identify how intersubjective relations complicate conventional hierarchies and open up possibilities for learning alliances, pleasure and reciprocity. Yet, there has been less exploration of how the supervision process is negotiated from different subject positions and which practices are helpful and which are not.~~ We present ~~our own~~ intersubjective narratives that give voice to 'critical moments' that reveal the normative assumptions about supervision relationships~~, that contribute to supervisors and students becoming 'stuck'.~~ Our analysis also offers insight into the possibilities of thinking otherwise about the practices of supervision and different notions of leadership that may contribute to the ongoing formation of learning alliances.

Key words: doctoral supervision, PhD, relationship, Creative Analytic Practice,

Introduction

> It was as if you did this by a kind of divine aura around you as a scholar, and the student would stand close and get warmed by this. (Connell and Manathunga 2012)

The above quote, in an article by Connell and Manathunga, reflects one, certainly ineffective view of the role of the PhD supervisor in Australian Universities. In this article we draw upon the growing body of literature on supervision pedagogy that acknowledges the doctoral process as a significant aspect of identity formation (the becoming academic) in the *relational process* of knowledge creation (Barnacle 2005;

Green 2005; Halse and Bansel 2012). The exploration of the complex supervisor-student intersubjective relation has been taken up through autoethnographic writing by supervisors, students themselves and at times through both voices (Bartlett and Mercer 2000; Lee, Blackmore, and Seal 2013). Our work seeks to contribute a reflexive account of our shared understanding of supervision practices and relations that emerged from our conversations during the doctoral process and subsequent analytic writing post-graduation for the second and third authors (Fox and Allan 2014). We identify several critical moments in the doctoral experience that commonly prevented students from proceeding with their writing, as well as those moments of insight where academic know-how developed through specific practices. All too often the practices through which effective supervision is performed and the academic practices that doctoral students need to develop are vague, shrouded in mystery (myths of natural brilliance) or highly prescribed through institutional 'to do' lists. In contrast, we aim to explore the intersubjective dimension of the pedagogic process through which both supervisor (SF) and students (RS & AP) developed self-knowledge that enabled intellectual autonomy, collegiality and shared know-how. We identify three common experiences relating to the uncertainty and shame of not knowing (the demons of stupidity), the process of unlearning in order to develop academic know-how (academic practices) and the peer relationships that support an emerging academic identity (shared insights).

These accounts are written as separate autoethnographic texts that are connected by the narrative threads that related to our analytic conversations around critical moments and shared insights. While we wish the reader to experience this writing as evocative of meaning (showing rather than telling) we also aim to situate the texts within the broader debates within the higher education literature around power relations as they govern the pedagogic relation between students and supervisors. In this way our texts bring into relation different registers of meaning that connect critical questions about how supervision is regulated and can be performed in ways that open up possibilities for autonomy and mutual learning.

Questions of power: Supervision, learning alliances and leadership

The increasing pressures on supervisors and students within higher education have been the subject of critical debate regarding the need to situate pedagogical challenges within the institutional and social contexts of advanced liberalism (Manathunga and Goozée 2007; Halse 2011; Halse and Bansel 2012). Students are required to complete high quality research within tight time frames that are governed by funding and policy regimes within the market economy of higher education. Supervisors are expected to ensure the quality of PhD 'outputs' and are subject to new audit practices that regulate professional development, require more administration and are often instrumental in focus. There now exist a multitude of workshops, recipes and tips for successful supervision that, while well intentioned in the desire to improve the capabilities of supervisors, fail to address the complexity of the pedagogic relationship. Despite the changing institutional networks and power relations that have come to govern the conduct of universities, and by extension supervisors, the model of supervision pedagogy remains a highly individualised relationship where expert advice is given and received (Halse and Bansel 2012). As Manathunga (2005) has argued, this intensification of supervision as a 'privatised sphere' of academic life poses a threat to the 'relational' understanding of knowledge creation and collaboration that can offer different conceptualisations and practices.

In their analysis of the discursive formation of the doctorate across a range of literature, Halse and Bansel (2012, 378) identified how four paradigms have framed normative understandings of supervision within universities today: apprenticeship, person-centred, scientific-technical and sociocultural. In response to the limitations of the four paradigms they make the case for a more relational ethics that would enable praxis in doctoral supervision (Halse and Bansel 2012, 378). This praxis informs the creation of a 'learning alliance' that moves beyond a pedagogy of doctoral education to encompass shared practices, policies and processes that connect individuals and organisations. The emphasis placed upon moral responsibility within the learning alliance does reconceptualise the university as existing beyond the market economy. However, 'responsibility' can discursively position supervisors as central actors when they often cannot exercise power to shift policies at the national or institutional level that affect workloads. Thus, we draw upon the notion of the learning alliance to signify the broader assemblage of relations that govern supervision practices and focus on how a relational understanding may generate different kinds of intersubjective knowledge practices. These supervision practices are at once individual and collective in their capacity to work within and yet contest the normative assumptions about power, academic identity and process.

We propose that the notion of a learning alliance requires a different conceptualisation and practice of relational leadership by the supervisor. Contemporary feminist debates on leadership and mentoring have identified how an ethics of care and responsibility for others is imbued with gendered power relations (Bartlett and Mercer 2000; Sinclair 2005). Feminist values of sharing, equity, democracy and fairness create both possibilities for innovation and a range of challenges in the professional arena (Ashcraft 2001, 1302). In contrast to conventional heroic models of masculine leadership where followers submit to the will of the leader, feminist approaches trouble the construction of fixed identities to reveal the complex intersubjective negotiations of power that constitute 'leaders and followers' in particular ways. With regards to supervision relations these debates are useful for clarifying how we might think about the intersubjective relation that plays out through particular supervision practices that are aimed at supporting self-knowledge, academic skill and know-how (Bartlett and Mercer 2000; Manathunga 2007).

It is not uncommon for supervisors to become caught in heroic constructions of leadership (as all knowing subjects) as these notions circulate through universities and amongst students who invest their desire for knowledge in credible leaders (to know what they know, to be like them) (Lee and Green 2009). Inger Mewburn, in her blog The Thesis Whisperer, regularly posts on the challenging relationship between supervisor and student, the expectations that come with it and provides different ways of thinking about how to 'manage' this kind of relationship. In a recent blog post (The Thesis Whisperer, 8 April, 2015), she discusses the common misunderstanding of the supervisor being a 'superhero'. She provides a checklist of things a supervisor needs to be able to perform, yet acknowledges that it is impossible for a single person to be able to know everything; being a supervisor – 'you never really master it. There is always something new to learn.' In a study of 100 blogs written by academics, Mewburn and Thomson (2013) also found that 'supervision' was one of the common themes discussed in these blogs. The challenges faced by both supervisors and students are similar in most disciplines, particularly in relation to broader academic work conditions.

In addition, there are familial metaphors that complicate supervisory relations for women as we navigate through historically masculine terrain with few signposts about how we make sense of supervision. Bartlett and Mercer (2000) have identified the gendered effects (and affects) of mother-daughter expectations that can mediate how guidance is provided and received. However, heroic and familial discourses work against the conditions that are necessary for students to exercise power through their writing voice and they undermine the creation of a learning alliance. In this context supervisors must negotiate the changing relations of proximity and distance, while enacting an ethics of care and enabling the exercise of intellectual autonomy in others. Grant (2005, 1) aptly framed supervision pedagogy as a continual 'practice of improvisation'. Engaging in critical discussion about the expectations that govern supervisor-leader and student-follower identities is a moment of improvisation where different ways of working together and identifying helpful supervision practices are made available. In the following section we turn our focus to the method that we used to elaborate upon this improvisation through an analysis of 'critical moments' where we as supervisor-student/s stalled, became stuck in past patterns governed by unhelpful expectations, and then found our way through.

Writing critical (and creative) moments

Taylor's (2011, 6) person-centred approach to supervision has emphasised the value of reflection on the PhD experience through reference to Miles and Huberman's (1994, 115 as quoted in Taylor 2011, 6) notion of 'critical incidents'. Such moments are significant events that are 'seen as critical, influential, or decisive'. This approach to reflection has been taken up by PhD students who have produced narrative accounts of their own 'turning points or on-going challenges' in the research journey (Lee, Blackmore, and Seal 2013). The related concept of 'critical moments' was conceptualised by Henderson et al (2007, 20-21) to describe events and situations that, while perhaps not deemed 'critical' at the time, are in hindsight recognised as significant. Henderson et al (2007) were attempting to theorise the experiences of young people involved in a longitudinal, qualitative study focused on *youth transitions*. The process of becoming an academic is certainly a *transition* and these concepts of critical incidents, or, perhaps more pertinently, critical moments, are useful and allow for revisiting and revision of events and situations over time.

While forms of analysis that reflect on critical incidents have provided invaluable accounts of doctoral experiences that are all too frequently invisible or unheard, we frame our approach differently to explore 'critical moments', not as individualised events or situations, but as intersubjective moments when both supervisor and student became 'stuck' and 'unstuck'. We contend that a relational and appreciative perspective not only works to foreground power as productive of (self-other) knowledge but also affords the opportunity for understanding how individual experiences are shaped by pre-existing subject positions. In this way we embrace multiplicity by sharing individual narratives between supervisor and student, as well as between students themselves. The many perspectives and positions from which we speak helps to break down the individualised nature of the relationship that can lead to supervisors or students blaming themselves (or each other) when the process becomes stuck. Rather, by appreciating the

joint development of new, creative and improvised practices of becoming ‘stuck’ and ‘unstuck’, we are rethinking supervision through the productive use of power. Writing our experiences together has also helped us make explicit the academic know-how that is developed along the way as supervisor-students learn from each other in dynamic relation.

We dDraw~~ing~~ upon methodological and theoretical insights from creative analytic practice, post-structuralist theory and autoethnographic approaches work to ‘show’ and not just ‘tell’ of our experiences through writing. As Gannon (2006) has argued, writing about one’s self is always mediated by relations with others and the language through which we make sense of contradictory subject positions and embodied affects. As such our writing offers partial knowledge and our intention is not to identify the ‘truths’ of successful supervision or doctoral experience, rather it is to reveal how dilemmas can be negotiated in ways that develop academic know-how. In writing both the students’ and the supervisor’s reflections side by side we make visible key moments where blame, failure and frustration might be worked around and through via a relational, and appreciative approach to the supervisory relationship and the doctoral process.

Our method involved writing on a shared, but closed, online forum about our experiences of supervision over several months as both students approached the final phase of their doctorates[i]. The online forum was originally established as a means of sharing ideas, resources and providing support during particularly challenging points in the thesis. It emerged out of the face-to-face discussion group that met regularly throughout the year with a larger group of students. Our analysis was completed after both students had graduated and were starting to supervise students themselves. It involved writing, reading and rewriting our texts in relation to each other as we engaged with arguments in the literature and reflected on past experiences. Our analysis was guided by the focus on critical moments as they gave rise to new supervision practices and insights. The texts we present below are both individual and interwoven, just as our own experiences of being supervisor and students have been mediated by the intersubjective dialogue we have engaged in over several years. Barnacle and Mewburn (2010) maintained that supervisors, peers and colleagues are all part of the doctoral actor-network and help the candidate in her journey of ‘becoming doctor’. Rather than merely focusing on writing, they argued, ‘supervisors might be best advised to look for creative opportunities for candidates to engage in knowledge performances in and beyond the text (Barnacle and Mewburn 2010, 441).’ Hence, we position our shared writing as an improvisation practice, or, in Eisenberg’s (1990) influential words, ‘jamming’, that reveals the constraining and enabling conditions of possibility for doing supervision differently. We discuss different practices that we have developed along the way, such as learning to listen and respond differently, or engaging in other ways of being (walking, running, dancing) and how these have shaped our intersubjective relations.

Becoming stuck and knowing how to move on

The PhD supervision process is largely invisible within the university between the 'confirmation and 'completion' milestones, unless things go terribly wrong. When several of my PhD students kindly nominated me for a PhD supervisor award I

appreciated their thoughtfulness but wondered when am I going to have time to write up the application? Time for reflection upon the process seemed like an indulgence but why should it be? I have spent the last 15 years developing my supervision approach and trying out different practices to identify how we might critically engage with supervision pedagogy. As a supervisor I received little training that was helpful in understanding the nature of the relationship and yet I carry enormous responsibilities. I needed to think this through further so I used the application process to outline how I work against simply reproducing a 'master/apprentice' model. It seemed that much of my approach was an ‘undoing’ of normative ideals about supervision (drawing upon my own biography of different supervisory experiences from my PhD) in the desire to support an emerging sense of academic identity. I thought about the specific learning relationship that I try to develop with each student, the use of writing and analytic practices to extend their PhD ‘know how’ and encourage collaboration within the group. It was a nice list of ‘good practice’ and pedagogic philosophy but that was really only half the story.

I had left out the complexities that are bound up with one's own supervision experience, the messy nature of learning to become a supervisor, and importantly, what students teach you along the way. What if we were to talk more explicitly about supervision pedagogy as it is embodied and relational? How might we create different forms of dialogue to develop a shared understanding with our students? This means refusing, but not denying, the status hierarchies and power relations that underpin the subject position of The Supervisor and The Student. I became interested in exploring the ‘know-how’ of supervision that could be produced through different kinds of knowledge practices that are generated 'with' students. We are not self-present subjects and like all relationships, supervision involves blind spots for both parties and complex levels of communication that can simultaneously involve developing a trusting and challenging relationship (is she hearing my concerns about the work and not her ability?), mastering content (have I been clear enough? does she get the essence of the task?) and developing academic practices (does she know how to do this?). Without some sense of shared insight into the relational process both students and supervisors can end up in the dead end of frustration, misunderstanding and self-doubt.

We don't make it easy for students to tell us when they are struggling; we expect that their diligence, dedication and perseverance will get them over the line. High achieving students respond by trying very hard to perform competently, to perfect their understanding. Yet, supervisors need to know when things slip otherwise we find ourselves in the spiral of misunderstanding; repeating points over and over, wondering why progress has stalled. So I now value the moment when the ideal of perfection unravels, when we can move beyond the stifling expectation that understanding will come easily. Key insights have emerged for me through reflecting upon those ‘critical moments’, when students have let me know in some unexpected ways that they were stuck and ‘things were not ok’.

Casting out the demons of stupidity: The uncertainty and shame of not knowing

> *RS: I’m lost, I have no idea what she’s talking about… somewhere between power relations and organisational practices I seem to have lost the plot. 20 minutes into the meeting and I’m already brain dead. What does she mean? I’ve stopped taking notes, maybe she’ll figure out that I’m lost?! No, she just keeps going and I keep nodding my head, pretending to understand everything. I have*

that feeling of guilt creeping up again… I'm supposed to know all this, we've already discussed some of those issues in the last meeting. I should've gone back to my notes from the last meeting. Maybe I should ask for some suggestions on further readings? It usually helps to read through a few things after the meeting so that I can start making the connections… but then again, we've discussed this before… no, I don't want to look stupid... But I do need to know where to go from here…?! I wish I knew how to ask the right question.

AP: Having supervision I would sit and listen and think to myself: 'how am I ever going to grasp all that she is saying', or 'what is she talking about!?' Then I would go away, and the next day look at my notes and pick out each point - it might be about a theorist, or concept, or links between my research and other stuff. I would follow it up, reading and writing, and hoping that what I was doing was 'enough'. It never felt like enough. The words that she spoke during our supervision sessions seemed far removed from what I eventually wrote down. But each time I would then show her my next version of the writing, she always seemed to think that I had progressed/improved the work to some extent (sometimes it was enough, other times it needed more, but I always felt as though I had really improved). The more times I went through the process - send through writing, sit down and take notes as she spoke about my work and the ideas she thought connected and ways I could extend my analysis and syntheses my ideas more. I rework the writing, send it back to her, and on it went - the more confident I became in my ability to pick up the threads and weave them through. I began to understand that the reason it wasn't all 'clear' to me, was because the ideas were complex, 'difficult', but ultimately, worthwhile. It was up to me to follow them up, not up to her to explain them to me in simple terms.

SF: We have been working through the first whole thesis draft in my office, talking about the conceptual threads that need to connect the argument and how to deepen the analysis. It is intense as I raise the intellectual bar a little higher, we need to move things to the next level. I think she is ready for this now but it is always a little risky. Across the table I see lots of nodding, murmurs of agreement about different theoretical points, a few frowns and then a confident exit from my office task list in hand. Some time later we have our PhD discussion group and someone let's slip 'Yeah sometimes I come out of your office feeling more confused than when I went in!'. There is laughter all round, they all nod with a shared understanding that I have just arrived at. Multiple supervision sessions flash through my mind. Really? I think I am approachable, why can't you say something? They reply, 'well sometimes we don't know what to say or what to ask'. This moment strikes a profound chord for me. I need to think and talk with each of them about what they do and don't understand about their own work. I try to think about how to teach someone how to read their own work in a way that will make sense to them, to their learning style and in terms of their PhD stage. I try out a few different techniques; comment on the draft you give me (what is clear, what is woolly), break things down, see the connections between ideas. We adopt these practices more explicitly and they seem to work, we spend less time with me explaining and more time with them reflecting, working things out and leading me as we go. I never again assume a nod means I understand.

Unlearning and learning new practices to develop academic know how

RS: *Looking back, however, I think what struck me the most about her style of supervision is that she really tried to make things work for me and to understand 'how I work.' My approach to doing my PhD is probably very different from the others, but I always felt like she understood 'how to' supervise me and my way of 'doing things.' One key thing she taught me is to reflect on what I am doing and why, to identify my strengths and use those strengths to get things done. For example, I like structure, I always need a plan, I need deadlines. She has always helped me to set realistic targets, then asked me to send through a summary of what we discussed in the meeting and what the next 3 steps would be. That sort of plan worked for me. It helped me keep track of everything, keep things organised - just the way I like it.*

AP: Sometimes I did leave her office in a spin, but for me it was all part of the process of undoing and unlearning what I thought I knew. Coming from a background in interpretive sociology, and starting to read feminist post-structural ideas is not an easy move - central is the questioning of 'truth' or any simple answer to complex problems. So she couldn't give me 'the answer', but she helped me find a way to think (and write) about the issues I was tackling in my thesis. She would offer books and articles to read, and I would reflect on these in my writing - in a writing journal. Some of these reflections ended up in my thesis. (…) I decided to instead write down all those doubts, concerns and 'fantastic' insights. If I had an idea as I was reading, I'd write it down - rather than talk about it as I often would in the past. As I wrote them down, and then shared them with my supervisor when our meetings came about, I was able to get feedback on my ideas.

RS: I try to smile as I get up to leave her office. Wow, that was intense! We have worked through the first full draft of my thesis and my head is spinning. I feel like I need to rewrite the whole thing... where to start?! Before I leave, I ask when we should meet again and what part I should rework first. She says, 'let's just play it by ear. See how you go.' This doesn't work for me. Doesn't she get that I need a new deadline? I want to start with chapter 4, have a new draft of that chapter by a certain date. I try again... 'So if I rework that chapter next week, can I send through a new draft on Friday?' (Am I driving her crazy? Am I asking too much? I know she is really busy at the moment...) Knowing how overwhelmed I am with all the ideas we have just discussed, she explains: 'Don't push yourself too hard. Take your time. Maybe spend a week just thinking about all these ideas before you go back and rework chapter 4. Draw a few mind maps... whatever works for you. But no writing for a week!' Sure... I nod and take off. Really?! No writing at all? That's not going to work for me. I need to produce something! I'm disappointed. I thought she knew what works for me and what doesn't. Why does she want me to do that??

(two days later) I've decided to give it a go. Maybe there is something important she wants me to learn from this exercise, which I can't see yet?! I'm sure there is (there always is!). So here I am... sitting at my desk, 'thinking'... I check my emails instead. I update my Facebook profile. I have a coffee with my friend. I find so many other things to do... I run into SF in the lunch room. She asks me

how I am doing and how my 'thinking' is going. I roll my eyes... 'It's driving me crazy. I am getting nowhere.' Again, she reminds me to 'be patient, it will come.' Yeah... right...

(a week later) I've tried to draw a mind map. Not my thing. I feel like I haven't done anything all week. Really, what's the point of just sitting here, 'thinking'?! I go back to my table of contents and start restructuring. Yes, that's more like my thing... I reread my chapters as well as one of the articles that seems important for what I am trying to do. And all of a sudden – of course!! It all makes sense now! I can see it. I know what I have to do. Why didn't I see it earlier? It's so obvious. And just like that I am back on track...

(reflection) I realised later that the whole point of this exercise was to learn how to step back, think and reflect on my own writing. Rather than SF telling me what to do and how to fix my chapter, I learned how to read my own draft and to see the connections. I was pretty frustrated at the time, but I now appreciate the process she made me go through. Now I quite often deliberately take these 'no writing, just thinking' breaks and I like to think that because of that, my writing has improved a lot since then.

AP: Sometimes I become stuck. She tells me to try going for a walk. She says that this is no less useful than sitting in front of a computer screen 'thinking' about the areas of the thesis I have become 'stuck' at. I am confused about how going for a walk might help me. But I do it. I am a 'good' student. I listen and take her advice. I go for a walk. I don't think about the ideas in the thesis, but somehow it helps. I sit down to write and get a new angle, a new idea. 'Its probably off track, but its something'. Writing, moving, doing. I know that she runs. So I go from walking to running. That seems to help too.

Shared insights, collective practices and peer learning

SF: I think one of the challenges (and core academic skills) is to learn to value your work from multiple perspectives - my view, your own view and views of others/peers. Given the individualised nature of the PhD (R's point about the pressure to do it by myself!) I think it is so important that you have each other to bounce ideas off, vent about the frustrations and make sense of the process - that helps you find your way through, because really no-one can tell you how to do it. And humour helps so much and you all use humour in ways that helps to open up a space to respond differently to whatever is going on.

RS : M came in to have a chat about her methodology chapter. She showed me the table of contents and wanted to know if it made sense. I think I said something like, 'well if you start with that, then you can add a bit about this here, move that section to the second part of the chapter, add a bit about that there and then you can come back to all this in the final section...' The structure was clear - well to me anyway. The funny thing, however, was that I also added 'remember, M, you need to take the reader on a journey!' She looked at me and

said 'woah, you just sounded like her. That's EXACTLY what she would say.' We both laughed (and started joking about getting t-shirts printed saying 'Remember, you need to take the reader on a journey - SF, 2013' - whatever happened to that idea, M?!).

AP: Who knew poststructuralist theory could be fun! I would go to our 'reading group' in the beginning, full of trepidation and uncertainty and she would use humour to work through ideas. As a group we'd laugh at some of our insights, interpretations and understandings. But not in a demoralising way. It was the excitement of understanding, of synethsis, of working through complex ideas in meaningful ways. It sometimes felt like we were 'naughty' for privileging poststructuralist theories. There was a strong sense of belonging – as a group of women situated in a business school, we were outlaws in some ways…I remember the first reading group I went to. The reading was a chapter from John Law's After Method. I was excited by the possibilities and pipped in with my understanding of the reading. After the group one of the more advanced PhD students took me aside and said, 'you did great'. Her comment confused me. Weren't we just discussing ideas?

Discussion

SF: I hope these thoughts help counter the 'supervisor pedestal' that gets in the way. I can honestly say that I felt all the things that you have mentioned as a PhD student too. With the completed PhD as evidence you can do it, the angst over this existential uncertainty dies down, so look forward to that change. Becoming a supervisor involves moving into a different subject position where you have multiple, intense relations to manage with students, compared with being a student who is invested mostly in one primary connection. Because of the emotion work involved there needs to be boundaries (some supervisors remain disengaged all the way and others have no sense of the student as a separate being with their own thoughts and lives). It is easy to burn out with the other demands on our time and not be very useful supervisors. But what is so different as a supervisor is the necessity to manage the process that is generally overwhelming for students who cannot yet see what they can accomplish. I'm not a therapist, nor a parent nor a friend in the conventional sense, so it is a hard relationship to make explicit and mutually understood I think. It is also a gendered context and women generally expect more of each other.

Supervisors need to understand the dynamics of shame for students that arise from governing one's self through high expectations (performing the autonomous student who is good enough and the supervisor pedalstool). Develop a language for talking about uncertainty and how students can begin to develop the self knowledge about what practices work for them.

Students - How not to feel stupid when you don't know, how to ask questions about what you don't understand

Developing Analytic practices (self mgt, emailing summaries, finding own style (eg structure) reading ones work and finding what works for writing, on not writing!)

Developing different kinds of academic voice (writing for supervisiors, self and others, reading/discussing ideas collectively, using google groups and facebook to connect ideas) and doing this collectively – sharing, speaking, revising

> *AP: 'Your contribution is great', says the principle supervisor (the more senior academic who asked me to join the team). I secretly (or not so secretly) beam. What a feeling! To be mentoring and providing support and guidance to a student. I guess it's a fine line between being supportive and second guessing the student though. Am I overdoing it? I still have a lot to learn and I am sure that every student I supervise will be different, facing different challenges, both personally and intellectually. But the first lesson seems learnt – that a relational approach is key. If my student doesn't understand something, its not all their 'fault', nor is it all my 'fault'; instead we can both play an active role. We are allies and have something to learn from each other. I mean, that's what attracted me to academic work in the first place; a love of learning and sharing ideas.*
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> *RS: Another meeting with Katie… I am struggling with this one. I feel like we are running around in circles. She's got too many things on her plate, doesn't seem to be focused on her dissertation. Why can't she be more like Steve? Steve sends through an email summary after every meeting, he has an action plan and he has already put the next three supervisor meetings in his diary – and so have I. He seems to be on track. But maybe he's not?! How can I be sure? Just because we have a similar way of working doesn't mean he's not facing any challenges, I remind myself. How do I know if he's struggling when he doesn't tell me? Oh wait… this meeting is about Katie… Right, how can I help her to prioritise and focus on her PhD for once? I pause and think… we're in this together. We need to find a way that works for both of us. I can't help but ask myself, what would SF do?!*
>
> *AP and RS: We are supervisors now. From SF we learnt to trust our students, to have confidence in their abilities, to provide suggestions where appropriate, to celebrate milestones and achievements, and to laugh together. And also to have boundaries, to stick to meeting times, to reply to emails in a timely and thoughtful manner, to highlight strengths and appreciate what they bring. We are no experts, though we can make suggestions. Reflecting on the moments we became 'stuck' and 'unstuck' has been useful in identifying what worked and what didn't. Lightening up. Using humour. Moving, walking, running. Writing more, talking less. Connecting with others. Finding synergies. Getting excited. These are not aspects of the supervisory relationship that are 'taught' in professional development seminars and programs.*

'Not understanding' is a relative position and the process of research and writing is often not straightforward. Creating a learning alliance is key. But this alliance is not an intimate one, but a professional one (Halse and Malfroy 2010). Academic practices of effective supervision are often highly prescribed (in 'to do' lists) and vague. However,

we have discussed how both supervisor and student learn and unlearn new/different/creative practices along the way, engage in shared practices and peer learning, and at times face the uncertainty and shame of not knowing. Fostering an *appreciative vision* (Cojocaru 2010) through a focus on the successes of students' rather than problems can help to create a stronger, though no less professional relationship based on support. The supervisory relationship is one where management is central, yet also highly complex. Self-management, institutional management, management of tasks and activities. An emphasis on the intersubjective dimension of the pedagogic process enabled us to discuss how both supervisor and students developed self-knowledge, collegiality and shared know-how. And so the supervisory relationship orientated 'for management' (Clegg et al 2006), though no less critical, enables polyphony. As Clegg et al (2006, 15) write, 'Polyphony does not deny power, but it does not assume domination either—it proposes that questions can be raised from the auspices of different rationalities'. Both a supervisor and student are engaged in numerous relations, including: with policies, others in the academic field, peers, family and personal relations, even technologies and spaces. The supervisory relationship that takes into account the management of these dialogues and relations occurring simultaneously with the supervisory relationship is one that can enable an alternative to the master/apprentice model of supervision. This alternative –a relational, 'polyphonic' (Clegg et al 2006) engagement – can circumvent the power relations inherent in models of supervision that simply assume a 'student would stand close and get warmed by this'. (Connell and Manathunga 2012).

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