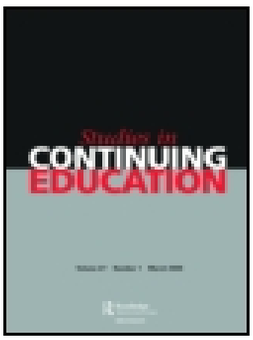

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Stories return personal narrative ways of knowing to the professional development of doctoral supervisors

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Storytellers have always known that there is more to a story than 'just a good yarn'. It is through stories that individuals construct and reconstruct their sense of self as they learn 'to be' in the world. Learning through stories is common across a number of professional contexts. However, storied approaches are under-utilised in supervisor professional development programs. This paper argues that telling, receiving, reading, writing and re-writing stories can open to doctoral supervisors a way to negotiate the chaotic pedagogy of becoming and being a doctoral supervisor. Two examples of storytelling – interactive telling and reading of stories of research student experience and supervisor autobiographical writing – illustrate how the art of storytelling can return personal narrative ways of knowing to professional development in today's performance-driven higher degree by research context.

Keywords: supervisor development; stories; storytelling; doctoral supervision; narrative knowing

Introduction

Internationally, doctoral education has undergone a fundamental re-shaping over the last two decades (Powell and Green 2007). A 'hallmark' of this 'sea-change' has been a growing emphasis on the quality of supervision as a factor affecting completion and attrition rates (Park 2005, 202) and a recognition of the 'importance of ensuring professional skills development for supervisors' (EUA 2007, 11).

In Australia the expansion of supervisor development programs across the higher education sector has been accompanied by an intensification of what Smith (2001, 26) has called the 'administrative framing' of postgraduate supervisor training. Framed from this perspective supervisor training has come to focus on information and resources (policies, codes of practice, statements of effective supervision), topics such as roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students, and on appropriate skills to manage students and the thesis; only a few programs 'draw on the model of supervision as reflective practice' (McCormack and Pamphilon 2004, 24). Technical rationality and administrative framing, based as they are on a need for certainty, set up dichotomies which separate mind and body, thinking and doing and theory and practice. They privilege 'generalisable, technical, management knowledge over local, disciplinary knowledge (McWilliam 2002)' (Manathunga 2005, 20). An outcome of this separation has been to remove the personal from the professional development of supervisors and to turn the focus from supervision as a chaotic pedagogy (Grant 2003)

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to supervision as an unproblematic relationship uncomplicated by power, hidden pleasures and desires, and tensions, contradictions and risks. This 'imbalanced dialectic, [is] one that subordinates the lived and living experiences of postgraduate research students' (Clark 1998, 45–6) and supervisors.

Storied approaches to supervisor development can return balance to this 'imbalanced dialectic' (Clark 1998, 45) because they 'value, explore, and build upon academics' prior knowledge and understandings' (Manathunga 2005, 22). This paper argues that the telling, receiving, reading, writing and re-writing of stories can open to doctoral supervisors a way to negotiate the chaotic pedagogy (Grant 2003) of becoming and being a supervisor of higher degree by research students. Two examples of storytelling – interactive telling and reading of stories of research student experience and supervisor autobiographical writing – illustrate how the art of storytelling can be incorporated into professional development programs for supervisors to return humanness (narrative knowing) to supervisor development to balance the performative framing (logico-scientific knowing) common to many supervisor development programs.

Learning through stories

Storytellers have always known that there is more to a story than 'just a good yarn'. Stories are more than a confessional (McCormack and Pamphilon 2004). Stories are a 'powerful tool for understanding and coming to terms with what it means to be human, in both a personal and universal way' (Burchell and Dyson 2000, 437). It is through stories that individuals construct and reconstruct their sense of self as they learn 'to be' in the world (Bruner 1986; Sarbin 1986). Stories as professional development move beyond mere recounting of events to 'create spaces for understanding our selves as multiple and diverse, as a work-in-progress (Greene 1995), constantly evolving, growing, shifting and changing' (Whelan et al. 2001, 148).

Learning through stories is common across a number of professional contexts. Storytelling has been employed by tertiary teachers across a number of disciplines (Clark 2002; Jenkins, Lonsdale, and Robertson 2007; LaBoskey and Cline 2000; McDrury and Alterio 2002). Stories have facilitated 'understanding of embodied "facts" and the lived experience of managing' (Rhodes and Brown 2005, 471) and empowered employees during organisational change (Kaye 1996; O'Connor 2000). Storying is also a strategy used by therapists (White 1997) and in career counselling (Gibson 2004).

However, supervisor professional development programs rarely employ storied approaches (for exceptions see Brew and Peseta 2004; Burchell and Dyson 2000; Manathunga 2005). Yet, Linden's argument (1999, 351) that 'narratives have considerable potential to sensitise supervisors to aspects of their role, and hence to enhance the quality of supervision', and Brew and Peseta's (2004, 19) finding that writing stories about supervision can 'challenge underlying conceptions' and result in qualitative changes in supervisors' thinking, suggest further investigation of storied approaches to supervisor development is warranted.

It has been argued (Schon 1983) that because professionals (such as doctoral supervisors) encounter complex and diverse practice experiences, straightforward rational approaches to learning (the logico-scientific mode of knowing) are not sufficient. Stories open to supervisors the alternative of a narrative approach to

learning (Bruner 1986). With this approach comes the possibility of re-storying their lives because stories have the potential to reveal both the individual and the collective nature of experience (McCormack 2001). Supervisors can become theory builders in their own lives by constructing and reconstructing their experiences through stories, and exploring similarities and differences in the stories of other supervisors. Stories help supervisors see into themselves, to see what they may not have seen previously, or to see the familiar through different eyes.

The following section presents two storied approaches to supervisor development noting the benefits of each approach from the participant and facilitator perspectives. The risks of storied approaches are discussed in the following section. The paper concludes that stories return the 'humanness' to supervisor development to provoke supervisors to undertake identity work and to understand the practice of supervision as a work-in-progress.

Stories in action in supervisor development

The context for both storied approaches to supervisor development presented in this section is a supervisor development program at a small Australian university. Supervisors enrol in this program in one of two ways: as a program participant (complete four modules) or as a student completing an elective unit in a graduate certificate in higher education (GCHE) (complete six modules, undertake reading and assessments). Participants are academic staff new to the role of doctoral supervisor. That is, those who haven't supervised but may supervise in future or supervisors with their first students. The two approaches – interactive telling and reading of stories of research student experience and supervisor autobiographical writing – illustrate how storytelling, receiving, reading and writing can construct professional development opportunities that make the experience of being a supervisor real, relevant and most importantly, doable.

Interactive telling and reading of stories of research student experience

The stories we discuss in this program session sit in a space that is both fact and fiction. The students whose stories we examine are 'real' students. Each story (see Appendix 1 for an example of a story) recounts an individual's experience of their research candidature told to me during in-depth interviews (McCormack 2001). The words that compose the story text are those spoken by the student during the interview. However, all stories are creative constructs no matter how closely the teller feels the events they relate match the events as happened and how closely the story adheres to the text of the interview. The account, as re-presented in each story, is also a fiction in the sense that the order of the events in the story has been reconstructed by me to make a point (the purpose of all stories). The construction and presentation of the story is mine. It is a fiction crafted into a story format (beginning, middle, end) using the tools and textual practices of a fictional storywriter.

The four-staged process that structures discussion of these stories (see Appendix 2 for a detailed description of each stage) draws from the story/dialogue approach initially developed by Labonte and Feather (1996) for health promotion work in Canada and further developed by McCormack and Pamphilon (2004). Unlike the unstructured questions that form the basis of a loosely facilitated discussion,

participants in this process use a structured approach to questioning. The first two stages involve supervisors in recalling, retelling and reflecting on their stories as students and interactively reading the stories of other students. Both of these stages employ Boud, Keogh and Walker's (1985) first two levels of questioning (describe the experience and attend to feelings) to facilitate a process of 'zooming-in' (Watson and Wilcox 2000, 61) on personal experiences. The third and fourth stages of the process use Boud, Keogh and Walker's (1985) third level of questioning (interrogating the story) to open to supervisors the opportunity to 'zoom-out' (Watson and Wilcox 2000, 61) of the everyday detail re-presented in the stories told and the stories read to consider supervisory practices in general and in relation to their practice in particular.

Immediately after the session participants voluntarily and anonymously complete a feedback questionnaire. In 2006, 14 participants completed a feedback questionnaire and in 2007, 23 participants gave feedback. Of these 37 staff, most attended the session as a program participant; seven participants were completing an elective unit in a graduate certificate in higher education (GCHE). Analysis across all participants' feedback for both years suggests three characteristics contribute to the effectiveness of this storied approach for supervisor development: the mirror/window quality of the stories, the particular qualities of the case stories and the structured process for engaging with the stories. Each of these qualities will be discussed in turn.

Stories as mirrors and windows

When stories act as a mirror, we learn about ourselves.

> As I read the story of Grace I smiled for in many ways she was me ... I felt what she was saying deep inside my heart. It was as though she was speaking for me ... I started to understand the importance of finding the right 'match' of student and supervisor. I also began to see very clearly that supervision is very individual and marked by the personalities of those doing it. (2007 program participant)

Also, as we look in the mirror from different angles we can see multiple selves not just the back to front image we see on first looking. Like Alice (in Wonderland), when the mirror became a window and she crawled through, supervisors find through stories as windows a world where everything is as different as possible, stories as windows are a way of looking into the past, present and future experiences of others. The familiar becomes different and so challenges assumptions, experiences and practices.

Characteristics of case stories

In these stories supervisors read the individual personal 'nitty-gritty', and the complexity, of the research student experience in a way that opens to the supervisor opportunities to construct and re-construct their supervisory practice. Characteristics of the stories that facilitate this process include their:

- *Authenticity:* 'Looking at case stories of students made it more real (especially as examples were based on real students)'. 'The case studies make it tangible' (2006 program participants).

- *Plausibility:* Supervisors can see similarities to, and differences from, their own story or stories of students they have supervised or heard about, in the stories they are reading.
- *Rich context:* These are stories of everyday experience; nothing is hidden, emotions are exposed and complications revealed but not always resolved.
- *Detailed accounts:* The stories include sufficient detail to encourage the reader to step into the shoes of the storyteller to experience vicariously the experiences of another.
- *Use of a narrative format:* The stories use a 'traditional' story framework (orientation, abstract, then what happened? complicating action, resolution, evaluation, coda). They are written in first person and employ conventional storytelling markers (And so, then, next, etc).

Structured process for engaging with stories

The structured process works because participants: have a sufficient body of shared experience, they feel safe and supported (in this case, being part of an ongoing formal program) and they have the opportunity to engage in discussions with colleagues (particularly cross-disciplinary dialogue). The use of structured reflective questions to guide the telling and reading and discussion of stories encourages meaningful discussion and invites supervisors to examine their experience, interrogate their practice and incorporate learning into future practice as illustrated by the following comments from 2006 and 2007 participants: 'Case stories generated good depth and discussion' and 'a lot of thoughtful and meaningful dialogue'; 'I started to understand the importance of finding the right "match" of student and supervisor'; 'I could see how my style and expectations can be quite different to that of a candidate (especially from a very different culture)'; and 'Case stories help to consolidate what we have been talking about during sessions'.

Supervisor autobiographical writing

The context for the autobiographical writing is an elective unit in a graduate certificate in higher education offered in 2007 (three participants). Each supervisor actively participated in the process of re-presenting their story in this paper. Quotes drawn from their autobiographical writing were included with the permission of each participant. Each participant saw the quotes I had chosen in the context of this story and was briefed on the context in which the story would be published. Participants were also sent a draft of the paper for final checking prior to submission. Participants were free to withdraw their quotes at any time.

The autobiographical writing task formed the second assessment task for the unit. Participants were asked to describe and critically reflect on their experience as a higher degree by research student. Two beliefs were behind my choice of an autobiographical writing task. Firstly, the belief that autobiographical writing as inquiry facilitates learning and self-discovery. Secondly, that supervision as a pedagogical practice is grounded in experience: personal experience as a student (Kandlbinder and Peseta 2001; McCormack and Landau 2004) and as a supervisor, and the experiences of others, personal colleagues or colleagues known only through their published writing.

Reflection is defined in this unit as an interactive dialogue with self, and between self and others, involving looking to the past from the present with an eye to the future. Drawing on the work of Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), Brockbank and McGill (2007), McCormack (2004) and Moon (2006), I developed a reflective framework to examine learning through autobiographical writing (Appendix 3). This framework became the lens through which to reflect on participants' writing in Assignment 2. Autobiographical writing in Assignment 2 stimulated reflection across the three reflective dimensions of this framework: setting the scene for reflective dialogue, reflective dialogue with self and with others and critical reflective dialogue.

Setting the scene for reflective dialogue

Each participant retold their experience using an identifiable story structure (beginning, middle and end). Participant 2 for example, began 'I went straight to a masters program from my undergraduate degree' and ended the story with the coda 'And now I've finished'. Most telling in terms of the value of Assignment 2 for participants as beginning supervisors was that their stories moved beyond setting the scene through descriptive accounts of their student experience (Dimension 1) to recount more than 'just a story' through reflective dialogue with self and others and through critical reflection (Dimensions 2 and 3).

Reflective dialogue with self and with others

In their stories participants actively analysed, evaluated and re-evaluated. Through self-reflective dialogue they recognised that emotions played a role in shaping their experience and its outcomes.

Emotions often overwhelmed events in participants' re-telling of their post-graduate student experience signalling the importance of emotions in constructing that experience. The extremes of emotions that surfaced in their stories illustrated the highs (intellectual challenge, confidence, passion, competence, excitement) and lows (loneliness, doubt, fear, uncertainty, abandonment) of their research student experience. Sometimes participants employed a metaphor through which to reveal these emotions. 'Once upon a time' began the story of '[Participant's name] adventure in Higher Degree Land'. This participant drew on a well-known fairytale to position her personal lived experience of the highs and lows of candidature within the experience of a fictional character. Another participant used the metaphor of candidature as a soup to describe the contradictory emotions she had experienced at the beginning of her masters candidature:

> It was frenetic and I felt challenged and reticent and confident all at the same time. I worked extremely hard – I loved the intellectual challenge. I loved taking my thinking to the next level. I felt excited, daunted, unstoppable, yet afraid. And that mixture of feelings set the tone for my entire candidature. I was always floating in an emotional soup, yet there was always also an intellectual light at the end of the tunnel. (GCHE 2007 Participant 2)

The journey of a tortoise conveyed the emotions of the third participant:

> I felt like a tortoise climbing a mountain range with a cracked shell. The initial excitement at enjoying beautiful scenery and fresh mountain air, had quickly turned to the grind of feeling each painful step, being blown backwards, or having to brace oneself when multi-national road trains steamed passed. Finally leaving the main path and trudging through a sea of unexplored territory and dealing with issues, events and personalities beyond one's ability to negotiate with, much less, control ... However had the tortoise planned the journey more thoroughly and actually researched the topic 'postgraduate research', the journey would have been less arduous. (GCHE 2007 Participant 3)

Participants also analysed their experiences by linking them to the experiences reported in the published literature on the research student and supervisor experience. In these reflective dialogues they related elements of other's stories (their ideas, experiences, comments and outcomes) to their own story and then evaluated the relevance of these stories to their own story:

> I discovered some of the issues that Grant (2000) refers to. These include an acknowledgement that the supervisor–student relationship is unequal with important gender issues ... Another issue was that my supervisor most probably viewed supervision as research not teaching – a different perspective to me. This set the scene for a difficult journey. As the process went on I did 'reposition' myself as Grant (2000) describes to being a more directed player. (GCHE 2007 Participant 3)

From their 'reflective dialogue with self and others' came actions for current and future supervisory practice (not all participants were currently supervising a research student).

Critical reflective dialogue

Critical reflection on both the highs and the lows of their student experience contributed learning for supervision. Occasionally, critical reflection surfaced stories of positive emotions from which students drew future supervisory practices:

> One thing that helped me enormously was to hear from my genius supervisor that she often felt like a fraud. That helped me to see that even the brightest are human. She also had the knack of saying just the right little thing at the right time which, for me, was far more successful than a protracted discussion – I could turn over a small conversation in my head, reflect on it, assimilate it whereas a long diatribe would become lost in my brain. I will try to model those aspects of her style in my own supervisory practice: admit my weaknesses, actively listen to the student and reflect manageable understandings of what they're trying to achieve back to them. (GCHE 2007 Participant 2)

However, recollections were more often of negative emotions suggesting 'what not to do' as supervisors. Critical reflection enabled participants to move their negative emotions on to a constructive role in shaping their future supervisory practice:

> When I think about being a supervisor I use my experience as an example of what I should not do. I really don't want to put someone else through the feelings of fear and uncertainty I have gone through. I want to be the kind of supervisor that 'means

> something', that makes a difference in somebody's life, that gives support and direction... I think about it holistically, that it's not just about the work – that really it's about the student and helping them to take a fulfilling and successful journey... I have a clear vision of how that might feel. I truly believe that a supervisor isn't just an absent overseer but rather should be a present and real teacher, someone to guide a student on their journey. (GCHE 2007 Participant 1)

Ideas for future supervisory practice also emerged when participants critically reflected on others' stories and then re-evaluated their experience in the light of this critical reflection:

> ... a supervisor isn't just an absent overseer but rather should be a present and real teacher, someone to guide a student on their journey. Sometimes the underlying principle that supervisors are meant to be teachers is forgotten (Lawson 2000). They are ... 'an active participant in the learning process' (Love and Street 1998, 153)... I like the idea of the research degree being a collaborative journey between supervisor and student (Love and Street 1998) or at least a shared responsibility (Krone 2006, 23). My feelings of isolation and abandonment are ones that I would try very hard to eliminate in my practice as a supervisor. (GCHE 2007 Participant 1)

With critical reflection came recognition and valuing of the process of learning through autobiographical writing:

> Recounting this story helps me to know how far I've come. It reinforces my view of the value of feelings and their consideration in assessing whatever I do. It makes me know that this reflection is a good starting place for building on the positives and limiting the negatives for those I supervise ... The role of feelings and their acknowledgement in the postgraduate experience was a significant learning that arose from reflecting on my own postgraduate experience. (GCHE 2007 Participant 2)

> The idea of my student research experience as a 'story' is one that has really captured my imagination. I had not thought of it as a narrative before, but I can see very clearly now that it has all the elements of a story – a main character, some villains, ups and downs, twists and turns, and some surprises... the metaphors add more depth to this retelling of my experience ... I was glad I had written my own story down ... I had examined my own circumstances, looked them in the eye and had all the emotional responses I needed to have ... It seemed that everyone had a story to tell, good or bad, and that story made them 'who they were' as supervisors. (GCHE 2007 Participant 1)

Participants' autobiographical writing also revealed the collective nature of their experience including:

- The importance of emotions in constructing their student experience (e.g., 'Perhaps the greatest benefit to me as a supervisor of the future from this reflection is my new understanding that part of the problem for research students is their ongoing amazement at the depth of feelings they experience').
- Seemingly mundane things, like a table and chair, can make a difference (e.g., 'I was allocated a desk in a postgraduate research room and that fundamentally changed my experience').
- The existence (or absence) of a student community of practice can also make a difference (e.g., 'encouraging the formation of communities of practice needs to be done in a healthy research culture').
- Informal learning can be as important as formal learning for research students (e.g., 'I think that informal coffee meetings are an excellent way to keep the flow of information happening, but perhaps more importantly, less formal

meetings are better at providing context for decisions which helps with the match of expectations').

Balancing outcomes: Benefits and risks

Individual and group processes of storytelling, reading or writing, as illustrated in the two storied approaches presented in the previous section, open to supervisors a way to negotiate the chaotic pedagogy of supervision because these processes reveal both individual and collective knowledge. Storied approaches to supervisor development provide individual supervisors with:

> ... an opportunity to develop rich descriptions of their practice while thinking through the contexts, influences and significant events that have contributed to the educational values they hold about research supervision. (Brew and Peseta 2004, 11)

Collective knowledge emerging from storied approaches to supervisor development extend learning beyond the individual storyteller, and the time of telling, to future students and supervisors. As Burchell and Dyson (2000, 441) note:

> There is an immediacy and accessibility about a story that no other form of writing or telling can match ... stories [deal] with current and very real concerns in dissertation supervision, which gives them the potential to speak powerfully to the experience of others in similar situations.

The importance of emotions in constructing a student's experience emerged as a common theme in supervisors' autobiographical writing and in supervisors' analysis of the stories of research student experience. The range of emotions reflected the roller coaster of emotions recorded in the literature on students' experience of doctoral studies (see Lamm 2005; Lee and Williams 1999; McCormack 2001; Morrison-Saunders et al. 2005; Parsloe 1992). The significance of an individual's personal experience of being supervised, and the role of contradictory emotions experienced as a student in the construction of supervisors' current and expected practice, also emerged through the individual and group approaches to supervisor development presented in the previous section. The role of emotions in the construction of supervisory practice as illustrated in the storied approaches to supervision discussed in this paper, together with the research on emotion and learning (see Brockbank and McGill 2007; Feldman 2007; Ingleton 1999; Lamm 2005), suggest that the shaping of supervisor identity through emotions (past, present and future emotions) merits further attention in supervisor development programs.

However, it is important to acknowledge that telling, reading, writing and reflecting, on stories is not without risks. Ethical concerns can arise when stories of another's experience are analysed, dissected and fully interrogated when the other is not present to clarify or expand meanings. Acknowledgement that a story is merely a snapshot in time – the person is not statically and permanently defined by the discourses of this story – needs to be included in such an analysis. Ethical issues also arise when stories written for a particular purpose, such as the extracts of autobiographical writing presented earlier, become part of another purpose, such as this journal article. The story writer will not be present when the journal reader examines their story. In such situations story writers must be actively included in the process of re-presenting their story as occurred in the writing of this paper.

A further complication arises when the autobiographical writing is to be assessed as part of a formal course. The context of assessment and grading creates an unequal relation of power and can imply in the application of a mark a sense of evaluation of the person rather than the writing. As Pagano notes (1991), the context of unequal power relations may have unintended consequences which run counter to our intentions to foster self-reflectivity.

To maximise individual and collective learning from stories requires an openness on the part of program participants to hearing the experiences of others, experiences that may be radically different from their own. Also, storied approaches require a willingness to explore problematic experiences, question assumptions, and to challenge previously entrenched ways of thinking/being as a supervisor. Some supervisors may resist this level of exposure and analysis preferring to go straight to a quick solution rather than examining alternatives.

When stories enter a pedagogical context, 'experience becomes a contestable resource for exploration' (Burman 2003, 276). This exploration requires courage and a high level of trust between facilitator and participant and among participants. Skilled facilitation to introduce participants to a storied approach (and the issues it can raise) and to 'read' the group, both at the start and during a program session, can facilitate an appropriate degree of risk taking and analysis.

Conclusion

This paper has responded to a recent observation that 'little is known about the pedagogical components of many supervisor programs' (Manathunga 2005, 19). It has presented two examples from an Australian supervisor program to illustrate how storytelling, receiving, reading and writing can construct professional development opportunities for academics new to the role of doctoral supervisor that make the experience of being a supervisor immediate, real, relevant and doable. These storied approaches address what Manathunga (2005, 19) notes is often missing from supervisor development programs, that is, 'the cognitive and affective domains of supervision … and the pedagogical issues of power, irrationality, and the body'.

The logico-scientific mode of knowing common to many supervisor development programs 'tends to underplay the humanness of teaching which involves making sense of contradictions and dilemmas; wrestling with ideas and methods; interacting with students and colleagues; and juggling the demands of teaching in an increasingly crowded portfolio of professional responsibilities' (Ballantyne, Bain, and Packer 1997, xix). This paper has argued that storied approaches to doctoral supervisor development enlist a narrative way of knowing to construct knowledge through the lived and living experiences of stories to foreground the humanness missing from supervisor development programs based in a paradigm of technical rationalism. Stories can do this foregrounding because they are complicated, ambiguous and infused with emotions. They are told in context rather than separated from their historical, social, and economic relationships. They are open to multiple interpretations from multiple perspectives. In stories tellers/readers/writers meet difference head on allowing them to challenge their assumptions, values and beliefs. Telling, reading and writing stories opens up the possibility of re-tellings/re-writings and as Dewey (1938) notes, reconstruction of experience is the foundation of education.

To create spaces for understanding ourselves as supervisors storied approaches to supervisor development must move 'beyond the process of merely recounting stories to a more educative practice of retelling and reliving stories' and when they do this stories provoke supervisors into 'asking questions not of knowledge, but of identity' (Whelan et al. 2001, 144). In the spaces created by storied approaches to supervision the demands of the current 'administrative framing' (Smith 2001, 26) of supervisor development can be balanced by the personal, the everyday experience of what it is like to do supervision.

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Appendix 1: Grace's story

My research is woven into the fabric of my everyday life. I see myself as a life-long learner, a life-long studier. I can't imagine not ever ever studying. Even when I've had periods of not doing anything I've studied something. I can't imagine it. I see growing as a human being and developing as an important part of my life so studying supports my view of the world and so does my work and leisure.

My topic is pretty much an area where I already know quite a bit about it. I know my subject topic inside out, but I don't know how to get where I want to go. I feel like quite a novice in terms of the research process. I'm probably on a very steep learning curve, and I'm going to enjoy it, but it won't be as safe as where I've been in the past. I feel, part of me feels a bit scared. It's like it would be easier to say 'ok I won't do this I'll go off and do another graduate diploma where I'll learn stuff but I'll be safer'. It feels like, more out on a limb. I'm being asked to produce something that is new I suppose on some level, or contributes to ongoing research, or expands what is already there. It requires me really to step outside my comfort zone. I'll talk about what it is I know and how that fits in with other research and you know, I need to do a lot of reading, literature reviewing, and all that sort of stuff. So that will be much more in-depth than I've done in the past.

That steep learning curve I was thinking about at the start of my study became much more obvious to me when it came time to present my proposal. I did my seminar at the end of November. I kind of produced a seminar from nothing, you know, from knowing nothing about the method. So I did a lot of work in that six weeks. I put an enormous amount of energy in, sort of six hours a day, for about six weeks and then I burnt out after that. I fell into a bit of a heap and thought I never wanted to see this stuff again.

But then after that I realised I was trying to push myself into somebody else's time frame and that wasn't going to work for me. Because for me this thesis is more than just, it's not just about fulfilling criteria. It's hard to explain. I don't want to produce a piece of work that's just about jumping through hoops. And also, I'm really mindful about what the faculty needs me to produce, but I'm also, producing something that is mine, that is what I want to do I guess. For me it is about, having practised differently for ten years in midwifery, I know there are different possibilities. I know the stuff I want to write about is really important to write about and it's not written about. It is silenced in midwives and it is silenced in women. It is because of the whole institutionalised way we do childbirth. I think that we've lost this whole other meaning of birth. That's the stuff I want to write about. It is about making a difference in midwifery education in the future. And so I want to add my own voice, my own experience in there. I just want to be able to, I guess, tell my truth, stand in my truth, in writing the master's.

My research is really a personal process for me. It's about being connected to my work. It is my work and it is my life purpose. I am sure we get more out of a master's than a bit of paper. It's more a journey of personal growth, a bit like birth should be I think.

Appendix 2: Four stage process for interactively reading student stories

1. *Supervisors retell and reflect on their stories of learning*: Supervisor pairs interview each other about their conceptions of learning through research using the following questions: Tell me about a time/situation during your time as a research student when you felt like:

   - Gee, I really learnt something then!
   - Well that was a waste of time, I didn't learn a thing!

   What was it that helped or hindered your learning in these contexts? The whole group then discusses their responses.

2. *Interactive reading of research students' stories of learning:* Supervisors read a story (see Appendix 1 for an example of a story) and make notes in response to two groups of questions: Describe the experience:

   - What in your words is this person's story?
   - How does this student define learning?
   - To what extent is this also your story?
   - In what ways is it different from your story?

   Attend to feelings:

   - What does learning feel like?
   - In what contexts does learning occur?
   - What elements characterise learning?
   - What feelings did the story trigger in you?
   - What do these feelings reveal about your experience?

   Supervisors then share their responses with someone who read the same story as they read, and then with someone who read a different story.

3. *Interrogate the stories to expose possible supervisory practices:* The whole group discusses the following reflective questions:

   - What understandings of learning are held by these students?
   - How are these students' understandings different from or similar to your own/those discussed earlier?
   - What other conceptions of leaning are possible?
   - What could the conceptions of learning held by these students mean for their interactions with their supervisor? For example: What could their conceptions mean for the topic they chose? What would motivate students with each of these conceptions to complete their thesis? What happens when conceptions of supervisor and student are different?

4. *Constructing/re-constructing personal supervisory practice:* This final stage asks: What principles of effective supervision will you draw from these stories to incorporate in your practice? Individuals take a few minutes to privately complete the following statement:

> The most important learning I will take away from this session is... This learning is important to my practice as a supervisor because ...

The completed statements are then shared in a round format. Each person's important learning is recorded on the whiteboard and becomes part of the discussion in subsequent sessions as participants continue to construct and reconstruct their understandings of research supervision.

Appendix 3. Framework for examining reflection in autobiographical writing.

Dimension	Action	Evidence
Setting the scene for reflective dialogue	*Narrative reflection*: Return to the experience and retell (rewrite) the story	Identifiable story: has a beginning and an end, gives context, actors, description of what happened, and then what happened, and the outcomes; mention of emotions in description of events in the story
	Emotive reflection: Attend to feelings associated with the experience	Focus on self (tells the story from one point of view) with little attention to ideas of others, alternative viewpoints, attitudes of others, possibility of multiple perspectives But more than 'just a story' because: Signals awareness of the presence of feelings and emotions in the story Signals points for reflection, for example, by asking questions or describing a critical incident/turning point (but doesn't actually begin this reflection by responding to the questions or analysing the critical incident)
Reflective dialogue with self and with others	*Analytical reflection*: Link to the experiences of others (other learners, research literature, colleagues) analyse these experiences	Evidence of self-questioning and willingness to be critical of self Recognition that emotions play a role in shaping the experience and its outcomes Relate elements of others' stories (i.e., their ideas, experiences, comments, research outcomes) to own story Evaluate the relevance of others' stories to own story and identify ideas for personal supervisory practice
	Evaluative reflection: Re-evaluate personal experience in the light of this dialogue with others	Acknowledgement of value of learning through autobiography/reflective writing
Critical reflective dialogue	*Critical reflection*: Reflection on learning implications for future practice	Evidence of metaphor in the story/story as the metaphor/construction of the story through a metaphor Stand back from own experience: move beyond the individual to the bigger picture, consider questions of power relations, context and multiple perspectives
	Process reflection: Reflect on the process of learning through reflection	Recognition of the role of emotion in shaping personal supervisory practice in the future Active self-questioning dialogue, deliberating between possibilities/perspectives and recognition of implications of these deliberations for future practice Acknowledgement that things can and will change, expectation of change as the 'norm' Actions to transform ideas into personal practice identified and acted upon Actions to for ongoing reflective dialogue identified (how will you know the transformed practice will be effective) Recognition of role for autobiography/reflective writing in ongoing professional development as a supervisor