‘Am I doing it right?’: Exploring the practice of supervising master’s dissertation students

Helen Ann Macfadyen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree of Professional Doctorate

Research Undertaken in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

December, 2016

Abstract

‘Am I doing it right?’: Exploring the practice of supervising master’s dissertation students.

Students undertaking taught master’s programmes comprise the largest group within postgraduate education. Dissertation supervision is recognised as being a key influence on student attainment, but there is relatively little research into this aspect of academic practice (Bruce and Stoodley, 2013).

This action research project, which involved collaboration with 25 master’s dissertation supervisors in health and education, identified that it is one of the aspects of the job that even experienced academics feel least prepared for and worry about.

In order to enable them to articulate their previously untapped expertise of supervision, I created a ‘communicative space’ (Kemmis and McTaggert, 2005) in which academics shared their experiences, reflected with one another on the nature of supervision, and developed materials for new supervisors. They recognised that supervisory expertise is not a definable body of knowledge but a process which involves situational judgement. Together we articulated five key messages for other supervisors which outline the complexities involved in this role. Building upon these findings, I constructed a new three sided model, which conceptualises the process of supervision.

The new model developed through my research explains how these supervisors practice, using a holistic approach to promote students’ development. The core element is the supervisor’s ongoing assessment of a student’s readiness, motivation and individual situation. In response to this assessment, supervisors balance three functions in promoting student growth: Facilitating, Nurturing and Maintaining Standards. Facilitating encourages student growth through challenge or stimulation. Nurturing involves the provision of support and reassurance within a safe space in which this growth can occur. Maintaining standards ensures that academic and professional rigor are preserved.

The key messages and new model contribute to the established knowledge within supervisory pedagogy and are of benefit both in the preparation of new supervisors and for future development of this academic practice.

Contents

1. Background and Context **p.21**
- Introduction p.21
- Initial aims p.22
- Revised aims p.24
- Outline of research cycles p.25

2. Conceptualising Supervision **p.28**
- Introduction p.28
- The concept of supervision within the Higher Education context p.29
- Student perspective p.30
  - Student consultation p.31
    - Organisational factors p.31
    - Academic guidance p.31
    - Supervisor's knowledge and skills p.31
    - Personal support p.32
  - Literature on student views p.32
- Employer's perspective p.34
- Evolution of supervision p.35
- Contradictory approaches p.38
- Changes in activity p.38
- Expansive transformation of the practice of supervision p.39
- Summary of the activity of supervision p.40
- The student-supervisor relationship p.40
- The need for further development of supervisory pedagogy p.42
- Conclusion p.44

3. Contemporary conversations on supervision **p.45**
- Introduction p.45
- Literature review process p.46
- Overview of the literature landscape p.46
  - Functionalist perspective p.47
  - Interpretive perspective p.49
  - Radical Humanist perspective p.50
  - Radical structuralist perspective p.51
- The concept of power within supervision p.53
- Cross cultural supervision p.54
- Supervisor development p.56
- Models of supervision p.58
- Conclusion p.60

4. Philosophical principles underpinning the research **p.62**
- Introduction p.62
- Review of possible methodologies p.62
  - Ethnographic approach p.63
  - Narrative approach p.63
  - Phenomenological approach p.64

- Case study research p.65
- Action research approach p.65

Initial exploration of supervision p.66
Overview of action research p.69
Action research typology p.71
Research Methods p.72
Conclusion p.73

5. Being supervised p.74

Introduction p.74
Reflexive activities p.74
- Assumption analysis p.75
- Contextual awareness p.79
- Imaginative speculation p.79
- Reflective scepticism p.80

Conclusion p.81

6. Methodology p.83

Introduction and Overview p.83
Ethical Considerations p.84
- Informed Consent p.84
- Anonymity and confidentiality p.84
- Protection from harm p.85

Phase 1 – Initial exploration p.87
- Planning p.87
- Action p.87
  - Recruitment p.87
  - Response to invitation p.88
  - Rationale for use of interviews and focus groups p.89
  - Approach to data collection p.90
  - Organisation of interviews and focus groups p.91
  - Format of discussions p.91
  - Transcription p.93
- Reflection p.93
  - Familiarisation and constructing a thematic framework p.94
  - Coding of the data p.94
  - Reviewing the themes p.95

Phase 2 - Increasing supervisors' awareness of their practice p.95
- Planning p.95
- Action p.96
  - Recruitment p.96
  - Interviews p.98
- Reflection p.99
  - Familiarisation and constructing a thematic framework p.99
  - Coding of the data p.100
  - Reflection on analytical process p.101
  - Indexing and sorting p.101

- Reviewing the data p.101

Phase 3 – Co-constructing an explanation of supervision p.102
- Planning p.102
- Action p.104
  - Reflection on the workshop arrangements p.104
  - Format of workshops p.106
  - Reflection on the atmosphere of the workshops p.106
  - Generating, collating and recording data p.108
  - Workshop one p.109
  - Workshop two p.110
  - Workshop three p.110
  - Workshop four and five p.111
  - Workshop six and seven p.112
  - Workshop eight p.113
- Reflection p.114

Phase – 4 Piloting of resources p.114
- Action p.114
- Reflection p.115

Further reflections on the overall study p.116

Abstraction and interpretation p.116

Conclusion p.117

7. Findings – Key Messages p.118

Introduction p.118

Key Message 1 – Going through the process with the student p.119
- Quality of relationship p.119
- Student goals and expectations p.122
- External pressures p.124

Key message 2 – The unpredictability of supervision p.126
- Fluctuating goals p.127
- Maintaining student confidence p.128
- Need for supervisors to be flexible p.130

Key message 3 – Assessing, anticipating and creating p.132
- Assessment of student needs p.133
- Anticipation of issues p.134

Key message 4 – Assessment and feedback p.135
- Consideration of student background p.135
- Challenges experienced p.136
- Feedback p.138

Key message 5 – Influences on your approach p.139
- Acknowledgement of supervisor's feelings p.141
- Benefits of discussions with other supervisors p.142

Supervision strategies p.143
- Elements of assessment p.144
- Managing the supervision process
  - Readiness p.144
  - Motivation p.145

- Situation p.145
- Managing the supervision process p.146
  - Facilitating p.147
  - Nurturing p.147
  - Maintaining standards p.148
- Student centred approach to management of supervision p.148

Impact of participation on supervisors p.149
- Increased self-awareness p.150
- Change in practice p.151
- Increased confidence p.152

Conclusion p.153

8.0 Discussion p.154

Introduction p.154
Commentary on the research process p.155
- Relationships p.155
- Formation of a communicative space p.156
  - Power and politics p.156
  - Working against denial p.157
  - Taking time p.157
  - Possible tensions in facilitation p.158
- Developing good working relationships p.159
  - Emotional risk p.160
- Practical outcomes p.161
- Extended ways of knowing p.162
  - Experiential knowledge p.162
  - Presentational knowledge p.163
  - Propositional knowledge p.163
  - Practical knowledge p.164
- Purpose p.164
  - The supervisors p.165
  - Recent literature p.165
  - Conferences p.166
- Enduring consequence p.166

New model of supervision p.167
- Development of the model p.168

Three sided model of supervision p.169
- Dynamic nature of the three sided model p.171

Tacit knowledge p.172
- Building educational theory p.173

Conclusion p.175

9.0 Conclusion p.176

Introduction p.176
Design of the study p.177
Resolving challenges p.177

Contribution to knowledge p.178
Future research p.179
Conclusion p.179

Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1. Experience of phase one participants p.88

Table 2. Professional background and supervisory experience of Phase 2 supervisors p.97

Table 3. Workshop attendance p.106

Table 4. Workshop activities and strategies p.107

Figures

Figure 1. Overview of action research cycles p.26

Figure 2. Outline of each action research cycle p.83

Figure 3. Example of summarising of statements to capture essential elements p.100

Figure 4. Basic structure of three sided model of supervision p.168

Figure 5. Assessment framework used by supervisors p.170

Figure 6. Supervisory functions p.170

Figure 7. The three sided model of supervision p.171

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the colleagues who invested their time and energy to participate in this study, and became my co-researchers along the way. Their willingness to share their experiences, insights and ideas about supervision was invaluable and their ongoing enthusiasm and interest in the project were a great encouragement to me.

The advice and comments which I received from my supervisors, Dr Colin Cameron and Dr Steve Tawse, were always helpful and I greatly appreciated their wisdom and reassurance throughout.

Special thanks are given to Andrew Fletcher for transcribing the interviews and focus groups so efficiently, to Alison Pringle for assistance with the formatting and to Dr Lesley Fishwick for proof reading and commenting on the final thesis. The indefatigable patience of Paul Agnew in answering my many questions about the process was such a help in negotiating the administrative requirements, and I am very grateful to him for all of his guidance.

I was helped enormously by the continued support of my doctoral student peers and colleagues within the Faculty and Academic Registry. Responding to their enquiries about how the study was going and what I was learning helped me to find new ways of expressing my thoughts, and their questions often prompted me to think about the work from a different perspective.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of my friends and family and to say a huge and heartfelt ‘Thank You’ to Gordon, Laura and Jamie for their love and endless patience throughout the years during which I have been preoccupied with this project.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 14th September, 2012.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 52,163 words

Name: Helen Ann Macfadyen

Signature:

Date: 12/12/2016

Chapter 1

Background and context

Introduction

> *"Hey Ann, do you have anything on how to supervise students doing their master's dissertations? I have been given a couple to look after."*

This question from a colleague caused me to stop and think. As my role involved learning and teaching development, I was often asked similar questions about different areas of academic practice, but I realised that I was a bit stumped by this request. Thinking about it, I recognised that it was not something covered on the teaching course for new academics. It appeared to be taken for granted that once someone had completed a master's degree, they should be able to take on the role of supervising others, often without any introduction to what might be involved. I began to wonder where and how my colleagues and I had learned about this aspect of our role. The lack of preparation for this responsibility was especially surprising given the need to develop further supervision capacity within the Faculty in response to increasing student numbers on the taught postgraduate programmes.

I was aware that several of my colleagues over the years had expressed anxiety at supervising students, articulating a concern that their inexperience could affect the student's performance and ultimately their grade. I began to think that defining the tensions inherent within supervision and developing a clearer understanding of the role would be useful to supervisors and improve student experience and achievement.

The health and education master's programmes within our Faculty contain a final dissertation component which is designed to enable students to demonstrate an understanding of research techniques in practice. I have enjoyed acting as a supervisor for postgraduate students who are undertaking master's level study, and have found the opportunity to work with individuals as they overcome their anxieties about research very satisfying. However, it is not always an entirely comfortable experience, as it can require that I stretch the boundaries of my own skills and understanding, working with students from a range of different clinical backgrounds. I recognise that

I feel great responsibility for the progress of these students, as they go through an often unsettling process which requires them to question the established knowledge within their discipline.

Although I had supervised many undergraduate students in their final year projects, I was a relatively inexperienced supervisor for postgraduate students, having supported three to successful completion of their master's research dissertation. All three had undertaken phenomenological research with an educational focus in a healthcare setting and drawing on my own similar research experience, and with the support of the master's programme team, I had felt quite comfortable in my ability to support them. Shortly after my colleague's question, I was asked to take on the supervision of two students from other programmes, one of whom would be using a different research methodology, and I was aware of feeling less confident in my supervision skills.

Reflecting on my need to develop better skills with which to support these students, I recognised that it was an element of the academic role which did not appear to receive much attention in staff development initiatives, and wondered if this was the situation in other institutions or disciplines. An initial review of the literature identified that although there was a growing evidence base about the processes involved in doctoral level supervision, this was not the case for supervision at master's level.

Initial aims

My original intention for this study was to follow an initial exploration of what supervision involved with a comparison of master's level supervision processes across different disciplines, similar to the work undertaken by Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997, 2004) on doctoral supervision, starting with my own Faculty. The research questions originally identified for the study were:

- What supervision strategies do supervisors identify as being good practice?
- What factors may influence the development and implementation of these strategies?

- What information may be gleaned from the findings that may improve the practice of research supervision?

I thought that undertaking initial investigations within my own organisation would enable me to identify the skills and challenges of supervision. I was seeking to understand the reality of supervision and obtain honest insights into the processes involved, and believed that 'insider research' would be a useful approach (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Although student achievement on the master's programmes offered within my own Faculty was good, with high completion rates, I was seeking to get behind the confident public persona which may be adopted by supervisors for the benefit of students or colleagues, and gain access behind this front, where I could get a better understanding of the paradoxes and problems which might exist. Given the apparent competence of the established supervisors I was unsure as to whether my colleagues would be interested in investing any time to critically evaluate this aspect of their role.

I invited colleagues from the disciplines of health and education to take part in an exploration of their experiences of supervising postgraduate students who were undertaking the dissertation element of their masters' level study. The response indicated that colleagues would appreciate such an opportunity. The list of those undertaking supervisory duties at master's level within the Faculty at that time included 31 members of academic staff. Following ethical approval, I e-mailed them with an invitation to participate in an interview or online discussion, and within days 23 people had responded to say that they would be willing to be interviewed.

Through the conversations which took place during the interviews, I was struck by the personal, individualised nature and the emotional elements of supervision which were described. Although it was clear that my colleagues were using a whole range of supervisory skills and strategies when promoting student development, many whom I knew to be very experienced and competent supervisors expressed doubts in their abilities. When asked to describe their approach to supervision, most found it difficult to articulate this. It seemed that supervisors sometimes felt a sense of ill-preparedness, under confidence, and being slightly unsure about their supervisory role. Almost all of those who were interviewed expressed uncertainty about their

supervisory practice – and the question '*Am I doing it right?'* emerged as a common concern.

Revised aims

On reflection, I realised that the experiences and sentiments expressed by my colleagues resonated very closely with my own involvement as a supervisor. Although I had perhaps not been fully conscious of this at the time, I had started on the study partly with the intention of dispassionately analysing supervisory practice aiming to identify what 'worked well', and to 'discover' the secret of successful supervision. This is indicative of a functionalist view of educational development, which is based on the idea that practice is a precise process, the outcome of which can be predicted by the alteration of one or more of the specific elements involved (Halse, 2011; Petersen, 2007).

Over the first few months of the study, I came to an understanding that I was one of a number of supervisors who recognised that this was a complex area of academic practice which did not appear to be clearly understood. This dawning awareness led me to reconsider the intended research approach and to review the original aims of the study. I recognised that these had been somewhat simplistic and not in line with my personal educational philosophies, which were based on an appreciation that the Faculty as an organisation was a social construction (Burr, 2015), in which processes and practices had been developed by individual members over a period of time.

I realised that, as described by Manathunga (2005), there was a wealth of contextually embedded knowledge about the process of supervision and that an understanding of this would best be gained by learning from those who had experience in this process, who could explain the hidden realities of supervision as a teaching strategy.

I amended my research question to:

- How can I better understand the complexities and challenges involved in the practice of supervision of students undertaking postgraduate master's dissertations?

There were three subsidiary questions which supported this aim. These were:

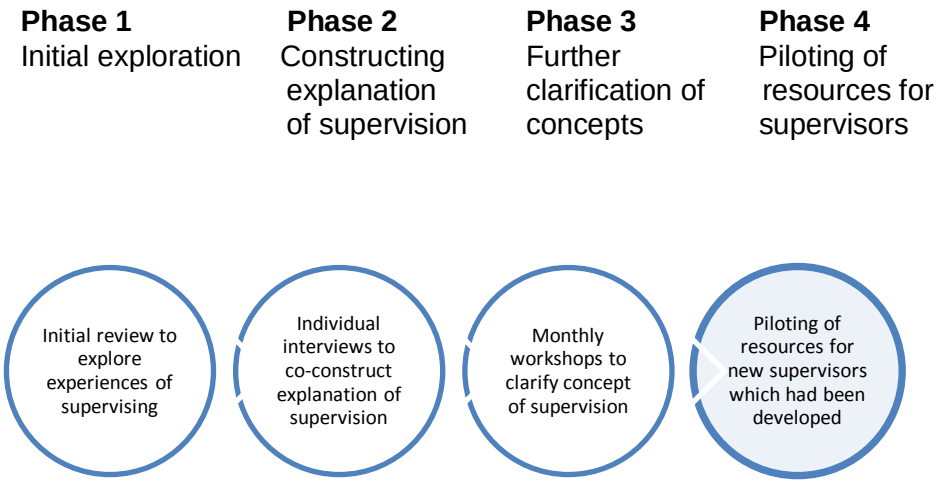
- What supervision strategies do supervisors identify as being good practice?
- What factors may influence the development and implementation of these strategies?
- What information may be gleaned from the findings that may improve the practice of research supervision?

In reviewing the literature, I became more aware of the underlying philosophical viewpoints which had informed my beliefs about education and my approach to this research. Burrell and Morgan's framework of sociological paradigms (1979) proved to be helpful in understanding the different perspectives evident within the literature and gave me fresh insight into the factors which can impact on practice. My selection of the approach used within this study was informed by consideration of the research methodologies.

Outline of action research cycles

Coughlin and Brannick, 2014 and McNiff and Whitehead, 2006 suggested that action research projects often encompass a number of phases or cycles, the findings from each of which feeds into the next. This project comprised of four phases which are illustrated below:

Figure 1 Action Research Phases



Phase 1 – In order to understand the processes involved I undertook an initial exploration into supervision within the Faculty. I interviewed the 20 academic staff who were available at this time, either in small focus groups or in individual interviews, to explore their experience of supervising students. While they were able to describe their experiences of supervising students, almost all struggled to define what approaches they used, as they had not been asked to articulate them before. Several of them expressed a wish to reflect upon this element of their practice and to explore the issue further with others.

Phase 2 – I interviewed 13 supervisors and worked with them to co-construct an explanation of their supervisory practice. We also identified a range of collaborative activities in which they would be willing to work together with the others to further develop our understanding of supervision.

Phase 3 – I worked with a group of 11 of these supervisors in a series of monthly workshops, to explore the concept and practice of supervision. We considered theoretical models of supervision and discussed factors which can impact on this part of the academic role after which we developed a document entitled 'Guidelines, Hints and Tips' for supervisors. Following this they agreed that reflection on their participation in small focus groups would be useful to identify the impact of the activities on our practice.

Phase 4 – I introduced the ‘Guidelines, Hints and Tips’ document to nine new supervisors during two small workshops, following which some commented on how this could be used to inform their practice.

From these actions, and the subsequent critical analysis which took place within this project, a number of key messages for supervisors were articulated, and a new model of supervision has been constructed. Given that supervision is an increasingly essential element in the work of most academic staff, and that there has previously been very little guidance on this role, I would argue that these findings make a valid contribution to the evidence base for this aspect of academic practice.

Before giving details of the action research phases described above, it is important to explore the principles underpinning the practice of supervision within higher education, and the existing knowledge base and thinking regarding this activity. This will provide a context against which the outcomes of this study can be viewed. These conversations are presented and discussed within the next two chapters, ‘Conceptualising Supervision’ and ‘Contemporary conversations regarding supervision’.

Chapter 2

Conceptualising supervision

Introduction

The benefit of researchers articulating their understanding of the topic they are studying has been highlighted by Maxwell (2005) and Ravitch and Riggan (2012). They suggest that having an awareness of their existing perceptions will inform the choices they make throughout the design and implementation of any research. I found that explaining the concept of supervision was a challenging exercise, since it commonly takes place between two individuals, and in private. Consequently, much of the existing knowledge about this activity is based on what supervisors and students report that they do, rather than what may actually occur within their meetings. In considering the concept, I found Activity Theory, which is a framework developed by Engström (2009; 2009), as particularly useful because it enables consideration of specific activities beyond the work of one person. The activities which can be analysed by this framework are deliberate actions taken to achieve a specific goal or outcome, and it is acknowledged that these actions may vary or change from one situation to another, since those undertaking them are socio-culturally embedded humans.

Grant (2003) recognised that the individual nature and assumed privacy involved in supervision contributed to the lack of formal understanding and pedagogic literature on this aspect of the academic role. De Kleijn, Meijer, Brekelmans and Pilot (2014) asserted that, although by its very nature this knowledge and these skills are developed in relation to work with individual students, there are elements which are common across many students, and across groups of supervisors. This argument reflects the notion which underpins Activity Theory.

Activity theory originated in the work of Vygotsky, but has been further developed by Engström (1999, 2009). Engström suggested that in order to understand the different elements involved in an activity, and the range of factors which may impact on how it is performed, a number of perspectives should be considered. He suggested that:

- An individual activity could only be understood against the background of related activities, and that the perspectives of the different participants involved in the activity should be considered.
- An exploration of the historical development of an activity should be undertaken to illustrate how local and global responses to its problems and potentials have shaped its evolution.
- An understanding of how potential contradictions to the way in which the activity is performed can contribute to the understanding of the activity.
- Changes in activity can occur from the need to incorporate a new element into the activity, which may emerge due to external innovations.
- Occasionally, there may be a need for an expansive transformation of the activity, which may happen when the reason for and the purpose of the activity are reconceptualised. This fundamental shift may be initiated as a result of developments external to the activity, or when some participants start to question the established norms (Engström, 2009, p56).

Engström argued that to understand the nature of an activity, it is important to include the views of the stakeholders involved. In relation to supervision of students within the disciplines of health and education, the key stakeholders are the supervisors, the students, the student's employers and wider society, all of whom have a vested interest in the effectiveness of the supervisory process. The perspectives of the supervisors are considered in some depth within the literature review in the next chapter, but the views of students, employers and of wider society are also important, and are explored below. The historical development of supervision can help to understand why the practice has evolved in the way it has, and an appreciation of political and technical innovations can offer insights into potential contradictions and future developments.

<u>The concept of supervision within the Higher Education context</u>

The traditional role of the academic has been described as involving both teaching and research, but Barnett (2000) suggested that that universities

had become sites of super-complexity, with an expansion of the different activities in which academics are expected to be involved. Barnett and Di Napoli (2008: 94) identified that there were a number of elements to the academic role:

> *"consultancy, commercialization of intellectual property, the development of spin-out companies, entrepreneurial activities and systematic fundraising from corporate donors as well as from alumni"*

To these activities Norton (2009) added preparation of students for employability and the need to be able to operate in a global market. In addition, due to the professional nature of their disciplines, the supervisors who participated in this study were also involved in recruitment and selection of students, the maintenance and development of placement learning sites (such as in nurseries, schools, hospitals and community healthcare facilities) and the support and assessment of students working in those practice areas.

Student perspective

In order to appreciate the views of master's students, I invited completing master's students within the Faculty to comment on their experience of supervision, but it proved to be difficult to gain insight into their views. There were a number of possible reasons for their reticence. The timing of the dissertation within the final stage of the programme means that accessing the views of students about their experience of dissertation supervision through the traditional teaching evaluation processes, or through specific evaluation meetings, can be problematic. This would involve them in re-engaging with online programme websites or visiting the campus following the completion of their studies, with no immediate benefit to them. Supervisory meetings take place in venues and at times which are often arranged individually between each student and supervisor, so arranging to meet with students individually is difficult. In addition, the individual nature of supervision, and the fact that it is often the supervisor who marks the final submission, may also contribute to students' reluctance to participate in a local evaluation of their experience. If the final mark was not what they anticipated, this may result in them questioning their perceptions about the process and the relationship and they may be hesitant to comment on the experience.

I did manage to access student views through two other sources of information. One was the findings of a consultation which I undertook with students who were about to commence their dissertation in order to explore their hopes and expectations about supervision, and the other was the wider literature on students' experience of supervision.

Student consultation

The student consultation was undertaken at the same time as the first phase of the project. More than twenty students commented on their expectations of supervision prior to starting their dissertation. During a 'Dissertation Café' where they had been invited to learn about the different dissertation module options available to them, they were asked to outline their hopes and expectations of their future supervisor and from the supervision process. The key issues which they identified were: organisational factors; academic guidance; supervisor's knowledge and skills; personal support. In terms of these issues, the students focused upon:

Organisational factors

The opportunity to meet with their supervisor was a key expectation for students – most wished to be able to have regular tutorials and many also wanted to have the ability to organise these when they perceived they needed advice. The opportunity to be able to fit these around their work and family responsibilities was important. Ease of access in contacting supervisors for advice or to arrange meetings was highlighted. Methods of communication identified as being potentially useful were face to face, by telephone or via e-mail.

Academic guidance

There were two main elements to this – one was that they hoped for support with deciding on the focus of their dissertation and the other was in the importance for them of timely and constructive feedback. The possibility that the relationship with their supervisor would provide a safe and creative space to explore different ideas was also mentioned as being desirable.

Supervisor's knowledge and skills

The importance of the supervisor having an understanding of the topic area and the relevant research processes was highlighted as being helpful, as

were the academic skills which would enable them to guide the student through the process of undertaking their dissertation.

Personal support

Several students acknowledged that the supervisor's approach was very important to them, particularly an understanding of how personal and work commitments could impact on their performance. They indicated that they valued approachability, understanding, patience, flexibility, empathy, and as one of the students phrased it, '*honesty with kindness'.*

These views are reflective of the findings of Anderson, Day and McLaughlin (2008), who identified that the motivation for education and health professionals to undertake master's study influenced their expectations of supervision. Students in that study felt that there were three elements which contributed to the potential impact of this level of study: personal (for personal challenge), academic (a commitment to academic standards and to make intellectual progress) and related to their professional arena (that the findings or results had application to practice).

Literature on student views

There have been a number of recent cross-institutional research projects which have sought master's students' views of supervision, and there is consistency in their findings, particularly in relation to students' reasons for undertaking postgraduate education, and their perceptions of the supervision process. A national survey of students on taught postgraduate programmes is undertaken in the UK by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) each year. In 2015, 72,200 students from 100 institutions took part, the vast majority (80%) of whom were undertaking master's programmes. Students from the disciplines of education and professions allied to medicine were well represented in this study (Leman, 2015) and so it provides some relevant insight into the motivation and experiences of students similar to those whose supervisors were involved in this study.

The HEA (2015) findings indicate that students' reasons for deciding to undertake postgraduate study vary across different student groups and include increased employment prospects, personal interest in the subject and the possible impact on career development. With regard to supervision,

the students highlighted the need for supervisors to achieve a balance between challenging students academically and ensuring that the workload involved was manageable. (Leman, 2015).

From the literature it would also appear that a supervision which focuses on the interpersonal relationship with the supervisor is a popular approach with many students. When asked about their experience of master's level dissertation supervision, over 400 Dutch students across three departments identified the quality of the relationship with the supervisor as the most influential factor on their satisfaction (De Kleijn et al, 2014; 2012). Personal involvement in the process and feedback from the supervisor were particularly key, with goal oriented, constructive feedback which also helped them understand how they were getting perceived as being most helpful.

Although much of the literature is based on the views of students from a range of disciplines, the view of students in two studies by Anderson et al (2008) and Drennan and Clarke (2009) are particularly pertinent, as they were from healthcare and educational backgrounds similar to those of the supervisors involved in this project.

In a study of 20 master's programmes for nursing programmes in Ireland, analysis of the responses of 220 students identified that the process of supervision was a significant factor in students' development of academic capabilities, which included analytical and problem solving skills, and the ability to understand research and apply it to their practice (Drennan and Clarke, 2009).

Key elements identified by Anderson et al (2008) were the quality of the relationship, guidance on the design, implementation and writing up the project, and the confidence that the supervisor had engendered. The approach taken by their supervisor was perceived to be particularly important and common features which students appreciated were a friendly informal approach, and the demonstration of a genuine interest, commitment and an 'empathetic appreciation' of the experience of undertaking academic study in the midst of wider constraints. Students described the benefits of

appropriately timed support and academic challenge in ensuring that they achieved the required standards. (Anderson et al, 2008).

It is evident from both the literature and the students themselves that the relationship between student and supervisor is perceived to be to be central to the effectiveness of the supervisory process across a range of disciplines. Both academic and interpersonal skills are valued by students as they expect that the supervisor will be able to guide them through the development of the required academic skills and understanding.

The effectiveness of supervision is also important to the students' employers, some of whom may be funding the study, or allowing study time away from work. Even if the student does not receive support from their employer, the development of the critical analysis, project management and problem solving skills which can be nurtured by the supervisor throughout the dissertation process will have an impact on the student's performance in the workplace.

Employer's perspective

From the employers' perspective, postgraduate education is recognised as having a positive impact on national economic growth and is therefore of benefit to society in general (Morgan, 2014; Smith, Bradshaw, Burnett, Docherty, Purcell and Worthington, 2010). The benefits of postgraduate skills to the UK economy have been acknowledged, particularly with regard to innovation, the ability to tackle major business challenges, entrepreneurship and growth (Leitch, 2006). The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2010) highlighted the need for the provision of appropriate higher level skills to maximise performance and provide real opportunities for development (UKCES, 2010). The Department of Business, Information and Skills' report on making the most of postgraduate education stressed the importance of ensuring that students received the right support and advice (2010). The distinctive selling point for UK post graduate education is the personal relationship between students and supervisors who are experts in their field (Financial Sustainability Strategy Group, 2008). The existence of this personal relationship can be variable across institutions, as some place more emphasis in this element of postgraduate education. The reasons for

the difference in educational approach can be traced back to the origins of the earliest higher education institutions.

Evolution of supervision

Educational philosophies and political influences have shaped the evolution of supervisory practice, and the history of universities illustrates the source of some of the tensions related to quality of supervision which remain today (Brabazon, 2013). The evolution of the concept of supervision is outlined below.

The impact of societal beliefs about the intrinsic value of learning and the availability of educational opportunity have been evident through the history of adult education, and are still a matter of current debate (Lee, 2012). This is particularly the case in relation to the traditional one to one, or 'unique student experience' which describes one of the most common forms of supervision (Elton, 1994). Aristotle differentiated between the learning of a craft or skill to the higher level consideration and development of ideas or 'truths' (Pring, 1973), which he believed were of value, even if they had no practical use. He argued that the latter, developed through argument and discussion, were only within the scope of elite individuals within a society. Socrates did not agree with this differentiation of ability, and argued that 'even a slave' could achieve an understanding of philosophy if he was encouraged to question his knowledge and experiences (Bowen and Hobson, 1987).

Cobban (1975) and Perkin (2008) identified that that although there were philosophical schools in Athens from the fourth century BC, the courses of study offered by the imperial University in Constantinople from 425AD focused on training for the military and priests. They suggested that there was little continuity between the schools in the earlier Greek, Roman and Arabic civilizations and the universities which emerged in the 12th century.

From the 12th to 15th centuries, universities appear primarily to have been religious institutions which offered training for servants of the church (Bourner, 2008). In the later middle ages the differentiation between pure thinking and its practical application were less segregated. Students at the

University of Paris had the opportunity to undertake higher awards to learn from the 'magisters' and to question the leading academics in the areas of theology, law, medicine and the arts (Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Rudd, 1975). From the 16th to 19th century, universities developed leaders and learned professionals who were a civilising influence on their societies (Bourner, 2008).

In 1810 Von Humboldt argued that universities should balance the requirements of any shorter term requirements of the state regarding the need for particular graduates, with the 'Wissenschaft' - the scholarship of the discipline of study (Elton, 2008), and proposed the PhD as a higher and more elite level of degree, which would be the nexus of research and learning (Clark, 1993). He proposed that the teacher and pupil should work together in the service of the scholarship

> "*at the higher level, the teacher does not exist for the sake of the student: both teacher and student have their justification in the common pursuit of knowledge"* (1970 Minerva translation p33),

Although this partnership in learning approach was adopted within Europe and the US (Clark, 1993) it was not universally so, particularly within some British universities, where the Socratic type hierarchy between student and teacher became the model for individual and small group tutorials (Palfreyman, 2001). This focus on the individual student-teacher relationship proved to be problematic as higher education expanded after the second world war, when it was recognised that more scientists were needed, and state funding for higher education increased accordingly. The numbers of postgraduate students had increased by 3.5 times between 1952 and 1972 (Rudd, 1975).

Prompted by concerns about the number of students who were not completing their studies and the length of time required, Robbins (1961) and then Rudd (1975) undertook a review of postgraduate education. Robbins highlighted the particular influence of supervisors on the students' experiences of study and he identified a significant lack of student satisfaction with supervision.

Robbins (1961) surveyed over 100 postgraduate students and over 3000 university teachers. There responses indicated that, partly due to the

significant increase in student numbers at institutions which had previously been primarily research focused, the level of support for students did not appear to have kept up with the increased emphasis on teaching. The following quote highlights the lack of organisational awareness and supervisor commitment to addressing the needs of the students.

> *"The evidence of our student survey provided disquieting confirmation of a general impression that the universities do not take their responsibilities for the organisation of postgraduate study seriously enough. Apart from the general lack of formal training and seminars, there is also the problem of the negligent supervisor…. While we would not favour any separate organisation of academic staff concerned solely with postgraduate students, we think that the question 'Who supervises the students' has not been faced in many of our universities"* (Robbins: Committee on Higher Education, 1961, para 305)

The results of a study published by Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) highlighted the continued political tension between universities and the State with regard to postgraduate education. In Britain the Government was keen to align Higher Education more closely with economic needs, but universities wanted to maintain creativity as well as the research training aspect of postgraduate programmes. Traditionally the focus of master's level programmes has been to develop research skills, while the use of research within doctoral studies has been for the creation of original knowledge (Lee, 2012). The research funding councils' emphasis focused more on the training aspect, and there was a shift in support from Government and state funded Research Councils towards taught master's programmes which were shorter and could be tailored to meet the particular needs of future employers, but some Universities were not keen to work with industry. This difference in approach to postgraduate programme development was reflected in the way in postgraduate programmes were constructed and resourced.

Contradictory approaches

Becher et al (1994) argued that prior to the funding councils' change in emphasis to increase the focus on master's programmes, many universities had tended to see master's programmes more as a filtering process, to identify the abler students who would then be allowed to continue their research studies. They asserted that, with the increase in student numbers, contradictions in the purpose and design of postgraduate programmes began to emerge within the sector. Becher et al (1994) highlighted that those institutions which established collaborative relationships with Government and commerce, introduced a range of practice or industry focused master's programmes which flourished, with emphasis on the development of applied knowledge and skills. Other universities initially maintained a more traditional research focus, but adopted teaching efficiency measures to accommodate the larger student body. The challenges in ensuring the quality of programmes was exacerbated as student numbers on postgraduate coursed continued to increase. Hallett (2010) suggested that the increase in numbers of students within higher education through the widening participation agenda had resulted in more graduates, which in turn increased the demand for master's programmes.

Changes in activity

Due to political and financial changes within Higher Education, the last few years have been a significant time for postgraduate studies provision within the UK. There was an increase in master's programmes designed for vocational purposes, in which students undertook a dissertation focused on an issue which is related to their work, with staff increasingly supervising projects focused on applied rather than pure research (Smith et al, 2010). In 2010 students undertaking taught masters' programmes comprised the largest group in this sector (HEPI, 2010), and were the group with the greatest growth. Within the last few years, changes to visa regulations and the lack of a structured funding system for UK postgraduate students have resulted in a reduction in the number of students on taught postgraduate programmes (Morgan and Direito, 2015; HESA, 2015a-c). Competition for students has resulted in more emphasis on student completion rates and the quality of the programmes on offer, as is illustrated by the increased uptake

of the HEA national survey on postgraduate student experience. Hammond, Ryland, Tennant and Boud (2014) highlighted the importance of supervision in the learning experience of students, and they argued that this was key to attracting students and ensuring timely completion.

Expansive transformation of the practice of supervision

In the light of increased emphasis on meeting student expectations, Halse (2011) argued that there is more need for transparency in the provision of effective supervision. Experience from the international academic community has highlighted that a focus on student experience and satisfaction can impact on the accountability of the research dissertation supervisor, with regard to the amount and nature of the supervision required (Grant, 2005).

In response to the changing demands placed upon them, with the need for increased visibility of student supervision and higher numbers of students, some academics have developed new models of supervision, including group and online supervision (Donnelly, 2013; McCallin and Nayar, 2012; de Beer and Mason, 2009; Dysthe, Samara and Westrheim, 2006). The introduction of new models of supervision could be viewed as evolutionary changes in supervision activity in response to external drivers.

Caution is recommended, however, by those who have developed these new models, who identified that they require careful consideration and appropriate staff development (McCallin and Nayar, 2012) if the advantages are to outweigh the disadvantages. Evaluations of these innovations identified that for group supervision the potential disadvantages were less specificity of advice, potential for reduced commitment to the student supervisor relationship, and role confusion (Dysthe et al, 2006). Studies appraising online supervision strategies highlight the potential for reduced non-verbal communication, less human contact, and the possible impact on the development of trust and rapport between student and supervisor (Donnelly, 2013; de Beer and Mason, 2009). The findings of a recent HEFCE funded national project, the Postgraduate Experience Project, indicate that student preference on receiving feedback on their work is for this to take place at an individual, face to face meeting with their supervisor (Morgan, 2015).

Summary of the activity of supervision

In clarifying my understanding of the concept of supervision, I found the framework suggested by Engström (2009) useful in that it helped to identify common elements of this activity. It was evident from the consideration of the views of the different stakeholders that while it is an activity which has the relationship between student and supervisor at the centre, there are a number of external factors which may impact on this relationship. At an individual level, the student's involvement in the activity may be affected by their personal and working situation, as they balance their role as student with family and possible work commitments. The supervisor's commitment to the relationship will be dependent on the other aspects of their academic role which can affect their availability to prioritise the relationship against their other responsibilities. This may in turn be affected by the institution's perspective on approach to master's level programmes – and whether their focus is primarily the identification and development of potential PhD students or research skills training designed around the staff development needs of a specific industry or profession. At a national level, funding priorities and availability will impact both on the University and the individual students. In designing research which would identify and illuminate some of the complexities and tensions within this activity, I considered how best to explore the ways in which these factors impacted on the practice of supervision, and this informed part of the framework of the initial phase of the study. The other important element which emerged from the analysis of supervision was a recognition of the central relationship between student and supervisor, which both the literature and the students had identified as being of vital importance.

The student-supervisor relationship

In articulating my understanding of the concept of the central supervisory relationship, I am in agreement with Armitage (2006) that social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961) has particular relevance. Supervision involves a psychological contract between the supervisor and student, legitimised through the University, which comprises a set of expectations for both – some of which may be unwritten (Armitage, 2006; Hetrick and Trafford, 1995). These expectations can contribute to perceived obligations

within the relationship – and the importance of discussing and agreeing these early on has been recognised (Moriarty, Danaher and Danaher, 2008). There is generally an acceptance that these expectations will alter, since the student is likely to develop academically as they undertake a journey of learning and discovery (Nulty, Kiley and Meyers, 2009; Grant, 2003). Because of this, there has been a recognition that the relationship will change as the student becomes more independent, requiring less directional support and taking an increasing ownership of their work as their skills and understanding of the topic area develop (Lee, 2008; Petersen, 2007). The changing nature of the relationship means that clarity about the purpose of the relationship is particularly important.

The notion of expectations within a relationship which involves individuals 'thrown together' for the purposes of supervision is more complex than those within a clearly defined economic exchange – where for example the student pays fees in return for clearly defined services (Armitage, 2006). The idea that such a relationship involves unspecified obligations, for example where one person invests in the other in the hope of future returns, is described in social exchange theory, in which there are perceived advantages for both parties in return for this investment (Blau,1964; Homans,1961). In the case of supervision, the student may hope for a successful outcome of their studies, in terms of qualification and both personal and academic growth (Drennan and Clarke, 2009). The supervisor may anticipate the successful completion of the thesis which contributes to their field of study and for which they will also receive credit, the opportunity to engage in a rewarding way with their discipline (Halse, 2011) and possible gratitude from the student (Unsworth, Turner, Williams and Piccin–Houle, 2010). It may be that either or both of the parties involved are focused on their own goals and do not fully appreciate the other's expectations.

An awareness of one another's position may contribute to a feeling of cooperation, as both student and supervisor are required to trust one another to discharge their obligations. Where there is a perception of personal obligation and the development of mutual trust, both parties can experience the benefits and find the process of value (Unsworth et al, 2010; Morgan and Ryan, 2003). There is also the potential for these benefits to continue past

the period of supervision, where there is the opportunity for future collaborations (Moriarty et al, 2008).

The need for further development of supervisory pedagogy

There has been concern for some time about whether universities are able to balance the demands of teaching and research, as described above. More recent reviews of supervisory practice suggest that it still remains an area in need of development (Bamber, 2015; Hamilton, Carson, and Ellison, 2014; Bruce and Stoodley, 2013; QAA, 2013).

> *"Research supervision is an integral, but often neglected, component of the teaching-research nexus" (Bruce and Stoodley, 2013:3)*

> *"There is growing recognition that higher degree research supervision is a crucial aspect of learning and teaching given the growing pressure on universities, faculties, disciplines and supervisors to increase enrolments, diversify offerings and prioritise timely completion" (Hamilton, Carson, and Ellison, 2014: 9)*

The practice of supervision of an extended piece of academic work occurs at two particular levels – for students undertaking doctoral study leading to a PhD or professional doctorate, and for students undertaking master's study. At master's level the outcomes of the dissertation element are focused on the development of an understanding of, and an ability to use, research tools. The official outcomes related to a dissertation undertaken as part of master's level study are:

> *"Originality in the application of knowledge, together with practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline" (QAA, 2008, Appendix 2a).*

At doctoral level the corresponding outcomes are the

> *"Creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication, and the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems" (QAA, 2008, Appendix 2a).*

Although much of the research literature on supervision is focused on work with doctoral students, many of the learning support resources and policy documents refer to both levels of postgraduate study (Wisker, 2012; Lee, 2012; Trafford and Leshem, 2008), which could be confusing for supervisors. Pilcher (2011) argues that this is the case and emphasises the difference in the length of the commitment required - doctoral dissertations or projects are normally undertaken over 3 years and master's over several months. Grant (2005) however does not agree that there are such fundamental differences between the two levels. She argues that some doctoral students have had previous experience of supervision, but not all; and some master's projects do make substantial and original contributions to their discipline. The timing for some master's projects can be longer than indicated above, with part time students often taking a year to undertake the dissertation element of their programme, as was the case for part time students within my own Faculty. Trafford and Leshem (2008) identified that master's dissertations, while of a smaller size, are required to demonstrate the 'essential features of serious research' (p6).

In ensuring that students achieve the required academic level, the role of the supervisor is evident for both levels of study, Although the master's supervisor will normally be required to assess the work as the primary marker (Anderson, Day and McLaughlin, 2008; Armitage, 2006), the gate keeping aspect of the doctoral supervisor's role is clearly identified within the literature (Lee, 2008; Petersen, 2007; Manathunga and Gozee, 2007), so it is clear that there are elements of ensuring the quality of the work for both types of supervisor.

Although there is a difference in the level of academic achievement between doctoral and master's supervision, there are similarities on the demands placed upon the supervisors. While doctoral studies normally take place over a longer period, the intensity of study for the master's dissertation provides particular challenges for both supervisor and student (Lee, 2012). It seems likely that there will be overlap between the processes involved and the developmental needs of both students and supervisors, however the evidence from the literature is that this has generally been assumed, as there is a paucity of research undertaken within master's level supervision.

Conclusion

In recent years, there has been an acknowledgement that supervision is perhaps more personally demanding and complex than had previously been appreciated. The situation of supervision at the research-teaching nexus (Lee, 2012), has resulted in its particular susceptibility to political influences throughout the development of academic practice. The impact of these will be considered within this study.

In this chapter, using Engström's activity theory as a framework, the evolution of this practice has been outlined, and the concept of supervision has been considered from the student's and the employer's perspectives.

A review of the most recent literature on supervision within the next chapter will explore the views of the supervisors themselves, and will illustrate the ways in which different philosophical approaches have shaped and contributed to the development of the established evidence base for supervisory pedagogy. I will explore principles of supervision pertinent to working with both doctoral and master's students, referring to the level of study where they may be significant differences between them, before explaining how my own research was informed by, and adds to this knowledge.

Chapter 3

Contemporary conversations on supervision

Introduction

In reviewing the most contemporary theories and practices on supervision, this chapter commences with an overview of the literature on the topic of supervision. A more in depth exploration of some of the key issues identified within the literature, such as the concept of power, the impact of internationalisation and supervisor development is then undertaken and the chapter concludes with an outline of the most comprehensive models of supervision.

Rather than acknowledging a view which would highlight the student's role in this learning situation (Jarvis, 2012), it is apparent that the main focus within the literature is regarding the role of the supervisor in promoting student growth. Within the pedagogic literature on supervision, there are two primary theoretical approaches to post graduate supervision. These reflect the two ends of what Bowen and Hobson (1987) described as an educational continuum between 'conservation' and 'creativity'. Bowen and Hobson suggested that conservation is the view that education is the means by which society ensures that its culture is passed on to its members, thus ensuring its continued existence. At the opposite end of their continuum, creativity views education as the means by which individuals' intellectual curiosity is developed and they can be freed from the limitations of their current knowledge, with the potential to develop new ideas.

At the conservation end of the continuum, Petersen (2007) suggests that supervision is a process which is used by some to support 'cultural reproduction', whereby post graduate students are made familiar with the actions, desires and skills within academia (for example the ability to read critically, discuss concepts and undertake research in order to demonstrate scholarly thinking) which are necessary to become a legitimate part of that social group. This approach is reflective of a research training focus. At the creativity end of the spectrum, it is argued that the process of post graduate supervision is as much about the formation of the student's identity as it is

about the end product (Linden, Ohlin and Brodin, 2013; Cherry, 2012; Green, 2005).

Literature review process

The primary review of the literature was updated throughout the study. As my appreciation of the concept of supervision grew, this informed the selection of topic searches and the identification of key authors, publications and journals. The initial search terms used were: 'supervis*', in conjunction with 'post graduate', 'master', 'student', 'research' or 'academic' within the ERIC and CINAHL databases, which are the established disciplinary databases within education and healthcare. The reference lists of selected papers were hand searched for further relevant literature. The review included both UK and international literature which was published in English within the last thirty years. Prior to this time there was limited literature on supervision, but following the release in 1985 of a blacklist of eight universities deemed to be ineligible to receive Education and Social Research Council research scholarships, due to their having PhD completion rates of less than 10% (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992), and publication of guidelines such as 'How to supervise a PhD' by Connell in 1985, there have been an increasing number of publications on this topic.

Overview of the literature landscape

The approach recommended by Burrell and Morgan (1979) was useful in sketching the overall landscape of the literature. This aims to clarify the philosophical underpinnings of authors, in order that the whole range of the literature, including that which is outwith the dominant orthodoxy of the topic, is identified and considered. Burrell and Morgan suggested that an individual's view of the world is influenced by two main beliefs:

- what constitutes reality
- their ability and desire to change

They proposed a matrix based on two continuums which specify the philosophical underpinnings of different theoretical perspectives (see Appendix 1). They identified four philosophical paradigms.

- Functionalist - Humans are rational and their behaviour can be understood through scientific study, and regulated by social engineering
- Interpretive – The order of the social world is created by the individuals concerned. The way in which people behave can be explained by understanding the viewpoint of those involved in the existing, on-going processes
- Radical Humanist – Human potential can be limited by existing social constraints, but individual's 'true selves' can be released from current dominant ideologies
- Radical Structuralist – Power within relationships can be changed when dominant ideologies and systems which maintain the structural status quo are challenged

Although this method of conceptualising different perspectives was originally developed for exploring sociological perspectives, it has been found to have merit in the consideration of different educational approaches (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Bowen and Hobson (1987) also recognised a continuum between conservation and creativity within educational principles and Grant, Graham and Jones (1994) utilised similar paradigms in their development of guidelines for the management of postgraduate supervision and in their exploration of educational philosophy. This approach to reviewing the literature enabled me to identify the beliefs underpinning the different research approaches used, and it was useful to consider these in the light of the different political influences outlined in the previous chapter.

Functionalist perspective on supervision

The literature on supervision which sits within the functionalist paradigm draws upon the assumptions that those involved in the activity are rational creatures whose behaviour can be understood through scientific study, and their performance could be predicted or engineered through the maintenance or alteration of a number of factors. This includes some of the earliest work on supervision, but also descriptions and recommendations of supervision

practice which are likely to achieve timely completion or high levels of student satisfaction. Studies which adopt this perspective often seek to identify factors which would contribute to these positive outcomes (McCallin and Nayar, 2012; Zhao, Golde, and McCormick, 2007). I would argue that such goals are seen to fit with the requirements of those stakeholders in postgraduate education who are primarily concerned with outcomes related to funding.

Arising from previous concerns about the quality of supervision, the earliest focus on the supervisory role prompted the production of a number of institutional or national publications, many of which drew on the experiences of experienced supervisors, for example Connell's 'How to supervise a PhD' (Australia, 1985), James and Baldwin's 'Eleven practices of effective postgraduate supervisors' (University of Melbourne, 1999), Shakaris-Doyle and McIntyre's 'Western Guide to Graduate Supervision' (University of Western Ontario, 2008), Delamont, Atkinson and Parry's 'Supervising the PhD', (1997), Eley and Murray's 'Effective Postgraduate Supervision' (2005) and Eley and Jennings' 'How to be an Effective Supervisor' (2009), Phillips' and Pugh's 'How to get a PhD' (2000, 2010), Wisker's 'The Good Supervisor' (2005, 2012) and Bruce and Stoodley's 'Resources to Assist Supervision' (Queensland University of Technology, 2012).

Among the strategies advocated in ensuring both quality of research and timely completion have been: student selection processes, (Thomson, Kirkman, Watson and Stewart, 2005); time spent in supervision meetings (Severinsson, 2012); types of feedback given to students (De Kleijn, Mainhard, Meijer, Brekelmans and Pilot, 2013; Lumadi, 2008; Higgs and Tichen, 2001); supervisor training (Pearson and Brew, 2002); development of a good relationship with students (Kandlbinder, 2000; James and Baldwin, 1999); facilitation of opportunities for peer support (Johnston, 1995); introduction to the disciplinary community (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, Delamont, 1997; Atkinson and Parry , 2000), and regular monitoring of progress in order to detect and address any issues particular to individual students (Ahern and Manathunga, 2004; Davis, Brownie, Doran, Evans, Hutchinson, Mozolic-Staunton , Provost and van Aken, 2012).

This emphasis of individual factors which can contribute to supervisory success and the monitoring of the outcomes has become increasingly

common, with funding for doctoral students dependent on completion and success rates in some countries, for example Australia (McCarthy, 2012; Petersen, 2007), New Zealand (Spiller, Byrnes and Ferguson, 2013), South Africa (Sayed, Kruss and Badat, 1998), and the inclusion of doctoral completions taken into account within the Research Assessment Framework, which had implications for the distribution of national funding in the UK (Deuchar, 2008).

With the political shift towards a mass higher education system and discussions about harmonising standards across Europe taking place, there was also a move towards compulsory training programmes for PhD supervisors as part of an EU drive to harmonise standards as part of the Bologna Accords (Lee, 2012). Internationally there has been a continuous shift to professionalise the role and move the activities of supervision from a private to a more public space, with greater emphasis on centralised processes and quality assurance (Jasman, 2012; Halse, 2011). The challenges in making this shift are related to the fact that this perspective of supervision could be described as being somewhat simplistic, and disregarding some of the tensions inherent in the process. Educationalists whose work is based within the interpretive perspective have sought to theorize these complexities.

Interpretive perspective on supervision

Adopting a very different perspective, the notion of supervision as a complex, chaotic process underpins the work of authors who operate within the interpretive paradigm, where the underlying assumptions are that it is insight into the views of those involved in processes which contribute to an understanding of the social world created by them.

Hemer (2012) and Halse (2011) both highlighted that while there has been much written about models, tasks and styles of supervision, there is little exploration of what actually takes place within supervision interactions, and they recognise the influence of time, space and power within the relationship. Grant's description of supervision as being like a 'rackety bridge' (Grant, 1999), emerged from her mapping of supervisory complexities, and has found resonance with many authors since (Cherry, 2012; O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom and Zammit, 2009; Armitage, 2007; Taylor and Beasley, 2005;

Gurr, 2001), as she articulated the need for flexibility and attentiveness to the changing needs of students undergoing supervision.

Hughes and Tight (2013) highlight that the 'journey' metaphor is one which is popular within the literature as it conveys the experience of progress, difficulty and change which is experienced by students. The developmental element to the supervisory role is highlighted and much of the literature explores the complexity involved for supervisors, as they seek to develop their students' skills and to develop critical understanding (Halse, 2011; Maxwell and Smyth, 2010; Kiley and Wisker, 2009; Drennan and Clarke, 2009; Dysthe et al, 2006; Barnacle and Usher, 2003; Pearson and Brew, 2002). The role of the supervisor may change over time, as the student develops research and critical thinking skills and also takes more ownership of their project, so flexibility is identified as a particular approach which is essential for supervisors (Moriarty, Danaher and Danaher, 2008; Pearson and Brew, 2002). Recognition of the lack of research into how supervisors achieved such a flexible approach informed the design of this study, and it was a topic of discussion in the interviews with supervisors. More recently de Kleijn, Meijer, Brekelmans and Pilot (2015) have coined the term 'adaptivity' to describe the way in which the supervisor responds to the student's changing needs, and they too have identified that further research is needed to explore ways in which the supervisor manages the different supervision strategies involved.

Radical Humanist perspective on supervision

Within the radical humanist paradigm, a number of authors suggest that traditional considerations of supervision which sought to identify and address contributory barriers to PhD completion were constructed around the 'master/apprentice model', which was based on white, rational, autonomous, Anglo-Celtic men (Manathunga and Gozee, 2007; Bartlett and Mercer, 2001; Grant, 2001). The basis for this view of supervision is a transmission model, where the students have the ability and willingness to receive their supervisor's knowledge. These researchers argue that this model can be problematic for supervisors or students from outwith this population. For example, women or international students may have internalised societal stereotypes about compliance and deference. This could impact on their experience of supervision, if they are not comfortable with approaches which

are focused primarily on the needs of the individual learner (Bartlett and Mercer, 2001).

Others within the radical humanist paradigm have explored the need for students to take part in academic and social activities in order to feel part of the collective community within a department or discipline (Lovitts 2001; Nagappan, Craswell and Grundy, 2001). Some advocate the benefits of developing more reflexive and collaborative space within supervision, towards a more person-centred approach with active involvement when working with students and supervisory colleagues (Cornforth and Claiborne, 2008; Conti, Hewson and Ibsen, 2001). The advantages of establishing communities of practice for supervisors in exploring supervisory challenges were highlighted by Zeegers and Barron (2012) and McCormack and Pamphilon (2004).

The work of Manathunga and others on post-colonial narratives within supervision have stimulated some debate. Firth and Martens (2008) disagreed with such an emphasis on the personal transformation which was highlighted within this perspective. They advocated the benefits of the clarification of explicit expectations for both the supervisor and student which restricted the focus on emotion to 'appropriate' levels.

Manathunga's response (2009) proposed that a radical humanist approach viewed individual differences as an advantage rather than as a problem, and suggested that this outlook could stimulate creative possibilities as a consequence of productive dialogue from a wider cultural perspective.

Radical Structuralist perspective

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that those who would be viewed as being situated within the radical structuralist paradigm highlight the changes within a society which are generated through political and economic influences as key in creating a need for change within supervision processes. Two of the key changes within higher education have been the development and use of technology, and the increase in numbers and diversity of students undertaking post graduate studies (Jasman, 2012). These changes have provided both opportunities and challenges in the area of supervision.

Communication with students no longer requires both student and supervisor to be in the same room, or even on the same country (Doloriert, Sambrook and Stewart, 2012; Hammond, Ryland, Tennant and Boud, 2010; Wisker, Robinson and Shacham, 2007). Educational developers, Baume and Baume (2013), forecast that the increase in educational technology is unimaginable. Issues with the effectiveness of online communication have been identified, but not explored to the same extent as other forms of communication (Manathunga, 2005; Morgan and Ryan, 2003). Several authors have suggested that while increased online communication could open up the supervisory process to others, such as to peers of the student and colleagues of the supervisor, its use merits further consideration if it is to be managed constructively and ethically (Donnelly, 2013; De Beer and Mason, 2009; Morgan and Ryan, 2003).

Group supervision has been suggested as a strategy for addressing the needs of several students concurrently (Donnelly, 2013; Dysthe, Samara and Westrheim, 2006). While the student groups coordinated by Dysthe et al (2006) required the presence of students in their supervision groups and colloquia, Donnelly proposed that joint face to face and virtual peer supervision sets facilitated student interaction, sharing of resources and an exploration of the emotional impact of study. Emilsson and Johnsson (2007) emphasised the importance of trust within such forums, and in order to promote this, Donnelly used online interaction once the students had met one another face to face. While appreciating the value of such interactions, she found that students wished to have virtual interactive opportunities *in addition* to face to face interactions. Wisker et al (2007) introduced the role of 'guardian supervisors' and facilitated the development of communities of practice for PhD students, which continued when many of the students undertook the later part of their studies abroad. Parker (2009) suggested that such peer groups may offer support but that they did not, in themselves, develop academic writing; he proposed that this could be facilitated through scholarly writing groups.

Although it was possible to categorise almost all of research literature within one of the four paradigms as outlined above, there are a number of key issues such as power within the supervisory relationship, the particular challenges of cross cultural supervision, and strategies for supervisor

development which were acknowledged within the literature from within the different paradigms. These are considered below.

The concept of power within supervision

Grant (1999) identified that while there are some predictable elements of the supervisory process, there are several elements which are unpredictable, such as power, identity, and the possibly transformative nature of study.

The issue of power has subsequently been explored by a number of authors in relation to both doctoral and master's supervision. Doloriert, Sambrook and Stewart (2012) and Malfroy (2005) suggested that confidence and locus of control are key issues within the doctoral supervisory relationship and recommend that both students and supervisors should be aware of power dynamics and factors affecting this; such as the management and expression of emotion and the feedback processes used within supervision. These involve methods of communication which can be used by the supervisor to guide the student as they develop their academic skills, or their understanding of their discipline. Petersen (2007), in his exploration of the 'academic boundary work' within doctoral supervision, explained that both student and supervisor are trying to 'get it right' – the student in developing the attributes required by their discipline at the level of study which they are seeking to attain, and the supervisor in supporting the student's development while maintaining the boundaries of 'acceptable academicity'. The notion of mutual dependency in relation to master's level supervision was explored by Anderson, Day and McLaughlin, (2006). Armitage (2007) suggested that while both student and supervisor wanted to control or influence the conduct of the other, they were also aware that they could hinder or facilitate the other's gratification. There was the potential that the supervisory process could promote self-development of the supervisor as well as the student, and that a personal and professional relationship could develop as a result of the one to one relationship which might continue after the dissertation was completed, leading to future collaborative publications or presentations. In exploring how power might shift as the relationship evolved from teacher-student to a more peer-peer relationship, he outlined (Armitage, 2007, p18) a range of types of power which were evident at different stages of the supervision journey, such as:

- reward power - the supervisor can facilitate access to resources such as time, feedback, praise, alternative sources of support
- coercive power - the supervisor has the power to 'punish' the student – possibly by withholding the resources described above. With master's dissertations, the supervisor is often the first marker
- expert power - the student may feel that the supervisor has information or knowledge which they do not have but which is relevant to them
- legitimate power - the student may feel that the supervisor has the right to guide and influence them
- referent power - there is identification between the individuals and they may share the same social goals, such as working collaboratively to produce papers

In order to generate knowledge about supervisors' practice, Armitage (2007) used an ethnographic approach and drew on interviews with 14 master's supervisors in the disciplines of management studies and health, and also examined their case notes of meetings with students. Different types of supervisory approach were observed, and it was noted that those supervisors who tended to stay within their own topic area were more directive, guiding students to particular literature or models. Armitage identified that master's supervisors tended to work in subject or methodological silos and he advocated an exchange of ideas and good practice to aid supervisors in the development of their professional praxis.

One of the issues which has been highlighted within a variety of disciplines, but in which there has been very little sharing of good practice, is in relation to supervision of international students.

Cross cultural supervision

The expansion of post graduate education and the internationalisation of its delivery have been identified as providing particular challenges for supervisor. Fan (2013); Huang (2008) and Brown (2007) suggested that due to language difficulty and possible challenges in socio-cultural adaption, international students may not have made adjustments in some key areas of academic discourse prior to undertaking their dissertation. Brown

acknowledged the possible challenges in providing this type of interaction, and strategies she suggested to address this were the need for supervisors to be aware of their use of language, and the provision of opportunities for students to communicate with others outwith the international student community.

More recently, supervisors have created new ways of working with students who are not studying in their first language, and whose constructions of knowledge and approach to research may be culturally influenced and different to those of their supervisor. Examples of these included: providing opportunities for students to discuss their ideas and 'work in progress' with others; supervisors accessing insights into student's cultural contexts; supervisors learning key phrases in the students' first language (Wisker, 2012; Halse, 2011). While advocating the benefits of opportunities for students to mix with students from different nationalities, there has been recognition that institutions might not create conditions which could facilitate these strategies, such as opportunities for the organisation of multi-cultural groupings or small group activities, to be implemented at programme level, (Hyland, Trahar, Anderson and Dickens, 2008).

De Beer and Mason (2009) suggested that online dialogue between supervisor and student was particularly helpful for students who were working in their second language, as it could reduce misconceptions and understanding, particularly as their online learning approach included the benefits of external language editors who could guide and assist students with their spelling and grammar. In an exploration of student experiences however, Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) found that some international students felt particularly isolated and 'invisible' if their interaction was primarily online.

If the academic supervisor is one of the few contacts the student has with the University, there may be an increase in expectations from international students that the supervisor will provide social and emotional support. Here knowledge of the support systems available and the referral process involved are useful sources of knowledge for the supervisor, but Brown (2007) suggested that most of the international students studying in the UK are from a collectivist culture, who may expect the supervisor to support them rather than to refer them on to others. She found that this situation can impact on

the supervisor-student relationship, with the student feeling disappointment and the supervisor frustrated or powerless to offer more help. If a university has recognised this as an issue and developed effective social, pastoral, language and learning support resources, these can be introduced early in the supervision process which may improve student experience (Wisker, 2012).

Supervisor development

In the light of the increase in diversity and number of students, the need for supervisor development has been highlighted (Guerin and Green, 2013 McCallin and Nayar, 2012; Davis et al, 2012; Jasman, 2012; Firth and Martens, 2008). In recent years, with the growth of higher education and agreements taken in order to standardise programmes across Europe, doctoral supervisor training programmes have become more established (Lee, 2012). Mandatory preparation for doctoral supervisors has been introduced in many European institutions in recent years, partly as a result of the Bologna Agreement (Lee, 2012), and subsequent moves to promote consistency of practices within and between institutions (Jasman, 2012; Halse, 2011). Recognition of the need to develop this aspect of academic practice has not commonly been extended to include master's level supervision, despite an acknowledgement of this need (Bamber, 2015; Blas, Jasman and Levy, 2012; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).

It has been recognised that some supervisors may resist these initiatives (Halse, 2011, Manathunga, 2005) and be reluctant to attend. Land (2001) acknowledged that academics may resent attempts to define or influence the elements of their academic role related to teaching. Supervisory functions have traditionally been private, with actions and the relationships between teacher and students unobserved, taking place behind closed doors. He suggested that the reason for such resistance might be a suspicion that practices, once exposed to others, might become more prone to surveillance, audit and interference, particularly in the context of increasing student numbers. There could also be a fear that the inadequacies of what is being done will be made visible, which Peseta, Hicks, Holmes, Manathunga, Sutherland and Wilcox, (2005) suggested can occur in initiatives designed to develop academic practice. An alternative explanation for lack of

engagement with staff development opportunities may also be due to lack of time, as suggested by McKenna and Hughes (2015) who argued that these could be seen as yet another pull on the time of busy academics, who may see them as further reducing the time available for research or interactions with students.

Deuchar (2008) argued that the increasingly market driven approach to the recruitment of international students and the inclusion of Doctoral completion rates within the Research Assessment Exercise have resulted in a move towards economies of scale which may impact on the scope for innovation and creativity within supervisory practice. Similar tensions have been reported internationally (McCallin and Nayar 2012; Spiller, Byrnes and Ferguson, 2013). Strategies to maximise the use of additional support which can be useful in supporting students have been proposed, including increased use of library and learning support services, institutional research training workshops and group meetings with students (Wisker, 2012; Halse, 2011; Hallett, 2010). McCarthy (2012) and Halse (2011) suggested that supervisors might adopt an increasingly directive approach with their students, providing additional input or placing more emphasis on the setting of milestones, which could result in students adopting a more passive role within the relationship.

While there is recognition that supervisors might adopt a more flexible role in response to the individual and changing needs of their students, there are very few models which offer an explanation as to how supervisors approach the management of the possible tensions.

Two conceptual frameworks of supervision, developed by individuals who have written and presented widely on this aspect of the academic role, and whose work has been influential on supervisory pedagogy, informed different elements of this study. In reflecting on my own experiences of being supervised, I was able to identify with some of the different discourses proposed by Grant. This is discussed within Chapter five, 'Being supervised'. During the third phase of my research, Lee's model of supervision was introduced to the supervisors and used as a basis for their discussions as they considered which of Lee's functions of supervision related to their own practice.

The two models are outlined below.

Models of supervision

Grant (2005) identified several discourses within the literature which exemplify the ways in which supervision can be viewed. These included:

The 'Trad' supervisor, where the supervisor is an established authority in the subject area, and the student adopts an apprentice or disciple role. They do not necessarily have a close or informal relationship, but the student accepts that they will be left to work on their project independently with occasional guidance meetings. Students experiencing this mode of supervision value their association with the acknowledged expertise of the supervisor and accept the need to live up to the trust implied in their autonomous scholarship. The supervisor offers intellectual challenge in order to stretch the limits of the student's understanding.

The 'Psy' supervisor, in which the supervisor is not necessarily an expert in the subject area of the student's dissertation, but focuses on encouraging the student's academic endeavour and personal growth. A good working relationship is central to the student's development as the student acknowledges their need for help and the supervisor's role is that of a caring, expert professional who offers personal support to the student who requires encouragement and motivation as they progress through a developmental trajectory.

The 'Techno' supervisor has more of a focus on research training and the development of particular skills, and may work with the student on a regular basis, with the student reporting their progress and the supervisor instructing, observing and judging their abilities and understanding. The focus of the student's project might be defined by the supervisor and a key driver is more towards timely completion of the project rather than the student's personal growth.

The 'Com' supervisor's relationship with their student is more contractually based, with clearly defined expectations and responsibilities as the student is perceived as a consumer of the university which includes the supervisor's educational services. The notion of reciprocal responsibility will be influenced by the funding arrangements, and this approach may be reflective of wider

institutional drivers. As such, Grant suggests that this view of supervision is more evident in the institutional literature (such as handbooks, student satisfaction surveys and clear procedural guidelines) rather than in the academic literature.

While these four ways of describing supervision are the most commonly articulated, Grant suggests that there is some evidence of another two, less commonly identifiable, which do not appear in institutional policies but are referred to in some of the literature.

The ‘Rad’ supervisor may have common social interests and shared radical discourses (eg critical, feminist or progressive) with the student and will possibly be more aware of the power relations between them, so may seek to establish a non-hierarchical relationship.

The ‘Psycho’ supervisor describes a view of the relationship in which there may be unconscious desires which might involve processes of transference and counter transference more akin to the relationship between an analyst and client.

Grant suggested that people might adopt the model of supervision with which they were most familiar of felt most comfortable. When she undertook analysis of master’s level supervision meetings, she recognised that there were elements of different discourses within the student: supervisor interactions. She suggested that this was perhaps not surprising, given the multiple social positions of both student and supervisor which expose them to these different views of supervision.

Lee (2008) identified several integral concepts which she suggested combined within the process of supervision which she named ‘Functional’, ‘Enculturation’, ‘Critical Thinking’, ‘Emancipation’ and ‘Relationship Development’. For each of these elements Lee outlined the activity undertaken by the supervisor and the knowledge and skills required, which are summarised below. Lee (2012) built upon these concepts in her book ‘Successful Research Supervision’ to suggest strategies which could be used at different stages of doctoral study or to manage a range of student behaviours which could impact on the process of supervision. Examples of these were students who have difficulty with conceptual thinking, who may

be overconfident, who are too dependent, who seem to lose interest in their work.

The Functional element of supervision involves the supervisor in supporting the student through their studies in an orderly manner, requiring skills in project management, direction, leading and negotiation.

Within the Enculturation element, in which they facilitate the student's introduction to the academic community, the supervisor is involved in introducing the student to relevant individuals and examples of good work, while undertaking some gatekeeping activity to ensure the student is ready for these opportunities. Assessment of the student and coaching skills are important abilities for the supervisor to have.

In the development of Critical Thinking, the supervisor's role is to work with the student, evaluating and challenging their thinking, drawing on their analytical skills and abilities in synthesizing arguments.

As part of the Emancipatory element, in which the student is encouraged to think independently, the supervisor can act as a mentor to support transformation through facilitating reflection.

In the Relationship Development element, the supervisor draws on their emotional intelligence and experience in the development of individual and possibly team relationships, managing conflict where required. The result of this might be that the student becomes a good team member with increased emotional intelligence of their own.

Conclusion

An overview of the literature on supervision of postgraduate students confirms that there has been less consideration at master's level rather than for doctoral students, however for both levels of study the majority of the literature is from the conservation end of the educational spectrum with particular emphasis on the 'improvement' agenda (Petersen, 2007) which seeks to improve student achievement and timely completion of study.

The literature which could be described as being underpinned by educational philosophies which are at the creative end of the spectrum is more focused

at exploring the ways in which students' intellectual capabilities can be developed. The research focuses on the complexities involved in supervision, as it seeks to develop students' skills and confidence and to promote critical understanding, and has highlighted the centrality of the supervisor's role.

There is acknowledgement of a number of influences and tensions which supervisors have to manage over the period of the dissertation project and the need for flexibility in responding to individual student's situation has been highlighted. The gaps in the literature relate to how supervisors actually balance these tensions and manage the different influences during supervision. The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of these complexities and challenges and to gain a clearer understanding of how the supervisors address these. In the next chapter I will outline a number of possible approaches which I could have adopted to achieve this. I will also articulate why I selected an Action Research methodology for the research.

Chapter 4

Philosophical principles underpinning the research

Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider the possible research approaches which I could have used to explore supervision practices and the processes involved, and provide the rationale for my choice of an Action Research approach. Following an explanation of the development of this research methodology I then focus on its use within the discipline of Higher Education, identifying possible reasons why the adoption of this approach was much later than for education in general. In considering possible research methods to be used within the project, I will present some of those used within the research on supervision, before explaining that the choice of methods used in this study was based on collaborative discussions with the supervisors who were co-researchers in the study.

Having recognised that supervision for students undertaking a master's dissertation was an area which had received little attention at my own institution, my consideration of the concept of supervision identified that this was an aspect of academic practice which could be explored from a number of different perspectives. These included the views and experiences of the students, the supervisors, the institutions or some combination of these.

Review of possible methodologies

The study aimed to identify and understand more about supervisory complexities and challenges, possible supervision strategies and the factors influencing these. Interpretative research such as this, which considers the perspectives of the individuals involved in the process as a starting point, is more suited to a qualitative rather than quantitative approach (Flick, 2009). Recognising this, I considered a number of different research approaches and reflection on each of these and the factors which informed my decision to adopt an Action Research approach are explained in this chapter.

In identifying a suitable research approach, I was initially interested in the work of Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997) who had taken an ethnographic approach in their study to consider the views and experiences of supervisors from a number of different disciplines.

Ethnographic approach

> "*Ethnography involves understanding the social world or culture – the shared values beliefs and values of particular group, typically via immersion in their community*." (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape, 2014: 18)

Creswell (2007) explained that ethnographers use interviews and observation to understand the behaviour, language and interactions of a social group. Delamont and Atkinson (2004) interviewed supervisors but did not use observation in seeking to learn about the practice of supervision. They argued that, with the exception of laboratory based supervision in the natural sciences, where the practice of supervision could be observed more unobtrusively, it would be difficult to explore the practice of supervision other than through supervisors' accounts of their practice. While it would be possible to undertake observation of actual supervision, it would involve both the supervisor and student being aware that they were being observed, either by the researcher being present at their meetings or through recording of these. This situation could result in a 'Hawthorne' effect, where the behaviour of both student and supervisor changed as a result of being observed. The alternative, covert observation, would be considered unethical (Nicholls, Mills and Kotecha, 2014; May, 2011). For these reasons it seemed that this might not be the best approach to gaining a clear picture of the practice of supervision.

Narrative approach

Supervision involves interaction between students and their supervisors, and an understanding of this process and the relationships involved could have been gained through a narrative approach. This methodology would seek to construct an explanation of supervision by making sense of the historical, institutional and emotional aspects of students' or supervisors' experiences, identifying and challenging taken for granted assumptions, myths and metaphors which may be prevalent in the area of postgraduate study (McCormack and Pamphilon, 2004).

This approach focuses on the in depth analysis of the stories of a small number of individuals. As a result, it has been suggested that research based on this approach may have limited penetration within a particular area of practice (Frost, 2011). One research project which used this approach did find that this was the case. McCormack and Pamphilon reported that while the supervisors found discussing their experiences cathartic, the researchers realised that their 'confessions' of concerns and possible issues was of limited value in exploring the complexity of supervision processes (2004). As part of the stimulus for my research was that supervision was a practice which might benefit from further development through greater understanding of the challenges involved, I felt that this approach might limit the value of its findings.

Phenomenological approach

In seeking to explore supervision from the perspective of different individuals, but to identify common elements of this practice I considered using a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of supervision. Phenomenologists aim to identify and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon and describe the meaning that people attach to this (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape, 2014; Creswell, 2007). With regard to supervision, this could refer to the experience of 'being supervised' for students or 'supervising students' for the supervisor.

It has been suggested that care should be taken by researchers seeking to describe phenomena, so that the description of these phenomenon should be as free from their personal presuppositions as is possible (Hammersley, 2013). In order to do this, some would argue that researchers should attempt to suspend their knowledge and beliefs about the phenomenon during the whole research process (Parahoo, 2006; Giorgi 1997; Ahern, 1999). An example of implementing this in practice could be by delaying the literature review until after any data has been collected (Hamill and Sinclair; 2010). Others have suggested that this is an unrealistic expectation and propose that researchers should adopt a reflexive approach and attempt to become aware of their personal perceptions, interests and values so that these can be acknowledged as having an influence on their decisions throughout a research project (Crotty, 1996; Koch, 1995).

Those who have used this approach to explore students' perceptions of supervision have described that they found a lack of shared meanings and common understandings due to the diversity of the experiences (Linden, Ohlin and Brodin, 2013; Hallett, 2010). For these reasons I questioned whether this was an appropriate methodology to use.

Case study approach

This approach involves a researcher exploring a particular example of the topic being researched, and collates a description of this example by drawing on multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2007). I did consider using this approach, using my own Faculty as a focus. The advantage of this approach was that the focus of the research would be specific, and that the findings could be shared with other subject areas in future research to explore whether there were similarities between disciplines. One disadvantage was that the usefulness of the findings might be limited by this narrow approach. Through discussions about my research topic with colleagues from other areas of the university, I was aware from the earliest planning stages that there was an acknowledgement that this aspect of practice would also merit exploration in other disciplines. I was also concerned that this approach might lead to a description of supervisory practices rather than an improved understanding of them.

Action Research approach

Action research involves '*people taking action to improve their personal and social situation*' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006). This approach to changing circumstances through collaborative action has been recognised as being effective in a range of different situations: enabling organisational change in the workplace (Passmore, 2006); empowering communities through facilitating reading (Friere, 1970); improving the situation of underprivileged groups (Fals Borda, 2006); developing educational, health and social care practice (Noffke, 2009; Koshy, Koshy and Waterman, 2011).

This was not a methodology which I initially considered appropriate, since my initial aims had been to explore the practice of supervision in order to gain insights into the processes involved, rather than to change it. I was aware that action research was primarily used to change practice, with a view to empowering the research participants and I had not ever considered

academic staff as a group of people who required support in becoming empowered.

Initial exploration of supervision

I decided that an initial exploration of supervision within my own Faculty would be helpful in considering which perspective I would focus upon within my research. In order to understand more about the nature of supervision, and following ethical approval, I undertook an exploration of supervision within my own Faculty which incorporated the institutional, student and supervisor perspectives. At that time the master's programmes offered by the Faculty were in the disciplines of health and education.

In my consideration of the institutional perspective I adopted a CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product) evaluation framework (see appendix 2). Developed by Stufflebeam (2003), this model provides an overview of current provision and insight into the phenomena under review by reviewing a range of different aspects. I undertook an exploration of the political and economic influences on the provision of taught postgraduate programmes within Higher Education, and the factors affecting recruitment. I also identified the resources required and the processes involved in the delivery of these programmes within the Faculty, and the output in terms of student retention and completion. As part of my exploration of the process of supervision, I sought the views of students and supervisors.

Accessing the views of students who were being supervised proved to be more challenging than anticipated. The taught component for the dissertation involved seminars which were delivered at the beginning of the module. These tended to run in the evenings and as students often attended at the end of their working day, many did not have time after the seminar for any additional activity. Invitations to participate in a discussion about their experiences attracted no respondents. I was able to ascertain the views of students who attended a 'Dissertation Café' prior to them starting their dissertation. The comments made by the students provided information about their hopes, concerns and expectations regarding their forthcoming dissertation study were outlined in chapter 2.

The invitation to supervisors to participate in discussions about their experience of supervision received an immediate and overwhelming response, with over 74% of the Faculty's supervisors offering to take part in interviews to discuss their experiences of supervision. At that time my role involved implementing academic development initiatives within the Faculty, so I had previously sent out invitations regarding other projects, but this level of response was unprecedented, and indicated that my colleagues thought that this was an issue which merited some consideration.

The first interview involved a small focus group with three experienced members of staff with whom I had worked on teaching or curriculum development projects for a number of years. I was struck by a number of the issues which were discussed:

- The feelings of a lack of preparedness and vulnerability in this aspect of their academic practice which were expressed by the supervisors
- The vivid description of some of the challenges and dilemmas they had faced with the different students they had supervised. This was particularly striking because, although I had read about the complexity of supervision, these were some real life examples which I had not found in the literature
- Their eagerness to discuss their experiences and their suggestion that they would find further discussions with other supervisors helpful in developing their practice.

These issues were common across the other interviews and I began to consider that an Action Research approach might be an appropriate methodology to adopt. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) suggest that while seeking to provide solutions to existing issues within a particular practical situation, this research method can also contribute to the knowledge base about the practice involved. Listening to the views of my colleagues, I became aware that supervision was a role which they had felt obliged to take on with little preparation and for which they received scant feedback or acknowledgement, other than from the individual students whom they were supporting. While recognising that support for the role was probably available within the Faculty, they expressed a belief that supervision was something which they should be able to do, but in which they felt isolated. Many expressed a lack of certainty about their abilities in undertaking this role. The

comment below which was expressed by one colleague, received agreement from others, who agreed that the established processes for recruiting, preparing, allocating and supporting supervisors would benefit from some improvement.

> *Bethany: I think if I had gone and asked the support would have been there, but I did feel a little bit vulnerable about 'I should be able to', and I think having better support for people would enable them more.*

It transpired that there were very few opportunities available for supervisors to meet, and when these did occur, the focus of the discussion was on wider programme issues, and did not provide an opportunity for colleagues to reflect upon this aspect of their academic practice. This situation seemed to be due to the fact that students could undertake their dissertation module as part of a number of different master's programmes, which were delivered across different departments.

Rather than being able to acknowledge the expertise which individual supervisors had attained through experience, and to share and further develop this knowledge for the benefit of all, the result of the organisational structure had resulted in supervisors doing their best without confidence that they were doing what was 'right'.

There was general agreement of the need for improvements to the Faculty's processes in the provision of supervision and many of the supervisors were willing to work with others to explore this aspect of their academic practice. This prompted me to think about a more collaborative research approach and to consider an action research study through which supervisors could be actively involved, working with others in a mutually supportive collective project. The identification of possible improvements to the organisation of research supervision and the improved understanding of supervisory practice which might result from such research could be empowering for the staff involved. The development of a collective reflective space would place the research within the Radical Humanist paradigm of the supervision pedagogy as defined by Burrell and Morgan's model (1976).

Overview of Action Research

The underpinning principles of action research are the involvement of participants in a process of change, in which they are able to work together, making decisions and taking actions which can both increase their understanding of their situation and change their social conditions (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The process involves moving back and forwards between thinking and action; exploring a situation; thinking about what action could be undertaken; taking the action; considering the impact it has had. It has been described as a 'developmental spiral of practical decision-making and evaluative reflection' (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001 p5) or as a cycle of stages in which researchers and participants 'plan, act, observe, reflect and then draw up a revised plan' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 p11). The evaluation from one cycle or phase can lead into the actions of another cycle.

Early advocates of action research, such as Lewin in the 1940s, advocated a 'plan, action, fact find' cycle of action, where an action was undertaken to address a specific need. This view of action research was based upon the assumption that there was a direct link between the cause and effect of a problem, which could be resolved by one or more particular actions (Somekh, 2006). In the 1980s, Carr and Kemmis proposed a more critical approach in which they viewed action research as a more developmental and even an emancipatory process, which could empower professionals as they took ownership of the improvement of their practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Later authors expanded upon this thinking, for example Somekh (2006) suggested that a more participatory approach could utilise action which

> *'emerged from group exploration of social interactions, rather than solely from rational deduction'* (p12).

McNiff and Whitehead suggested that this more democratic approach, where practitioners focus their action research on their own practice, could result in more sustainable organisational development (2006).

The use of action research principles in education began in the US in the 1950s (Noffke, 2009) and in the UK in the 1970s with the work of Stenhouse, who suggested that teachers should be involved in developing their practice through

> '*the commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development*' (1975, p144).

Whitehead (1989) suggested that the knowledge from individuals questioning their own practice contributed to a 'living educational theory' which could become part of a wider epistemology of educational practice (Whitehead, 1989).

The use of action research principles in Higher Education started to emerge in the late 1980s (Schratz, 1992). Zuber-Skerritt suggested that

> '*the general assumption and common practice has been to regard educational theory as being created by educational researchers and applied to some practitioners in Higher Education'* (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992, p9).

He suggested that the impact of such educational theory on Higher Education teaching practice was limited because academics tended to focus primarily on their own disciplinary literature, and were alienated by the jargon used in educational research papers. Increased awareness of action research principles which had been valuable in other contexts led to acknowledgement that there was potential to develop knowledge related to the educational practices involved in Higher Education. The ways in which creative and active learning experiences with colleagues had led to a deeper understanding of other situations was recognised as a possible strategy for the development of Higher Education learning and teaching practice. Staniforth and Harland (2003) undertook action research with new academic staff, but suggested that commitment to such developmental opportunity would be limited to new academic staff, as professional development opportunities are not seen as a priority among established academics.

While some use of action research to develop the practice of supervision is evident within the literature globally (Manathunga and Goozee, 2007; Emilsson and Johnsson, 2007), there are fewer examples from within the UK. Blas, Jasman and Levy (2012) used a collaborative action approach to explore their new roles when they first took on supervisory responsibilities. Walker (2001) suggested that the dominant paradigm for academic development in the UK was of the training tradition, which focused primarily on skills, techniques and outcomes. Rowland (1999) recognised a more 'surface learning' approach about the practice of teaching. Greenwood (2012) argued that the public management models applied to Higher

Education had resulted in a decrease in the number of collaborative, cross disciplinary research projects undertaken. Institutional support and infrastructure to support learning and teaching has been identified as a factor which can provide support for localised action learning projects (Wisker, Griffiths, Waller, Robinson and Lilly, 2005).

Consideration of these previous studies identified that, from the work which had been done in in accessing supervisors' insights on their practice, action research had been a suitable approach. I concluded that action research would be an appropriate methodology through which the aims of my study could be achieved, as I could gain access to the contextually embedded knowledge related to supervision. I realised that this approach would involve me becoming immersed in the messiness of the practice in my own organisation, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), but decided that this strategy could result in a better understanding of the reality of the situation, gained from those who were knowledgeable about it (Flick, 2009).

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) highlight that researchers working within their own work context need to be aware of how embedded assumptions could influence the way in which they view issues. Since I am a supervisor and am experiencing supervision myself, it is inevitable that my own experiences and beliefs will impact on the research. I have undertaken a number of reflexive activities which I will discuss in the next chapter 'Being supervised', in an attempt to address the possibility that my particular understanding of supervision has the potential to 'taint' the research (Hammersley, 2013).

Action research typology

Hart and Bond (1995) proposed a typology which identified that action research could incorporate a number of approaches and they outlined seven sets of distinguishing criteria within action research. Of these, my study best fitted within the criteria which involved a collaborative research relationship. In this particular approach, the practitioner researcher is involved with colleagues as a co-researcher. Within this relationship the researcher works with the practitioners, who take increasing ownership of the project. A key principle is that action research is not done *on* the participants by the

researcher, and the focus of the study is identified by those involved, who should have ownership of the process (Hart and Bond, 1995).

As it was the supervisors involved in what began as an initial exploration of supervision within the Faculty who suggested the potential benefits of working with others to explore this aspect of their practice, this became the first phase of what evolved into the action research project, and I applied for an amendment to the ethical approval for the initial exploration to reflect this (see appendix 3), as well as being granted permission for the larger action research project (see appendix 4).

Research methods

Researchers who have sought to explore the processes and relationships within supervision through the experiences of those involved have used a range of different research methods. Some have focused on reflection on their own experiences (Grant, 1999; Pearson and Brew, 2002), but most have accessed the experiences of others (Delamont and Atkinson, 2004; Halse, 2011; Dysthe et al, 2006; Morgan and Ryan, 2003). Many have found supervisor discussions to be useful (Zeegers and Barron, 2012; Erichsen and Bolliger, 2011; McCormack and Pamphilon, 2004). Other methods used have been group meetings, interviews, diaries and paired observation of tutorials (Burchell and Dyson, 2005; Blas, Jasman and Levy (2012).

An important element of the role of the supervisors in this study in acting as co-researchers in the collaborative action research approach involved decisions about the data collection methods used (Hart and Bond, 1995). Discussion with the supervisors who were involved in the first two phases of the project identified that the methods which they preferred were focus group or individual interviews, while those within the third phase opted for workshops. Burchell and Dyson (2005) reported that although participants had found meeting with others to be a useful activity, group meetings were difficult to organise due to the varied responsibilities of the participants, and that not all could attend every meeting or sometimes be present for the whole time which had been set aside. This proved to be the case in this study, and the group meetings were supplemented with informal discussions and communication via e-mail or in person.

Conclusion

Each of the research methods I considered for this study had some disadvantages, and following consideration of each I elected to undertake an exploratory study within my own Faculty in order to gain a clearer understanding of some of the issues involved in supervision. The discussions with supervisors highlighted that this was an area of practice in which they were somewhat put upon, due to a lack of involvement in preparation, selection and ongoing development of this role. I recognised that a collaborative project could have the benefits of empowering them through active engagement in research into this practice, while also providing them with the opportunity to articulate the complexities of their supervisory role more clearly. Although this complexity had been recognised within the literature, the lack of explanation as to what supervisors actually do has been acknowledged as an area for further research (Pearson and Brew, 2002; Bamber, 2015).

In recognition of the importance of exploring my personal experiences and understanding of supervision, in order to acknowledge that these will influence my decision making during the study, I have undertaken some reflexive activities which I will outline in the next chapter, 'Being Supervised'.

Chapter 5

Being supervised

Introduction

Given that the focus of this research is the process of supervision, it was inevitable that my exploration of this topic has been influenced by my own experience of being supervised, which in turn has also provided me with insight into the student perspective of supervision. Throughout the duration of the project I have also acted as a supervisor for students undertaking their master's dissertations, and I am aware that my learning from the project has been informed by, and impacted on my own practice in undertaking this role.

These experiences have also influenced my decisions about the research design, data collection and analysis. Carr and Kemmis (2009) recognised that self-reflection was a central element to action research, as the researcher is not an objective bystander to the events which occur, but has more of what Coghlan and Brannick (2014) described as an actor-director role. Reason and Bradbury (2006) suggested that action research has three audiences, and that the voices of all should be incorporated within an integrative approach. The first audience is the researcher themselves, who can inquire into their own assumptions, intentions, philosophy, desire and behaviour through reflexive activities. The second audience includes those involved in working and enquiring into the issues with the researcher, who are included through conversation, dialogue and action. The third audience includes those outside a project, who can become involved at the stages of reporting and wider dissemination of the research.

Reflexive activities

In order to ensure that my own voice was included within the project I undertook two reflexive activities. This was in recognition of the need to be as transparent as possible in articulating and documenting both my own learning and also my decision-making process throughout the research. In my monthly supervision meetings, I discussed not only the research project,

but also my personal learning. I also kept a personal research journal in which I recorded some reflections on my experiences throughout the different phases of the study. I have included extracts from this within the methodology chapter to illustrate my thoughts on parts of my research journey. One particular framework of reflection which I found helpful was that of Brookfield (1995). Using this model of critical reflection in education enabled me to capture my thinking, feelings and learning throughout the research.

Brookfield identified four approaches within a critical reflective process: assumption analysis, contextual awareness, imaginative speculation and reflective scepticism. This involves: challenging our beliefs, practices and values; acknowledging that these have been created in our personal environment; thinking of different ways in which to view things; critiquing previously accepted truths.

He suggested that these processes could be undertaken by looking at our experiences through four lenses: our autobiographies as teachers and learners, the theoretical literature, our colleagues' experiences and our students' eyes.

Assumption analysis

In order to recognise my assumptions, I undertook an educational biography exercise on my own experiences of supervision (as a student and supervisor) which I shared in writing and in discussion with my supervisor. These discussions included philosophical principles underpinning supervision, and led to written reflections which considered the background against which the historical and contextual influences on supervision could be explored.

In order to further consider my own identity as a supervisor, I asked one of the supervisors involved in the project to observe me supervising one my students, who agreed to her presence at our meeting. This proved to be more of a challenging than a helpful experience however, and I found, as had others who had tried this strategy (Blas, Jasman and Levy, 2012), that my awareness of my performance distracted from my ability to focus on the student. In fairness to the students whom I was supervising, I did not repeat this strategy.

In reflecting on the process of being supervised during my doctoral study, I found that I was best able to relate to the supervisory discourses described by Grant (2005). I realised that my experience of being supervised incorporated more than one of the discourses, and incorporated a combination of 'Psy', 'Trad' and 'Techno' supervision at different stages of the project, as outlined below. Grant proposed that it was not uncommon for different discourses to be adopted over the course of doctoral study, due to the different social roles which students could occupy. My supervisor, who undertook this activity independently, also recognised these discourses within our relationship.

A caring personal approach with timely reassurance and support as I progressed through the different stages of the research was reflective of the 'Psy' student-supervisor model of supervision. As a mature student from a professional rather than traditional academic background I did doubt my abilities to undertake doctoral study, particularly while working full time, to the extent that I was two years into the research before I told many of my friends or extended family that I was undertaking a doctorate. Reflecting on the reason for this I recognised that, as I was late on in my career before starting this project, they might question the wisdom or necessity of this further level of study. I wanted to be confident that I would be able to undertake the amount of work required before telling them, just in case I had taken on more than I was capable of. Reassurance from my supervisor that I was capable, that my study was worthwhile, and that the findings could be a valuable contribution to disciplinary theory, which might ultimately be of value to other supervisors, was helpful. A key element of this aspect of supervisory support was his understanding of the difficulties I experienced while trying to complete the doctorate while working full time and with family commitments, and sympathetic encouragement during periods when I felt completely overwhelmed by the demands of the work.

Particularly with regards to the writing up of the project, which was a continuous process throughout the study, the approach used was more of a 'Trad' supervision in which the supervisor stretches the student's academic abilities. As someone who had worked in higher education for many years, and who had previously undertaken and published research, I was fairly confident in my ability to undertake the more practical aspects of project planning, implementation and data analysis, but had concerns about the

levels of conceptual thinking which I knew would be required. My primary supervisor came from a very different academic background and he had a much better grounding than I did on the history of ideas, which he was able to draw upon to encourage my development. His encouragement to consider the work Kierkegaard (Palmer, 1996) in relation to how we view ourselves and the nature of truth did increase my thinking and self-confidence. Once I started the process of documenting and discussing the project, rather than the more exploratory writing in which I engaged during the very early stages of my thinking, he had greater expectations of the written work I submitted for discussion. The challenge to produce more polished writing introduced a different element to our relationship, and we would agree more formal deadlines by which I would produce another chapter. Having read some of his work, including his own doctoral thesis, I was aware that he was skilled in coherent writing which articulated underlying conceptual principles very clearly, and I was aware that this was a particular area in which I could learn from him.

In developing my writing skills, we adopted more of a 'Techno' approach, where he made comment on my writing, giving feedback on areas for improvement.

Possibly due the fact that I was also an employee of the University, whose study was funded by the institution, the 'com' approach to supervision was not apparent within our relationship. As colleagues we tended to have some sympathy with one another's situations – he was sympathetic to me studying while working, and I was aware of the ever demands of increasing doctoral student numbers and the pressure to fit in time for research and teaching which he experienced.

The issue of power dynamics within our relationship, which was identified by Doloriert, Sambrook and Stewart (2012), and Petersen (2007) as being relevant for both student and supervisor, was something which I specifically considered. Our situation was somewhat unusual in that I was older than my supervisor, had worked in the Faculty for longer and was in a more senior role to him, so the potential power dynamics could have been different to the norm. A number of factors meant that these were not as complex as they might otherwise have been. My role was advisory rather than managerial, our roles very rarely overlapped, and as during the course of the project a

Faculty restructure resulted in us being placed in different departments, these differences did not appear to be a source of tension at all.

Further exploration within the literature revealed that Armitage (2007) and Grant, Graham and Jones (1994) suggested that both supervisor and student have the power to impact on the achievement of the other's hopes or expectations for the relationship, through the granting or withholding of rewards or resources. Analysis of our situation identified that the rewards which my supervisor could offer or withhold were access to his time, advice and expertise, while I could either offer or withhold effort and the sharing of my work as it progressed. The institutional drivers for increased monitoring of doctoral supervisory processes, which could have impacted on both of our ability to withhold these resources from the other, was evident to both of us, as the amount of documentation required increased over the course of the project. The requirement to maintain ongoing records of our monthly supervision meetings had been present from the beginning of the process, but this was changed to an online system with reminders sent if the reports were not completed. It was evident from the literature that this is a common experience across the sector, but the understanding of the rationale for this did not detract from the feeling that these additional tasks used up valuable time which could be better spent on the actual doctorate. It is apparent that this is also a common perception in the countries where quality control mechanisms are being implemented in an attempt to promote higher completion rates (Severinsson, 2012; Spiller, Byrnes and Ferguson, 2013). In acknowledgement that for both of us the primary aim was completion of the doctorate, we colluded where possible against the system – choosing to focus our efforts on the research rather the monitoring processes, and while complying with the requirements, we did so with minimal effort, providing only the basic information when necessary.

While my supervisor had some understanding of the process of supervision, he was new to this responsibility, and due to the topic of the project, I was also developing an understanding of the processes involved in this role. As my supervisor he had the legitimate power identified by Armitage (2006) through his right to guide and influence my course of study as my supervisor, but he did not have the power to withhold information regarding the processes required for a doctoral project, since I could access this information through other sources within the Faculty. We were both

constrained by the power of the Faculty in terms of access to resources, and the other demands on our time, but had some flexibility in the priority we gave to these.

Following my assumption analysis activities, we discussed and so were aware of one another's expectations for the project – for both of us the main focus was on my successful completion of the doctoral study, which would reflect well on us both. Following the initial phases of the work we were able to co-author two conference presentations, one at an international Action Research with two of the other supervisors involved in the research. This was an additional outcome that I would not have anticipated at the start of the project, but which he encouraged me to work towards from an earlier stage than I might have considered. This sharing of goals is what Armitage terms 'referent' power, and recognising this, we worked collaboratively with these in mind.

Contextual awareness

Reviewing the theoretical literature on postgraduate supervision and investigating the development of supervisory processes in other countries contributed to my contextual awareness of supervision. The use of Engström's activity theory (2009) facilitated the development of my understanding of the process of supervision from a number of different perspectives, and increased my understanding of different models of supervision. The reason that these have emerged in other Higher Educational contexts is due to the academic culture or constraints placed on supervision such as geographical distance or lack of experienced supervisors. Exposure to these models of delivery has enabled me to include alternative possibilities to the established norm of my own experiences of supervisory processes in my discussions with the other supervisors.

Imaginative speculation

Exploration of my colleagues' perspectives was achieved through the interviews and discussions with them during the project which gave me insights into their perceptions and experiences. Working with them to plan the discussions and the workshops which occurred in phase three enabled me to think creatively in order to consider alternative ways in which we might explore our practice. This process was also one which ensured that the

voices of the Reason and Bradbury's (2006) second audience were included in the project. Greater ingenuity was required in finding a way to access the students' insights into supervision, but the issues raised by them prior to commencing their dissertation modules, which are discussed in the 'Conceptualising Supervision' chapter, were invaluable in providing me with a more complete understanding of supervision as an activity.

Reflective scepticism

Of particular value was reflection on other voices which were heard throughout the project, as I shared the process of the research with colleagues who were interested in the study, but who were not directly involved. There were several of my peers who were undertaking doctoral study at the same time, and we established informal support mechanisms or attended research workshops at which we were able to share our progress and the challenges we were experiencing. The opportunity to reflect on their comments and suggestions, while also considering their challenges, was particularly helpful, as were the shared resources which increased my awareness of different theoretical perspectives.

At an action research workshop which took place just at the time when we were starting to plan the workshops, it was suggested that action research participants would engage more fully in a project where they felt that their practice could be enhanced right from the start. The other supervisors agreed that the opportunity to share supervision practices with one another and to discuss supervisory dilemmas would be useful, and these activities were identified by those involved as being particularly helpful.

The voices of the third audience included some of the dialogue reported above, but also included insights contributed by those with whom we shared the research outwith our Faculty. A second conference presentation, at a learning and teaching conference attended by colleagues from the other regional universities, was given with another of the supervisors involved in the project, who had not been involved in the presentation at the earlier conference. The questions asked by the audience caused me to realise that the strategies used by supervisors could be further clarified. In answering one question in particular I was struck afresh about the skills involved in the supervisor's assessment of the student's needs, and about the fact that this is such a central element to supervision. Possibly because assessment is

such a basic element of practice for myself and the other supervisors who were involved in health and education, I had not been aware of how complex a process it was, until trying to explain it to a member of the audience who was from a completely different discipline. During individual discussion after the presentation, it emerged that this was an area of practice within her own discipline which she had been thinking merited further exploration and staff development. Comments from others in the audience who were from the student support and wellbeing services at my own university highlighted that there was scope to incorporate their services more effectively for students on taught postgraduate programmes through information which was targeted through dissertation supervisors.

Conclusion

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) suggest that by engaging in a reflexive process, a researcher can become aware of personal assumptions and biases which may affect their research. I believe that recognition of the ways in which personal motivations and beliefs may have affected decisions about the topic of study and influenced the methodology chosen did contribute to the authenticity of the research. Acknowledgement of my understanding of supervision was taken into consideration during the design of the workshops and analysis of data, to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Examples from the reflexive activities undertaken during the course of this research are provided within this thesis, and the use of Brookfield's critical reflection model (1995) has provided an effective framework within which the different voices of those involved in the project have been able to be heard, and have shaped the project throughout. The relevance of the research for three audiences has been considered, the researcher, those involved in the research project, and those with whom the process and outcomes of the study have been shared.

The recognition of the complexity of supervision, but the lack of detailed description of strategies used by master's supervisors in managing the possible tensions, changing nature of their relationship and need to respond to individual students' needs and situations, informed the original aims for this study – to explore the challenges and the strategies used in supervisory

practice, the views held by supervisors as to the factors which can influence these strategies and their perceptions of how the practice of supervision could be developed.

In the next chapter I will explain the design and implementation of the action research project, and offer the rationale for the decisions made throughout this process. This will include details of the planning, action and reflection involved in each of the four cycles of the project.

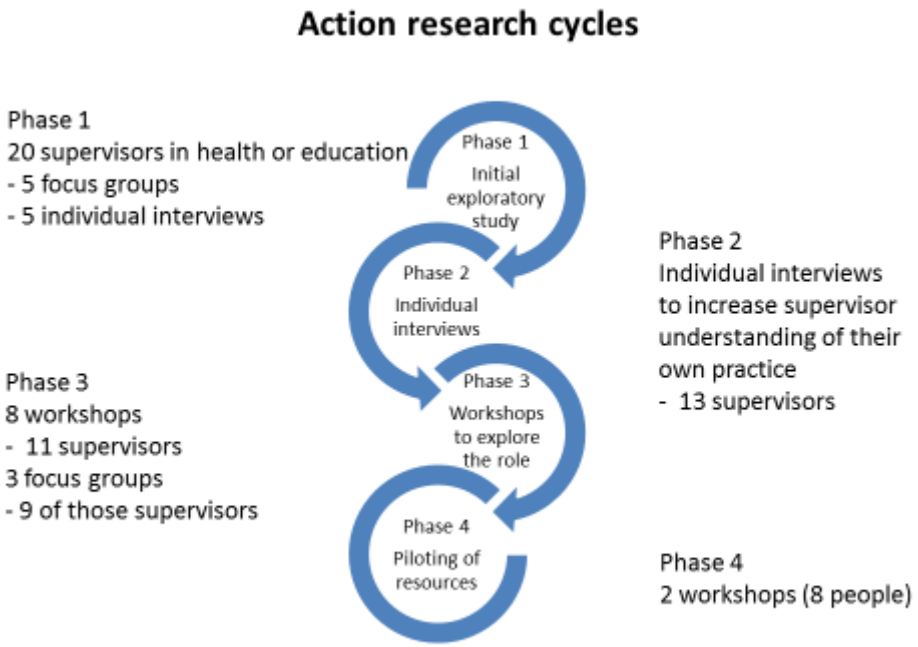
Chapter 6

Methodology

Introduction and overview

The project composed of four action research phases as is illustrated below. Each phase comprised a process of planning, action and reflection.

Figure 2 Outline of each action research cycle



In this chapter I begin with a discussion of the ethical considerations upon which the research was designed followed by an explanation of the planning, action and reflection undertaken within each cycle. I have included extracts from my personal research journey to provide some insight into my reflections on the processes used. McTaggert (1998) suggested that the presentation of an action research project should enable the reader to assess the validity of the research and its claims to the creation of knowledge. He advocated that the research processes should first be reported factually, followed by a discussion of the meanings made of them. This approach is also supported by Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) and Coghlin and Brannick (2014) who argue that the theorizing about action research should

be separated from the narrative of the story. In following these recommendations, I explain the research processes within this chapter, and present a detailed critical reflection and commentary in the discussion chapter.

Ethical considerations

Due to the nature of the action research approach which I used within this study, I engaged with the supervisors, who became co-researchers, at deeper level than perhaps might have been the case if I had adopted other research methodologies. This raised a number of particular ethical challenges which Rowan (2006), Norton (2009) and Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) highlight it is important to address from the design stage of the research.

Informed consent

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) emphasize that research design should minimise the potential for colleagues to feel coerced into involvement or to have insufficient information to undertake an informed choice about participating. In order to ensure this within this study, I e-mailed information to colleagues inviting them to express an interest or to ask for more information about the research. I offered supervisors a choice of methods of participation, so that they could, if they wished, participate by sharing their comments online. Due to the high number of responses to this initial invitation, there was no need for follow up invitation, and the option to withdraw at any time was included in the information sheets (see appendices 5 and 6). I undertook recruitment for both the second and third phase through one recruitment process, and the commitment required was explained both in the information sheet (see appendix 6) and in information which I provided to supervisors within the Faculty. There were colleagues who withdrew from the study at each phase, mainly due to work commitments.

Anonymity and confidentiality

In my reporting of the study findings, the inclusion of supervisors' comments breaks confidentiality, so it was important that participants were aware that the project would be written up as part of this thesis, which might then be

disseminated through presentations and academic publications. This was explained in the participant information sheets (see appendices 5 and 6). In the reporting and dissemination of the research, comments are attributed to individual participants who are identified by a fictional name, which was allocated to each during the analysis of the data. The identity of each participant and their allocated name was kept securely and separate from the study data. Zeni (2009) highlighted that such anonymity may prevent participants being given credit for intellectual property. In order to address this issue, I proposed that all of the supervisors who participated in the workshops would be invited to be involved in any dissemination of the project, at conferences or through publications. Five of the supervisors have co-presented the study with me at conferences.

As a result of the dissemination strategies, the institution will be identifiable, and so it was important to ensure that I provided participants' details in such a way that individuals cannot be identified by their colleagues or others. In table 1 the professional backgrounds of the supervisors involved are noted and their supervision experience listed, but these details are presented separately from other information about those involved, in order to prevent individuals being able to be identified as participants.

There was the potential that the research might show the institution in a bad light. This could be the case where the processes for selection, training and support of supervisors are described. One way of addressing this issue was to mention the Faculty's high success rates for student dissertations in this thesis and in any dissemination of the project. In addition, I have highlighted the ways in which the supervisors involved in the research reported that the communicative space for supervisors which was created during the project, had a positive impact on their supervisory confidence and skills. The development of a guidance booklet (see appendix 7) and activities which could be used to support new supervisors resulted in increased support materials which we piloted in the fourth phase of the study (see appendix 8). These have contributed to ongoing supervisor support.

Protection for harm

Norton (2009) argued that although the purpose of educational action research is to enhance practice, and therefore the learning experience of students, the potential of causing harm to participants must be considered.

The interviews and workshops involved a time commitment and the supervisors all had busy workloads. Any sense of obligation to attend could have resulted in feelings of stress. To alleviate this, I negotiated the times of the interviews to fit into their working day. I made clear in the information given prior to phase two and in the first phase three workshops that it was not anticipated that participants would be able to attend all of the workshops. This was reinforced when colleagues offered apologies for not attending.

There was also the potential that the participants could reveal practice which then made them feel that their supervision was in some way inadequate, so the options of individual and group interviews were offered in phase one. In order to highlight that they were not alone in any feelings of inadequacy, the findings of phase one, which had identified a common experience in the lack of both supervisory preparation and ongoing support, were shared prior to the later phases. The shared experience of colleagues in questioning their supervisory practices, with the question '*Am I doing it right*?' being asked by almost all participans, was highlighted at the initial workshops.

Rowan (2006) suggests that in research where the researcher and participants become closer, interpersonal ethics (the care with which people treat one another as equals) and social ethics (the concern about the results of the research and any unintended outcomes) become more apparent. As described above, the flexibility of the arrangements was a deliberate strategy adopted in acknowledgement of the busy lives of the supervisors and to minimise any unease they may have experienced due to their non-availability for workshops. Mayer, Ashburner and Holman (2006) suggested that caring should be a standard for such research. I provided a variety of hot drinks and home-made cakes during the workshops, and offered drinks to those participating in the focus groups and individual interviews where possible, as a way of making colleagues comfortable and in recognition that they were taking time to participate. In order to consider both the intended and unintended consequences of their participation on the supervisors, focus groups were undertaken at the end of the workshop series, partly to identify any less than positive impact so that this could be followed up as appropriate.

Phase 1 – Initial exploration

Planning

An explanation of how the research methodology and the methods were chosen is given in the 'Research Philosophy' chapter. What began as an exploration to enable me to understand the practice of supervision, became the first phase of the action research project. Those who participated identified the need for development of the processes which were in place at that time, and several volunteered to be involved in any work on this.

Action

Recruitment

The aim of the initial phase was to explore the experiences of supervisors of master's students within health and education. Flick (2009) suggests that an understanding of the reality of a situation or practice is best gained by recruiting from a core group of those who are experienced and knowledgeable about it. Following ethical approval, I sent an invitation to participate in the first phase to all 31 supervisors on the master's programmes within the Faculty.

In order to ensure that colleagues felt comfortable to share their experiences honestly, I offered a choice of ways for individuals to be involved. These were face to face interviews, either as individuals or within small groups, or through an online discussion. The methods were ones with which supervisors would be very familiar from their day to day work with students and other colleagues, and which have been identified as creating environments in which individuals feel able to contribute their thoughts and share experiences (Forsey, 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2014; Flick, 2009; Salmon, Nie and Edirisingha, 2010).

This choice of participation strategies was selected as I anticipated that some colleagues might prefer to talk about their experiences in a more confidential way, some would prefer to so this with peers, and some might prefer to add comments to an asynchronous online discussion as and when they had the time to do so. The advantage of face to face interviews or group discussions is that individuals can be encouraged to reflect on their experiences in some depth. Organising these can be challenging due to the number of other

academic responsibilities which colleagues have (Burchell and Dyson, 2005). In the event, all volunteered to take part in face to face interviews, and the five individual interviews which did occur were mostly as a consequence of the individuals' not being available at the same time when the focus groups took place, rather than their reluctance to be interviewed with others. All of the supervisors had worked within the Faculty for a number of years and most knew of, or had met one another. Some had worked together previously on programme teams and most had attended cross Faculty meetings where the others might have been present.

Response to invitation

23 staff responded within a few days, which indicated that there was a good level of interest about supervision. I arranged Interviews with 21 of these staff as two people who had an interest in being involved were away from the university and not available over this period of time, and one person had to withdraw due to other commitments. The remaining 20 staff who had responded to the invitations were interviewed. The professional background and supervisory experience of those who participated are listed in the table below. Some could remember how many students they had supervised, but others could not give an accurate number, as they had been supervising for some years, and the number of students was different from year to year. There was a variation in the number of students that each participant had supervised. For some, particularly in education, the main focus of their role was with postgraduate students, whereas others were primarily involved in undergraduate programmes but supervised a few postgraduate dissertation students each year. Those involved in the first phase, who were also involved in phase two and three, are identified in the table below.

Table 1 Experience of Phase one participants

Participant	Professional Background	No of years as supervisor or number of students supervised	Involvement in Phase 2 and 3
1	Education	3 students	Yes
2	Health and Education	8+ students	Yes
3	Health	6 years +	Yes

Participant	Professional Background	No of years as supervisor or number of students supervised	Involvement in Phase 2 and 3
4	Education	15 years	No (retired prior to phase 2)
5	Education	11 years	No
6	Education	10 years	No (retired prior to phase 2)
7	Health	4 students	Yes
8	Education	11 years	Yes
9	Health	2 years	No
10	Health	6 years	No
11	Health	5 years	No
12	Health	6 years	No
13	Health	6 per year for several years	Yes
14	Health	13+ students	No
15	Health and education	5 years +	No
16	Health and Education	4 students	Yes
17	Education	7 students	No
18	Education	200+ students	No
19	Health and Education	5 years +	Yes
20	Health	14 years	No

Rationale for use of interviews and focus groups

Both of the interview strategies used have particular benefits. Forsey (2012) suggests that individual interviews are an appropriate method of collecting participants' views when a depth of insight on their experience is required.

Group interviews have the advantage that the interaction between those involved can result in the generation of deeper insights, with ideas emerging in a more natural conversation (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Due to the challenges of identifying times when several people were available, I arranged the focus groups whenever at least three people could meet together. Although this number of people is fewer than within traditional focus groups, Finch, Lewis and Turley (2014) suggest that this can be an effective number to enable in-depth discussion between colleagues. Focus groups of people who are known to one another can offer an atmosphere where individuals feel safe enough to share behaviour that they might not otherwise discuss (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2014). Barbour (2007) suggests that different perspectives may be ascertained by using both individual and focus group interviews; however, this did not prove to be the case as the issues raised were very similar across all the interviews.

Approach to data collection

The literature review had identified that there was a lack of information about what it is that supervisors actually do when they meet with students (Halse, 2011), and so the focus of the first phase of the study was to identify and explore the strategies used by the supervisors in guiding and supporting their students.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Bryman (2012) suggest that detailed planning of the methods used within the fieldwork phase is important to optimise the data collected and to ensure that it fits within the overall aims of the study. They argued that this should be the case even where the conversations were deliberately less structured, to allow the participants to explore the meaning of the issues for them. Since I conducted a number of different groups, and in order to ensure that the same issues were addressed in each interview or discussion, I devised a topic guide. Arthur, Mitchell, Lewis and McNaughton-Nicholls (2014) propose that this is a useful aide-memoire as to what should be explored, ensuring some consistency in what is discussed while allowing flexibility for participants to explore the issues under discussion. They advocate that for focus group discussion, fewer topics will help ensure that each participant has time to give their views.

I sent the topic guide to the supervisors prior to the interviews, so that they would be aware of the proposed focus for the discussions. The topic guide included the following areas for discussion:

- Factors which could impact on students undertaking a master's dissertation
- Which supervision strategies the supervisors identified as being good practice
- Any factors which had influenced the development and implementation of these strategies
- Suggestions as to how they thought the practice of supervision could be improved.

The format of the interviews and the rationale for the order of these topics is outlined below.

Organisation of interviews and focus groups

Both the interviews and the focus groups took place at a time convenient for the supervisors and in a room which I had booked in advance. For the focus groups, the seats were arranged in a circle with a small table, in the centre, where two voice recorders were placed. Partly as a way of reminding the participants about the interviews, I telephoned them about 30 minutes prior to the interview to ask if they would like a hot drink, which I would collect from the canteen just before the time the interview was due to begin. This proved to be a useful reminder about the interviews for which appreciation was often expressed. The participants had agreed to have the interviews audio recorded, with the recordings then stored on a secure, password controlled file on a shared drive which was set up with access for only the transcriber and me.

Format of the discussions

The format of the interviews was similar for both the individual and group interviews, although the focus groups began with introductions to allow people to introduce themselves to the others present, followed by:

- Context setting – I briefly outlined the nature of the study. In the group discussions this was followed by clarification regarding the need for confidentiality between the members of each small group (as recommended by Flick, 2009 and Barbour, 2007) and an outline of some of the practicalities of the conversation, for example the fact that it was to be recorded (which they had all agreed to as part of the consent process) and the benefits of not talking over one another to ease transcription and ensure that everyone's views could be recorded accurately.
- Opening topic – Each person was asked to outline their previous supervision experience, including the programmes and dissertation modules which the students had been undertaking. This topic encouraged each of the participants to talk, with a view to easing them into conversation and provided me with some background information. This also clarified whether their experience had been mainly with part time, full time or international students.
- Factors affecting the student's experience – I generally asked a question such as 'What factors can affect the experience of postgraduate research students undertaking taught master's programmes? '. This enabled the supervisors to draw on their experience in supervising a range of students, and to identify particular issues which they were readily able to identify without too much difficulty. This element of conversation often began with issues which commonly occurred (eg balancing the demands of work and study, family commitments, motivation) but during the course of the discussion, examples of particular issues which had been experienced by individual students would sometimes emerge.
- Strategies used – This issue proved to be challenging for almost all of the supervisors, as it appeared that they had never been asked to articulate their practice in this way before. I found that asking the prompt question 'What experiences/input/support/advice have you found useful in supervising students?' enabled them to reflect upon their practice in a much more productive way, and they were able to explain some approaches to supervision and the actions which supported these in some detail.

- Possible improvements – I asked them to suggest ways in which they felt that their own practice might be able to be improved, and to identify any possible improvements to the Faculty processes and systems. This stimulated a lot of discussion, and several of those involved expressed appreciation of the opportunity to think about this aspect of their academic role, which they felt they had not had the opportunity to do before. There was general agreement that further opportunities to consider supervisory practice would be useful, and several people asked to be informed about any future conversations about supervision.

Transcription

Five focus groups of three staff and five individual interviews took place and were then transcribed by an experienced research transcriber. Saldana (2011) outlines the benefits of the researcher transcribing the interviews themselves, but acknowledges that if funding for transcription is available and time is an issue, that professional transcription may be a preferred option. Since there was Faculty funding available for phases 1 and 3, and an experienced transcriber was able to transcribe the interviews within days, this service was used. In order to ensure accuracy of transcription, I read the transcript while listening to the interview and was able to correct some words which had not been clear to the transcriber. Most of these were educational terms, but there were a few occasions when two people had spoken at the same time.

Reflection

The reflection of phase one involved three elements: analysis of the data; discussions about the themes with those who had been involved in the interviews; conversations with the wider group of supervisors within the Faculty. In designing the analytical process, Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor and Barnard (2014) recommend that the aims of the study should be considered. The aim of this initial exploration of supervision was to provide a rich description of the strategies used within supervision, with a view to developing an understanding of the everyday realities of supervision and the factors which can affect the strategies used, so the approach chosen was of thematic analysis. This is an appropriate strategy where the intention is to

capture and interpret the meanings of the data, rather than on to focus on the structure of the narrative within the discussions (Spencer et al, 2014).

This approach to data analysis focused on the statements made by the participants, which give insight into the participant's social world and their understanding of their experiences (Silverman, 2000). The management and analysis of the data involved a number of steps, as advocated by Spencer et al (2014), including familiarisation, constructing a thematic framework and coding the data.

Familiarisation and constructing a thematic framework

In order to familiarise myself with the data, I read the transcripts while listening to the recordings of the conversations and then re-read the transcripts several times, noting what appeared to be the issues which were discussed. It was possible to identify certain issues which had been discussed by several of the participants. Some people had talked about the role of the supervisor in developing student understanding, the need to encourage students to develop realistic expectations about what could be achieved within their study, or the possible influences on the students' choice of topic or approach. Other issues which had been discussed were the preparation which the supervisors had received prior to taking on this role, the process by which they were allocated students and the support which they had received on an ongoing basis. These issues or 'themes' were identified as capturing something important in relation to understanding the supervisor's role, and formed the initial thematic framework.

Coding of the data

In order to ascertain whether these themes were reflective of the general experience of the supervisors which should be included in the description of supervisory experiences, or whether they were the particular experiences of only a few, I undertook a process which involved annotating the transcripts, identifying which statements fitted within any of the themes, a process which Gibbs (2007) calls 'coding'. Miles and Huberman (1994) described a four stage process of coding, and I used this to inform the analysis. As described above, I identified what I perceived to be the issues discussed within the text. This 'open coding' enabled me to identify what I thought were recurrent themes related to supervision. I then re-read the transcripts and identified the

statements which reflected these themes, or any others which I had not noticed previously, in a process that Miles and Huberman called 'axial coding'. Following this exercise, I re-read the transcripts and considered whether there were any links between the themes or patterns which could be identified, which was the third stage of coding.

During this exercise, some of the themes were adapted, for example from the theme identified as 'supervisor development strategies' it became apparent that there were two issues. These were that there was a lack of development strategies but also suggestions as to what strategies could be helpful, so two different sub-themes emerged.

Reviewing the themes

A sample of the transcripts was reviewed by my second supervisor to confirm that the themes identified were reflective of the comments made by participants.

I sent all of the participants a list of the themes by e-mail and asked to confirm whether they felt that these were reflective of the comments they had made, which they did. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated such member checking as a technique for confirming the findings of qualitative research. The themes and a sample of comments that I felt best illustrated them were incorporated into a summary of this phase, through a process called 'selective coding', which is the 4th stage identified by Miles and Huberman (1994). With the permission of the supervisors who had been interviewed, I shared the themes with those who had participated in the interviews, and those responsible for post graduate programmes who had expressed an interest in the findings.

Phase 2 – Increasing supervisors' awareness of their practice

Planning

The supervisors who had been interviewed also gave me permission to share the findings of the initial exploration of supervision with the wider pool of Faculty supervisors at postgraduate programme meetings, where proposals for the next cycle of the research were outlined. During these discussions,

and informal conversations with some of those who had indicated that they would be interested in being involved in future work on this topic, proposals for phase two and three were drawn up, and ethical approval was granted. These included individual interviews to raise supervisor's awareness and understanding of their own supervision strategies and further exploration of supervision over an extended period. The details of phase three were deliberately flexible at this time, as due to the action research approach I was proposing, supervisors would increasingly take on the role of co-researchers who would work collaboratively to identify possible areas for discussion and actions which they agreed would be useful.

Action

It was apparent from phase one that the supervisors were supporting their students in a number of different ways, but when asked to outline their 'supervision approach or strategies', they struggled to articulate both what these were, and the process they went through in deciding which strategies they might use with different students. Forsey (2012) argued that when a researcher wishes to focus not only on an individual's actions but the meaning behind these, individual interviews are a particularly effective research method. In interviews, individuals share their perceptions of their experiences rather than what might actually have occurred, but if the interview is with an individual, they can be prompted to disclose the discernment processes which informed their actions at the time. These insights and reflections on their decisions were relevant to the subsidiary questions of the study, which were to explore strategies used within supervision and factors which influenced the development of these.

Recruitment

The findings of the first phase of the action research project were presented at a number of programme meetings for health and education master's programmes, which were attended by many of those involved in supervising students. Following this, invitations and information sheets for phases two and three and were then sent by e-mail to all 31 of the supervisors within the Faculty, inviting them to take part in individual interviews to explore their supervision strategies in more depth. Thirteen supervisors responded positively to the invitations, nine of whom had also been involved in the first

phase (see appendix 9) These included two males and eleven females, with the following backgrounds:

- two from Physiotherapy
- two from Children's and Neonatal Nursing
- one from Mental Health Nursing
- one from Learning Disabilities Nursing
- two from Adult Nursing
- one from Community Nursing
- one from Health Visiting
- one from Early Years Education
- one from Post 16 Education
- one from Public Health

Of these 13, four had PhDs and were also involved in supervising Doctoral students and two were themselves receiving supervision as doctoral students. Three of the supervisors had experience of supervising students while working at other institutions. Although the majority of the participants for this phase were from a health rather than an education background, several of the volunteers had supervised several students who had undertaken a Master's in Education for health care professionals.

The professional backgrounds and supervisory experience are illustrated in the table below. Participants are identified by number in this table in order to maintain anonymity due to the small numbers involved.

Table 2 Professional backgrounds and supervisory experience of phase two supervisors

Participant	Gender	Professional or academic area	Number of masters dissertations supervised
P1	Female	Health	25
P2	Female	Education	3
P3	Female	Health	25
P4	Female	Education	42
P5	Female	Health	4

Participant	Gender	Professional or academic area	Number of masters dissertations supervised
P6	Male	Health	9
P7	Male	Health	20
P8	Female	Health	12
P9	Female	Health	15-20
P10	Female	Health	20
P11	Female	Health	4
P12	Female	Health	4
P13	Female	Health	29

Interviews

The interviews took place at a time convenient for the supervisors and they were given a choice of venues. Some took place in my office, some in their office or, where they were based in a shared office, in a classroom nearby.

A semi-structured approach, which allowed for flexibility of conversation while maintaining some structure to include particular topics within the discussion was used within the individual interviews (Ritchie et al, 2014). These began with me summarising the first phase of the project to explain the context of the study, particularly for those who had not been involved in the initial interviews. A list of topic prompts had been designed as a focus for the conversation, but as the purpose of the interviews was to facilitate the supervisors in bringing their sub-conscious supervision strategies to the surface and articulate these, a more open ended, semi-structured approach to the interviews was appropriate, and I asked questions 2-5 below only if the topic had not already been discussed in the conversation. My role as interviewer in this situation could perhaps best be what Roulston (2010) describes as a co-constructor of knowledge, using an engaged questioning approach to encourage the supervisors to reflect upon and share their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

These interviews had the nature of a conversation during which we covered the issues listed within the questions below, with the questions only used to prompt discussion where needed, which was rarely:

1. Please tell me about the types of students and projects you have been involved in at master's level
2. How have you developed your supervision strategies?
3. What supervision strategies do you think are good practice?
4. What factors do you think can influence the implementation of good supervision strategies in practice?
5. Which particular elements of supervision would you like to explore within this action research project?

Questions 3 and 4 were similar to those used in the first phase, as not all of the phase two participants had been involved in that phase. The other questions were designed to encourage them to consider the strategies they used, since this had proved challenging in the first phase.

Reflection

Reflection during phase two involved analysis of the interviews and discussion with those who had indicated that they would like to be involved in phase three. The process by which the themes were identified was based on Miles and Huberman's four stages. Some of those who had been interviewed became involved in reviewing the interview data analysis. Reason (1988) highlights the contribution which those involved in the research can make to the process of 'making sense of what is found out'. Due to the time constraints on the supervisors, most of whom had committed to being involved in phase three, I undertook the initial analysis and invited the others to review the themes which were identified. Details as to the way in which the themes were identified is provided below.

<u>Familiarisation and constructing a thematic framework</u>

Following the interviews, I sent those involved the transcript of their interview to check that the conversations had been recorded accurately. After they confirmed that this was the case, I undertook open coding and the initial analysis at a descriptive level which aimed to capture the essence of what the participants were saying, as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). In order to retain the richness of meaning of their comments, the initial process undertaken involved me listening to the audio recordings, reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify and summarise the essential 'elements' contained in individual statements within the data, using people's own words

where possible. The text of each transcript was displayed in a column on the left of each page and the 'elements' were written on the right. The example below, which is an extract from one of the focus groups in phase one, illustrates this process.

Figure 3 Example of summarising of statements to capture essential elements

<u>Coding of the data</u>

The next part of the process, axial coding, involved sorting the 'elements' statements into groups of statements about the same thing, which were then labelled as themes. During this process, which Mason (2002) called 'cross-sectional analysis', it became apparent that there were different aspects, or subthemes, within some of the themes. On re-reading through the transcripts it was also evident that some elements were not included in the initial thematic framework, so I created new themes and sub-themes. During this process, relationships between some of the subthemes were identified, and the themes and sub-themes were re-ordered on a few occasions, until a more consistent 'fit' was created. The 'messiness' of the process is illustrated by my thoughts during this process:

Reflection on analytical process

Extract from personal Research Journal April, 2013

"Although the processes I have described seem very organised and cut and dried, the reality was not quite so straightforward. There were some themes (eg relevance to practice) that were applicable to both students and supervisors but in different ways, so these became separate sub-themes.

There was some overlap in the process of identifying themes and possible groupings of these, moving back and forward between the two, so the process may have been too simplistic, and influenced by my earlier reading, but from what I have read about qualitative analysis, this seems to be fairly normal".

Indexing and sorting

I constructed tables for each of the themes and extracted the comments which were illustrative of each. This is the selective coding which I described in phase one, but organising them into tables is what Spencer et al (2014) describe as 'indexing and sorting'. The reason for undertaking this lengthier process than the one used in phase one was to facilitate sharing of the themes and illustrative statements with the other supervisors which required easy retrieval of the data. I found that accessing the participant statements within the table for each theme was simpler than searching through the transcripts for relevant comments. Each statement was attributed to the person who had made it. In order to ensure anonymity, each participant was allocated a fictional name.

Reviewing the data

Spencer et al (2014) suggest that this process helps the development of more conceptual categories, and this did prove to be the case. It was clear from fairly early on that there were similarities between some of the themes. When the themes were grouped together around possible similar over-arching themes, there were four possible groupings, or categories, which contained seven themes and 32 sub-themes (see Appendix 10).

Following my initial analysis, two of the supervisors who had been interviewed volunteered to read a sample of the transcripts to check that the themes identified could be seen to emerge from the data, and minor changes were made to the sub-themes at this stage. The themes were then shared with all of the participants to check that these were an accurate reflection of their experience, and they confirmed that this was the case.

In order to ensure that the voices of the participants were not lost within this summarising process, I developed a small A5 booklet for each of the categories which listed the different themes and sub themes, and included a number of the participants' statements which conveyed the richness of the meaning of each (see appendix 11).

These booklets were positively received by the supervisors who found it interesting to see others' comments and the themes which had been identified. This process of member checking or validation is identified as one of the most important techniques for establishing credibility of research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston and Morrell, 2014), as it involves participants confirming that the meaning assigned to their comments is accurate. Two of the themes, 'confidence' and 'investment' were identified during discussions as meriting further exploration and were later revisited and discussed in more depth as part of two of the workshops in the third phase.

When discussing possible activities for the third phase, all of the supervisors had mentioned that meeting with others to discuss the practice of supervision would be beneficial, and a series of workshops, were planned. Two of the phase two participants were not able to continue into the third phase, due to workload issues, but one of them was happy to contribute comments on the summaries of the workshops which were sent to them.

Phase Three – Co-constructing an explanation of supervision

Planning

The third phase of the project involved a group of supervisors exploring the concept of supervision together. In order to ensure that the research was collaborative, and that the voices of all those involved were heard, rather

than one or two members dominating decisions, (Heron and Reason, 2006), the supervisors indicated their preferences about what strategies they would prefer to use during the phase two individual interviews rather than this being decided in a larger group discussion. I had identified a number of possible activities which could have been undertaken from the literature or from the suggestions of the supervisors in the first phase of the study. These were outlined in the information sheet sent out to supervisors prior to the second phase (see appendix 6) to allow them time to consider the different strategies, and I asked them to indicate their preferences the phase two interviews. The range of options included: peer buddying; the sharing of personal reflections on current or recent supervision; observation of supervision; discussions around sample supervisory scenarios; real or virtual journal clubs; analysis of a supervision meeting which has been recorded; or reflection on feedback from colleagues or previous students.

The activities which appeared to be most popular were the sharing of personal reflections and discussions around supervisory scenarios, but some supervisors also expressed a desire to draw upon theoretical principles to further develop practice. While some of us initially considered the opportunity to work with a buddy in reciprocal observations, the logistics of this proved to be prohibitive. Many of the students had to fit their supervisory meetings around work and family commitments, and appointments were made around their availability, which tended to change, so we found that ensuring a tripartite meeting where the supervision could be observed was problematic. Blas, Jasman and Levy (2012) undertook such peer observation of supervision and found that the process of being observed in what would otherwise be a private meeting resulted in the supervisors becoming self-conscious and questioning their abilities rather than a constructive discussion of the supervisory strategies observed. Following further discussions, the opportunity to explore the concept and practice of supervision from a theoretical perspective and around practical scenarios, while drawing on their collective experiences, were the most popular options identified and it was agreed to incorporate these elements within a number of monthly workshops over the coming year.

Action

Following reflections on the second phase, eight workshops took place over the following year. The workshops were almost all held from 3-5pm in the afternoon. This seemed to be the most convenient time on Mondays, which was the day when most of us were generally on campus. For some of the workshops, particularly those towards the end, there was an element of coming and going if people had to arrive late or leave early, and not all lasted the full two hours. The workshops were nearly all held in the same room, located in an area where interruptions were not likely to occur.

Reflection on the workshop arrangements

Extract from Personal research journal November 2015

The room which was used for most of the workshops was one which was right at the back of the campus, in an area where most people did not normally go during the course of their day to day work. It was a room which was primarily reserved for programme validation or review events, and it had the advantage that it was not included in the normal timetabling processes, so that I could book it for the whole year's workshops in advance. It was normally set out in a formal board room style (see photograph in appendix 11) but it did have a small sofa and some more comfortable chairs set at the back of the room. This was a room in which I felt very comfortable, as I spent quite a lot of time there either in meetings or as part of a programme review panel, however some of the other supervisors found it quite a daunting room, as their experience of being there was often when they were presenting their programme for review or approval.

In order to make us more comfortable, we would push the tables out of their formal setting and gather the more comfortable chairs around in a circle. I would also lay out a kettle, drinks and cakes. It felt like we were pushing the formal institutional layout aside and creating a more welcoming space on the edge of the room.

When preparing for one of the conference presentations, in discussion with some of the supervisors involved, I mentioned that this communicative space was actually 'on the edge' of our normal everyday experience, both in terms of physical layout and that we were carving out some time for ourselves to

stop and reflect on our practice. One person expressed that they felt that it was also 'on the edge' of their experience, in that postgraduate supervision felt like a bit of an 'add on' to their normal role in teaching other groups of students. Another commented that it also felt 'on the edge' as they were pushing the boundaries of their knowledge and experience of supervision. The conference presentations at which we presented this project was entitled: 'On the edge': exploring the practice of supervising master's dissertation students.

Flick (2007) highlights that it is difficult to avoid people dropping out of a study, and I used a number of strategies to try to minimise this, including arranging the workshops to suit people's availability and maintaining contact with all, even if they were not able to attend. Following discussions, we agreed not to have workshops at some particular times over the year when several people were on holiday or were particularly busy (May, July, August and December), and one of the workshops was held earlier on a Friday prior to a bank holiday weekend. Two people had to withdraw from the study during the year due to workload demands. Two people had extended periods of sick leave involving surgery, two had research sabbaticals and two had extended periods of teaching overseas during the year in which the project ran, which resulted in them not being able to attend all of the workshops, but I sent the information for the workshops and a summary of the discussions to them, and several people did correspond by e-mail at times during their absence.

Following a major restructuring within the University, six of the group experienced a significant change in role, which involved taking on new responsibilities. This did impact on the numbers attending the workshops as is illustrated in Table 3 below; however, all demonstrated ongoing commitment to the project as they continued to send comments on the summaries of the workshops which I e-mailed to them if they could not attend. These communications were via e-mail or in individual conversations outwith the workshops. Some of these conversations were planned but others were more informal and took place where group members happened upon one another in a variety of locations, for example in the canteen, in corridors or at the end of more formal meetings about other issues.

Table 3 Workshop attendance

Workshop	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number attending	7	6	8	5	4	4	3	4

Format of workshops

The format of the workshops was fairly informal and normally commenced with some general conversation. Some of those involved have since commented that the provision of refreshments made the workshops 'easy to attend' as the thought of engaging with others about something that interested them over food and drink made it an attractive option when coming out of class or leaving a meeting mid-afternoon.

The atmosphere was generally relaxed, but discussions were focused and as we got to know one another, and we became comfortable enough to challenge one another. This is illustrated in this extract from my research journal following the third workshop at which we had explored supervisory dilemmas.

Reflection on the atmosphere within the workshops

(Personal research journal, March 2013)

There was some general chat at various points but we covered seven of the nine dilemmas in some depth, and those there appeared to find it an enjoyable and helpful experience. Two of those there were based in the same office, and one of them had not been able to come to the first two workshops. "I am really enjoying this" she said at one point. "Well you should have come to more" responded her colleague, laughing.

On that particular day it happened that we were all sat around one end of a rectangle of tables (board room style) with tea/coffee and some Easter cake. "This feels a bit like 'Loose Women'" [TV discussion programme] someone said – and others agreed – it felt very relaxed, but people were questioning and challenging one another as they discussed the dilemmas.

The content of the workshops was varied, and more detail is given below, but the formats included the consideration of the applicability of a theoretical

model of supervision to their particular practice, the exploration of a 'story' which was constructed from our collective experiences, identification and discussion of particular dilemmas which we might experience in the supervisory role, sharing of strategies we had used with students, further consideration of two of the themes which had emerged from the second phase of the project and the development of guidelines for fellow and future supervisors.

During this phase of the study, the aim of the study evolved to be an exploration of what it was that supervisors do to support individuals' learning and the complexities involved in this, rather than the identification of 'good practice'. This revised aim resulted in the development of a common body of knowledge, which could be used to further develop the practice of supervision within this particular area of educational practice.

The focus of the workshops which was negotiated on an ongoing basis by those involved is summarised below.

Table 4 Workshop activities and strategies

Workshop	Activity	Strategies
January 2013	Reflection on own experiences supervision Consideration of Lee's model	Agreeing expectations Tripartite interviewing Group discussion
February 2013	Supervisor's story dialogue	Exploring challenges and strategies used with students
March 2013	Supervisory dilemmas	Show and tell with discussion
April 2013	Sharing of practices	Show and tell with discussion
June 2013	Sharing of practices	Discussion Proposals for 'Guidelines, hints and tips' document
September 2013	Exploration of investment	Discussion
October, 2013	Exploration of confidence	Discussion Review of materials developed for guidelines document
November, 2013	Review of supervisor 'Guidelines, hints and tips' document	Summarising and agreeing strategies

Generating, collating and recording data

To capture the content of the workshops, a variety of strategies were used to record the discussions and to ensure that the conversations were not interrupted by note-taking (Arthur et al, 2014).

Audio recordings were made of two of the workshops (September and October) which were later transcribed. At others, we wrote thoughts on flip chart paper or post it notes (February, March, April, June), and at the first workshop, we worked in groups of three, with one person asking another about their experiences of being supervised and the third person taking notes of the discussion. Each took it in turn to be interviewer, answer questions and take notes. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) highlighted that data generation is itself an action, and so these approaches were used to highlight the collaborative nature of the workshops, with everyone having equal responsibility for generating and collecting the data, rather than it being seen as the responsibility of one researcher, who would then 'own' it.

I developed a Blackboard (e-learning forum) site and a web page as a means of keeping summaries of the discussions and the material produced in easily accessible sites, but most people appeared to prefer to have the information sent to them via e-mail, and this proved to be one of the most effective strategies to enable individuals to comment on materials.

I summarised the discussions within the workshops in the week following each workshop, and these summaries sent for checking by those who had attended (as advocated in Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001). Once confirmed, the summaries were sent to all of the 11 supervisors. I analysed the recorded discussions using the thematic analyses using the same process as I had used for the interviews in phases one and two, which is described above. The themes from the other workshops were considered against the existing themes, and no new themes emerged from these discussions, but more details and a greater depth of understanding was gained for those which had been identified previously. The examples of supervisory strategies discussed were incorporated into the Guidelines, Hints and Tops document for new supervisors.

Workshop One

In order to ensure that those who had volunteered to be involved in this stage of the study were aware of the proposed nature of their involvement and happy about the possible level of engagement which might be expected from other members of the group, I gave an outline of the collaborative nature of the workshops, and some of the challenges highlighted, within the context of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines. I gave an explanation as to how ethical considerations outlined above would be addressed. I had already discussed these issues with the individuals involved in informal discussions, when they consented to participate in this phase, so those present were already aware of the principles involved. We discussed and agreed on how we would manage the authorship of subsequent outcomes from the study.

I had designed the activities undertaken in this workshop but had discussed these with some of those involved prior to the workshop who had agreed that it would be good to have some pre-planned exercises which would help us to get to know one another before having to work together to agree the format of future workshops. The first activity involved consideration of Lee's (2008) model of supervision, and enabled us to explore an established model, with an introduction to a new theoretical perspective on supervision.

Lee proposed that there were five elements within supervision, which she termed functional, enculturation, critical thinking, emancipation and relationship. Although primarily developed with doctoral supervisors, Lee suggested that it was also relevant for master's students (Lee, 2012). Lee's outline of each of these was initially considered and summarised by people working in pairs, and examples of different strategies which could be used for each element were then proposed by those present. We agreed that while four of the elements were also applicable to master's supervision, there was less emphasis on enculturation (where the student is encouraged to become a member of the disciplinary community) than might be the case for doctoral students.

The second part of the workshop focused on how supervisors assess students' needs. This is a concept which was evident from an initial analysis of the individual interviews, but which is not commonly addressed within the literature. I asked the supervisors to think back to their own experiences of

being supervised and to consider how (if they did) their supervisors might have assessed their needs when they were students, before sharing this with two others. Lee's framework was used as a starting point for discussions, as she argued that personal experience of supervision has been identified as being one of the most common influences on supervisory style (Lee, 2008). Following the workshop, I sent a summary of the suggested strategies for assessing students' needs and supporting them through supervision to all the phase three participants, including those who had not been able to attend this first meeting.

Workshop Two

The second workshop was based around an activity which had been used by McCormack and Pamphilon (2004). This involved a postmodern narrative group-work approach which encouraged reflection on issues within a narrative called 'a supervisor's story'. In order to ensure that the discussions were grounded in our own experiences, rather than use the same story as McCormack and Pamphilon, I developed an alternative story using the statements from the first two phases of the project, selecting those which illustrated the most common themes which had emerged, such as the student experience, the supervisor's role in supporting them and the preparation and support given to supervisors (see appendix 13). Our discussions in the workshop confirmed that the themes were reflective of our experiences, highlighted that the issues raised were common across our experiences, and prompted further discussions of the issues raised. I e-mailed an outline of the collated comments to all of the phase three participants.

Workshop three

During the second workshop the group began to take increasing ownership of the direction of this phase of the project and discussed what we would like to explore during the next few events. It was decided that we would find it helpful to discuss some of the dilemmas which can arise during supervision at the next meeting. We agreed that the members of the group would contribute a brief description of one or more dilemmas, which they or their colleagues had experienced, prior to the event. Seven dilemmas were suggested and a further two were added from examples within the literature. One of these was taken from an institution which had a very different culture

of supervision from our own (see dilemma 4 in appendix 7), which resulted in a lot of discussion as to the underpinning philosophies which were quite established within our disciplines. The dilemmas were then explored at the third workshop, with people working in twos or threes to look at individual dilemmas and possible actions, which were then shared and discussed with the others present. I collated the possible strategies which supervisors might use in these situations and shared them with the whole group, and these were later included in a 'Guidelines, Hints and Tips for supervisors' document (Appendix 7). It was at this workshop that we took the decision to work together on this document which could be given to new supervisors, and which could draw on the discussions within the workshops. In developing this document, we made suggestions as to what could be included and I drew up a first draft of each section which was circulated by e-mail to all group members and then discussed and amended at later workshops.

Workshops four and five

The focus of the fourth and fifth workshops was the sharing of practices which we had found useful in our experiences of supervision. It was noticeable after the first three workshops that, through discussions with others and consideration of examples from the literature, individuals were developing confidence in some of the strategies they had been using.

During workshops four and five we shared some of these strategies with others, to discuss how and why they had been developed and used, and to outline any adjustments we had made to address specific situations or challenges. The strategies shared included:

- A questionnaire for supervisors which had been used by one programme team to ascertain their collective supervisory experience and expertise
- A student progress checklist which could be used as a self-assessment tool by students
- A model of supervision which had been adapted from a clinical supervision model
- A framework which could be used to plan and map the development of students as researchers.

At the end of the fifth workshop, I collated the materials and shared them with the group by e-mail. We also agreed the focus for the remaining workshops. It was apparent from the discussions that some of the supervisors recognised that the issue of confidence was one which was worthy of further exploration. Some of the group were also aware that their practice in supporting students were causing them some disquiet, as their beliefs about the time and effort they were investing in the students' development was out of line with others in the group and the university expectations of this.

Workshops six and seven

Two of the themes which had emerged from phase two of the project were further explored in the sixth and seventh workshops – the investment made by supervisors in supporting students, and supervisor confidence. It was evident from the interviews that many of the supervisors believed that the students should receive as much support as they needed, rather than the limiting this to the hours identified as supervision workload by the university. Additionally, the benefits of communication with the student's employer, who might be have unrealistic expectations as to what the student should be able to achieve within their dissertation, were also articulated by some of the supervisors. Some had spoken of arranging tripartite meetings in the student's workplace to discuss this issue, although this was above and beyond what might be expected of the supervisor's role. Through the extended discussion about this issue, it became apparent that some perceived these practices as 'good' practices, but others did not necessarily agree, believing that they might be as a result of a lack confidence on the part of the supervisor. It was evident that these differences were based upon the judgement of value against which the individuals made decisions such as 'Is it worth my while?' This notion of exploring 'what we know to be good', to understand 'how we know it to be good', and realising that it is influenced by our personal moral bias which affects our value judgements, was described by Coghlan and Brannick, who call it 'interiority' (2014). They argue that interiority requires '*self-knowledge of how we see, think, judge, imagine, remember, criticize, evaluate, conclude'* (p53), which can help us inquire into the sources of our biases. Burgoyne (2011) suggests that such a process involves a critical realist approach which can emerge through learning which is centred on our practice. The discussions in these

workshops are indicative of the learning which was taking place for some of the supervisors as a result of their participation in the project.

Within workshop seven, we explored the issue of supervisor confidence, particularly in relation to supervisor identity, preparation and ongoing support. The potential impact of the University restructuring on the allocation of supervision of supervisors was also considered, as there had been a move to a departmental structure within the Faculty rather than a cross Faculty taught master's programme framework. We identified that this could result in 'silo' working with reduced collaboration, due to different programmes being placed in, and resourced by, staff in four separate departments. We recognised that these changes might have an impact on the sustainability of some of the outcomes of this study, particularly those related to the sharing of experiences and resources which had been so appreciated by those involved.

The discussions from these two workshops, and individual conversations with some of those who had not been able to attend, but who had wished to contribute their thoughts, were recorded and transcribed, and the analysis of the data was used to inform and expand the themes which had emerged from the earlier phases of the study.

Workshop eight

The final workshop was somewhat disjointed, as not all those who attended could be present for the whole time. The focus was on the 'Guidelines' document produced by the group, but we recognised that it would be beneficial to review people's experiences of being involved in phases two and three, and it was suggested that there would be benefits in organising some final focus groups, to provide people with the opportunity to reflect on what they had learned, and whether there had been any impact on their practice. Raelin (2009) highlighted the importance of such opportunities for reflection, which he suggested helped the individuals involved realise and make explicit to themselves what they had discovered and achieved.

Following the last workshop, I invited those involved in phase three to take part in a focus group discussion to reflect upon their involvement in the

project and to identify any challenges or benefits which they had experienced.

Reflection

Heron and Reason (2006) advocated the finding of a balance between action and reflection, to avoid too much reflection on too little experience, or vice versa, situations which they describe as ‘armchair theorising’ and ‘mere activism’ (p151). The nature of the discussions within the workshops had required the supervisors to undertake reflection on their practice as supervisors, but it was agreed that some concluding reflections would be helpful in in articulating what they felt they had learned from their involvement in the project itself. Nine of the supervisors took part in three focus groups, each with three people. The size of the groups was again due to staff availability, but as with the focus groups in the first phase, this size of group appeared to facilitate active participation from each of those present, and all were able to articulate the impact of their involvement in the project on both their practice of supervision and their feelings about this aspect of their academic role.

Phase Four – Piloting of resources

Planning

The sharing of the resources and findings was undertaken after phase three, and the timing planned to take place prior to the delivery of the next year’s dissertation modules. Following discussion with the programme manager who expressed an interest in the materials which had been developed, I facilitated two workshops for new supervisors. For the first group the ‘Guidelines, Hints and Tips’ document (see appendix 7) was e-mailed to the three new supervisors prior to the session, but following their feedback, I gave the next group the booklet at the session, following explanation as to its content.

Action

The ‘Guidelines, Hints and Tips’ document which was collated contained some of the material developed during the first three phases of the study.

This included an overview of dissertation processes within the Faculty, an outline of a variety of supervision models and strategies, examples of some supervisory dilemmas with possible actions, and suggestions for supervisor development. Following the Faculty restructuring referred to previously, there were changes to the delivery of postgraduate taught programmes, which was then followed by a review of the range of programmes offered by the Faculty. Rather than a cross Faculty approach to programme delivery, the responsibility for programme co-ordination became the responsibility of individual Departments. Partly as a result of this, the fourth phase was limited to dissemination to staff from two Departments rather than across the Faculty.

In piloting the materials which had been developed, three new supervisors were invited to a session at which they were given the existing supervisor induction, but also copies of the 'Guidelines, Hints and Tips' document. At a follow up session, I introduced some of the activities which had been used within the phase three workshops, and explained relevant resources from the booklet in more detail. Another session with five supervisors took place some months later. This session included an activity similar to the one which had been used at the first phase three workshop, in which the supervisors reflected on their own experience of being supervised, following which they were given the document which was then discussed. I also sent the document to a new supervisor who was working on a programme where there were no other induction opportunities, who reported that they found it extremely helpful.

Reflection

Feedback on the sessions identified that the new supervisors felt that the discussion with signposting to the relevant materials was more beneficial than just reading the materials on their own, as they had appreciated the opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences of being supervised and learn from other's experiences. This is similar to the findings of others who have developed doctoral supervision development materials (Bruce and Stoodley, 2013).

As this phase was conducted as a pilot study, there is scope to further expand supervisor development in the future, once the institutional review of programmes has been completed.

Further reflections on the overall study

The data collected during the different phases of the project included a range of materials, including:

- Phase 1: audio recordings and transcripts of five individual and five group interviews
- Phase 2: audio recordings and transcripts of thirteen individual interviews
- Phase 3:
    - summaries of workshop discussions (collated from flip chart paper, comments and post it notes)
    - audio recordings of workshops six and seven, and two conversations with individuals which took place following the workshops, and the transcripts of these
    - audio recordings and transcripts of three focus group discussions following the conclusion of the workshops
    - e-mail conversations with workshop participants
- Phase 4: e-mails and notes following discussions with new supervisors
- Researcher notes and reflections throughout

Abstraction and interpretation

The overall aim of the study to produce a rich description of how the participants viewed and experienced supervision was a guiding principle within the analysis of the materials. Spencer et al (2014) suggest that a useful test is whether the categorisation would be recognised by study participants. Following each of the phases, I shared the themes and categories which had been identified with the participants to check this, as has been described. Following phase four, I undertook a process of standing back from the initial analysis to review the themes, while writing this thesis. During this time I presented elements of this research with some of the supervisors involved. Following feedback from the phase four pilot and further discussions with the supervisors about the outcomes of the study, the findings were re-phrased into 'key messages for new supervisors' and a new model of supervision was constructed. These are presented in the next chapters.

Conclusion

The format of the different phases of this project, and the notion of joint enquiry in which supervisors would be co-researchers rather than participants, was a key element of this study (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006; Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001). The data collection methods included both individual and group interviews and a series of eight workshops which took place over a calendar year, at which participants were able to explore the concept of supervision and reflect on their experiences both as a student and supervisor. The content of the workshops was suggested and negotiated by the participants of the third phase of the study. During the year they suggested that the knowledge and materials developed should be included in a document to inform new supervisors, and three of the participants presented the methodology at an international and a regional conference.

Kemmis (2010) suggests that action research is about 'transforming people's practices, their understanding of their practices and the conditions under which they practice' (2010 p. 217). He advocates the provision of a 'communicative space' (Kemmis, 2009 p471) in which practitioners can reflect with one another on their practice – to define what it is, how it is undertaken and the impact it may have.

Within the Faculty there was no established communicative space for master's level supervisors to reflect upon their practice, but the comments of the participants which are detailed within the next chapter indicate that the different phases of this project did facilitate the development of such a communicative space which resulted in the participants accessing a great deal of untapped expertise.

The findings in the next chapter are presented in relation to the five key messages about supervision which emerged from the analysis of the data emerging from all four phases of the project which I described above. This format is in recognition of the dynamic, adaptive nature of supervision which is focused on the needs of individual students rather than being a defined body of knowledge or a set list of developmental activities upon which supervisors can draw.

Chapter 7

Findings – key messages

Introduction

The findings which are presented in this chapter were developed through a number of stages that involved increasing levels of abstraction. The themes which emerged from the initial analysis of the interviews and workshops were discussed with the supervisors to ensure that they accurately reflected their views and experiences. These themes were then compared with previously published research on postgraduate supervision. This re-visiting of the literature identified that there was an apparent resonance between the findings of this study and the established understanding of supervisory practice. During the process of the phase four discussions, the findings were further developed to improve clarity and they are presented below using the voices of the supervisors themselves.

Through the iterative process described above, which ensured that the findings were grounded in the realities of practice, I constructed five key messages about supervision. These messages constitute a new contribution to the knowledge base on this aspect of academic practice, as they verbalise the challenges and complexities involved. I was also able to categorise the supervision strategies used by supervisors within the disciplines of health and education. As a result of their involvement in the study, several of the participating supervisors reported changes in their own supervision. These included an increased awareness of their supervision approach, an increased confidence in their abilities, and some changes to their practice.

The key messages are:

- When going through the dissertation process with a student, a successful outcome will often involve becoming aware of their goals, expectations, and external influences which can impact on their ability to study.
- You cannot fully predict when students will need advice, guidance, support, challenge, reassurance or encouragement.
- Although students have responsibility for their progress and the quality of their work, you may be involved in assessing and

anticipating their needs and creating strategies to help them to achieve the skills and understanding required to reach the required outcomes.

- Your assessment of a student's progress and feedback on their work can help them to undergo what may be a transformative educational experience.
- Your personal experiences of being supervised can affect your approach to supervision but you may also find the way in which others have conceptualised the supervisory role or discussion with other supervisors helpful.

Key message 1 - When going through the dissertation process with a student, a successful outcome will often involve becoming aware of their goals, expectations, and external influences which can impact on their ability to study.

The relationship between student and supervisor is the focus of much of the literature, and there is agreement that, given that it is likely to have to last over an extended period of time, it is an important element of supervision (Grant and Graham, 1999; Delamont et al., 2000; Pearson and Brew, 2002). James and Baldwin (1999) suggested that it was of benefit for the relationship to involve 'an appropriate degree of trust and mutual respect' (p.6), a sentiment reinforced by Wisker (2012), Sharakis-Doyle and McIntyre (2008) and Lee (2008).

<u>Quality of relationship</u>

The quality of the relationship was clearly articulated by the supervisors in the study:

Bethany: *I do think you actually need to grow the relationship with them, that they, you know, they have a respect for you and you have a respect for what they are doing… Well I think it's just about your normal, you know, how do you develop a relationship with any student; I think by being genuine, by being honest, telling them kindly if it is not right.*

Tara: *I do try to engage the student, just to provide them with some reassurance that... to try and get them to feel comfortable really, because I do think it's quite important that you do feel comfortable with your supervisor.*

A number of strategies were identified in helping supervisors cultivate this respect and understanding. In developing an effective working relationship with the student some basic communication strategies were outlined:

Daisy: *On a basic level, showing that you're interested and involved in their study and that it's a useful and good piece of work and that you've got a commitment to them. You need to be available; you need to be on time; you need to give them your full attention in the way that you might if you were doing a staff appraisal, you know. Turning phones off, not looking at your emails at the same time as you're trying to have a conversation with them. Showing you're interested in their... that what they're doing is interesting and useful, 'cos sometimes they might be feeling that 'Is there any point and should I be doing this?' – and that encouragement... so making sure you've got space and time.*

The impact of a lack of communication skills in supervisors was also recognised:

Neil: *They might be absolutely brilliant at that one subject area, but just not have an idea of how to interact, rapport, body language; all the things that you need to be able to do to be a good supervisor and mentor. All the knowledge in the world won't help that person if they can't gain that trust and bond.*

Due to the size of the project and length of time involved in undertaking and writing a dissertation project, several supervisors highlighted the importance of 'going through' the process with the student, so that they felt supported throughout.

Lucy: *I was supporting them in helping them to believe that they could do it and they could develop the skills and in dealing with the ups and downs as they went through their projects.*

Having the confidence that they have ongoing support through the course of their project can help prevent students thinking that they are on their own and avoid them experiencing feelings of dislocation and isolation which were identified by Doloriert et al (2012), and McClure (2005). Lee (2008) also highlights the importance of students experiencing a quality of relationship throughout this period of their studies.

One of the supervisors outlined what she felt would be a quality relationship from a student's perspective, but also explained the benefit for this for the supervisor, in 'getting the best out of the student':

Nicola: *It's about the relationship for me between the student and the supervisor. I think that's key to getting the best out of the student, so if the supervisor is, you know, not available or doesn't feel as though they are engaging or they are not investing, not that I have seen that at all, but if I was thinking about it from my perspective, if I was a student, that's what I would want. I would want that engagement, I would want that investment, I would want that extra touch, that added value, because it's such a massive piece of work.*

De Klejin et al (2012) and Doloriert et al (2012) suggest that friendly, helpful relationships which incorporate an insight into a student's perspective are more likely to motivate students, and Hockey (1996) argues that effective supervision requires an understanding of how supervisors can best facilitate this relationship.

Honesty related to their expectations of the relationship is also advocated by some authors (Deuchar, 2008; Gurr, 2001) and Taylor and Beasley (2005) emphasise the importance of students knowing that such discussions are not 'taboo'. Clarification of their expectations during their first meetings is suggested by Armitage (2006), and Taylor and Beasley (2005) suggest returning to this topic to review their expectations on an ongoing basis. There was evidence within the discussions that supervisors were aware that some students were more ambitious than others, so this was a strategy with which they were comfortable:

Winnie: *When they come for the first tutorial, I outline what I expect of them, but also what they can, should expect of me and if there are any kind of practical issues that we have to, so for example, well, how often are we going to meet? That's something that we always cover. But also in terms of writing, in terms of doing the research and getting their protocol right, all that, we just, I just go through that with them... master's is also for many people is a huge step, and so they need to know what they can expect of me as well. And if they disagree, then we can have a discussion about it…*

Grant (1999) warned that the difference in authority between the supervisor and student could impact on the effectiveness of their communication. She suggests that unless there is a clear understanding of their identities, issues such as idealisation, stereotyping or dismissiveness can occur. Comments from some of the supervisors in the study indicated that an investment in developing open and honest discussions from the beginning could avoid misunderstandings and resentment later on.

Jim: *I think there's a two-way relationship, a critical friend type role on both parts sort in a way. So sometimes the students question me on what I am saying as well as I am questioning what they are saying and I think that works really well.*

Student goals and expectations

Gaining an understanding of student goals and the external pressures and influences which may affect their study is also important in the maintenance of an honest relationship. The commitment of many of the students was acknowledged:

Gillian: *I'm always very, very impressed with the students, how much effort they've put in.*

Nicola: *Students generally put a lot of effort into it and it gives them sleepless nights.*

A common issue appeared to be the need to ensure that students had a realistic perception of what they could achieve, or what would be expected from them, as their ideas could be over ambitious:

Lucy: *Sometimes people have picked, when they have been working in practice, their assumption was that you could solve problems with research and they would be quite big problems they were trying to solve… and therefore quite disappointed when actually "You are only going to be able to do a small bit of this and you haven't got the time to do all of that and you are not going to get the depth that you need, so you actually need to take a little tiny bit of the whole idea" and that's quite sort of different to what they have done elsewhere.*

Others may have a more pragmatic approach to what they want to achieve, which can have an impact on the approach taken by both student and supervisor. This can be due to personal circumstances, or their reasons for undertaking the master's programme:

Bethany: *One of the people I supervised last year who was in a, you know, very high achieving job as a regional director and was applying for very high level jobs at the time. At the end they just came back and said 'Look, I know I could do a better, but I just want to pass'. You know, at the end of the day, in the context of their life, that was what was most important. That's fine. So it's probably pointless…pressuring and pressuring people to improve their level, when really that's not where their aspirations are so, it's about being real about it as well.*

McCarthy (2012) identified that there are a range of reasons that people might undertake post graduate study, for example for personal or career development, for personal interest or for the benefit of their community, and that it is these motivations which are important to help them continue through challenging times. There may be other, more subconscious, drivers which can impact on the student's perseverance (Grant, 1999), and again the benefits of engaging with the student can help the supervisor better to understand the student, as was explained during some of the conversations:

Liam: *It's actually getting inside the person's way of thinking, their learning styles, how they think…cognitive styles, and then you get to know that person… find out how they learn, then you're adapting your style to the individual*

The fact that post graduate students are possibly more likely to have family responsibilities than undergraduates, either for children or older parents; or that they have travelled abroad for study, can mean that the impact of other conflicting demands on their time is noticeable to supervisors.

There were particular pressures which were identified as having a possible impact on study related to family, and the role of the supervisor in supporting students who might require more time or an interruption from study was highlighted:

Terry: *They generally have a lot of other things going on as well, ... and you know concerns about various other things that*

sometimes impact on…different sorts of challenges I think, like we have currently got one student who had to go back to her own country for personal reasons

The age and external responsibilities of students was noted by McCallin and Nayar (2012); Armitage (2006) and Ahern and Manathunga (2004), who recognised that many also had other external demands, both professional and family, which impacted on the time available to undertake their studies. Cherry (2012) suggested that the supervisor's own personal experiences might contribute to a particular awareness of the personal cost of undertaking postgraduate study, and there were examples of this in the supervisors' comments.

Thea: *You do hear people saying: "Oh, well I'm going to have to take two weeks off work to do this", so you feel then the need to help them at that time, so I suppose it forces you into their timescale. So you feel like you should give them that time when you need it, rather than saying "Oh, well I haven't actually got that time this week..." so you tend to be pushed along with them. I think that's the way it is as well and we've all done it; I think I draw on my own experience, we also have done things while working and I know the... I know the possibility that you can do it, but I also know how difficult it is. It's not impossible, but it's difficult. And I'm maybe as well thinking "Well, you know, work is not an excuse, but it can be a reason". So,yeah. I think sharing that professional background, knowing that you've been a working person and also being a student helps me sometimes.*

Amundsen (2009) reported that a shared professional background can also impact on students' aspirations and describes how students may draw upon their supervisor's career experience in forming their aspirations.

<u>External issues</u>

The impact of the study on personal and family life was also acknowledged:

Natalie: *One of the things that I have seen over the years, and this is particularly true I think of the PhD students, but to some degree with the master's students, is that their lives seem to really go on its head when they embark on these postgraduate studies and I often wonder is it because of the postgraduate study or is it because …they are kind of taking*

on lots of life changing decisions anyway and so their life falls apart. I mean the number of divorces I have seen…

Ahern and Manathunga (2004) suggested that jealous feelings could be caused when one partner in a couple was undertaking study which could result in the other partner attempting to derail their progress. Financial difficulties could also impact on families although Manathunga (2002) reported that students may be reluctant to discuss such issues with their supervisor.

One of the issues which emerged from discussions within the interviews and focus groups was the increasing influence which the students' employer, who could be funding the study, might have on the choice of dissertation focus or method. Unlike with some disciplines, where students may apply to work on a study which is part of a larger project; within professional programmes the tendency has been for students to choose the focus and method of their dissertation, but several supervisors noted an increasing external influence on this from the employer, and had empathy with the impact this could have on their students:

Gillian: *Gone are the days where the student comes in and says "I think I would like to look at..." The driver now isn't so much the students; more the person who's supporting them. And I can understand that; if they're getting funding…*

The employers' commitment to supporting the study was acknowledged as being a key factor in completion rates, and in the amount of time which students could commit to their studies:

Gillian: *It's changing now, the majority of students are getting the study day and that's it. No protected time. Some of them in some of the modules, certainly on the year one; I'm not talking so much about dissertations now, but they come in for their session and then they have to go to work. So gone are the luxurious days of the day a week quota ...: Yeah. Literally, off night duty and studying. So I think they have a bad deal and I think they don't have the luxury of days off designed to study.*

The employer's influence on different aspects of study was articulated by Morris, Pitt and Manathunga (2012) who suggested that students could be

confused as to whether they were primarily an academic student or an employee, and have to balance academic requirements and their employer's interests, either with regards to the choice of topic or the remit of the study. The impact on funding was also identified as being potentially problematic with some students suffering from changes in funding. Wallgren and Hägglund (2007) found that there could also be an impact on the supervisor – student relationship when employers were involved. While supervisors in this study did take cognisance of the employer's influence in relation to funding and possible impact on study time available to the student, and did communicate with the employer to clarify the requirements of the dissertation, it did not appear to have a negative influence on the relationship.

Key message 2 - You cannot fully predict when students will need advice, guidance, support, challenge, reassurance or encouragement.

Although both student and supervisor are aiming for successful completion of the dissertation, student progress is likely to consist of a number of contributory elements and intermediate goals. The achievement of these can be unpredictable and the process is not a linear one, with students needing varying levels of support at different times. One of the challenges for master's level supervisors is that, unlike for doctorates which have external markers, the supervisor will normally be one of the dissertation markers (Anderson, Day and McLaughlin, 2008; Armitage, 2006), although a gatekeeping function is also evident with regard to doctoral study (Lee, 2008; Petersen, 2007; Manathunga and Gozee, 2007). Supervisors in the study were aware of this tension:

Nicola: *Because you wouldn't want your students to not get the best deal and not, you know, get the maximum mark, but at the same time you wouldn't allocate marks where they weren't due, you know. So, we've all got integrity, so I think it's a little bit of a pressure really*.

The need to balance the maintenance of academic standards with supporting students was highlighted by Bruce and Stoodley (2013) and Ahern and Manathunga (2004), who drew on the work of Inskipp and Proctor (1995) in articulating the different domains involved in clinical supervision. They identified that there were different roles within the supervision relationship,

which they termed formative, restorative and normative. Anderson et al (2006) recognised this duality of interests, where supervisors had to consider the needs of both the academic community and their desire to facilitate student growth, and de Kleijn et al (2014) identified that supervisors found that the need to both support and regulate students could cause them to experience tension.

Reflecting on this tension, one of the supervisors spoke of the need to consider student development as well as the mark awarded:

Bethany: *Well I mean, what is a good outcome, you know, a good outcome for supervision though? Is it the student has passed and done really well or, or is it that they have had a learning experience during that, so even if they have really struggled, they feel as though they have achieved something, you know, even if it's not a brilliant mark?*

This development of analytical and critical thinking as a significant outcome from their experience of research was also identified by Drennan and Clarke (2009) and Barnacle and Usher (2003) in their consideration of students from professional research degrees.

<u>Fluctuating goals</u>

A common issue appeared to be the need to ensure that students had a realistic perception of what they could achieve throughout the process, or what would be expected from them. Sometimes their ideas could become over ambitious:

Neil: *People keep coming up with ideas and then they start getting inspired and they get carried away and you go "Woah, woah, woah, let's get you back again". So yeah, they do have a basic idea of what to do, but sometimes you need to guide them as to what's practical in that period of time as well.*

A negotiation of expectations was part of the role identified by Bruce and Stoodley (2013). Anderson et al (2008) who suggested that supervisors should be responsive to the student's individual position, and Maxwell and Smyth (2011) proposed that effective supervision occurs when the student and supervisor work together to achieve the student's goals. McCarthy (2012) stressed the value in the supervisor adopting a non-judgemental

attitude in initial meetings, in that this could enable a good understanding of their student's situation.

This does not mean that these goals and expectations remain fixed however, as Delamont and Atkinson (2004) argue that such a perception could lead to the student adopting a passive role, taking direction from the supervisor. They advocate a more fluid negotiation of roles, where both are open to their expectations changing during the course of the research.

Supervisors in the study were aware of the difference in students' expectation with some, as described above, being unrealistic in the expectations of what they could achieve, while others may not have appreciated the requirements of the higher academic level required:

Liam: *It's like 'Right, you want to go to lectures and the lecturers should tell you exactly what you should know and then that should be applied to what you're doing and everything should be… you know?' And it's this idea of reading around the subject area, including methodology. And, you know, there's so much methodological stuff for them to engage with these days, but it's masters level, so if you want to have a good solid master's project, you're going to have to do some good, solid reading and show your understanding around that and frame your study like that*

Maintaining student confidence

A dawning realisation of the challenges involved was recognised as having an impact on students' confidence, and the supervisors were aware that this might occur. Doloriert et al (2012) recommended that confidence and locus of control were issues of which both student and supervisor should be aware, and Manathunga (2002) suggested that building student confidence was an integral part of the supervisor's role:

Thea: *There's a big confidence issue. I think again, you know, people come through... some very high fliers that come on the MSc that have got very high positions now in nursing and health and they're very confident professionally, but I think academically, they might say "Well, I've never done that before".*

Kiley and Wisker (2009) highlighted the skills required in maintaining students' confidence while challenging them about their skills or their decisions regarding the progress of the research, and Malfroy (2005) describes the vulnerability which may be experienced in sharing their work in an academic context, particularly for students who might also hold senior professional roles. One strategy used by some supervisors was to help students to see the relevance of their project within the established evidence base or the possible impact on professional practice:

Bethany: *I think I am much more focussed now on saying 'Right, well, if you are saying that there's a gap in the literature, do the analysis of the literature now, and prove that', because it's no good getting down the line and realising it was there in the literature anyway, you just hadn't searched thoroughly.*

Another supervisor explained that at the initial stages she explicitly outlined the need for students to be realistic about the time required for study and the support that was available to them, and the need to anticipate other demands on their time so that they had a better appreciation of the challenge and could plan for this:

Winnie: *I try to talk them through that, you know and talk about the support that they're going to get at the beginning and if they're not going to get any and they say they're going to do it all in their own time, then we'll talk about how they're going to manage that; have they built in any downtime, you know, family time, stuff like that?*

The need for ongoing communication and assessment of the student's progress was a key factor:

Natalie: *They go through the same stages, and to an extent they have to, obviously, but, sometimes you just have to pitch it right and time it right and it's not the same for every student because they are not quite ready to, you know, move into this phase or to think about that phase.*

Need for supervisors to be flexible

Pearson (2002) suggests that students learn a lot about themselves throughout the process, but suggests that it takes confidence on the part of the supervisor to allow them time and space to pursue ideas which may come to nothing, as it requires flexibility, maturity and trust. This awareness and need for flexibility was articulated in some of the conversations:

Neil: *I think the biggest thing that you have to be as a supervisor is flexible, because, to me, you kind of have to give people a little bit of a slack to a certain degree but keep your kind of eye on the ball and look out for if things are going to go totally off-piste, do you know what I mean? Where you do have to kind of step in and it's like 'No'.*

An awareness of the impact of being flexible in working around students' development was evident from the supervisors within the study. They recognised that students developed at different rates and that sometimes their progress was unpredictable:

Rosie: *You just suddenly think 'Actually', something that they have said makes you think they are ready to go the next step…'*

Working with part time students who also had professional roles, or with international students who had other external pressures, meant that it was often difficult to predict when they would want to access support, and that this might not fit with the pattern of supervision meetings which was more usual for the full time students.

Bethany: *To be fair, you know, you get time within your workload to do the supervision, the problem is that you don't know when you are going to have that time allocated, it's not a straightforward thing where you can say 'I can give you an hour then and an hour then', because it's down to when they have done that sort of conceptual shift, from 'Ah now I get it' or you know, 'Now I have got a gap, and I am going to write my stuff up, oh it's got to be in next week, I will have to do it this week', you know, it's that bit. So I think you have got to be flexible.*

A flexibility of approach with a student-centred focus is apparent from a number of authors who have suggested that some research cultures may take the view that the process of supervision is not just about the production of the written work but is also about the maturation of the student's research abilities (Lindén et al 2013; Cherry, 2012; Green, 2005).

In describing how supervisors describe their duties, a number of authors have identified different approaches to the role, such as managers, mentors, coaches, facilitators and counsellors (Hammond et al., 2010; McCallin & Nayar 2011). One of the supervisors articulated this approach to supervision:

Ken: *I would say that I kind of develop strategies that are kind of, it's kind of like a coaching strategy that runs between directive to counselling. All the way it is kind of 'guide on the side'.*

Doloriert et al (2012) suggest that supervisors may also take on a developmental, mentoring role, although Pearson and Kayrooz (2004) argue that this has more of a focus on career development and does not necessarily include the intellectual academic dimension. Evidence of this aspect was apparent from some of the supervisors:

Toni: *I am finding with my master's supervision that I am doing a lot of clinical supervision work, with a lot of these earlier career professionals.*

Pearson and Brew (2002) suggested that a coaching approach could enable students to set and revise their goals while developing an awareness of their problem solving and judgement skills.

It is evident that the nature of supervision offered varies from those who offer only technical support, to those who also offer more pastoral support, which may include moral and social guidance (Doloriert, 2012), or mentorship (Zuber Skerritt, 2007; Kandlbinder, 2000). Those who have explored the student perspective suggested that the key factors affecting student satisfaction were structure and support (McCallin and Nayar, 2012; Zhao, Golde, and McCormick, 2007).

Key message 3 - Although students have responsibility for their progress and the quality of their work, you may be involved in assessing and anticipating their needs and creating strategies to help them to achieve the skills and understanding required to reach the required outcomes.

Maxwell and Smyth (2011) argued that while supervisors may find models of supervision useful in conceptualising their role, it is important that they do not lose sight of the fact that the project and dissertation is the student's, who has the ultimate responsibility for its completion.

This was a tension which was recognised by the supervisors in the study:

Neil: *And to me, the important thing is, it's about ownership, it's the students piece of work and if you are kind of quite clear 'Look, ok', I am either involved with them because I am interested, I have knowledge, some level of expertise, whatever label you want to stick on it, of the subject area. Or similarly with the method or methodology that they are using, so, but, in terms of their question, to me they are the expert. They are going to develop into the expert; do you know what I mean? So that is, it's kind of their ball and they have got to run with it.*

Hemer, (2012) acknowledges that supervisors are influential in the direction of the study and in ensuring the standard of the work is as required and recognises that there is potential to abuse that influence. The need to have an awareness of this was highlighted in the discussions:

Thea: *I think it can be potentially quite a powerful role in that you can direct a student down a path that they might not want to go purely because that's your strength and not the student's strength, and I think certainly over the years I have had to take cognisance of that*.

The need to 'let go' to allow the student to develop the project with the awareness that they have some element of control was articulated by Armitage (2006) who found that some supervisors questioned their level of involvement

> '*If I help the student and provide advice will I at the end of the day be marking my own work?'* (Armitage and Rees, 1988, p101).

Assessment of student needs

The supervisors in the study spoke at length about the need to assess the abilities and needs of individual students, in order to identify the nature and extent of support which they might require. They explained the processes they used in integrating this strategy within their supervision:

Nicola: *Asking them open questions, well, 'What did you think about that?' You are trying to get inside their, it's a bit like being mindful isn't it, trying to get in their mind really as to what they are thinking and getting them to articulate it as well, because some students might be really good at writing something or they might be really good at saying something but they can't write it, or they can't articulate it. And if they can't articulate it, it makes me feel a little bit nervous actually, about whether they understand it, understand the implications, the application and are they able to critically evaluate and analyse the literature?*

Drawing upon such assessment to build upon their student's strengths and address any weaknesses is advocated by a number of authors (de Kleijn, 2014; Doloriert et al, 2102; Anderson, 2006; Amundsen and McAlpine, 2009; Pearson and Brew, 2002). Doloriert (2012) suggests that all supervisors should have a range of different styles, and Severinsson **(**2012) highlights the mutual, interactive nature of the supervisory process.

De Kleijn et al (2014) have explored the relationship between the diagnosis of student needs and the use of appropriate support strategies, and argued that the interactions involved between the two processes were more complex than might first appear. They suggested that supervisors might also consider the student's individual situation and determination as well as their abilities, in relation to the desired outcome, possible consequences and available range of strategies, in deciding what level or support or challenge might be most appropriate for that student at that time. There was evidence of a consideration of these kinds of factors in the conversations with the supervisors:

Emma: *I guess I try and see my students... once a month at least. Sometimes more frequently, depending on whether something urgent is coming up, or they need more support in particular times, and because the projects are so different, it's difficult to say "You know, well, this is the sort of schedule that I follow" because students are so individual and they are so individual as learners, but you have to be person centred there.*

Anticipation of issues

Some of the supervisors also incorporated this understanding of the individual and their previous experience of supervision to anticipate problems and look out for these:

Lucy: *I have got somebody at the minute who is a very rigid thinker, you know, who gets her confidence in her job, her quite senior job role, from being quite rigid in her thinking and I can see already that at the end of her project she is going to have some real challenges to the way that she thinks…*

Manathunga (2002) identified warning signs which she suggested should alert doctoral supervisors to what she called 'stalled students' who might require some active intervention to re-start their project. These were: constantly changing the topic or planned work; avoiding all forms of communication with the supervisor; isolating themselves from the department and from other students and avoiding submitting work for review. Of these indicators, the changing of topic, non-contact with the supervisor and not producing written work were also recognised by the master's supervisors, and incorporated into the guidance document which was developed.

Daisy: *I've had situations where I've worried that someone is telling me... some very interesting conversations and discussions, but because I've not seen any written evidence of that, I got quite worried…*

In relation to creating strategies to help them develop the research skills and understanding required at master's level, there are a variety of models which identify a range of supervisory responsibilities (Bruce and Stoodley, 2012; Amundsen and McAlpine, 2009; Lee, 2008; Pearson and Brew, 2002), however it has been recognised that there has previously been little exploration about what occurs in supervision meetings. Wisker (2012, 2005) does provide an outline of what guidance and support students may require, and suggests some strategies which can be used, but the findings of this study identify a wider range of approaches to support and expand student capabilities in relation to different aspects of undertaking the project and writing the dissertation.

Key message 4 - Your assessment of a student's progress and feedback on their work can help them to undergo what can be a transformative educational experience.

Within the discussions the supervisors acknowledged the impact which undertaking the master's level study could have:

Lucy: *I think it's quite a powerful experience going through a master's programme, you know, for whatever reason you do it. I think it can affect people quite profoundly and I think they do need support as they make those kinds of transitions.*

Possible reasons for this effect varied across the different student groups. Many of the students were part time, health or education professionals, some of whom might not have followed a traditional academic pathway or may have been out of education for quite some time:

Rosie: *People who are in really senior management posts who have, you know, sailed to the top and suddenly found themselves in managing massive budgets, but have never been academically prepared for, you know, this graduate workforce and the brave new world…*

<u>Consideration of student background</u>

Part time students generally undertook their masters on a part time basis over three years, with the first year being postgraduate certificate, the second a postgraduate diploma and culminating in their dissertation in the third year. Vos (2013) argues that the predominant UK model of a one year, full time master's programme does not give students enough time to develop the skills required. It is possible that this longer period of study helped them develop the different skills and critical mind set required for this level of study, but the supervisors suggested that some were not as prepared for their dissertation as would be hoped:

Thea: *When you start talking about reliability and validity, people often wonder "I don't know about that", you know? I don't understand what you mean … I think they can describe everything and tell us what they do, but it's taking a step back and looking at the analysis of that and where does that fit the bigger picture?... some of them are very good, I think. Some... the odd one I think does still escape the net, you know, and hasn't learned to analyse*

This is similar to McCormack and Pamphilon's (2004) findings that there could be a considerable gap between supervisor's expectations of their students' research understanding and the students' actual abilities.

Most of the students who were studying on a full time basis were international students, who tended to have experienced a very different educational approach:

Bethany: *Their kind of educational background was very different because it's kind of very hierarchical and didactic in the approach and so they come in and the fact that you would question like the person who is working with you, teaching whatever, you know, ... the fact that then that you would then kind of dare to question a published piece of work was just totally off some people's radar.*

The need to undertake critical evaluation of the literature has been recognised as being challenging for some international students (Fan, 2013; Zuber-Skerritt and Knight, 2010; Huang, 2008), and is acknowledged that this may be due to the way in which their previous education has reinforced the notion that academics should be respected and that students should not question the opinions of their superiors (Vos, 2013).

A smaller group of students were those undertaking a full time two years' master's programme which led to an MSc and a professional qualification in Physiotherapy or Occupational Therapy. These students had a previous degree and many had worked in other roles before changing career.

Kiley and Cumming (2014) recognised that students who return to study can find their new identity as a student challenging, possibly as a result in a loss of self-esteem or self-confidence, and this was a common issue highlighted by the supervisors in their discussions, as is illustrated by their comments above. Malfroy (2005) suggested that they might struggle with being novices who have to learn new terminology and skills, including those required to undertake research.

<u>Challenges experienced</u>

While the need to consider the student's background and previous experience was acknowledged by the supervisors, they perceived that students from different situations faced similar challenges:

Daisy: *I think it's just when they start dipping their toe in the water and start realising how much they don't know, it's quite daunting really because they have so much to read and they don't know what of the literature to actually focus on because they haven't really understood what would be the best way to research what they want to research.*

Bethany: *They are very clever, you know, they have got all the, you know, they have got all the attributes that you would want to supervise, but you are absolutely right, you know, some of them their command of English, you know, let's be honest about it, rather than pretend, their command of English is not that good, so they start doubting themselves when they start reading what they say, "Oh my god am I expected to read, to write at that level? ", but it isn't an issue of ability, it's an issue of them doubting themselves, so they do need extra time… You know, it's not an issue of ability; it's an issue of the time it takes to get them there*

In describing the research journey for doctoral students, the metaphor of going on a journey is one which is commonly used (Hughes and Tight (2013), as it incorporates the difficulty, change and progress which may be experienced. In one study supervisors suggested that maintaining student motivation could be problematic, and it has been advocated that this is an issue which it is good to address from the beginning (Vos, 2013). Grant suggested that being supervised could be an uncomfortable process because it

> *'interferes with the way people are, how they understand themselves to be, and what they strive to become' (Grant, 1999, p6).*

In discussions it was apparent that the supervisors were aware of the challenges experienced by the master's students as they went through the process:

Lucy: *I think it can make them doubt whether they are going in the right direction career wise sometimes and want to change, you know, it has that power to unsettle people a little bit I think.*

Acknowledging the time and effort required for this level of study was one way of preparing students for periods where they might find their study more challenging:

Rosie: *Another thing that I do tend to say to students, and like it sounds really obvious, 'It's not easy, you have got to work and you have got to read, you have got to live and breathe and you know, dream this subject matter and once you have immersed yourself in that subject matter, you start to make connections in your head'. … If you were reading and making notes and thinking and reflecting, you do eventually start to make the connections naturally, so the themes start to emerge from the literature. Now until you put yourself into the position where you do that, it doesn't happen by magic. So I suppose the message to the student is, 'This is going to be hard, it's not going to be an easy road, but the encouraging bit is once you do get immersed in that, you start to get excited by it'.*

Feedback

One of the key strategies identified in supporting and advising students through their dissertation project was giving students feedback on their work. It was identified that the nature of the feedback is important – that it should be constructive, honest, timely and build on the student's existing knowledge in order to help them move forward. One of the supervisors advocated that the feedback should be in writing, so that the student could take it away and reflect on it.

Ted: *Feedback's about, or 'feed forward' is about, learning isn't it? 'This isn't quite up to scratch; this is what you've got to do to be successful with your project'*

Rosie: *I think a lot of it is about helping a person recognise what they are good at and what they do know… Well, it's feedback, obviously again it's down to communication, so, it's facilitating her to tell me, or to demonstrate in her work what she knows, and then build on that in a way that is meaningful to her*

Phillips & Pugh (2010) and Drennan and Clarke (2009) found that timely feedback which helped students understand how they were doing, how they should be proceeding and which made alternative suggestions, was an effective way of giving students confidence and facilitating their completion. Lumadi (2008) reported that a lack of timely and explicit feedback was a cause of complaint from some students.

Doloriert et al (2012) highlighted the emotional impact which feedback can have on students and advocated that both students and supervisors should be aware of the emotional response it could evoke. There was evidence of awareness from one of the supervisors:

Nicola: *And some students in the past have kind of been a little bit, not assertive, but, I don't know, sometimes they feel a bit cross with me sometimes ha, ha, because I am trying to guide them and actually what they are doing is something different and it's about bringing those two things together, but also enable them to know that they are doing the right process and they are going to get to the end of it. Not bring critical, but if you are given constructive feedback sometimes students always don't understand the process behind that, and that really what you are trying to do is get them to achieve their maximum performance and the best mark that they can get, so if they are coming back and you are saying 'Well have you thought about this, and could you consider that?' Sometimes, you know, it's almost, you're not being critical, you are just trying to get them to do their best*

The balance required is described by Manathunga (2005) who has coined the phrase 'compassionate rigour' which acknowledges the need to provide empathy and support when giving rigorous feedback. Li and Seale (2007) recommend the use of restorative work, praise, humour and sensitive abandonment in this element of supervision.

Key message 5 - Your personal experiences of being supervised can affect your approach to supervision but you may find the way in which others have conceptualised the supervisory role, or discussion with other supervisors, helpful.

One of the factors identified in the literature as being most influential on supervisors' styles of supervising is that of their own experience of being supervised – it has been suggested that individuals may try to emulate supervision which they felt was helpful and avoid which they perceived as less positive (Guerin, Kerr and Green,2015; Blas, Jasman and Levy, 2012; Doloriert, Sambrook and Stewart, 2012; Lee, 2008; Kandlbinder, 2000, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 1997).

This was the case with the participants of this study.

Emma: *I've experienced two different models of … supervision; one I liked very much and one I didn't like very much at all and I guess that informs my perspective as a supervisor… I had supervisors who were very critical and criticism is fine, but for me, it lacked a bit of constructiveness, and they tried to.... there were sort of quite strong efforts to try and get me to do a particular thing...whereas the supervisory team I experienced up here was much more: 'Well, you tell us what you think; we tell you what we think. It's good or it's not so good, but you need to make your own decisions and it's your piece of work'... and I was very happy working within that… How does that inform my supervision? I guess I'm trying to be critical but constructive all the time and give students autonomy in their work as long as I feel that they're safe and what they do is ethical and it results in a valid study.*

Rosie: *I had a brilliant mentor, I had a brilliant mentor, and I think I have modelled my kind of strategies if you like on what she did with me*

Some of them described how they drew on their experiences when supervising students, or shared their own memories of supervision with their own students.

Natalie: *When I went back to do my masters, I got stuck on that, and I often for students who get particularly stuck, I kind of tell them the story about myself and how I also had a professor as my [supervisor]…, and he said 'Tear it up and start again'*

Grant (1999) suggests that the result of supervisors' own experiences of supervision may become unconscious, unpredictable influences on the way in which they respond to their students, and can affect the relationship. She refers to

> *'shadow figures and relationships' that may be lurking behind the student and supervisor, causing them to make unconscious responses to one another: They may remind each other of former significant others (and thus in some sense there are others present in the supervision meeting), of themselves even. They may feel strong feelings - of gratitude, resentment, frustrations, disappointment, love - because of these remindings (Grant, 1999, p8.)*

This strength of feeling was evident within some of the comments made in the interviews and workshops. For example, following Emma's statement above, where she described her unhelpful experience of supervision, she appeared to be echoing her of her own feelings as a student, as she continued:

Emma: *I'm certainly careful to be positive about how I frame my comments as opposed to "Well, you didn't do that very well", or "That needs major revision" … Because I think you can really destroy somebody's confidence and that would just be an awful thing to do.*

While acknowledging the impact of personal experience on supervision skills, Guerin et al (2015) and Blas et al (2012) proposed that the development of a conceptual understanding of supervision is also important for supervisors. As the context of supervision changes, they advocated that supervisors will benefit from reflecting on their personal experiences in the light of new supervisory pedagogies which are emerging. Sharakis-Doyle and McIntyre (2008) suggested that effective supervision required not only high level of self-knowledge but also an understanding of the contextual influences and the potential complexities involved in the relationship, which I explored within chapter 2.

Acknowledgement of supervisor's feelings

Lee (2008) identified the pressure that developing their identity has on new supervisors who may feel isolated at the time they are required to take on this role, often shortly after joining academia or just after successful completion of their own studies. This feeling of isolation was vividly described by some of the supervisors in this study

Ken: *I think one of the things I found hardest sometimes about this sort of level of supervision is a sense of loneliness sometimes, because, you know, you have the compliment of being asked to take on the role. So you feel that, you know, obviously somebody is recognising in you that capability which is, you know, a massive compliment. It is a massive compliment, and then you have to live up to that expectation.*

The need to address any sense of isolation, and feelings of a lack of competence and confidence was also recognised by Emilsson and Johnsson

(2007) in the development of a support initiative which involved supervision for supervisors themselves. Blas et al (2012), in their reflections on supervision within professionally based disciplines which had not traditionally been situated in universities, suggested that lack of confidence in supervision could result from academic staff comparing their academic abilities to their more well established professional competence.

Benefits of discussion with other supervisors

Almost all of the supervisors questioned what they were doing within their supervisory practice at some point within the interviews, and this lack of confidence appeared to be particularly related to their preparation for the role.

Nicola: *If you haven't been through the process yourself doing a systematic appraisal, which I actually haven't, then you begin to question yourself, and you think, well actually 'Am I directing them in the right way?'*

Within the literature a number of strategies to support new supervisors to develop their understanding of the complexities of supervision, and to support experienced supervisors as they continue in the role, have been suggested. Halse (2011) highlights that these are increasingly participatory and practice based. Examples include: action learning (Davis,et al, 2012); collaborative critique (Guerin and Green, 2013), an established supervisor development framework and communities of practice (Pearson and Brew, 2002), self-evaluation (Zuber-Skerrit and Roach, 2004) and story dialogue workshops (McCormack and Pamphilon, 2004). Some institutions have found that some more experienced supervisors, who may have a more functionalist view of supervision, are reluctant to participate in these initiatives (Halse, 2011, Manathunga, 2005).

Amundsen and McAlpine (2009) recognised that finding the balance for giving an appropriate amount of support was one of the challenges for supervisors, and Petersen (2007) described the way in which supervisors were trying to balance the student support and academic monitoring aspects of the role in a way which enabled them to 'get it right'. While developing workshops which were used as part of the induction for new supervisors,

Jasman (2012) found that colleagues identified that having confidence both to support the student and contribute to the development of the project was an important aspect of effective supervision. Within the discussions, some of the supervisors expressed a sense of responsibility which they felt, acknowledging that, while the student was ultimately responsible for the dissertation, they did not want their supervision to have a negative impact.

Gillian: *Some of the students are… you know, they haven't got the academic capabilities, so fair enough, they fail, but I would hate them to fail because of me and because I gave them the wrong advice.*

Pearson and Kayrooz (2004) recommended that support for academics which involved some discussion on the nature of supervision, and feedback on their practice, was essential. They argued that otherwise, supervisors would be subject to unrealistic expectations which could cause resentment and reduce their openness to professional development on this aspect of their role. The supervisors who were involved in this project identified that their participation in discussions on supervision had impacted on their understanding of the role, as they were better able to verbalise the concerns and difficulties they experienced and the strategies they used to address these.

Supervision strategies

When asked to outline their supervision strategies, the supervisors involved in this study initially struggled to articulate them. The explanation provided by one of them illustrates this:

Rosie: *… and some of that's intuitive I think, in between the student and a supervisor*

This lack of clarity in the process of supervision resulted in many of the supervisors feeling unprepared for the role and less than confident in their skills. Although most of them were experienced and had supervised students to successful completion, almost all of them acknowledged a feeling of uncertainty about their role – 'Am I doing it right?'. Even those who had

undergone preparation for PhD supervision expressed their frustration regarding the lack of clarity about the role:

Emma: *I've just been on a PhD supervisor update and you know, again, you cover all these theories and you sort of try and do your best sort of thing, but again, there is not the space to say "right, actually, somebody give me feedback…" was the advice I've given, was that enough, or should I have been more directive, or should I have got the piece of paper out for them and said 'this is the paper you need to read?', or...". You know, how much do you take your student by the hand? How much do you point them in the general direction? Do you say: "There is literature out there... go and find it" or "you want to read this or that author" or whatever it is.*

During discussions and workshops the supervisors in this study described their experiences, shared their supervisory activities, and explored the challenges they had faced. Through analysis of these conversations, it was possible to identify key aspects of their approaches to supervision. Central to these was their assessment of the student. There were three different elements which they assessed with each individual: their readiness, motivation and situation.

Elements of assessment

Readiness

Due to the range of master's programmes available and the routes through which students could access the dissertation module, the effectiveness of students' academic skills varied, and it was important for supervisors to identify any possible gaps early on, so that they could support the students in these areas, or arrange for additional support from the study services which might be available.

Thea: *They may not have come through a route of being able to critique things, so depending on how they've got to at the MSc – they might have gone through a traditional route, then they might have done a few top up modules to get the degree, and then they come on to the MSc and they might not have gone through that whole … evidence-based critique of literature.*

Motivation

Awareness of a student's aspirations and motivation for undertaking the study could enable the supervisor to tailor the support given to the students, as some had aspirational goals, whereas were less ambitious:

Tom: *Whether the students want to be here, you know some of them have said, you know, 'I have been told I have got to do that…so for me, as long as I pass that's fine'. But there are other people…who have paid for it, and for them it's a, you know, they want to do the best, and others are doing the masters because they want a stepping stone to the...doctorate work*

Situation

As previously discussed in some depth, there were a number of factors which could impact upon a student's commitment to the study and the resources available to them. These included family or employment responsibilities which could impact on the time and space in which they could concentrate on their project:

Lucy: *Its getting the balance as well… you are empathetic to the people because you recognise that they are in busy jobs, they are in senior positions*

In their descriptions of the process by which they assessed students, it was clear that the supervisors were aware of the need to ascertain the student's abilities and expectations through explorative discussions:

Nicola: *I think it's not so much setting the parameters, it's more of a finding out and establishing what the students understand, by assessment, really initially, you know… By asking them questions really. You base your … your supervision, around the answers that they provide and what they bring to the tutorial, whether they feel as though they have established the process, what materials they bring, you know, what questions they ask*.

Their initial assessment formed a foundation for the way in which a supervisor began to work with a student, however it was evident that the assessment of each of these elements continued to be revised throughout the period of the dissertation. A student's knowledge and perspective on their topic might change, their belief in their abilities would increase, or their

circumstances could alter; all of which had to be factored into the supervisor's approach.

The variety of backgrounds for students undertaking master's level study and the implications this can have on their readiness to study has been recognised in relation to the identification of individual learning needs (Morgan, 2013, O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom and Zammit, 2009). The importance of motivation has been acknowledged (QAA, 2013; Anderson et al, 2008) but not explored in any depth in relation to supervision. An awareness of the external factors which may impact on a student's commitment to, and capacity for, study has been identified as being of value, but Tobbell, O'Donnell, and Zammit (2010) suggested that academic staff had little understanding of their postgraduate students' life experiences. In this study it was clear that the supervisors actively sought out information on student motivation and demonstrated high levels of understanding and empathy for their student's personal and professional situation. Building upon their assessment of the student, the supervisors used a variety of educational activities as they managed the process of promoting student development.

Managing the supervision process

In attempting to articulate what supervision involves, Maxwell and Smyth (2010) proposed that in the development of the dissertation project, a creative synergy is required. They suggested that this could be apparent in the selection of activities adopted by the supervisor to enable student growth during the research process. Cherry (2012) argued that the development of supervisory praxis (an ability to understand the best thing to do in the circumstances) requires reflexivity on the part of the supervisor, rather than only the acquisition of tools of techniques.

Such reflexivity and creative synergy was evident in the way in which the supervisors responded to the student's identified needs. During the analysis of the data, I identified three different functions within their supervisory role, and labelled these 'Facilitating', 'Nurturing' and 'Maintaining standards'. This categorisation was informed by work on clinical (rather than academic) supervision.

Proctor (1987) and Inskipp and Proctor (1995) explored supervision within a counselling context, and suggested that developmental support given to professionals by senior colleagues, involved a balance of 'formative', 'restorative' and 'normative' approaches, where the clinical supervisor educated and supported a colleague while also ensuring that professional standards were met. They recognised that the supervisory relationship was one which was set up to achieve a specific task, and identified that this could involve the supervisor in a number of different roles, such as gatekeeper, manager, facilitator, teacher, tutor, trainer, judge, mentor, colleague and fellow human being, each of which required different skills. In their exploration of the art, craft and tasks of supervision, they acknowledged the need for supervisors to be flexible in moving between these different roles.

Within the literature on academic supervision, and in the discussions regarding academic post graduate supervision which took place within my research, there was evidence that the supervisors in this study were actively balancing the use of similar functions, as is explained below.

Facilitating

The supervisors provided an environment in which the student could see the need for growth through challenge or stimulation. This could involve the supervisor questioning the student's existing knowledge and beliefs or by presenting them with alternative perspectives. Prompted by these discussions, students would explore different ideas or principles:

Neil: *Challenging them a little bit about the relevance and the usefulness of their research idea*

Rosie: *I feel like I am competent enough to push somebody down a sort of learning pathway. So just give them a little carrot to get them a bit further to get them a bit further.*

Nurturing

The supervisors created a safe space in which this growth could occur, by providing support and reassurance. This could involve the supervisor reassuring the student of the longer term benefits and likely success of their studies, at times when they were facing the challenge of investing the time and energy required, in the midst of their often busy lives. Acknowledgement of the student's existing skills and achievements and recognition of the growth which occurred during the course of their studies were also important

strategies in supporting the student through any difficulties which they encountered:

Nicola: *A lot of reassurance, you know, I think, as to the fact that they are going to achieve and they're going to get to the end*

Rosie: *You encourage them with what they do know, what they can do, you know, and then help them build up the bits that they are not so confident in*

Maintaining standards

While the supervisor was engaging in the other two approaches they did so within set parameters or requirements. This included promoting student ownership of their project, attainment of the appropriate academic standards, adherence to ethical approval processes, and institutional requirements such as timely progress reports and submission deadlines:

Gillian: *I think you've got to be empathic and sympathetic, but I think firm. The deadlines…the timelines*

The way in which they balanced these three functions was evident within the interviews and discussions. Depending on their assessment of the student, different emphasis might be placed on each function at different times throughout the supervision period, as is illustrated by two comments from the same supervisor:

Daisy: *If they are high achievers in their work life, but they have got time pressures and commitments such as families, one of the students … was extremely motivated and very, very keen and wanted to do really well, but she had all these other things that were happening, you know, all at the same time, and being realistic about what you can expect of yourself in that situation*

Daisy *I have probably done it myself, you know, justify 'I haven't done this because I have all these things on' and being able to actually say 'Yeah, but if you are actually going to achieve this, you need to commit the time to it'.*

Student centred approach to management of supervision

The need for supervisors to adopt a flexible approach, which enables them to balance the different functions of their role has been acknowledged within the supervisory literature by a number of authors. Grant (1999) argued that

supervision required both awareness of the student's circumstances and a flexible approach; De Kleijn et al (2014), recognised that students' needs could change throughout the process of undertaking a master's dissertation, and suggested the notion of 'adaptivity' which explained the way in which the supervisor can assess and respond appropriately to a student's needs at any particular time. Higgs and Tichen (2001) highlighted that rather than just following established principles or codes of practice, supervisors 'craft their own distinctive resolutions' to the dilemmas and situations which they encountered with each student

This approach to supervision, with supervisory activity tailored to the individual student, is perhaps not surprising, given the professional backgrounds of the supervisors involved in this project. Recognition of the value of focusing on learners as unique individuals is prevalent within both the educational and healthcare development literature. Noddings (2012) argued that care ethics was prevalent within education, and suggested that educators are interested in the expressed needs of their students as well as their academic needs, and draw on their store of knowledge to respond intelligently to both. Within healthcare education and development Tichen and McCormack (2010) use the word 'flourishing' to describe the personal growth which can occur when a holistic perspective is adopted.

Higgs and Tichen (2001) propose that since supervisors develop their skills in adaptive supervision from their experiences of working with students, this constitutes 'practical' rather than the more formal 'propositional' knowledge which might be have been taught in supervisor preparation sessions or discussed within the literature. Armitage (2006) recommended the sharing of practice among staff involved in the supervision of students undertaking master's degree dissertations, but found that this was not happening. The opportunity to share their experiences during this research did appear to have had a positive impact on the supervisors involved.

Impact of participation on supervisors

Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggested that

> *Action researchers … are inclined to see the development of theory or understanding as a by-product of the improvement of real*

situations, rather than [seeing] application as a by-product of advances in 'pure' theory' (1986, p28).

With regard to this project, action research was adopted as a research approach that was appropriate to meet the aims of the study, which were specifically related to the development of understanding of the practice of supervision. Improvement of the Faculty's supervision processes was recognised as a possible consequence of the study, as was the potential that the practice of supervisors could be improved by their involvement in the research.

In assessing the impact of involvement on an action research project, Reason and Bradbury (2006), suggested that participants may ask the question '*Can we use this work to help develop our own?*' (p345). In the latter workshops, some of the supervisors suggested that we should explore the views of the group regarding any impact on their practice, in order to ascertain the effect which their participation may have had upon their practice. Three focus groups were organised, each of which included three of the supervisors who had been involved in the workshops. In discussion it was identified that there had been three areas in which supervisors had experienced some change.

Increased self-awareness

Several of the supervisors explained that they had become more aware of the approaches they had taken previously, and had found it useful to reflect on how their style of supervision might be different from that used by others:

Daisy: *Been exposed to other people talking about their styles of supervision I think. Made me reflect on how I have perhaps supervised in the past and although I am currently not supervising anybody at that level, I think if I was doing it again I might do things differently. It made me more aware of the relationship between me and the student in terms of, like controlling, urges to make sure everything is alright and, whereas some of the people who have been in the group and have had more experience of supervising have talked very much of the project belonging to the student and allowing them some independence in that and whilst advising or guiding, not being as controlling as perhaps I would be tempted to.*

Nicola: *It's made me a lot more thoughtful actually, because I am doing some supervision currently with two students and it's*

made me think a lot more about the processes. Just, you know, going from the initial interview I think, where we talked about the experiences of it. It's kind of putting that a little bit into context and… I think I am having to be a bit more self-aware.

The advantages of establishing communities of practice for supervisors in exploring supervisory challenges were highlighted by Zeegers and Barron (2012) and McCormack and Pamphilon (2004). Some advocate the benefits of developing more reflexive and collaborative space within supervision which may facilitate the development of alternative approaches to working with students and supervisory colleagues (Cornforth and Claiborne, 2008; Burchell and Dyson, 2005). Pearson and Brew (2002) recommended that learning through self-awareness which involved personal reflection was particularly relevant where supervisors could consider 'theories-in-use' as opposed to 'espoused theories' (Argyris & Schon,1974).

Change in practice

Some of those involved in the project described how they had made changes to the way in which they had already made or were intending to make to the structure of their supervision meetings or in the strategies they used to support students:

Bethany: *I think I'm going to have more of a dialogue about theories of learning and time management. You know the whole process.*

Tara: *I think it's probably a combination of being more confident, probably being more structured.*

Neil: *It's allowed me to sort of re-frame some of the things I had previously done in my own thought processes, but it's also given me a bit more confidence in trying something that I had sort of heard about or thought about, and seeing the success that other supervisors who have been involved in the project have had with that.*

Bruce and Stoodley (2012) highlighted the benefits of supervisors participating in pedagogic conversations. They were able to identify a range of strategies and approaches which could be used by supervisors through this approach. The creation of physical space away from professional

demands, and inner space to facilitate reflection and dialogue with others about supervisory practice was recommended by Burchell and Dyson (2005) as a way of enabling supervisors to explaining their practice through dialogue with others.

Increased confidence

Although some of the participants had not changed their practice of supervision, they indicated that their confidence in their ability to supervise had improved:

Thea: *I don't think I'm doing anything different this time, this year, to what I was this time last year, but I feel differently about it… I think I feel a bit more confident, as I said earlier, and I have more awareness of the process. So I have some of the bits of the jigsaw fit together better. So perhaps that makes me feel a bit more confident. More confident of the processes.*

Nicola: *It's made me think quite a lot about my own practice, so… and now I don't feel as though really I'm as bad as what I thought I might have been.*

The confidence to ask for advice or support from other colleagues would also appear to have increased:

Thea: *I haven't supervised any master's students in that time, but I think if I did, I would certainly think about a lot of the issues we've talked about and especially, we had a conversation in one of the groups: you can't be an expert in everything and sometimes it's about… maybe admitting that and saying 'For that bit of your dissertation. You know. I might put you in contact with x, or something'… I don't think you can… Especially now I know more supervisors and you listen to other people from other areas have you know, the same issues.*

Nicola: *I've never done that before at master's level. I've helped people do it as part of another… to something else, and I've thought: 'Ooh, gosh. I'm not quite sure about this'. But I thought 'Well, hey, you know, you've got needs as a supervisor. It's okay to go and look that up; it's okay to go and find it out', so maybe it did make me think… 'That's okay. It's okay to not know'… and 'cos I wasn't quite sure what this thing was at master's… what it was. What's the end product? So maybe if anything, it made me think: 'Well, you're not all-knowing'… So I think yeah, maybe I thought 'Ooh, it's okay to look this up', because maybe I thought' I should know this' – and I didn't.*

It would seem that involvement in the project increased supervisors' confidence in what they were doing, but also to recognise that it was 'OK' to ask for advice or support from others.

Blas et al. (2012) suggested that for those less familiar with the university environment, a lack of confidence could be an issue, for which they recommended the opportunity for conversations with others on supervisory pedagogy. Davis et al (2012) found that an action learning project for supervisors had a noticeable impact of the confidence of participants.

Conclusion

Through a process of sharing and discussion, the supervisors became increasingly aware of the challenges inherent within supervision. This awareness informed our articulation of five key messages to enable others to better understand the complexities of this role. I was also able to identify issues which influenced how they worked in different ways with each student. These strategies involved responding to the abilities, expectations and needs of those individuals by balancing three key supervisory functions, which were facilitating, nurturing and maintaining standards. The impact of their involvement on the supervisors themselves included an increased awareness and confidence in their supervision, and some changes which they identified could be made to their practice.

I will now discuss the research approach adopted for the study and comment on the ways in which the decisions, which my co-researchers and I made, contributed to the worthwhileness of the research. In reflecting upon the implementation of the action research cycles I will extend the theory of supervision by clarifying how the findings of my study can be extrapolated into the wider higher education context. This discussion will answer the 'so what?' question about this research. I will also explain how I was able to draw upon the findings to construct a new model of supervision which conceptualises the ways in which supervisors balance the different functions required of them in their role.

Chapter 8

Discussion

Introduction

In support of my assertion that this study contributes to the existing knowledge on the practice of supervision, I begin this chapter by theorizing about the worthwhileness of the research. There are a number of definitions of action research, but one that is particularly pertinent to this project originates from the field of educational action research, and identifies the benefit of action research as improvements to practice and understanding.

> *Action research is the study of a social situation carried out by those involved in that situation in order to improve both their practice and the quality of their understanding* (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001 p9).

This definition is appropriate for this study which resulted in the recognition of the different aspects of the supervisory role, an increased appreciation of the complexities involved, and the identification of strategies which can be used to support and facilitate the development of master's students. These were articulated by the supervisors in the previous chapter and have contributed to a clearer understanding of this role. The findings of this research have been of benefit both for the supervisors involved in the research and for their departmental colleagues.

Drawing upon their explanations of what the role involves within the findings from the four phases of the action research, I have constructed a new model of supervision which I present in the second part of this discussion.

Commentary on the research process

In considering the worthiness and quality of action research, Reason and Bradbury (2006) suggested that action research which could be described as '*getting valuable work done well*' (2006, p343-4) impacts positively on the understanding and practice of the individuals involved in the research, their

co-participants and those in the wider context. They identify five dimensions: 'Relationships', 'Practical outcomes', 'Extended ways of knowing', 'Purpose' and 'Enduring consequence', which they suggest are apparent in such research, following which those involved can say

> '*that was our research and it helped us to see ourselves and our context anew and to act in all sorts of new ways'* (2006, p344).

Consideration of these enables those involved in action research to have confidence in their understanding of the origins, purpose and development of their work, and its ongoing value to themselves and others. These dimensions have been used as a framework to explore the 'worthwhileness' of this project.

Relationships

The collaborative nature of action research should mean that this type of research is done *with* participants, rather than *on* them, and that those involved are co-researchers as well as participants (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). In this process, the importance of establishing a forum for new and ongoing dialogue, through which open and honest exchange of ideas can occur, is highlighted in the literature (Reason, 2006; Rahman, 2003; Kemmis, 2001). Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and Habermas (1984), articulated the notion of *'communicative space' as a* framework for collaborative work. This is described as a '*network of persons' who 'come together to explore problems and issues' (*Kemmis, 2006 p103*)* and is different to a defined project group. Membership is more fluid, as members are involved as much as they wish, and in different ways at different times.

> *'The first step in action research turns out to be central: the formation of a communicative space . . . and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned' (Kemmis, 2001 p.100).*

This concept fitted well with this project, where supervisors themselves identified the need for exploration of the topic, but their desire and availability to be involved varied. From my earliest conversations with colleagues about

the idea of undertaking research on the topic of supervision, it was apparent that many thought that this was a relevant area for study, and several expressed an interest in being involved in considering it further. Twenty supervisors were involved in the first phase of the project to explore the concept of supervision and share their ideas and experiences, and thirteen (including ten members from the initial group of twenty) helped co-construct an improved understanding of the practice. A smaller group of eleven were interested in exploring supervisory practices in more depth over a period of a year, with the opportunity to meet with others in monthly workshops. The number of people attending the workshops fluctuated (from three to eight people), but all were involved in ongoing discussions through e-mail or in individual face to face conversations. A key factor in maintaining interaction between those involved was the creation of a 'communicative space' as described by Kemmis and McTaggert (2005).

Formation of a communicative space

Reason (2006) identified a number of issues which can impact on the creation of a communicative space, some of which were pertinent to this project, including 'Power and politics', 'Working against denial', 'Taking time', and 'Tensions in facilitation'.

Power and politics

Roth and Bradbury (2008), Coghlan and Brannick (2014) and Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) all highlight the value of recruiting relevant sponsors and stakeholders for an action research project, in order to ensure approval and support for the project. The stakeholders identified for this project were the Faculty Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching and the senior managers who had responsibility for postgraduate research and taught programmes. The project proposal, which included an analysis of the political context of supervision, at both a national and local level, was submitted to these individuals for comment and discussion prior to submission for ethical approval.

Student numbers on post graduate taught programmes within my Faculty had increased by 78% over the previous five years and there was recognition that the capacity for support and supervision of postgraduate students would need to be addressed to accommodate for planned future growth.

An advantage of this sponsorship was some financial support for the transcription costs for the first part of the project from the learning and teaching budget as it was perceived that there was the potential for the project to improve student experience of supervision in the longer term. The support of senior programme managers also confirmed the value of the study within the Faculty and highlighted its relevance to the master's programme teams.

Working against denial

There was the possibility that those leading the programmes would deny that supervision at masters' level was an issue which required further exploration. The Faculty was a well-established provider of master's level programmes and in the year in which I commenced the research, there were 110 students undertaking master's dissertations in health or education. Of the 108 who completed their projects, 106 passed, and the mean marks for all groups of students (including full and part time, home and international students) was over 60%. As mentioned above however, conversations with colleagues from the initial planning stages indicated that there was general agreement that an exploration of supervision processes and practice could be beneficial. The prompt response of the supervisors, including some who were also programme managers, who indicated that they would be willing to be involved, reflected this level of interest. The discussions throughout the project resulted in recommendations as to possible enhancements to supervisor preparation and ongoing support which were presented to the taught master's programme management group.

Taking time

The depth of discussion and reflection on the practice of supervision indicated that this was a rich element of educational practice about which the participants felt they would appreciate further opportunities to share and develop. Several of those involved in the first phase articulated that they had found the experience of sharing their experiences with others helpful, and suggested that an opportunity to continue such discussions would be beneficial. The later phases of the project were planned on the basis of these comments.

The availability of supervisors to participate was an issue throughout the project. Although individuals had indicated their willingness to be involved, finding the time to do so was challenging, although all contributed when they could, either within the interviews and workshops or commenting on the summaries of discussions.

A flexible approach to attendance at the workshops was discussed, so that people were aware that while their attendance would be appreciated by other group members, there was an understanding that individuals' attendance at all the workshops would be extremely unlikely, given the workload and personal responsibilities of those involved. It was proposed and agreed that summaries of the discussions which had taken place would be collated and sent to those who had been present to agree that they were an accurate reflection of the dialogue which had occurred. These would then be e-mailed to those who had not been able to attend, for consideration and comment. This process of clarifying expectations is important if the authentic relationships which underpin the democratic aspirations of this type of research (Ospina, Dodge, Godsoe, Minieri, Reza and Schall, 2004; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

Knowing that this would involve both time and commitment on my part, but recognising the importance of keeping the members of the group up to date with the nature of the discussions, I ensured that I had booked in the time to do this in my diary, normally the day following each workshop, or as soon after as was feasible. To make this ongoing communication more manageable, a variety of strategies were used to record the workshop discussions including audio recordings and comments on flip chart paper or post it notes.

Possible tensions in facilitation

Possible tensions in facilitation can occur in attempting to maintain the balance between the need to have some coordination the group interactions while allowing for the group to develop a life of its own, and in encouraging participation while ensuring that participation remains voluntary (Reason, 2006; Ospina, et al, 2004). These tensions were not apparent during the interviews in the first two phases as each participant was involved in only one small group or individual interview, but became more evident in the third phase of the project as attendance at the monthly workshops decreased.

Anticipation of the factors which could impact on their involvement was discussed during the second phase interviews with those who had indicated their willingness to be involved and was explored at the initial two workshops. The ongoing communication strategy was developed to keep people informed of the ongoing discussions throughout the year to ensure that the voices of all those involved were included (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

During the first workshop, the British Educational Research Guidelines were used as a starting point of discussions, particularly the principles around consent, openness, disclosure, the right to withdraw and ownership of any presentations, publications or products which emerged from the group. Following discussion, it was agreed that the supervisors' participation in the project would not be shared with others outside the group until this had been agreed by them. In practice this meant that e-mails about the project were sent out to people individually until they had attended a workshop and agreed that their involvement could be known to other group members, after which they were included in a group e-mail distribution list. It was also agreed that those who contributed directly to the preparation of presentations or writing of any articles or presentations would be named as co-authors on these with their agreement at the time.

Following the conclusion of the third phase, a proposal to submit an abstract to a conference was mooted and discussed with the group. Two of the group volunteered to be involved in the preparation of the abstract and the presentation itself and the others agreed that they were happy for them to do so. A few months later, for the writing of an abstract and presentation at a regional conference where only two presenters were allowed, all were invited on a first come first served basis and another of the supervisors was involved as a co-presenter on this.

Developing good working relationships

Prior to the workshops, some of the less experienced supervisors had expressed concerns about their ability to contribute to the group. Greenwood argues that

> '*Participation is a process that must be generated. It begins with participatory intent and continues by building participatory processes into the activity within the limits set by the participants and the*

conditions. To view participation as something that can be imposed is naïve and morally suspect.' (Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy,1993, p175).

In recognition of the need to confirm that their experiences were valuable, I felt that it was important to create a culture where all members felt able to contribute their expertise within the group (Ospina et al, 2004). Although the intention was that the group would decide on the content and format of most of the workshops, I took the lead in planning the first two in advance, developing the format in discussion with those who had indicated they would be able to attend. The workshops were designed to help the group members get to know one another better and recognise that they all had relevant experience. At the first workshop this was done by considering a model of doctoral supervision to explore its relevance for working with master's students, and then by sharing experiences of personal supervision in small groups of three.

Recounting their own personal experiences as a student resulted in all of the participants articulating some of their beliefs about supervision while acknowledging the impact that this may have had on them personally and on the approaches they had subsequently adopted with their own students. Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) suggest that emotional self-awareness, appreciation of one another's feelings and a commitment to learning from one another can enhance group harmony and productivity.

'*we must not forget that 'enquiry' carries a real 'emotional risk' as we expose our experiences, our interpretations and our value-judgements to challenge' (p22)*

<u>Emotional risk</u>

An illustration of the nature of this emotional risk was articulated following the final phase, when the first conference presentation was being developed. One of the supervisors proposed that we use two images of icebergs (see illustration on slide 7 and 8 in appendix 13), as an illustration of her feelings about her involvement in the project. The first picture was of an iceberg floating in the ocean, which she entitled 'Feeling exposed' which she explained was how she felt at the start of the project, anxious that her contribution would expose her lack of knowledge and skills as a supervisor

to others. The second picture which she labelled 'Exposure' showed a picture of a whole iceberg but with only a small proportion visible above sea level. She explained that this illustrated that through her involvement, she had been exposed to the much wider theoretical principles underpinning supervision, and to the practices of her colleagues, which had made her realise how much more there was to supervision than she had been aware.

Practical outcomes

Reason proposes that one question we should ask of action research is "does it provide reliable guides to what we want?" (Reason, 2006, p191). He argues that there may not be a clear answer to this question, because there may be an issue in deciding who it is who decides on what we want, or whether we actually know. He warns against having too narrow a vision and suggests that the outcome of an action research project may go well beyond the original aim:

> *'It must include whether we have helped the development of an effective community of inquiry among participants, whether questions of power have been addressed, whether the inquiry has been emancipatory and deepened the experiential basis of understanding, and so on' (Reason, 2006, p193)*

From the first phase of the project, there were a number of suggested outcomes from the supervisors for any further work which might take place: the creation of some opportunities to explore the processes of supervision; the chance to share supervisory practices; the improvement of Faculty processes and the development of some guidelines for new supervisors. Those involved in the second phase were asked about their hopes for phase three, and their hopes appeared to be along similar lines.

The development of the communicative space in which concepts and experiences of supervision could be explored within the workshops and in subsequent conversations was a significant outcome in itself (Heron, 2006) which participants agreed that they had found of value. The recommendations of the first phase on supervision within the Faculty,

particularly in relation to supervisor development and support, were presented and accepted by the postgraduate taught masters' programmes management group. Unfortunately, organisational changes have since impacted on the authority of this group to implement all of the changes agreed.

Those who had taken part in the second and third phases identified the impact of their involvement on themselves and on their practice. These reflections are presented within the findings, but discussions identified that key areas of change were on their self – awareness, confidence and on their actual supervisory practice. Some specific elements of the materials produced were also identified as being helpful, and they were being used by some of the supervisors after the study had completed. The fact that the use of these has continued following the end of the research indicates that the knowledge developed is meaningful to those utilising it on an ongoing basis.

Extended ways of knowing

Heron and Reason (2006) suggest four alternative 'ways of knowing' - experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical, which together contribute to knowledge which is not merely theoretical, but which is based upon

> 'T*he everyday practices of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives.'* (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 9).

<u>Experiential knowledge</u>

Reason (2006) compares experiential knowledge to that described by Polanyi as 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1962), which has not yet reached the conscious level. Grant (2005) identified that this was a particular issue regarding supervision. Pearson and Brew (2002), had identified the need to have supervisors 'surface their mental models of supervision' (p143) to develop training for doctoral supervisors. Dialogue with others on their practice of supervision has been suggested as one way of tapping into such tacit knowledge (Halse, 2011; Apsland, 2003). Recognition of the importance of this deeper, more personal knowledge which had been developed through a one particular creative approach, using storytelling, did emerge from the final focus groups following the third phase.

Presentational knowledge

Presentational knowledge builds on experiential knowledge and seeks to re-describe this in new ways – through drawing, sculpture, story, or other forms of expression (Reason, 2006). Storytelling was used in the second workshop, where participants reflected on a narrative 'supervisor's story' which had been developed using statements to illustrate the most common themes from the first phase of the project. This strategy had been used by McCormack and Pamphilon (2004) and involved a postmodern narrative group-work approach which they found enabled doctoral supervisors to identify 'insights' into supervision. Developing a sample narrative based upon the comments made in the first phase enabled reflection on people's experiences without them being necessarily attributable to any particular individual.

Those at the workshop felt that there was lots of resonance with the story, as was evident from some of their comments. It was identified that the supervisor's story was just one of a number of discourses. While the supervisor story presented the discourse of the supervisor, it was recognised that the voices of students, their employers and the University are also important, as they impact on the process and experience of supervision.

The use of metaphors was also discussed during the discussion on confidence in the seventh workshop, and one of the supervisors described her feelings of supervision as being like going into a dark room with a student, and groping around for the light switch, to throw some light on their discussions, not knowing where the switch was but not wanting to let the student know that she didn't know where it was. This feeling of being in the dark but not wanting to acknowledge this appeared to be illustrative of some of the feelings of other supervisors, as members of the audience at the conferences where this project has been presented, agreed that this is a good illustration of their feelings about supervision.

Propositional knowledge

Propositional knowledge is '*knowing about something'* (Heron and Reason, 2006) and draws upon ideas in an attempt to develop new theories which can

> *'formulate alternative perspectives, ideas, worldviews, and beliefs'* which can '*transfer the world into something new . . . uproot old taken for granted beliefs and establish new topics on the agenda.*' (Styhre, Kohn, and Sundgren, 2002 p.101).

Reason (2006) describes this as the way in which action research links to scholarship. One way of developing theory on supervision has been to conceptualise the process of supervision using the knowledge and experiences of those involved in the project. In order to do this, analysis of the discussions led to the development of a model of supervision which conceptualises the way in which supervisors assess the needs of their student, and then respond to those needs, based upon a holistic perspective to encourage student growth.

Practical knowledge

Reason describes the difference between propositional knowledge and practical knowledge as 'knowing about action' rather than 'knowing 'in action', and Torbert (1976) states that practical knowledge should be 'useful to an actor at the moment of action rather than to a disembodied thinker at the moment of reflection' (p167).

The discussions on the processes involved in supervision and the influences which can affect these appeared to have been of value to those involved. They have subsequently identified that this heightened appreciation has informed their practice as supervisors and as such they are drawing on the theory which they developed during the research. The decision to build upon their increased understanding to create a resource for other supervisors was indicative of their commitment to ensuring that this new knowledge would not be lost but would be of benefit to their colleagues.

Purpose

In reflecting on the value of research, Reason and Bradbury (2006) suggest that those involved should not be afraid to reconsider the purpose of the project on an ongoing basis. Reason (2006) suggests that the research should contribute to the 'flourishing' of individuals and the communities to which they belong. The worthwhileness of this research into the practice of

supervision has been confirmed by three sources: those involved in the project as their ownership of the direction of the research developed; the wider international community of research supervisors who, within the recent literature, have argued the need for further work in this area; and the responses of audiences to whom the project has been presented at conferences.

The supervisors

During the first phase the supervisors involved proposed that they would appreciate the opportunity to explore the issue of supervision with their colleagues. In discussions throughout the second phase, recognition of the responsibilities within the role and the need for supervisors to be adequately prepared was reinforced. Following the early workshops in phase three, they decided on the focus and direction for future workshops. Attendance at the later workshops in particular was affected by the change in role of many of the participants, with a significant increase in workload for some. Despite this, the participants' continued commitment to contribute their thoughts and comments, albeit sometimes in a more flexible manner, was evidence of their appreciation of the benefits of the project, both for themselves and for others. The new supervisors involved in phase four expressed their appreciation of the resources which had been developed.

Recent literature

An ongoing review of the literature throughout the project confirmed a growing awareness of the benefits of supervisors articulating what they actually do in order to better prepare those taking on this responsibility (Bruce and Stoodley, 2013; Guerin, Kerr and Green, 2013).

The reflexive nature of supervision which was described in some detail by those involved in this study has recently been recognised by De Kleijn et al (2014; 2015), who described this process as 'adaptivity', and recommended the need for further work:

> *'the findings of this study give insight into how … expert supervisors provide adaptive supervision... Nevertheless, this is only a first attempt to explore adaptivity and, therefore, we suggest that this*

issue is considered in future research studies concerning research supervision' (2014, p130).

Bamber (2015), following work on a national QAA (2013) project on mastersness, proposed that further research into taught post graduate education was needed:

> *'A commitment to evidence-informed improvement cycles at personal and local levels can generate knowledge, which can also inform practice in other settings.' (p221).*

Conferences

Following the presentation of the findings of the study at a regional and an international conference (see appendices 14 and 15), feedback and questions from the audiences reinforced that this was an important area for further exploration, and requests for further details of both the methodology and the methods used. There has been ongoing conversation with an academic from another institution about how the strategies used within this study might be transferable to a completely different discipline (linguistics).

Enduring consequence

An indication of the ongoing developmental quality of action research is whether or not a 'living interest' has been created, through which the impact of the work is experienced by those involved and the wider community, and through which further evolution can be sustained following the departure of the initiating researcher (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

The recommendations of the first phase were presented and accepted by the postgraduate taught masters' programmes management group. The fourth phase of the project involved the dissemination of the 'Guidelines, Hints and Tips' document to new supervisors, and the sharing of knowledge developed in workshops for those taking on supervision for the first time. The document has been passed on to the programme which has the highest number new supervisors, so that it can be sent to new supervisors as they are identified.

Experience in the use of the guidelines document within the workshops has highlighted that it is more beneficial to focus on one aspect of supervision at a time in discussion, with the document provided as an overarching resource.

Comments received by these new supervisors have indicated that they have appreciated these opportunities to explore their new role.

The way in which the different voices involved in an action research project can have an impact for different audiences and the benefits from the findings of research studies for both local and wider audiences was described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) and Hamilton et al (2014). Antman and Olsson (2007) articulated the processes involved:

> *'If university teachers do not embrace and practice scholarship within the area of teaching and learning, important and innovative work will continue to be private and undocumented, not available for scholarly peer review, scrutiny and feedback, not made public in a form other can build on, and consequently lost to the academic community'.*

In order for this dissemination and discussion to happen, Shulman (2011) highlights that any learning should be made public through a process of peer review which provides the opportunity for discussion with other members of the academic community. The sharing of the approach and methods used and the findings of the research has begun, with three of those involved presenting with myself at research conferences, where the methodology for the study and the development of the key messages have been shared.

A common theme in the questions following these presentations was related to the way in which supervisors identified the educational activities which they suggested for each student, and about the ways in which they balanced the different supervisory functions.

In considering how I could communicate these processes more clearly, I developed a new, 'three sided' model of supervision, which I present below. Discussions with some of the supervisors who were involved in the research have informed the creation and refinement of the model.

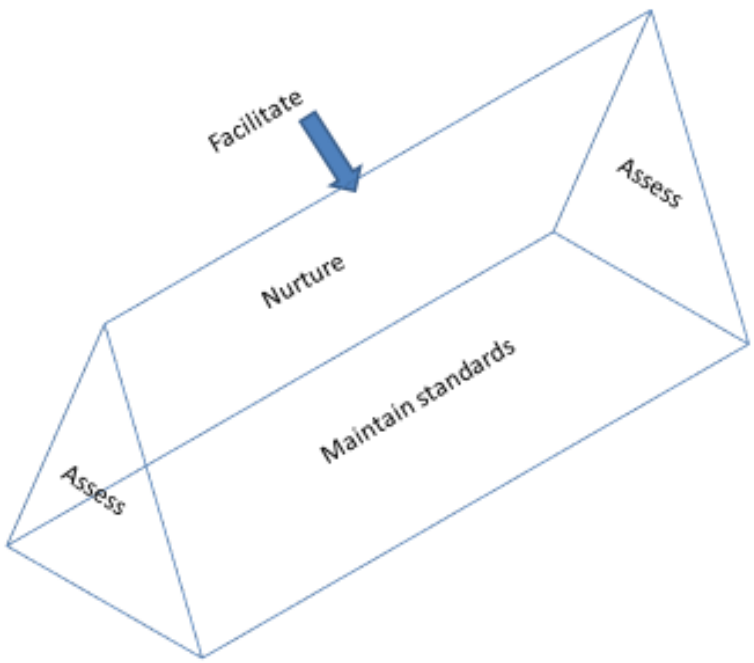
New model of supervision

The three sided model highlights the three key functions of supervision identified in this study: Facilitation; Nurture; Maintenance of Standards, and

depicts each as the face of a triangular prism, as pictured in the basic outline of the structure below. This illustrates the necessity for the supervisor to address all three components of the role, but the way in which not all faces of the prism are visible at once exemplifies the way in which their focus might be on different functions at different times throughout the supervision process.

Central to these processes, and depicted in the model as the back and front ends of the prism, is the supervisor's assessment of the student's readiness, motivation and situation, all of which can impact upon their ability to undertake their dissertation study.

Figure 4 Basic structure of three sided model of supervision



Development of the model

The requirements of master's level study identified by the QAA (2008) comprise of a number of elements which include

- conceptual and practical knowledge and understanding
- analytical, creative, decision making, communication, self-directional, problem solving, and project management skills

- qualities which enable successful master's graduates to take initiative and personal responsibility, and to undertake independent decision making in complex and unpredictable situations within employment.

Most educational programmes leading to master's level qualifications include a taught component followed by a capstone project (Casey, Clark ad Hayes, 2011). These elements are designed to enable students to demonstrate the required knowledge, understanding, qualities and skills which are outlined above. There is general acknowledgement that the role of supervisor in supporting students through their final project is complex, but a lack of conceptual models which articulate this process has been recognised for some time (Pearson and Brew, 2002; Wisker, 2012).

The majority of the published guidance for supervisors on the dissertation project describes how the skills required for the different stages within the final dissertation may be demonstrated (Wisker, 2012; Eley, 2005; Phillips and Pugh, 2010). The stages identified generally include the following: justification for the focus for the study; literature review; project design; data collection and analysis; identification of findings and recommendations; writing up of the written format or dissertation.

Some of this guidance also includes a description of activities or exercises which can be used to enhance the student understanding or the skills which are required at this academic level (Wisker, 2010; Casey et al, 2011), but there is a lack of a clear explanation as to how academics successfully manage or deliver successful supervision (Lee, 2012). The three sided model illustrates the way in which the supervisors in this study used their ongoing assessment of each student as the basis for their decisions about the approaches they adopted at different times throughout the process.

Three sided model of supervision

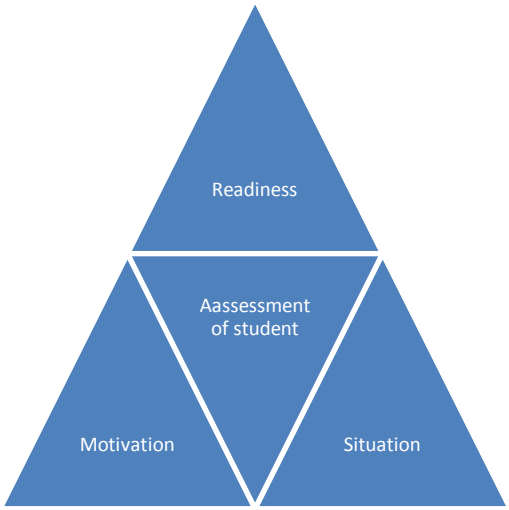
A central element of the supervision process as described by the supervisors in this study was their assessment of the student's needs and expectations. There were three elements to the assessment framework they used:

- the student's readiness to undertake the work involved
- the student's motivation and goals

- the situation in which the student was undertaking their study

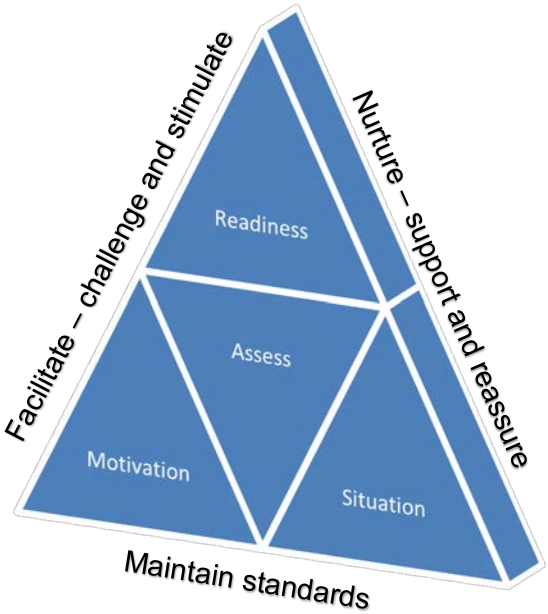
All of these elements were identified as being crucial to a supervisor's approach to supervising a student, as is illustrated and explained below.

Figure 5 Assessment framework used by supervisors



With the assessment as a core element of supervision, running through the length of the prism, the three functions of facilitating, nurturing and maintaining standards are depicted around this:

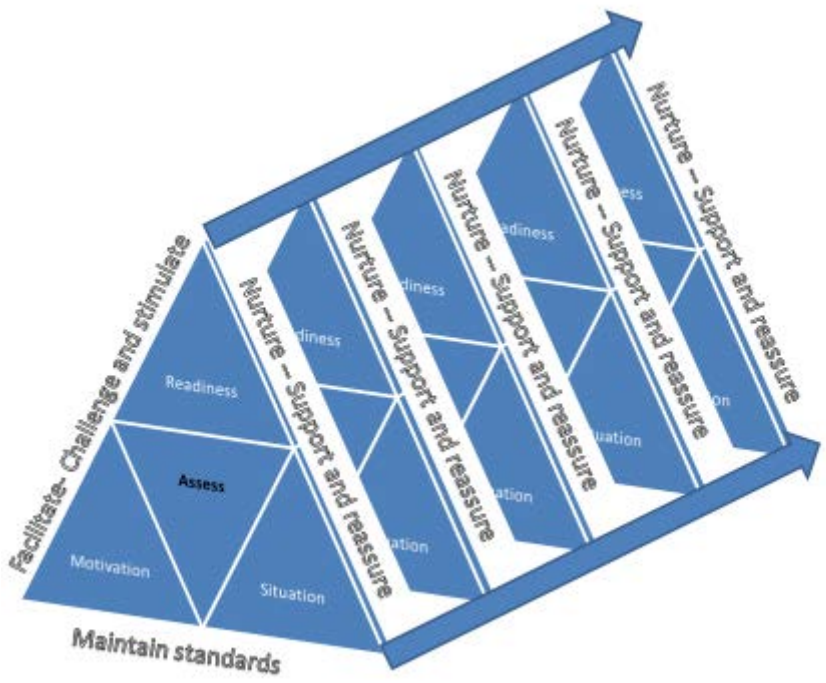
Figure 6 Supervisory functions



Dynamic nature of the three sided model

The assessment and management of the supervision process as outlined above is not one which takes place only during formal supervision meetings, but it is ongoing throughout the period of the dissertation. Supervisors may assess, facilitate, nurture or maintain standards through any contact which takes place with the student, or if they notice that the student has not made contact for a while. This model of supervision demonstrates that the management of supervision occurs on an ongoing basis throughout the dissertation process as is illustrated below.

Figure 7 The three sided model of supervision



In summary, this model of supervision is based around the central aspect of the assessment of the student as an individual learner, which includes three elements: their readiness, motivation and situation. Building on this holistic assessments, there are three functions which supervisors used to manage the supervision process: facilitating; nurturing; maintaining standards. The focus of supervision may address each of these functions at different times throughout the supervision process. The development of this model has

enabled me to conceptualise what supervision involves, and explain what it is that supervisors do, which extends the existing knowledge base of this practice. In order to do so, I accessed the previously unspoken expertise of supervisors and enabled them to appreciate and express their practice in a way that others could understand.

Tacit knowledge

It was recognised within this research that one reason for the lack of an established explanation of supervision at master's level was the difficulty in accessing and extracting supervisor's tacit knowledge, which existed at a subconscious but previously unarticulated level.

Eraut (2000) argued that tacit knowledge can be accessed either through those who practice it 'telling' of the knowledge, or by researchers elucidating enough of the knowledge to infer its nature, which can then be verified or clarified by those who possess it. This, he suggested, can be particular challenging. Circumstances which he suggested could facilitate disclosure of tacit knowledge include an environment where mutual consultation was encouraged or an informal 'out of work hours' setting where people were comfortable enough to make 'riskier' comments. He also advocated the value of discussion where theoretical principles and alternative viewpoints could help individuals articulate their knowledge by helping them to visualise issues more clearly and provide them with an alternative vocabulary which could enable them to articulate aspects of their work which it had previously been difficult to discuss.

The combination of small focus groups, individual interviews and collaborative workshops used within this project provided opportunities for discussions based around personal experience or theoretical models of supervision. These seemed to facilitate supervisors' reflections upon, and vivid descriptions of, their practices. They appeared to share honestly about their experiences, discussing their anxieties and perceived inadequacies as well as the strategies they had used to try to overcome these. There was evidence of a willingness to undertake reflexive consideration of supervisory practice. Those involved recognised the potential benefits of identifying a generally agreed body of knowledge on the processes of supervision which

could be shared with those who are new to the role of supervisor. The potential waste of resources from an organisational perspective if this was not recognised was highlighted:

Daisy: *You learn from experience, but you know you don't want everybody to learn from experience if it's already there.*

Building educational theory

The three sided model of supervision which has been developed through this study is based upon the recognition that supervisory expertise is not a static body of knowledge. It involves a number of elements: an understanding of students' readiness, motivation and situation; the experience to recognise some of the possible contributory issues; an awareness of possible appropriate actions which might be helpful. This notion of supervisory expertise is comparable to Aristotle's concept of 'practical wisdom' which he termed 'phronesis' (Ackrill and Ross, 1973), which has been described as the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances (Carr, 2006). Carr suggested that educators who are seeking to achieve what they perceive to be 'good' or excellent in their practice, develop the ability to make wise judgements in each individual situation.

In their exploration of practice knowledge, Higgs and Tichen (2001) argued that the rationale behind academic judgements and actions which are acknowledged as appropriate should be articulated. Such explanation can contribute to the legitimisation of practice and the external accountability required in a society which is increasingly evidence based and predominantly values scientific knowledge. The development of the above model of supervision provides a conceptual framework which offers a coherent approach for supervisors as they guide students through the dissertation journey. It can be of value to the supervisors as a structure on which they can base reflections in practice, but also as a visual illustration which can be used to explain their role to students throughout the process.

Elliott (2009) described a process through which communities of educators in 'disciplined conversations' (p35) with each other may be able to identify similarities which are relevant in different situations – from which common 'rules-of-thumb' may be discerned. The consideration of these 'rules-of-

thumb' in their different practice contexts can add rigour to the testing of what he suggested could be thought of as emerging elements of educational theory. He refers to the earlier work of Stenhouse in describing the value of collaborative research to the development of educational theory. Stenhouse (1975) proposed that when teachers acted as researchers exploring elements of their practice through action research, they could construct a 'tradition of understanding', which could contribute to the development of educational theory.

In Elliott's work 'Building Educational Theory through Action Research' (2009), he further clarified this process:

> "*It has been my experience that educational action research, which involves teachers sharing and developing their practical insights into the problems and dilemmas of realizing their educational values in concrete teaching situations, together with their judgements about how these can best be resolved, can yield useful summaries of the universal significance of insights and judgements to guide further reflection and action"*. (p35)

The nature of the workshop discussions which took place within this study, where the participants considered the practice of supervision using a range of activities to explore their experiences and insights did take the form of 'disciplined conversations' as described above. The reflexive processes involved enabled supervisors to become more consciously aware of their practices and contributed to the articulation of five key messages for supervisors and the construction of a new model of supervision.

Dewey (1916) recognised that new models or theories of education were 'anticipations of continuity' or connections within an activity, and as such were unproved until tested by their application in practice. He suggested that their value is to guide further observations. Although the supervisors who participated in this research recognised the messages and new model of supervision as representative of their personal practice and experience, further research may result in revisions as they are considered by academics from different disciplines. For example, discussions with colleagues about the findings has indicated that while the notion of the assessment is not as familiar to those from other subject areas, they recognise aspects of this within their own practice.

Conclusion

Through consideration of Reason and Bradbury's (2006) five dimensions of action research, I have justified the reasons why I consider this research to be worthwhile. This included: the relationships between those involved in the research; the practical ways of knowing which were used by the supervisors; the extended ways of knowing demonstrated by them in articulating their practice; the purpose of the work undertaken and the findings produced; the enduring consequence of the research. This includes the articulation of five key messages for supervisors and the construction of a new model of supervision. Both the five key messages and the new model illustrate the processes involved in supervision. Academic staff work with individual students, assessing their abilities and needs. They balance the responsibilities placed upon them in creating an environment and an experience through which students can develop in order to achieve the knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes required to attain master's level outcomes.

The implications of the outcomes of this study and their relevance to supervisory pedagogy will be articulated within the conclusions chapter which follows. The benefits of the findings for other supervisors and their contribution to the provision of academic supervision for master's level students will be outlined and the scope for future research suggested.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Introduction

Undertaking master's level study can be a challenging experience for students, during which they learn to both question the existing evidence base for their discipline and apply it in a new and meaningful way. The dissertation element is designed to enable them to consolidate and utilise their new knowledge and skills to produce a significant piece of academic work. This normally requires them to demonstrate critical and creative abilities in the design and completion of an in depth project. The guidance of an interested, supportive academic can be invaluable during this process, and the alternative; an unengaged or elusive supervisor, can result in student isolation, frustration and lack of progress. The role is acknowledged to be a key one within higher education, which is at the nexus of research and teaching, however preparation for this responsibility is variable.

Unlike doctoral supervision, there is relatively little attention paid to the processes involved in master's level supervision or recognition of the skills required. These academics will normally have sole responsibility for students, during what can be an intensive and transformative period of study. The dearth of literature on this topic, and its omission from induction or preparation programmes for new academics, perpetuates the acknowledged mystery surrounding the practice of supervision.

In the current environment, with particular scrutiny of the quality and impact of teaching within Higher Education, the need for evidence to support the effectiveness of academic support has become increasingly apparent. The lack of evidence and understanding about what it is that supervisors actually do is partly because the process commonly involves two individuals who meet in private, and there appear to be few opportunities for master's supervisors to share or discuss their practice.

The aim of this project was to enable me to better appreciate the complexities and challenges involved in supervising students undertaking their

postgraduate master's dissertation, with a view to improving the understanding of this practice. In order to do this, I sought to identify strategies which were advocated by supervisors, and the factors which could influence the adoption of these.

Design of the study

It was apparent that many of the supervisors felt unprepared for this role and lacked confidence that they were 'doing it right'. Even experienced supervisors who had successfully supported many students over a number of years lacked a conscious awareness of their supervisory approaches or the ways in which they had developed, and were refining, the strategies they used. I envisaged that the aims of the study could be met using an action research approach, in order to enable them to better appreciate and explain their practice, and this did prove to be the case. This collaborative methodology supported their involvement as co-researchers and resulted in them being able to better articulate their practice.

Resolving challenges

Although undertaking research in your own organisation can raise a number of practical and ethical issues, I found that there were advantages in my familiarity with people and institutional processes when seeking to understand the reality of practice. My ability to access resources and identify potential barriers to such research was strengthened by my insider knowledge. The openness of colleagues to reflect upon their experiences and their willingness to share their concerns and anxieties resulted in frank descriptions and explanations of this aspect of their academic role.

The main challenge I experienced during the research was that of the availability of the supervisors. Although willing to participate, the busyness of their roles could have resulted in their initial enthusiasm waning when their academic responsibilities prevented their involvement in the interviews and discussions. The development of a 'communicative space' where individuals appreciated that they could contribute as and when they were able, was effective in maintaining commitment to the study. Their continued

involvement helped to ensure that the findings were grounded in the realities of practice, and the ongoing contact with one another maintained the momentum of the research.

As a result of our combined exploration of supervision, those involved accepted that they had some legitimate expertise in this aspect of the academic role. This was liberating for some, who appreciated that they 'were not as bad as they had thought'. The suggestion that we should develop a resource for other supervisors emerged from a gradual acknowledgement that the findings of this study constituted a legitimate evidence base for the practice of supervision, which could be of value to others. There was also a recognition that the existing situation, where all those new to the role had to start from scratch and learn about supervision through experience, was wasteful and unnecessary.

Contribution to knowledge

The need for supervisors to acknowledge their practice and to express it in language which makes their role understandable to others has been evident for some time, and the recent QAA report on 'mastersness' reinforced this (Bamber, 2015; QAA, 2013). Bamber highlighted the contribution that local studies such as this one could make to the pedagogy of supervision, in the generation of knowledge through 'evidence-informed improvement cycles' (Bamber, 2015 p221), which could enlighten practice in other subject areas. The benefits of the findings of this research, which include the articulation of five key messages about supervision, and the development of a new three sided model of supervision, are that they can be used as a guide for new academic staff who may be struggling to understand the concept of supervision, and as a model for established supervisors to reflect on the strategies they use.

As a by-product of the research, the supervisors involved recognised an increase in their self-awareness and confidence in their ability to undertake this role. The development of a communicative space where they could reflect on their practice with their colleagues proved to be a helpful opportunity for them to consider and refine their supervisory strategies. In future projects to explore different elements of academic identity, this

approach could prove useful in facilitating continuing professional development or collaborative research into educational practice in the midst of busy academic lives.

Future research

The nature of the action research approach which underpinned this study has meant that it focused on the practice of academics from two specific disciplines, within one university. Some elements of the key messages and the new, three sided model of supervision may only be applicable to the professional disciplines of the supervisors involved in the study, however when the findings have been shared with colleagues from other universities, they have resonated with those from different academic backgrounds. Future research could explore how well the findings of this study reflect research supervision within other disciplines. In particular, the relevance of the model for academics working in other subject areas should be explored, with a view to identifying any amendments which could strengthen its applicability across the higher education sector, both with in the UK and beyond.

I acknowledge that while this study focuses on the supervisor, there are other stakeholders who have a vested interest in supervision. Future research should explore the applicability of the findings, initially with the health and education master's students who have been supervised by those who participated in this research. This work should explore how helpful they have found their supervisor's use of the responsive, structured model described in this study.

Conclusion

As a result of this research study we have a clearer understanding of what academic staff do when they supervise master's students. Central to their supervision is an assessment of the individual student's readiness, motivation and situation. Building upon this assessment, academics balance their role in facilitating the student's academic progress alongside nurturing their development, while at the same time promoting the achievement of the required standards.

The knowledge created during this research will be of benefit in the preparation of new supervisors as they seek to ascertain what it is they are supposed to be doing as they work with individual students. It will also be of interest to established supervisors who are seeking to better understand and enhance this aspect of their practice.

References

Ackrill, J.L. and Ross, W.D. (1973) Aristotle's Ethics London: Faber

Ahern, K. J. (1999). Ten tips for reflexive bracketing. Qualitative Health Research 9(6)407- 411.

Ahern, K. and Manathunga, C, (2004) Clutch-Starting Stalled Research Students Innovative Higher Education 28(4) 237-254

Amundsen, C. and McAlpine, L. (2009) 'Learning supervision': trial by fire Innovations in Education and Teaching International 46:3, 331-342

Anderson, C., Day, K. and McLaughlin, P. (2008). "Student perspectives on the dissertation process in a masters degree concerned with professional practice." Studies in Continuing Education 30(1) 33-49.

Anderson, C., Day, K. and McLaughlin, P. (2006) "Mastering the dissertation: Lecturers' representations of the purposes and processes of masters' level dissertation supervision" Studies in Higher Education 31(2) 149-168

Antman, L. and Olsson, T. (2007) A two-dimensional matrix model for analysing scholarly approaches to teaching and learning. In C. Rust (Ed.), Improving student learning through teaching. Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development

Apsland, T. (2003) A research narrative: Confronting the tensions of methodological struggle IN O'Donoghue, T. and Punch, K. Qualitative Research in Action: Doing and Reflecting London: Routledge Palmer

Argyris, C. and Schon, N, D. (1974) Theory in Practice: increasing personal effectiveness (San Francisco, CA,Jossey–Bass).

Armitage, A. (2007) "Supervisory Power and Postrgraduate Education" International Journal of Management Education 6(2) 18-29

Armitage, A. (2006) Consultant or Academic? Frameworks of Supervisory Practice to Support Student Learning and Postgraduate Research The Higher Education Academy Annual Conference July 2006

Armitage, S. and Rees, C. (1988) Project Supervision. Nurse Education Today 8, 99-104

Armstrong, K., (2013) Best practice in managing, supervising and assessing post-graduate marketing dissertations. York: Higher Education Academy

Arthur, S., Mitchell, M., Lewis, J. and Nichols, C.M. (2014) Designing Fieldwork In Ritchie, J., Lerwis, J., Nicholls, C.M. and Ormston, R. (2014) Qualitative Research Practice London: Sage Publications

Bamber, V. (2015) Mixing Decks: Frameworks for Master's Scholarship Higher Education Quarterly 69(3) 221-236

Barnett, R. (2000) Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity Buckingham: SRHE Open University Press

Barnett, R. Di Napoli, R. (2008) Changing Identities in Higher Education: Voicing Perspectives London: Routledge

Bartlett, A. and Mercer, G. (2001) Postgraduate Research Supervision: Transforming (R)Elations New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Barbour, R. S. (2007) Doing focus groups London: Sage

Barnacle, R., and Usher. R. (2003). Assessing the quality of research training: The case of part time candidates in professional work. Higher Education Research and Development 22,
(3): 345–58.

Baxter, H. (1987) System and 'life-world' in Habermas' Theory of communicative action Theory and Society 16(1) 39-86
BERA (2011) British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/ethical-guidelines (accessed 3/4/12)

Becher, T., Henkel, M. and Kogan, M. (1994) Graduate education in Britain London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Blas, E., Jasman, A. and Levy, R. (2012) Supervisor reflections on developing doctoralness in practice-based doctoral students Quality Assurance in Education 20(1), 31-41

Blau, P. (1964) Exchange and Power in Social Life New York: Wiley

Boucher, C. and Smyth, A. (2004) "Up close and personal: reflections on our experience of supervising research candidates who are using personal reflective techniques" Reflective Practice 5(3) 345-356

Bourner, T. (2008) The fully functioning university Higher Education Review 40(2) 26-46

Bowen, J. amd Hobson, P.R. (1987) Theories of education: Studies of significant innovation in Western educational thought (2nd ed) Auckland: John Wiley and Sons

Brabazon, T. 2013. 10 things your PhD supervisor will never tell you Times Higher Education July 11,
https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/10-truths-a-phd-supervisor-will-never-tell-you/2005513.article [accessed 5/8/2016]

Braun, V. and Clarke, E. (2006) Using thematic analysis in Psychology Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2) 77-101

Brew , A. and Peseta, T. (2004). Changing postgraduate supervision practice: a programme to encourage learning through reflection and feedback. Innovations in Education and Teaching International 41(1): 5-22.

Brockbank, A. and McGill, I. (1998) Facilitating reflective learning in higher education Buckingham: Open University Press

Brookfield, Stephen. (1995) Becoming a critically reflective teacher San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Brown, L. (2007). A consideration of the challenges involved in supervising international master's students Journal of Further and Higher Education 31(3), 239–248

Bruce,C.,and Stoodley,I.,(2013). Experiencing higher degree research supervision as teaching Studies in Higher Education 38(2) 226-241 Retrieved from eprints.qut.edu.au/40969/ [accessed 4/3/2015]

Bruce,C.,and Stoodley,I.,(2012) Resources to assist research student supervision Queensland University of Technology http://eprints.qut.edu.au/ [accessed 4/3/2015]

Bryman, A. (2012) Social Research Methods (4th Edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press

Burchell, H. and Dyson, J. (2005) Action research in higher education: Exploring ways of creating and holding the space for reflection Educational Action Research 13(2) 291-300

Burgoyne, J. (2011) Evaluating action learning: A perspective informed by critical realism, networks and complex adaptive system theory In Pedler, M. Action Learning in Practice Farnham: Gower

Burr, V. (2015) Social Constructionism (3rd edition) New York: Routledge

Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1979) Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Buttery, E., and Ruchter, E.M. (2005) An overview of the elements that influence efficiency in postgraduate supervisory practice arrangements. International Journal of Educational Management 19 (1) 7-26

Calderhead,J. (1987) Exploring teachers' thinking London: Cassell

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S (2009) Educational Action Research: A critical approach IN Noffke, S. and Somekh, B. (2009) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research London: Sage Publications Ltd

Carr, W. (2006) Philosophy, methodology and action research Journal of Philosophy in Education 40 (4) 421-435

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research Lewes: Falmer Press and Deakin University Press

Casey, D., Clark, L. and Hayes, S. (2011) Study Skills for Masters' Level Students Exeter: Reflect Press

Cherry, N. (2012) The paradoc and fog of supervision Quality Assurance in Education 20 (1) 6-19.

Christie, H., Tett, L., Cree, V.E., Hounsell, J. and McCune, V. (2008), A real rollercoaster of confidence and emotions: learning to be a university student, Studies in Higher Education, 33 (5) 567-81

Clandinin, D. and Connelly, F. (1987) Teachers' knowledge: What counts as personal in studies of the personal Journal of Curriculum Studies 19(6)487-550

Clark B.R. (1993) (ed) The Research Foundations of Graduate Education University of California Press: Santa Monica

Cobban, A (1975) The Medieval Universities: Their Development and Organisation, London: Methuen

Coghlin, D. and Brannick, T. (2014) Doing action research in your own organization (4th edition) London: Sage Publications Ltd

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) Research methods in education (7th ed) London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group

Connell, R.W. (1985) How to supervise a PhD Australian Universities' Review 28(2) 38-41

Conti, J., Hewson, D. and Ibsen, J. (2001) Power, voice and connection In Bartlett, A. and Mercer, G. (2001) Postgraduate Research Supervision: Transforming (R)Elations New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Cornforth, S. and Claiborne, L. B. (2008) Supervision in educational contexts: raising the stakes in a global world Teaching in Higher Education 13(6): 691-701.

Craig, D.V. (2009). Action Research Essentials San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Incorporated Publishers

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Crotty, M. (1996) Phenomenology and Nursing Research Melbourne: Churchill Livingston

Davis, K., Brownie, S., Doran, F., Evans, S., Hutchinson, M., Mozolic-Staunton, B., Provost, S. and van Aken, R. (2012), Action learning enhances professional development of research supervisors: an Australian health science exemplar Nursing and Health Sciences 14, 102–108

De Beer, M. And Mason, R.B. (2009) Using a blended approach to facilitate postgraduate supervision Innovations in Education and Teaching International 46(2) 213-226

de Kleijn, R.A.M., Meijer, P.C, Brekelmans, M. and Pilot, A. (2015) Adaptive research supervision: exploring expert thesis supervisors' practical knowledge Higher Education Research & Development, 34:1, 117-130

de Kleijn, R.A.M., Meijer, P.C, Brekelmans, M. and Pilot, A. (2014): Adaptive research supervision: exploring expert thesis supervisors'

practical knowledge, Higher Education Research & Development 15(1) 117-130

de Kleijn, R. A. M., Mainhard, M.T., P. C. Meijer, P. C. Brekelmans, M. and Pilot, A. (2013) Master's Thesis Projects: Student Perceptions of Supervisor Feedback. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 38 (8): 1012–26.

de Kleijn, R. A. M., Mainhard, M.T., P. C. Meijer, P. C., Pilot, A. and Brekelmans, M. (2012) Master's Thesis Supervision: Relations between Perceptions of the Supervisor-Student Relationship, Final Grade, Perceived Supervisor Contribution to Learning and Student Satisfaction Studies in Higher Education 37 (8): 925–39

Delamont, S. & Atkinson, P. (2004) Successful research careers: A practical guide, Buckingham, SRHE and Open University Press

Delamont, S. , Atkinson, P. and Parry, O. (2000) The Doctoral Experience: Success and Failure in Graduate School London: Falmer Press

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P. & Parry, O. (1997) Supervising the PhD: A guide to success Buckingham, UK: SRHE & Open University Press

Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2010) One Step Beyond: Making the most of the post graduate education sector http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/p/10-704-one-step-beyond-postgraduate-education.pdf (accessed 6/6/2011)

Dewey, J. (1916) Democracy and Education New York: Macmillan

Doloriert, C., Sambrook, S. and Stewart, J. (2012) Power and emotion in doctoral supervision: implications for HRD European Journal of Training and Development 36 (7) 732-750

Donnelly, R. (2013) Enabling connections in postgraduate supervision for an applied eLearning professional development programme International Journal for Academic Development 18(4) 356-370

Drennan, J. and Clarke, M. (2009) Coursework masters programmes: the student's experience of research and research supervision Studies in Higher Education 34(5): 483-500.

Dysthe, O., Samara, A. and Westrheim, K. (2006) Multivoiced supervision of Masters students: a case study of alternative supervision practices in higher education Studies in Higher Education 31(3): 299-318.

Eley, A. and Murray, M (2009) How to be an effective supervisor: Best practice in research student supervision Maidenhead. OU Press McGraw-Hill Education

Eley A, Jennings R (2005) Effective Postgraduate Supervision. Maidenhead. OU Press McGraw-Hill Education

Elliott, J. (2009) Building Educational Theory through Action Research IN Noffke, S. and Somekh, B. (2009) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research London: Sage Publications Ltd

Elton, L (2008) Collegiality and Complexity: Humboldt's Relevance to British Universities Today Higher Education Quarterly 62(3) 224-236

Elton, L. (1994) Staff development in relation to research In Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Ryan, Y. (Eds.) Quality in postgraduate education (pp. 24-37). London: Kogan Page

Emilsson, U. M. and Johnsson, E. (2007). Supervision of supervisors: on developing supervision in postgraduate education Higher Education Research & Development 26(2): 163-179.

Engström, Y (2009) Expansive Learning: Toward an activity-theoretical reconceptualization IN Illeris, K. (ed) (2009) Contemporary Theories of Learning Abingdon: Routledge

Engström, Y. (1999) Activity theory and individual and social transformation IN Engestrom, Y., Miettinen, R. and Punamäki, R-L. (Eds.), Perspectives on activity theory (pp.19–38). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Eraut, M. (2007). Early career learning at work and its implications for universities. In Entwistle, N. and Tomlinson, P. (Eds.), Student learning and university teaching (Psychological Aspects of Education – Current Trends, Monograph Series, No. 4; pp. 113–133). Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society

Eraut, M. (2000) Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work British Journal of Educational Psychology 70, 113–136

Eraut, M. (1994) Developing professional knowledge and competence London: Falmer Press

Erichsen, E. and Bolliger, D. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student isolation in traditional and online environments. Educational Technology Research and Development 59(3): 309-326.

Fan, Y. (2013). The experiences of international students with dissertation study: Business Education. York: Higher Education Academy

Fals-Borda, O. (2006 Participatory (Action) Reasearch in Social Theory: Origins and challenges IN Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2006) Handbook of Action Research London: Sage Publications p27-3

Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (2008) The sustainability of Learning and Teaching in English Higher Education FSSG http://www.hefce.ac.uk/finance/fundinghe/trac/fssg/ (accessed 14/4/12)

Finch, H., Lewis, J. and Turley, C. (2014) Focus groups IN Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton-Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R. Qualitative Research Practice London: Sage Publications Ltd

Firth, A. and Martens, (2008) Transforming supervisors? A critique of postliberal approaches to research supervision Teaching in Higher Education 13(3) 279-289

Flick, U. (2009) An introduction to qualitative research (4th Edition) London: Sage

Foreman-Peck, L. and Winch, C. (2010) Using Educational Research to Inform Practice London:Routledge

Forsey, M. (2012) Interviewing individuals IN Delamont, S. Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Herder & Herder

Frost, D.M. (2011) A search for meaning: recognising the potential of narrative research in social policy-making efforts Sexuality Research and Social Policy 8(3) 151-161

Frost, A. (1999). Supervision of NESB postgraduate students in science-based disciplines. In Y. Ryan, & O. Zuber- Skerritt (Eds.), Supervising postgraduates from non-speaking backgrounds (pp. 101–109). Birmingham, UK: Open University Press

Gatfield, T. (2005) An investigation into PhD supervisory management styles: Development of a dynamic conceptual model and its managerial implications Journal of Higher Education and Policy Management 27(3) 311-25

Gibbs, G. (2007) Analysing Qualitative Data London: Sage

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology 28(2) 235- 260

Grant, B. M. (2005). Fighting for space in supervision: fantasies, fairytales, fictions and fallacies International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 18(3): 337

Grant, B. M. (2003) Mapping the pleasures and risks of supervision Discourse studies in the cultural politics of education 24(2) 175

Grant, B. (2001). Dirty work: A code for supervision read against the grain. In A. Bartlett & G. Mercer (Eds.) Postgraduate research supervision: Transforming (r)elations(pp. 13–24). New York: Peter Lang

Grant, B. (1999) Walking on a rackety bridge: Mapping supervision. Paper presented at HERDSA Annual International Conference, July 12_15, Melbourne, Australia. http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/1999/pdf/grant.pdf (accessed 27/11/2015)

Grant, B., Graham, A. and Jones, J. (1994) Guidelines for discussion: a tool for managing postgraduate supervision In Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Ryan, Y. (Eds.) Quality in postgraduate education (pp. 165 – 177)). London: Kogan Page

Green, B. (2005) Unfinished business: subjectivity and supervision Higher Education Research and Development 2(2) 151-163

Greenwood, D.J. (2012) Doing and learning action research in the neo-liberal world of contemporary higher education Action Research 10 (2) 115 – 132

Greenwood, D.J., Whyte, W.F. and Harkavy, I. (1993) Participatory action research as a process and a goal Human Relations 46(2)175-192

Goffman, E. (1959) The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life New York: Doubleday

Guerin, C., Kerr, H. and Green, I. (2015) Supervision pedagogies: narratives from the field Teaching in Higher Education 20(1), 107-118

Guerin, C. and Green, I. (2013) Collaborative critique in a supervisor development programme Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 50(4) 399-409

Gurr, G. 2001. Negotiating the 'rackety bridge': A dynamic model for aligning supervisory style with research student development. Higher Education Research and Development 20, (1): 81-92

Habermas, J. (1984) The theory of communicative action (Vols I-II) London: Polity Press

Hallett, F. (2010): The postgraduate student experience of study support: a phenomenographic analysis Studies in Higher Education 35(2) 225-238

Halse, C. (2011): Becoming a supervisor': the impact of doctoral supervision on supervisors' learning Studies in Higher Education, 36(5), 557-570

Halse, C., and Malfroy, J. (2010). Retheorizing doctoral supervision as professional work. Studies in Higher Education 35(1), 79–92.

Hamilton, J., Carson, S. and Ellison, E. (2014) Building distributed leadership for effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees Sydney: Australian Government

Hamill, C., & Sinclair, H. (2010). Bracketing-practical considerations in Husserlian Phenomenological research. Nurse Researcher, 17 (2) 16-24

Hammersley, M. (2013) What is Qualitative Research? London: Bloomsbury

Hammond, J., Ryland, K., Tennant, M. and Boud, D. (2010) Building Research Supervision and Training across Australian Universities

http://www.academia.edu/2314934/Building_Research_Supervision_and_Training_across_Australian_Universities [accessed 15/4/2016]

Hart, E. and Bond, M. (1995). Action research for health and social care Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hatton, N., Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in Teacher Education: Towards Definition and Implementation. The University of Sydney: School of Teaching and Curriculum Studies http://www2.edfac.usyd.edu.au/LocalResource/Study1/hattonart.html (accessed 27/5/2012)

Heath, T. 2002. A quantitative analysis of PhD students' views of supervision. Higher Education Research and Development 21(1): 41–53

Hemer, S.R. (2012): Informality, power and relationships in postgraduate supervision: supervising PhD candidates over coffee, Higher Education Research & Development http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.674011

HEPI,(2010) Higher Education Policy Institute Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom http://www.hepi.ac.uk/files/45%20Postgraduate%20education%20full.pdf (accessed 4/1/2012)

Herbst, P. (1973) Work, Labour and University Education IN Peters, R.S. The Philosophy of Education Oxford University Press, Oxford

Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2006). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research with rather than on people. In Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (Eds.), Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice p179-188. London: Sage

Hetrick. S and Trafford, V.N. (1995) The mutuality of expectation: mapping the perceptions of dissertation supervisors and candidates in postgraduate department of a new university. Journal of Graduate Education 2 (2), 35-43

Higgs, J. and Tichen, A. (2001) Doing, Knowing, Being and Becoming: The Nature of Professional Practice IN Higgs, J. Professional Practice in Health, Education and the Creative Arts Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2014) A Review of the Cost of Postgraduate Taught Provision http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/What,we,do/Cross-cutting,work/Postgrad/pgtcostreview.pdf [accessed 17/1/2016]

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2015 a) Table 2-Students by level of study 2000/01 to 2013/14. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/pressOffice/sfr210/071277_student_sfr210_1314_table_2.xlsx [accessed 17/1/2016]

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2015 b) Table 1 - HE students by HE provider, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2013/14. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1973/239/ [accessed 17/1/2016]

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2015 c) Table 1 - All students by HE institution, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2010/11. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1973/239/ [accessed 17/1/2016]

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2013), Students by Institution 2010/2011 – Table 1 All students by HE institution, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2010/2011 www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/view/1973/239/ [accessed 17/1/2016]

Hockey, J. (1996b), Motives and meaning amongst PhD supervisors in the social sciences British Journal of Sociology of Education 17 (4) 489-506

Homans, G. (1961) Social Behaviour New York: Harcourt, Brace and World

Huang, R. (2008) Decoding critical thinking for Chinese and Indian international students studying in tourism and hospitality subjects. York: Higher Education Academy. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/enhancing-international-learning-experience-critical-thinking-discussion-chinese [accessed 26/11/2015]

Hughes, C and Tight, M. (2013) The metaphors we study by: the doctorate as a journey and/or as work Higher Education Research & Development, 32 (5) 765-775

Hyland, F., Trahar, S., Anderson, J. and Dickens, A. (2008) A changing world: the internationalisation experiences of staff and students (home and international) in UK Higher Education The Higher Education Academy http://escalate.ac.uk/4967 [accessed 27/09/2016]

Inskipp, F. and Proctor, B. (1995) The Art, Craft and Tasks of Counselling Supervision London: Cascade

James, R. and Baldwin. G. (1999) Eleven practices of effective postgraduate supervisors Centre for the study of Higher Education and the School of Graduate Studies. University of Melbourne

Jarvis, P. (2012) The Sociology of Adult and Continuing Education (3rd edition) Lundon: Routledge

Jasman, A. (2012) From behind closed doors: making the tacit explicit in research supervision practice International Journal of Organisational Behaviour Volume 17(1), 28-41

Johnston, S. (1995) Building a sense of community in a research master's course Studies in Higher Education 20(3) 279-291

Jump, P. (2012) Postgraduates may be put off when reforms do not serve master's well Times Higher Education No 2038 22-29 February p9

Kandlebinder, P (2000) A case study approach to supporting change in postgraduate supervision ASET-HERDSA conference proceedings available at U:\EdD2\Articles\2014 lit review articles\ASET-HERDSA 2000 Kandlbinder - a case study approach to supporting change in postgraduate supervision 2000.htm (accessed 27/11/2015)

Katz, P.M. (2005) Retrieving the Master's Degree from the Dustbin of History A Report to the Members of the American Historical Association https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/retrieving-the-masters-degree-from-the-dustbin-of-history [accessed 17/01/2015]

Kegan, R, (2009) What 'form' transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning IN Illeris, K. (ed) Contemporary Theories of Learning Abingdon: Routledge

Kemmis, S. (2010): What is to be done? The place of action research Educational Action Research 18(4) 417-427

Kemmis, S. (2009): Action research as a practice-based practice Educational Action Research 17(3) 463-474

Kemmis, S. (2006). Exploring the relevance of critical theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice (pp. 94-105). London: Sage.

Kemmis, S. (2001). Exploring the relevance of critical theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jürgen Habermas. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice (pp. 91-102). London: Sage.

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2005) Participatory action research: Communicative action and the public sphere IN Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 3rd edn) Thousand Oaks CA: Sage p 559-604

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1988) The Action Research Planner (3rd edn) Victoria: Deakin University Press

Kiley, M. and Cumming, J. (2014) Enhanced learning pathways and support for coursework master's students: challenges and opportunities, Higher Education Research and Development, 34 (1) 105-116

Kiley, M. And Wisker, G. (2009) Threshold concepts in research education and evidence of threshold crossing Higher Education Research and Development 28(4), 431-41

King, H. (2005) Editorial, Planet :14 (2-3) 14 www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/planet/p14/hked.pdf (accessed 3/4/12)

Kneale, P. (2005) Enthusing staff delivering taught Masters programmes Planet 14:13 https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enthusing-staff-delivering-taught-masters-programmes (accessed 20/12/15)

Knowles, M.S., Holton SEF III, and Swanson, R.A. (2005), The Adult Learner, San Diego, CA: Elsevier

Koch, T. (1995). Interpretive approaches in nursing research: The influence of Husserl and Heidegger. Journal of Advanced Nursing 21, (5) 827-836.

Koshy, E., Koshy, V. and Waterman, H. (2011) Action Research in Healthcare London: Sage Publications Ltd

Krueger, R.A. and Casey, M.A. (2009) Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (4th edition) Thousand Oaks CA: Sage

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009), InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lee, A. (2012) Successful Research Supervision: Advising students doing research London: Routledge

Lee, A. (2008) How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision Studies in Higher Education, 33(3), 267-281

Leitch, S. (2006) HM Treasury Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_index.htm (Accessed 2/4/2012)

Leman,J. (2015) What do taught postgraduates want? The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2015 https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/postgraduate-taught-experience-survey-2015 [accessed 17/1/2016]

Lessing, A.C. and Schulze, S. (2003) Lecturer's experiences of postgraduate supervision in a distance education context South African Journal of Higher Education 17(2) 159-168

Lewis, J., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R. and Morrell, G. (2014) Generalising from qualitative research In Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J.(eds)(2003) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers London: Sage Publications

Li, S. and Seale, C. (2007), Managing criticism in PhD supervision: a qualitative case study Studies in Higher Education 32(4) 511-26

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, G.E. (1985) Naturalistic Enquiry, Beverly Hills CA: Sage

Lindén, J., Ohlin, M. and Brodin, E.M. (2013) Mentorship, supervision and learning experience in PhD education, Studies in Higher Education 38(5), 639-662

Lumadi, M.W. (2008) The Pedagogy of Postgraduate Research Supervision and It's Complexities College Teaching Methods & Styles Journal 4(11) 25-32

Lusted, D. (1986) Why pedagogy? Screen 27(3) 2-14

Maxwell, J.A. (2005) Qualitative Research Design: An interactive approach Thousand Oaks: Sage

McCallin, A. and Nayar, S. (2012). Postgraduate research supervision: a critical review of current practice Teaching in Higher Education 17(1) 1-12.

McCarthy, G. (2012) The case for coaching as an approach to addressing challenges in PhD supervision International Journal of Organisational Behaviour 17(1) 15-27

McCormack, C. (2004). Tensions between student and institutional conceptions of postgraduate research. Studies in Higher Education 29(3) 319-334.

McCormack, C. And Pamphilon, B. (2004) More than a confessioal: post-modern groupwork to support postgraduate supervisors' professional development Innovations in Education and Teaching International 41(1) 23-37

McKenna, C. and Hughes, J. (2015) A report on the locations and identidy construcyion of academic developers HEDERA and Institute of Education http://www.seda.ac.uk/resources/files/Legacy_Grant_Final_Report_ExILED.pdf [accessed 12/02/2016]

McLure, J. 2005. Preparing a laboratory-based thesis: Chinese international research students' experiences of supervision. Teaching in Higher Education 10 (1): 3-16

McMichael, P. (1993) Starting up as supervisors: The perceptions of newcomers in postgraduate supervision in Australia and Sri Lanka Studies in Higher Education 18(1) 15-26

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2006) All you need to know about action research London: Sage Publications

McTaggart, R. (1998) Is validity really an issue in PAR Studies in Culture, Organization and Societies 4(2)211-237

Malfroy, J. (2005) Doctoral supervision, workplace research and changing pedagogic practices Higher Education Research & Development 24:2, 165-178

Manathunga, C. (2005). The development of research supervision: Turning the light on a private space International Journal for Academic Development 10(1): 17-30

Manathunga, C. (2002). Detecting and dealing with early warning signs in postgraduate research education: A work-in-progress. In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.), Quality in postgraduate research: Integrating perspectives conference proceedings, Adelaide, April 18–19, (pp. 80–88). Adelaide, Australia: Advisory Centre for University Education, The University of Adelaide

Manathunga, C. and Goozee, J. (2007). Challenging the dual assumption of the 'always/already' autonomous student and effective supervisor Teaching in Higher Education 12(3) 309-322

Marshall, C. and Rossmann, G.B. (2011) Designing Qualitative Research 5th Edition Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Mason, J. (2002) Qualitative Researching (2nd Edition) London: Sage

Matthews, D. (2014) International and postgrad fee survey Times Higher Education August 21 https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/international-and-postgrad-fee-survey-2014/2015207.article [accessed 17/1/2016]

Maxwell, T.W. and Smyth, R. (2011) Higher degree research supervision: from practice toward theory Higher Education Research & Development 30(2), 219-231

May, T. (2011) Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process (4th edition) Buckingham University Press

Mayer, J. and Land, R. (2006) Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge Abingdon: Routledge

Mayer, J., Ashburner, C. and Holman, C. (2006) Becoming connected, being caring Educational Action Research 14(4) 477-496

Mellors-Bourne, R.., Hooley, T., & Marriott, J. (2014). Understanding how people choose to pursue taught postgraduate study Bristol: HEFCE.

Mezirow, J. (2009) An overview of transformative learning IN Illeris, K. (ed) Contemporary Theories of Learning Abingdon: Routledge

Mezirow, J. (1991) Transformative dimensions of adult learning San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Mezirow, J. (1978) Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community colleges New York: Teachers College, Columbia University file:///U:/EdD2/Articles/2015b%20articles/Mezirow%201978%20Ed%20Perspc%20Transform.pdf [accessed 17/1/2016]

Middleton, S. (2010). Rhythms of place: Time and space in the doctoral experience. In M. Walker and P. Thompson (Eds.), The Routledge doctoral supervisor's companion: Supporting effective research in education and the social sciences (pp. 185–196). London: Routledge

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook London: Sage

Morgan, M. (2015) Study expectations of different domiciled Postgraduate-Taught students in a UK post-1992-institution Quality Assurance in Education 23 (3) 233 - 249

Morgan, M. and Direito, I. (2015) Postgraduate Experience Project Briefing Paper No.12: Challenges and moving forward file:///U:/EdD2/Articles/2015b%20articles/PEP%20Briefing-Paper-12-Challenges-and-moving-forward.pdf [accessed 17/1/2016]

Morgan, M. (2014) Patterns, drivers and challenges pertaining to postgraduate taught study: an international comparative analysis Higher Education Research & Development, 33(6) 1150-1165

Morgan, M. (2013) Individual Project Report. Understanding Prior Feedback Experiences of New Postgraduate Taught (PGT) STEM Students' and Their Expectations and Attitudes Towards PGT Level Study at A 1992 Institution. Higher Education Academy Individual Grant. York: Higher Education Academy

Morgan, W. and Ryan, M. (2003). Rendering an Account: An open-state archive in postgraduate supervision Higher Education Research & Development **22**(1) 77-90

Moriarty, B., Danaher, P.A. and Danaher, G. (2008). Freire and dialogical pedagogy: a means for interrogating opportunities and challenges in Australian postgraduate supervision International Journal of Lifelong Education **27**(4): 431-442

Morris, S., Pitt, R. and Manathunga, C. (2012) Students' experiences of supervision in academic and industry settings: results of an Australian study, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 37(5) 619-636

Nagapann, R., Craswell, N. and Grundy, (2001) Life beyond a PhD In Bartlett, A. and Mercer, G. (2001) Postgraduate Research Supervision: Transforming (R)Elations New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Neuman, W.L. (2014) Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative methods (7th edition) Harlow: Pearson Education Limited

Nicholls, C.M., Mills, L. and Kotecha, M. (2014) Observation IN Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J.(eds)(2003) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers London: Sage Publications

Noffke, S.E. (2009) Revisiting the professional, personal and political dimensions of action research IN Noffke, S. and Somekh, B. (2009) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research London: Sage Publications Ltd

Noddings, N. (2012) The caring relation in teaching Oxford Review of Education 38(6) 771-781

Norton, L.S. (2009) Action research in learning and teaching London: Routledge

Nulty,D., Kiley, M. and Meyers,N. (2009): Promoting and recognising excellence in the supervision of research students: an evidence-based framework Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 34:6, 693-707

O'Donnell, V., Tobbell, J., Lawthom, R. and Zammit, M. (2009) Transition to Postgraduate Study: Practice, Participation and the Widening Participation Agenda Active Learning in Higher Education 10(1) 26–40

O'Rourke, B. (1997). What is supervision? Teaching Review March 26-40 Canberra: CELT, The University of Canberra

Ormston, R. Spencer, L., Barnard, M, and Snape. D. (2014) The foundations of qualitative research In Ritchie, J., Lerwis, J., Nicholls, C.M. and Ormston, R. (2014) Qualitative Research Practice London: Sage Publications

Ospina, S., Dodge, J., Godsoe, B., Minieri, J., Reza, S., and Schall, E. (2004). From consent to mutual inquiry: Balancing democracy and authority in action research. Action Research, 2(1), 45-66.

Palfreyman, D. (ed.) (2001) The Oxford Tutorial: Thanks, You Taught Me How to Think. Oxford: OxCHEPS

Palmer, D.D. (1996) Kierkegaard for Beginners New York: Writers and Readers Publishing Inc

Parahoo, K. (2006). Nursing research: Principles, Process and Issues (2nd ed.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Park, C. (2007) Redefining the doctorate. York: Higher Education Academy
Park, C The end of the secret garden: reframing postgraduate supervision Research Supervision, an Online Journal http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/current_journal (accessed 4/4/2012)

Park, C. (2005) New variant PhD: The changing nature of the doctorate in the UK Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management 27(2) 189-207

Parker, R. (2009). A learning community approach to doctoral education in social sciences. Teaching in Higher Education 14, (1): 43_54

Parkin, F. (2002) Max Weber Chichester: Ellis Horwood

Passmore, W. (2006) Action research in the workplace IN Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2006) Handbook of Action Research London: Sage Publications p38-48

Pearson, M. and Kayrooz, C. (2004) Enabling critical reflection on research supervisory practice International Journal for Academic Development 9:1, 99-116

Pearson, M. and Brew, A. (2002). Research Training and Supervision Development Studies in Higher Education 27(2): 135-150.

Perkin, H. (2008) History of Universities IN The History of Higher Education (2nd ed) Goodchild, L. and Weschler, H. (eds) Boston: Pearson

Petersen, E. B. (2007). Negotiating academicity: postgraduate research supervision as category boundary work. Studies in Higher Education **32**(4) 475-487

Phillips, E. M. & Pugh, D. S. (2010) How to get a PhD: a handbook for students and their supervisors. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Philips, E. M. & Pugh, D. S. (2000) How to get a PhD: A handbook for students and their supervisors. (3rd Edition) Open University Press, Buckingham

Phillips, E.M. and Pugh. D.S (1994). How to get a PhD: A handbook for students and their supervisors Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press

Piaget, J (1952) The origins of intelligence in children New York: International Universities Press

Pilcher, N. (2011). "The UK postgraduate Masters dissertation: an 'elusive chameleon'?" Teaching in Higher Education 16(1) 29-40.

Polanyi, M. (1962). Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Ponte, P. (2007) Postgraduate education as platform IN van Swet, J., Ponte, P. and Smit, J. Postgraduate programmes as platform: A research–led approach Rotterdam: Sense Publishers

Pring, R. (1973) Curriculum integration IN Peters, R.S. The philosophy of education Oxford: Oxford University Press p 123-149

Proctor, B. (1987) Supervision: a cooperative exercise in accountability. In Marken, M and Payne, M.(eds) Enabling and Ensuring: Supervision in Practice National Youth Bureau, Leicester

QAA (2013) What is Mastersness? http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/report/what-is-mastersness.pdf (accessed 26/11/2015)

QAA (2010) UK Quality Assurance Agency Masters Degree Characteristics http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/masters-degree-characteristics.aspx (accessed 19/8/2012)

QAA (2008) The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 2008 www.qaa.ac.uk/en/.../Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf *(accessed 01/01/2015)*

QAA (2004) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes www.**qaa**.ac.uk/publications/.../documents/**postgrad**2004.pdf (accessed 19/8/2012)

Raelin, J.A. (2009) Seeking conceptual clarity in the action modalities Action Learning Research and Practice 6(1) 17-24

Rahman, M. A. (2003). Globalization: The emerging ideology in the popular protests, and grassroots action research. Action Research, *2*(1), 9-24

Ravitch, S. and Riggan, M. (2012) Reason and Rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research London: Sage Publications

Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2006) Handbook of Action Research London: Sage Publications

Reason, P. (2006) Choice and quality in action research practice Journal of Management Enquiry 15(2) 187-203

Reason, P. (1988) Human Enquiry in Action London: Sage Publications

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J.(eds)(2003) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers London: Sage Publications

Ritchie, J., Lerwis, J., Nicholls, C.M. and Ormston, R. (2014) Qualitative Research Practice London: Sage Publications

Robbins Report (1961) Higher Education Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1963

Rodigues, J. F. Lehmann, A. and De Sousa – Fleith, D. (2005). "Factors Mediating the Interactions chbetween Adviser and Advisee during the Master's Thesis Project: a quantitative approach." Quality in Higher Education 11(2): 117-127.

Roth, G. and Bradbury, H. (2008) Learning history: An action research in support of actionable learning IN Reason, P. and Bradbury H. (eds) The Sage Handbook of Action Research (2nd ed) London: Sage 350-365

Roulston, K. (2010), Considering quality in qualitative interviewing, Qualitative Research, 10 (2), 199–228.

Rowan, J. (2006) The humanistic approach to action research In Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2006) Handbook of Action Research London: Sage Publications

Rowland, S. (1999) The role of theory in a pedagogical model for lecturers in higher education, Studies in Higher Education, 24:3, 303-314

Rudd, E. (1975) The highest education: A study of graduate education in Britain London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Ryan, Y. (1994). Contracts and checklists: Practical propositions for postgraduate supervision. In Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Ryan, Y. (Eds.) Quality in postgraduate education, (pp. 156-164). London: Kogan Page

Saldana,J. (2011) Fundamentals of Qualitative Research, New York: Oxford University Press

Salmon, G, Nie, M. and Edirisingha, P. (2010) Developing a five-stage model of learning in Second Life Educational Research, 52:2, 169-182

Sayed, Y., Kruss, G. and Badat, S. (1998): Students' Experience of Postgraduate Supervision at the University of the Western Cape Journal of Further and Higher Education 22:3, 275-285

Schön, D (1983) The reflective practitioner New York: Basic Books

Schratz, M. (1992) Researching while teaching: An action research approach in higher education Studies in Higher Education, 17(1), 81-95

Schutz, A. (1970) On phenomenology and social relations Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Scott, D. (1990) Practice wisdom: The neglected source of practice research Social Work 35(6) 564-7

Sears (2005) A busy academic's guide to recent policy developments and publications in post graduate education Planet 14: 4 http://www.gees.ac.uk/planet/index.htm#P14 (accessed 5/4/2012)

Selke, M. (2001) The Professional Development of Teachers in the United States of America: The practitioners' master's degree European Journal of Teacher Education 24(2) 205-214

Severinsson, E. (2012) Research supervision: supervisory style, research-related tasks, importance and quality – part 1 Journal of Nursing Management 20, 215–223

Sharakis-Doyle, E. and McIntyre, G. (2008) The Western Guide to Graduate Supervision The University of Western Ontario Teaching Support Centre

Shulman, L.S. (2011) The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Personal Account and Reflection International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 5(1) Article 30 p1-7

Silverman, D. (2000) Doing Qualitative Research: A practical handbook London: Sage

Smith, A., Bradshaw, T., Burnett, K. Docherty, D., Purcell, W. and Worthington, S. (2010) One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Somekh, B. (2009) Agency through Action Research: constructing active identities from theoretical models and metaphors IN Noffke, S. and Somekh, B. (2009) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research London: Sage Publications Ltd

Somekh, B. (2006) Action research: A methodology for change and development Maidenhead: Open University Press

Spencer. L., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R., O'Connor, W. and Barnard, M. (2014) Analysis: Principles and Processes In Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J.(eds)(2003) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers London: Sage Publications

Spender, J.-C. (1996). Organizational knowledge, learning and memory: Three concepts in search of a theory. Journal of Organizational Change Management 9(1)63-78

Spiller, D., Byrnes, G. and Ferguson, P.B. (2013) Enhancing postgraduate supervision through a process of conversational inquiry Higher Education Research and Development 32(5) 833-845

Staniforth, D. and Harland, T. (2003) Reflection on Practice; Collaborative action research for new academics Educational Action Research 11(1)79-91

Stenhouse, L. (1975) An introduction to Curriculum Research and Development London: Heinemann Educational Books

Stufflebeam, D. L. (2003). The CIPP model for evaluation. In T. Kellaghan & D. Stufflebeam (Eds.), International handbook of educational evaluation Boston:Dordrecht

Styhre, A., Kohn, K., & Sundgren, M. (2002). Action research as theoretical practices. Concepts and Transformation, *7*(1), 93-105.

Taylor,T. and Beasley, N.(2005). A handbook for doctoral supervisors London: Routledge

Thomson, D.R., Kirkman, S., Watson, R. and Stewart, S. (2005) Improving research supervision in nursing Nurse Education Today 25, 283-290

Tichen, A. and McCormack, B. (2010) Dancing with stones: critical creativity as methodology for human flourishing Educational Action Research 18(4) 531 – 554

Tobbell, J., O'Donnell, V. and Zammit, M. (2010) Exploring Transition to Postgraduate Study: Shifting Identities in Interaction with Communities, Practice and Participation. Educational Research Journal 36(2) 261–278

Torbert, W. R. (1976). Creating a community of inquiry: Conflict, collaboration, transformation. New York: Wiley

Trafford, V. and Leshem, S, (2008) Stepping stones to achieving your doctorate Maidenhead: Open University Press

UKCES, Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow - The National Strategic Skills Audit for England (2010) http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications/nssa-wales-vol-1 audit-for-england-2010-volume-1-key-findings (accessed 2/4/2012)

Universities UK (2014) The funding environment for universities 2014 International students in the UK: The UK and its competition file:///U:/EdD2/Articles/2015b%20articles/Univerisities%20UK,%202014.pdf [accessed 17/1/2016]

Unsworth, K.L., Turner, N., Williams, H.M. and Piccin-Houle, S. (2010) Giving thanks: the relational context of gratitude in postgraduate supervision Studies in Higher Education 35(8) 871-888

Von Humboldt, W. (1970) On the Spirit and the Organizational Framework of Intellectual Institutions in Berlin. Translated by Edward Shils. Minerva, 8, 242-250

Vos, L. (2013) Dissertation study at the postgraduate level: A review of the literature York:Higher Education Academy

Walford, G. (2007), Classification and framing of interviews in ethnographic interviewing Ethnography and Education, **2** (2), 145–57.

Walker M (2001) Reconstructing professionalism in university teaching Buckingham: Open University Press

Wallgren, L., and. Dahlgren. L.O. (2007) Industrial doctoral students as brokers between industry and academia. Industry & Higher Education 21: 195–210

Wass, R., Harland, T., and Mercer, A. (2011) Scaffolding critical thinking in the zone of proximal development. Higher Education Research & Development, 30(3), 317–328

Weber M (1968) Economy and Society Roth, G. And Wittich, C. (eds) New York: Bedminster Press

Wenger, E. (1998) Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

White, S.K. (1988) Reason, Justice and Modernity Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Whitehead, J. (1989) Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice:' Cambridge Journal of Education 19(1) 41-52

Winter, R. and Munn-Giggings, C. (2001) A Handbook for Action Research in Health and Social Care London: Routledge

Wisker, G. (2012) The Good Supervisor (2nd ed) Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan

Wisker, G., Robinson, G. and Shacham, M. (2007) Postgraduate research success: communities of practice involving cohorts, guardian supervisors and online communities Innovations in Education and Teaching International 44(3)301- 320

Wisker G (2005) The Good Supervisor Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Wisker, G., Griffiths, S., Waller, S., Robinson, G. and Lilly, J. (2005) Daisies in the Meadow: Communities of practice and action research: Research and Development in Higher Education Higher Education in a Changing World 28: 642-650

Zeegers, M. and Barron, D (2012) Pedagogical concerns in doctoral supervision: a challenge for pedagogy Quality Assurance in Education 20 (1) 20-30

Zeni, J. (2009) Ethics and the 'personal' in action research In Noffke, S. and Somekh, B. (2009) The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research London: Sage Publications Ltd

Zhao, C.-M., Golde, C, and McCormick. A, (2007). More than a signature: How advisor choice and advisor behaviour affect doctoral student satisfaction. Journal of Further and Higher Education 31(3) 263-81

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) Action Research in Higher Education London: Kogan Page Ltd

Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Fletcher, M. (2007) The quality of an action research thesis in the social sciences Quality Assurance in Education 15(4) 413-436

Zuber-Skerritt, O., and Knight, N. (2010). Problem Definition and thesis writing, Higher Education, *15(1-2):* 89-103

Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Roche, V. (2004) A constructivist model for evaluating postgraduate supervision: a case study Quality Assurance in Education 12 (2) 82-93

Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Ryan, Y. (Eds.) (1994) Quality in postgraduate education (pp. 24-37). London: Kogan Page

1994 Group (2012) The Postgraduate Crisis www.1994group.ac.uk/documents/120215_PostgraduateCrisis.pdf (accessed 2/4/2012)

Appendices

Appendix 1.	Burrell and Morgan's 1979 Matrix	p.204
Appendix 2.	CIPP evaluation framework	p.205
Appendix 3.	Ethical approval (extended) for initial consultation	p.206
Appendix 4.	Ethical approval for Action Research	p.207
Appendix 5.	Research participant information amended sheet for Phase 1	p.209
Appendix 6.	Research participant information sheet for Action Research	p.213
Appendix 7.	Guidelines, hints and tips for supervisors document	p.218
Appendix 8.	Support materials for new supervisors' workshop	p.252
Appendix 9.	Supervisors involved in each phase	p.254
Appendix 10.	Initial data analysis groupings	p.255
Appendix 11.	Extract of A5 booklet to summarise participant statements	p.257
Appendix 12.	Photograph of room used for workshops	p.260
Appendix 13.	Supervisor's story from workshop 2	p.261
Appendix 14.	Conference presentation for international conference	p.264
Appendix 15.	Conference presentation for regional conference	p.270

Appendix1

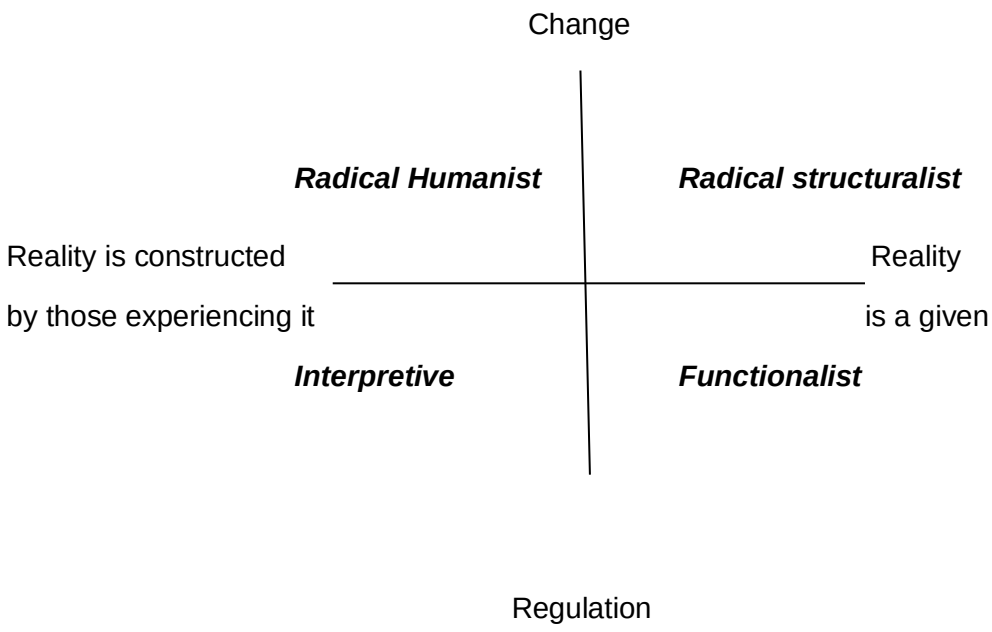
Burrell and Morgan's Matrix

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggested that an individual's belief about what constitutes reality and about their ability and desire to change this influences their view of the world. They proposed a matrix, based on two continuums, which specifies the philosophical underpinnings of different theoretical perspectives. The basis of their matrix considers what they suggest are four main debates:

- Whether reality is a product of the mind or a given
- Whether someone has to experience something to understand it
- Whether humans are determined by their environment or do they have 'free will' to change
- Whether understanding is best achieved through scientific study of regulated activity

They identified philosophical paradigms typified by the four quadrants of their matrix, as illustrated in Figure * below, which are:

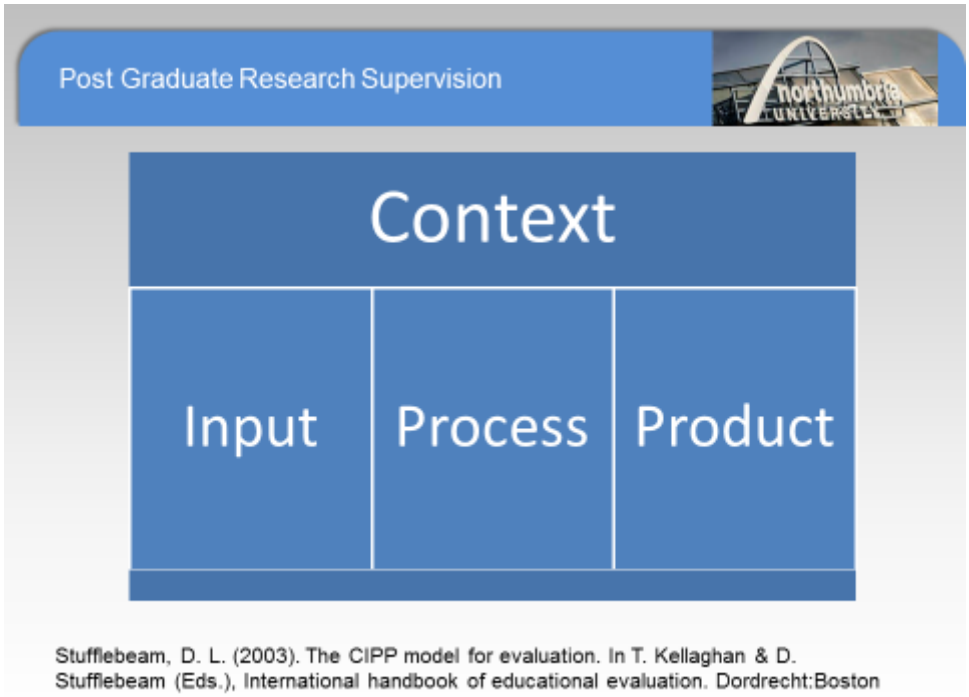
Figure * Burrell and Morgan's matrix for reviewing literature



Burrell and Morgan (1979) p. 30

Appendix 2

CIPP evaluation framework



Appendix 3

Ethical approval (extended) for initial consultation

Project Amendment Form

Date original ethical approval received:
29th Sep 2011

Project Name:
A CIPP Evaluation of research supervision
in taught post graduate programmes

Principal Investigator:
Ann Macfadyen

Date:
26th January 2012

Description of Amendment/Change:

Amendment of consent forms and information sheets to include permission to use the data collected in EdD research project into post graduate research supervision.

Reasons for Amendment/Change:

To allow data to be used in EdD study (following ethical approval).

Anticipated Implications:

That the data will be viewed by the EdD supervision team as well as the original project team.

Acceptance/~~Rejection~~ **Signature**:

Date:

31.1.12

Appendix 4

Ethical approval for Action Research

Professor Kathleen McCourt CBE FRCN

Ann Macfadyen

Northumbria University

Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

Coach Lane Campus

This matter is being dealt with by:

Professor Olivier Sparagano

Associate Dean

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

Research & Innovation Office

Room H007

Coach Lane Campus East

Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7XA

Tel: 0191 2156480

Fax : 0191 2156083

Email : *julie.blackwell@northumbria.ac.uk*

14th September 2012

Dear Ann

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Review Panel

Title: An action research project to explore how research supervision at masters' level within two professional groups can be developed

Following independent peer review of the above proposal, I am pleased to inform you that University approval has been granted on the basis of this proposal and subject to compliance with the University policies on ethics and consent and any

other policies applicable to your individual research. You should also have recent CRB and occupational health clearance if your research involves working with children and/or vulnerable adults.

The University's Policies and Procedures are available from the following web link: http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/researchandconsultancy/sa/ethgov/policies/?view=Standard

All researchers must also notify this office of the following:

- Commencement of the study;
- Actual completion date of the study;
- Any significant changes to the study design;
- Any incidents which have an adverse effect on participants, researchers or study outcomes;
- Any suspension or abandonment of the study;
- All funding, awards and grants pertaining to this study, whether commercial or non-commercial;
- All publications and/or conference presentations of the findings of the study.

We wish you well in your research endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Professor David Stanley

Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Review Panel

Appendix 5

Research participant information sheet and consent form for phase 1

An evaluation of research supervision in taught post graduate programmes

Information about the research

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. Before you decide please read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose is to explore the factors which influence students' and staff's experiences of research supervision within taught post graduate master's programmes. The findings will be fed back to programme managers and module leaders to inform their programme planning.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because your experience of supervising students who are undertaking research on a post graduate taught master's programme.

What will happen if I take part?

You can take part in a number of ways. We will be arranging some small focus groups of 6-8 staff who will be asked to discuss and identify what they think are the key influences on a student's experience of research supervision. If you would prefer to meet with a researcher individually to discuss this topic, you can do so in person. Alternatively, you could add your views to an online discussion to which you will be able to contribute anonymously. Before the small group meeting or interview, we will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part and that you are happy to have the conversation recorded. If you wish to contribute to the online discussion, your participation will be taken as evidence of your consent to be involved in the study.

In addition, and with your permission, your comments could also be used in a further doctoral study into post graduate research supervision undertaken by the interviewer.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are unlikely to be any disadvantages or risks in taking part, however, if you are upset in any way, the researcher will stop the discussion.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from this study will help us understand what factors contribute to a good supervision experience. Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might suffer will be addressed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. We will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. After the small group meeting or interview, the staff's' comments will be transcribed. These notes will be saved on password protected computers and the originals will be stored securely in a locked office until the end of the study. The comments from the online discussion will be anonymised, so that the summary notes will not identify which staff made which comments. If it is possible that you may be identifiable from your comments, you will be asked if you wish your comments to be removed from the data.

What will happen to the results of the research?

A report will be produced for the School. This will present the anonymous views of participants. The results will also be shared with academics in other Universities through conference presentations and publications in professional journals.

Contact for further information

If you would like to speak to someone about the study before deciding, please contact:

Ann Macfadyen
HCES
0191 215 6347

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact

Dr Linda Prescott-Clements
Associate Dean for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience
HCES
0191 215 6070

Informed Consent for Lecturers

(Headed Northumbria University Paper)

A CIPP Evaluation of research supervision in taught post graduate programmes

This study aims to gain insight into the experiences of staff and students who have been involved in giving or receiving research supervision on taught post graduate master's programmes.

Please read the statements and initial the boxes next to them if you agree.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and these have been answered to my satisfaction	
I am willing to be interviewed and I am happy for this to be recorded	
I am aware that the interviews will need to be transcribed into a written form	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. This will not affect my job.	

I know that my name and details will be kept confidential and will not appear in any printed document	
I agree to take part in this study	
I am happy for this information to be used in a doctoral study on post graduate research supervision following this evaluation	

Consent of Participant

Signature _____ Print _____

Date _____

Researcher

Signature _____ Print _____

Date _____

Appendix 6

Research participant information sheet and consent forms for Action Research project

An action research project to explore how research supervision at masters' level within two professional groups can be developed

Information about the research

You are being invited to take part in an action research project. Before you decide please read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

A recent evaluation in the School of Health, Community and Education Studies has identified that there would be benefits in exploring the role of supervisors for students undertaking master's level dissertations, to develop this area of teaching and to identify and articulate previously unacknowledged principles of good practice. This study will attempt to examine patterns of masters' research supervision, the views held by supervisors as to the factors which can influence this process and their perceptions of how supervision practice could be developed.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because your experience of supervising students who are undertaking research on a post graduate taught master's programme in health or education.

What will happen if I take part?

There are three stages to the project, which uses an action research approach. If you agree to participate you will be asked to:

- take part in an individual or small focus group interview in which you will be
  asked about your experiences of supervision.

- you will then be given information about a number of different strategies which could be used to develop the role and to articulate principles of good practice of supervision. Examples of these are include peer buddying, the sharing of personal reflections on current or recent supervision, observation of supervision, discussions around sample supervisory scenarios, real or virtual journal clubs, analysis of a supervision meeting which has been recorded, or reflection on feedback from colleagues or previous students. These are all strategies which have been used by academics in other institutions or which have been suggested by your colleagues in

HCES. You will be asked to indicate which of these strategies you might find useful in considering the development of your role, or to suggest alternative strategies. You will then be matched with one, two or three colleagues who have identified the same approach and asked to work with them to use this in order to explore supervision from both an academic and personal perspective. This part of the project will take place over a year, although the strategies adopted may take less time than this. You will be able to explore more than one approach if you wish.

You will be offered the opportunity to share the processes and conclusions of your small group strategy to a larger group of about 12 colleagues who are also participating in the project. Your role in this project will be of participant-researcher, as the action research approach underpinning this project is a collaborative one which aims to empower those who take part through the development of this aspect of their academic role and the articulation of theoretical principles of supervision.

You will have the opportunity to share your findings with other participants in two ways. Monthly workshops will be organized where you will be able to meet with others, but your participation will not be dependent on attendance at any of the workshops as you will also be able to communicate your thoughts and experiences to a secure online community forum.

Take part in small group interviews at the end of the year, about if and how your perception of the role of supervisor the skills involved in supervision has changed or developed over the period of the study. If you wish, your personal conclusions or notes from the strategies which you undertake during the project can be included in the findings from this study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are unlikely to be any disadvantages or risks in taking part, however, you are free to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. Your contributions to the project up to this point can still be included in the findings if you wish. Details of staff counselling services will be made available to all participants at the start of the project in case you are affected by any issues arising from the study which they wish to discuss further on a confidential basis.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise that participation the study will help you but the information we get from this project will help us understand what factors contribute to a good supervision experience. It is possible that you will develop their knowledge and skills of supervision as a result of their involvement with what is intended to be a developmental process. Any

complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might suffer will be addressed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

We will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. After the interviews, your comments will be transcribed by a professional typist. Notes of discussions will be made during the workshops by some of those who attend. These transcripts and notes will be saved on password protected computers and the originals will be stored securely in a locked office until three years after the end of the study. The comments from the online forum will be anonymised, so that the summary notes will not identify which staff made which comments. If it is possible that you may be identifiable from your comments, you will be asked if you wish your comments to be removed from the data.

Due to the collaborative nature of the project, the participants may become known to one another, and you will have the opportunity to work with others on activities within the study. The aim of the project is to identify, articulate and share elements of practice; however, the importance of participants' anonymity will be highlighted throughout the project. You may want to inform your manager of your participation, particularly if you your involvement will form part of your research and scholarly activity. If you are happy for any of the materials which you have developed to be shared with others outside the study, you will be asked to give permission for this to happen. There will be a 48 hour 'cooling off' period during which you can withdraw your consent for this dissemination.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The findings from the study will form part of the researcher's EdD thesis, which may be made accessible through a variety of electronic and print formats. This document will present the anonymous views of participants. The results will also be shared with academics in other Universities through conference presentations and publications in professional journals.

Contact for further information

If you would like to speak to someone about the study before deciding, please contact: Ann Macfadyen

HCES
0191 215 6347

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact
Dr Colin Cameron
HCES
0191 215 6350

colin.cameron@northumbria.ac.uk

Informed Consent for Lecturers

(Headed Northumbria University Paper)

An action research project to explore how research supervision at masters' level within two professional groups can be developed

This study will attempt to examine patterns of masters' research supervision, the views held by supervisors as to the factors which can influence this process and their perceptions of how supervision practice could be developed.

Please read the statements and initial the boxes next to them if you agree.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and these have been answered to my satisfaction	
I am willing to be interviewed and I am happy for this to be recorded	
I am aware that the interviews will need to be transcribed into a written form	
I know that my name and details will be kept confidential and will not appear in any printed document	
I am willing to undertake activities to explore supervision	
I am willing to share the results of these activities with other participants	

I understand that my contributions to the study may be shared anonymously with others who are not participants	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. This will not affect my job.	
I am happy for this information to be used in a doctoral study on post graduate research supervision	
I agree to take part in this study	

Consent of Participant

Signature _____ Print _____

Date_____

Researcher

Signature _____ Print _____

Date _____

When completed 2 copies: 1 for participant, 1 for researcher file.

Appendix 7

Guidelines, hints and tips for supervisors document

Guidelines, hints and tips for dissertation supervisors for Masters programmes in Health and Education

A resource developed as part of an action research project

Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

January 2014

Contents

Introduction

Programme structures

Dissertation modules

Models of supervision

Supervisory activities

- **Finding and keeping focus**
- **Reviewing literature**
- **Project management**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Academic writing**

Supervisory dilemmas

- **Different research approaches**
- **Very set ideas**
- **All talk but nothing in writing**

Choice of topic affecting student

Proposal not up to scratch

Lonely international student

Undue employer influence

Key messages for supervisors

Introduction

You may well be reading this information because you have been asked to take on responsibility for supervising a Masters level student who is undertaking their dissertation. If this is the case it is possible that you are feeling a bit daunted at the prospect. The following quotes are from experienced supervisors who participated in research into supervision practices in Health and Education

> *I think if you are new to supervising, I think one of the things when I found daunting when I got the first student I thought 'well ok, … I will give it a go.' … I think the most daunting thing was actually suddenly thinking 'oh my God, what if they have got a question that I can't answer? Which was one thing at the back of my mind - who do I go and talk to'?*

> *I was sitting there thinking 'gosh', because it was quite intimidating because you know I had supervised a lot at level six, but not at level seven…and I just really felt quite vulnerable in it all and I didn't really want to say 'actually, I don't know whether I can do that… I think if I had gone and asked the support would have been there, but I did feel a little bit vulnerable about 'I should be able to'*

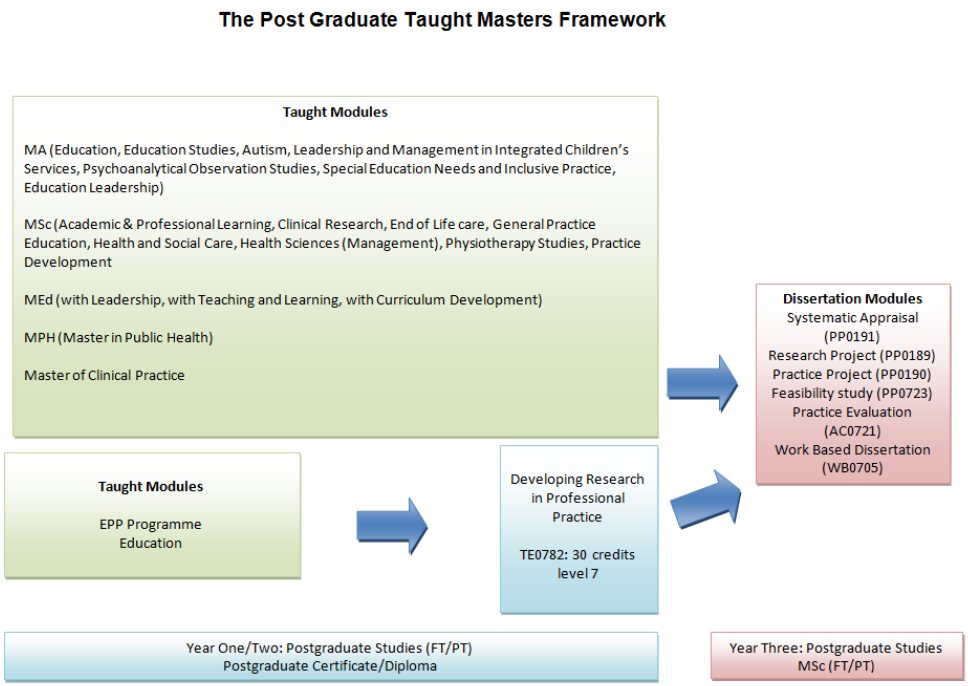
This research identified that there were a number of areas in which selection, preparation and support of supervisors could be improved, including the benefits of an information resource for supervisors – the one which you are now reading. A group of 14 supervisors took part in an action research project to explore what is involved in master's level supervision, and the following resources are a result of this project.

The first sections give an overview of the programmes and dissertation modules which will be undertaken by the majority of students, followed by some information about some models of supervision which may give you some insight into the different aspects of the role. The examples of actual supervisory practice which were identified during the action research project may be useful in giving you some ideas of how to support your students as they undertake the different component of their project. The last section outlines some strategies which other supervisors have found useful as they have developed their supervisory skills.

Programme structures

The diagram below illustrates the structure of the majority of taught Masters programmes in Health and Education in which students undertake modules specific to their professional background. This includes a research module which outlines research methodology and research methods, and a dissertation component. This dissertation can be based on a number of approaches – an empirical research project, a systematic appraisal, a service improvement plan, a work based project, a feasibility study or a practice evaluation.

Diagram 1 Structure of Taught Post Graduate Masters Programmes in Health and Education



This programme structure enables students to achieve the standard required of master's level programmes, which is to demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge and in problem solving and also to demonstrate an understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research, in a programme which is normally at least 1 year full time, (QAA, 2010). The dissertation module is 12 weeks in length for full time students, 6 months for full time international students on the MPH programme, and 9 months for part time students. The table

below lists the dissertation modules available to students on the taught master's programmes within this area of the Faculty.

Table 1 Availability of Dissertation Modules within Masters Programmes

Master's Programme Titles	Availability of Dissertation Modules within Masters Programmes					
	PP0189 Empirical Project	PP0190 Practice project	PP0191 Systematic Appraisal	PP0723 Feasibility Study	AC0721 Practice Evaluation	WB0705 Work-based Project
PGC/D/MSc. Academic & Professional Learning	√	√	√			
MA Autism	√	√	√			√
MSc. Clinical Research	√					
MA Education (PT & FT)	√	√	√			√
PGC/D/MSc. Education in Professional Practice	√	√	√	√		
MA Education Studies	√	√	√			√
MSc. End of Life Care	√	√	√			
PG Cert/Dip/MSc. General Practice Education	√	√	√			
MSc. Health & Social Care	√	√	√			
MSc. Health Sciences (Management) FT - overseas only			√	√		

Master's Programme Titles	PP0189 Empirical Project	PP0190 Practice project	PP0191 Systematic Appraisal	PP0723 Feasibility Study	AC0721 Practice Evaluation	WB0705 Work-based Project
MA Leadership & Management in Integrated Children's Services (with or without NPQICL)	√	√	√			√
MSc. Physiotherapy Studies FT – overseas only			√			
MA Psychoanalytical Observation Studies	√	√	√			
Master in Public Health (PT & FT)	√ PT only	√ PT only	√	√		
MA Special Education Needs and Inclusive (Practice)	√	√	√			
MA Education Leadership	√	√	√			√
M. Ed. with Leadership M.Ed. with Teaching & Learning M.Ed. with Curriculum Development FT – overseas only			√			
MSc Practice Development	√	√	√		√	
Master of Clinical Practice (ACCP)	√	√	√		√	

Due to the range and start dates of masters' programmes, the actual timing of the dissertation module within the academic year varies between different student

groups. Each dissertation module should consist of a number of seminars organised by the module leader and individual supervision.

Information on the six different dissertation modules

PP0191 - Systematic Appraisal

This module focuses on the role of the student as a research user/consumer. It provides an opportunity for the student to make effective and systematic use of published research to inform health, social and education practice and/or policy.

Through the process of systematic appraisal the student will develop enhanced critical appraisal skills, including skills of analysis and synthesis. The systematic appraisal project will address research questions which arise from the student's specific practice/field of expertise.

These questions may address:

- Effectiveness of single/definable interventions in order to state and recommend best practice/provide evidence based guidelines for practice.
- Evaluation of appropriateness/ acceptability/process/outcomes of complex human services in order to improve/develop/inform practice.
- The service user experience of health, social and education services.
- Relationships between practitioners and service users.
- Theoretical and ideological issues of relevance to health, social and education practice and/or policy.

Published work to be included in the appraisal may be either entirely quantitative, entirely qualitative or mixed method. The philosophical perspective of both the research question and the appraisal methodology must be critically examined. The student will work within the appropriate research governance and ethical guidelines for their professional discipline. On completion of the module we would encourage the student to share their learning and their ideas through dissemination within their organisation, more widely at conferences and through publication in academic journals.

If you are supervising a student who is undertaking a systematic appraisal, you may find some specific guidelines which have been developed by the module team very useful. Contact the module leader if you have not seen these.

Module Leader –

PP0189 - Empirical Project

The empirical project is a major component (60 credits) of the student's programme. It aims to develop, refine or verify knowledge concerning their area of interest.

As such, it is an opportunity, with the support of an experienced supervisor, to undertake a small scale study. The student will be encouraged to use other staff, colleagues and students as sounding boards for their research ideas and peer-support is encouraged through student-led seminars.

The project focuses upon the student as a researcher and provides the opportunity for the collection and analysis of primary data (qualitative, quantitative or both) for the purpose of answering specific research question(s). A range of methodologies and methods may be appropriate, dependent on the nature of the research problematic.

From the outset it is important to point out that the student will be undertaking empirical research in an area characterised by concern to adhere to stringent research governance; therefore, the process will be demanding and they need diligent organisation. Essentially, the student needs to make a start as early as possible to plan the process.

Whilst all students are encouraged to engage in thinking about project planning from shortly after beginning the programme, it is hoped that part-time students will have begun to substantively develop an ethics/governance application at or around the time that year 1 ends and for full-time students, this ought to have developed prior to the end of semester 1.

To be successful, the student will be expected to:

a) Conceptualise the research topic and establish its relevance to an area of interest.

b) Carry out an extended literature review in support and development of the research question.

c) Critically consider the ethical and philosophical dimensions related to the project.

d) Define the study protocol in terms of the research question, methodology and methods of data collection and analysis.

e) Project manage the empirical study.

f) Analyse the data and interpret the findings with due regards to issues of reliability, validity, rigour, trustworthiness and reflexivity.

g) Report the findings in a written format for an academic audience with reference to relevant guidelines.

If you are supervising a student who is undertaking an empirical project, there are a number of guidelines to the ethical review process which will be useful, for both yourself and the student. If you don't have these, your Departmental lead for ethics will be able to send you a copy. It will also be useful to have a note of the dates on which ethical approvals have to be submitted in time for the ethical review panels throughout the year. When the student uploads their proposal and supporting documents into the online system, you will be asked for authorisation before it is released to the ethical reviewers.

Module leader –

PP0190 - Practice Project

Students will undertake a project with the support of an experienced academic supervisor, who will be allocated by the programme manager. The teaching and learning methods employed are based on negotiation between the student and the supervisor.

Peer support is encouraged through project-related seminars. Students are encouraged to use other staff, colleagues and students as sounding boards for ideas. The project has a formative step, a proposal, which must be completed and approved prior to undertaking the project. Students will work closely with the supervisor to develop the proposal.

At this formative stage, ethical issues must be identified. If the proposal requires the collection of primary data to address a research question, even if the research is an action research project, then you will be advised to undertake module PP0189 (Empirical Project). Practice projects are not research projects; they are projects which undertake a small change improvement in practice, which will creatively advance your professional practice and be of benefit to the participants and the organisation. You will need a signed letter of permission from a representative of the organisation in which the practice project is being undertaken. Assessment of the project is via a final project report (15,000 words).

Module leader –

PL0723 - Feasibility Study Dissertation

The Feasibility Dissertation module will enable you to focus on your workplace to hypothetically plan, implement and evaluate a practice intervention project with a target group, culminating in a 15000 word dissertation.

The module requires high level analysis and synthesis skills, offering a challenging but rewarding dissertation option. Students undertake their dissertation with the support of an experienced academic supervisor, who will be allocated by the programme manager. The teaching and learning methods employed are based on a critical two-way dialogue between the student and supervisor. Peer support is encouraged through dissertation-related seminars. Students are encouraged to use other staff, colleagues and students as sounding boards for their ideas. It is recommended that you discuss your ideas with work based colleagues early in the process. This will ensure you are undertaking a project that is not only valuable to your learning, but also one that may be of value in improving the services provided in the area in which you work/intend to work in the future.

Module Leader –

AC0721 - Practice Evaluation Dissertation

This module is aimed at healthcare practitioners who wish to fulfil the requirements for an award at Masters level linked to practice.

The emphasis of this module is on obtaining a critical understanding of how communities of practice are continuously reshaping in response to new roles, shifting role boundaries and service development. Reflection on personal, professional and practice development is an integral component of this dissertation.

The student will develop the ability to deconstruct their personal role, reflect on the concept of role development and analyse the impact on service delivery. It will also provide the opportunity for reflexive analysis of the role of 'self' in relation to role transition and facilitate discussion on strategies for personal, practice, professional and service development including evaluation of development.

The teaching and learning methods employed are based on dissertation related seminars. Students will engage in discussion with clinical specialist staff, colleagues and peers as sounding boards for their ideas. Formative feedback on progress will be ongoing during the dissertation development. Students will undertake the dissertation with the support of an academic supervisor.

Summative assessment (15,000 words) as follows: Using an appropriate analytical structure, examining practice or role in relation to achieving mastery in a sphere of practice. This may include personal, professional and practice development.
The work should also include recommendations and plans for evaluation.

Module Leader –

WB0705 - Work-Based Dissertation

This dissertation is designed to promote your personal and professional development. This is demonstrated through an individually negotiated real-time work-based project that will be of benefit to the student in their professional and academic career, and to their employing organisation.

The student is required to identify an area of work that provides the scope and opportunity for personal, professional and organisational development that will then form the basis of a quality improvement project.

Quality improvement projects are not research projects, any data used must come from secondary sources. Before starting the project the student will demonstrate that appropriate ethical, commercial confidentiality and data protection issues are taken into consideration by obtaining necessary permissions from your employing organisation and the university.
The student will be expected to reflect on the learning derived from carrying out the project.

The student will be supported in this process by seminars where peer support is encouraged and at which they will be assisted through the various stages of carrying out their work based dissertation. In addition the student will receive on-line and face to face tutorial support from their academic supervisor and where appropriate from their workplace advisor.

The student will be summatively assessed by way of a 15000 word report that they will submit along with any relevant supporting evidence.

Module Leader –

Dissertation Cafe

Twice a year there is a 'Dissertation Café', where students who are thinking about undertaking their dissertation module can attend in order to find out about the different dissertation modules available to them on their programme. Each module leader is present, often with a student who has completed the module. These are held in the late afternoon so that students can attend after work where possible, and refreshments are provided (normally very nice cakes) in recognition of this.

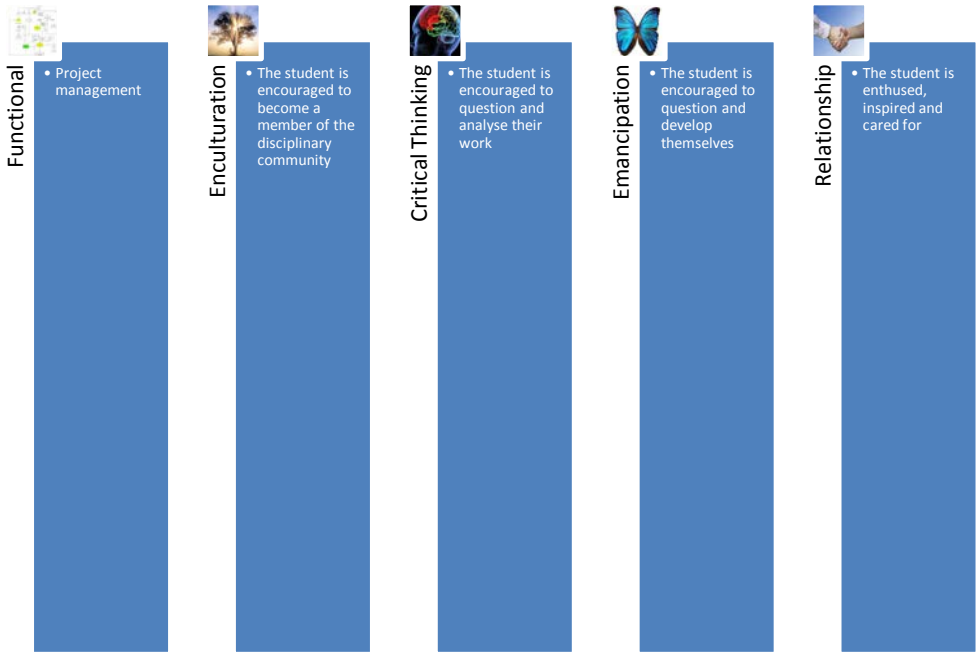
Models of supervision

Most of the models of supervision within the literature have been for Doctoral level supervisors. One of these models was developed by Dr Anne Lee, who advises that the factors which are most influential on a supervisor's approach are their own experience of supervision and their concept of research supervision (2008).

Your own experience of supervision

Reflecting back on your own experience of being supervised, it might be useful to identify which aspects you considered most helpful. There may also be features which you feel contributed less to your development. These may relate to your own learning preferences, but as you think back it is possible that you will recognise other issues which could have impacted on your experiences. Lee's suggestion that personal experience will influence an individual's approach is re-iterated in much of the literature on this topic.

Lee's model consists of 5 elements, as illustrated below.



Further information about this model can be found in an article which can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03075070802049202, and the link below will give access to an online presentation at an international Learning and Teaching conference by Dr Lee herself.

http://www.nairtl.ie/index.php?pageID=423

You might find it interesting to consider how well you think Lee's model of Doctoral supervision fits with the supervision of master's students. Are there some of the elements which you think might fit with your expectations or experience of your role as a supervisor?

Additional Information

In exploring how applicable Lee's model is to your own supervision, the following comments might be of use. These are a summary of the points made during discussions among a group of experienced master's level supervisors in health and education.

Functional (Project management). This was the element that people could identify with most easily. Examples can be seen on p22 below.

Enculturation:

The difference in the nature of master's and PhD programmes was highlighted, including the timescale involved and the wider focus of the discipline at this level – "what are we enculturating them into?". The following suggestions were made:

- Peer support can be a strong feature of students undertaking master's programmes, as students can feel part of a group, depending on cohort identity. Some students enjoy the camaraderie they may experience with others from different backgrounds.
- For professionals undertaking master's programmes, they can view their study as an 'escape', where they are exposed to others of similar or different backgrounds. They may feel that they can interact with others who may have similar experiences within a different context, or may perceive academic study as part of a 'different world'.
- They may develop a clear understanding that it is OK to be criticised and receive criticism. On some programmes they participate in a lot of peer review of their project ideas. Cross professional groups may expose them to different perspectives. For example, one group which included students who were from 2 professional groups (one more scientifically

grounded and the other more creative in their practice), found that there was some useful synergy in hearing different approaches.

- For some students who are undertaking master's programmes which involve a change in professional focus (eg students undertaking programme leading to an educational qualification for their profession) they can find exposure to a different professional culture surprising – and to experience what it is like 'on the inside' – as they may not have been aware what those in the new profession do.
- Some students may be exposed to a research culture, which may be very different to that of their previous backgrounds. Those who have undertaken a first degree in a more scientific background where they may have had been primarily lab based and where 'there isn't any grey' may find research where there are different views of the same thing , where people have different opinions, completely new. The need to critique published work may be unfamiliar to them. Strategies to assist this change in research culture may involve encouraging them to look at work of varying quality to develop their critical skills and the awareness that this is necessary.

Critical thinking

The development of critical thinking was one area where people were more confident in identifying strategies but the following strategies were discussed during the workshop:

- Asking students to review their own writing, and to question it was identified by several supervisors – more details of these processes emerged in the individual interviews.
- Encouraging students to read literature, and to challenge and question this. Grounding them in what is good and what is not. Some students were felt to need 'permission to critique'.
- In helping students to understand the process of critiquing published work, one exercise suggested was to let them read the first draft of a published article, to ask the students to work in groups to critique this, then to show them reviewers' comments and the final, published article.
- One text which was suggested to be helpful in this process is Jenny Moon - Critical Thinking: an exploration of Theory and Practice. London: Routledge (372.152/MOO in the Library). Another book is by Debbie Casey – Study Skills for Master's Level Students: a Health and Social Care Workbook. Exeter: Reflect (361.0072/CAS in the Library). Different models can be used to facilitate this process – eg Brookfield's work on different lenses (Brookfield, S. (2005) The power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching. Maidenhead: The Open University Press [374/BRO in the library]).

- The fact that the role is very focused on the single supervisor was acknowledged – '*If I get it wrong, it is their MSc up the spout*' with some supervisors doubting their own abilities in critical thinking. The possibility of advising them to seek help from expert staff in particular methodologies was also identified as a positive strategy. The balance between helping students to develop rigour and confidence in their methodology, while retaining ownership of their work was acknowledged. Some supervisors have found that the students are very immersed in their project idea, particularly if it is related to their own work, and they find it difficult to be critical, particularly if they come from an environment where established knowledge is not questioned. They can find this notion of challenge either emancipatory or very uncomfortable. This experience was also suggested to be the case for some whose experiences have been of more didactic teaching.

Emancipation

There was recognition that some students definitely go through a process of emancipation during their master's level studies, and that this might start during the taught component.

- Some students have ambitious or unrealistic ideas about that they want to achieve during their project, and this can lead to difficult conversations where the supervisor has to 'engender realism' and advise them that 'they may not find a 'right answer' or be able to 'change the world'. The process of narrowing the scope for their study can cause grief reactions for some students who may have invested a lot in their idea, but for others it can be emancipatory, 'freeing them up' and 'taking the pressure off'.
- For those students who are courses leading to a new profession while studying at master's level, they may find that they can have more ownership of their research project, rather than undertaking a project which has been designed by someone else (as is perhaps the case in other, more scientific disciplines.
- Where students are established professionals undertaking projects in their own area of work, they may require encouragement to push boundaries further within their work culture – this can involve 'lots of in depth conversations about what they are worried about' and support in carrying out their projects, which may lead to changes in practice.

Relationship development

It was acknowledged that the relationship for supervisors with post graduate students 'feels different' to that with undergraduates, with whom they tend to be 'more directive'. Supervisory input into postgraduate dissertations often is more

on a 2-way basis, with recognition of what they bring to the project from their experience. This is a longer term relationship which goes through different phases or stages.

- There is often the assumption that students have already developed knowledge, skills and abilities, but that too much may be assumed. They may have some professional background and some background knowledge of research, but there is a need to 'see how up to speed they are' and to get to know them a bit, to discover the way in which they tend to work.
- Some supervisors see an initial building of rapport as essential, and normally do not find this problematic '*it's what you do'*, possibly due to the supervisors' professional backgrounds. There are benefits to knowing the students for longer – possibly if teaching them on earlier modules within the master's programme.

Assessment of students' need

This is a skill which is not addressed to any extent within the literature. Supervisors were asked to think back to their own experiences of being supervised and to consider how (if they did) their supervisors might have assessed their needs. The Lee framework was used as a starting point for discussions.

Critical thinking/ emancipation

It was suggested that the skill may be in making it look as if you are not assessing. Feeling that you are being assessed can contribute to poor experiences. Less positive experiences were of non-constructive criticism of early drafts of literature reviews and at mid-point review. This was a painful and unhelpful process.

- A possible lack of assessment would appear to be in situations where there was very directive supervision which was at odds with the student's ideas and lack of in depth conversations around critical thinking, but more focused on grammar and language.
- More positive processes were where assessment occurred in discussions as 'equals' and supervisors were used as 'sounding boards', or as a 'critical friend with experience'.
- One supervisor used a plan produced by student as a focus for discussion, but the responsibility here was with the student as there was little other guidance.
- Critical thinking may be developed more through earlier parts of the programme, rather than through supervisor. The experience of traditional PhD students may be very different – as there may not be a peer group within this process.

- Some identified that the process could involve taking small steps until 'a light goes on' after which progress was made.

Relationship development

The development of the relationship was seen as important – the need to 'suss one another out' knowing that they could move on, knowing that the supervisor was open to contact.

- A lack of choice of supervisor does not necessarily add to relationship.
- A lack of warmth and a focus on functional instruction was not inspirational.

Enculturation

Enculturation for master's students was queried, as it was suggested that professional students may not feel encultured into research or education as they are 'steeped and busy in practice'.

- Direction to relevant chapters to inform methodology, but which did not relate to student's context would perhaps indicate a lack of assessment on the supervisor's part.
- Where the supervisor had research knowledge but was a different professional background, the experience was not particularly enabling. Some supervisors were willing to guide towards others if they had a lack of knowledge in particular area, which could contribute to the development of respect within the relationship,
- The difference in time scales between masters and PhD students was again acknowledged.

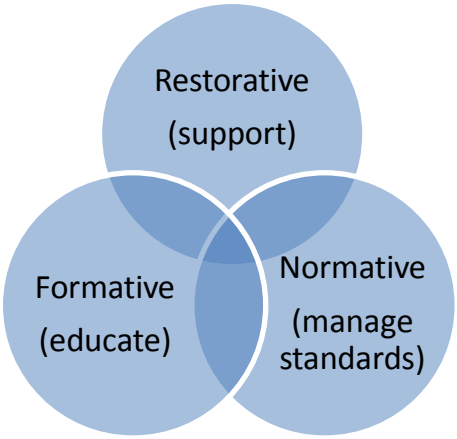
Supervision: a functional model

Another model which supervisors have found useful when working with master's level students is one that has been adopted from Procter's model of clinical supervision. In considering a framework for [clinical] supervision, Proctor (1987) identified three core functions which are:

Restorative – the supportive and helpful function of supervision. Includes self-awareness (supervisee and supervisor!) and empowerment.

Formative – the educative function that encompasses the process of learning and developing the supervisee's skills, understanding and abilities.

Normative – overseeing quality, standards and the accountability of the role



Proctor (1987)

Supervision needs to address all three areas if it is to be effective – what would happen if it became 'stuck' in one area? For example, if the student had more of a need for support due to difficult circumstances, the educative function of the supervisor might be minimised for a period of time. As the supervisor is normally the marker, the normative aspect will be informing the supervisor of the level of formative need, as they are aware of areas in which the student needs to develop their skills or knowledge. The relative sizes of the circles may change for different supervisees or over time for the same supervisee.

In more detail, the three functions may include some of the following (adapted from Ayre et al, 1997):

Restorative (Support)
➢ Professional support, to bolster a sense of security ➢ Stress/distress management ➢ Confidence to discuss anxiety-provoking aspects of the work ➢ Emotional support to deal with the labours of work

➢ Empowerment to produce improved confidence, competence and effectiveness ➢ Increased confidence in dealing with novel situations, eg critical incidents ➢ Encouragement of peer support ➢ Forum for discussing problems in a genuine, empathic and non-judgemental way ➢ Context for constructive challenge
Formative (Educate)
➢ Developing skills, knowledge and attitudes ➢ Fostering continuing professional development ➢ Enhancing professional autonomy ➢ Personal development planning ➢ Forum for promoting evidence-based practice ➢ Role modelling ➢ Development of critical reflection and problem-solving skills ➢ Enhancing self-growth in awareness and knowledge ➢ Context for analysing issues and problems and clarifying roles ➢ Context for identifying strategies for goal attainment ➢ Developing action planning approach to development ➢ Experiential learning of supervisory skills
Normative (Manage standards)
➢ Maintaining and developing standards ➢ Ensuring work is within regulatory standards and guidance ➢ Safeguarding standards of professional practice ➢ Professional accountability ➢ Professional approach to dealing with ethical issues and conduct ➢ Context for dealing with contemporary challenges in professional practice ➢ Stimulating initiative and independence ➢ Ensuring work is fit for practice, purpose and award ➢ Guidance on regulatory frameworks

References:

Ayer, S. et al (1997) Practice-led education and development project: developing styles in clinical supervision *Nurse Education Today* 17 pp347-358

Proctor, B. (1987) Supervision: a cooperative exercise in accountability. In Marken, M and Payne, M.(eds) *Enabling and Ensuring: Supervision in Practice* National Youth Bureau, Leicester

Supervisor Activities – 'Hints and tips'

In this section you will find examples of strategies which some supervisors have found useful, in their own words. **A word of warning** - these strategies are the results of years of experience in supervising students, and are offered as words of advice to colleagues. All of these supervisors are still asking *'am I doing this right?'* and are always open to learn about how their colleagues supervise students. You will almost certainly feel daunted as you realise how much can be involved in supervision, but remember that it is very unlikely that you will need to address all of these issues with any individual student. These strategies/activities address five key areas within supervision. Each of these is described in the tables below by a supervisor who has found them useful.

Overview of possible supervisory strategies and activities

Finding and keeping focus	**Reviewing literature**	**Project management**	**Critical thinking**	**Academic writing**
Clarifying the scope	Giving direction	Starting with a plan	Clarifying their understanding	Developing skills from the beginning
Mapping thoughts	Signposting to relevant literature	Working backwards from the end	Developing diagrams	Writing in smaller chunks and learning to edit
Starting with firm foundations	Introducing them to reference management systems	Drawing a timeline	Looking for links with the literature	Keeping feedback positive
Thinking about the relevance and the impact	Ensuring they know about search strategies	Clarifying tasks involved	Challenging their assumptions	Giving specific constructive feedback
Exploring different avenues	Using a structured strategy	Breaking the project into stages	Using specific prompting	Identifying specific areas for feedback
Helping them to manage distractions	Exploring the resources	Thinking about practicalities	Focusing on philosophy	Using supporting evidence

Finding and keeping focus	**Reviewing literature**	**Project management**	**Critical thinking**	**Academic writing**
Keeping them moving asking for written work	Setting mini tasks in critiquing	Identifying support	Getting them to take a step back	Encouraging them to being their own critical friend
Looking out for warning signs such as repeated topic change, avoidance of meetings,	Identifying flaws in other studies	Building in downtime	Encouraging them to question	Keeping focused
[Also see suggestions on p12 above]	Looking for gaps in the literature	Checking progress throughout	Keeping a research diary	Alerting them to possible pitfalls

Explanations of strategies used to support students in finding and keeping a focus

Finding and keeping focus	**Explanation from supervisors**
Clarifying the scope	*Students have to be guided by what is a reasonable project to do within the scope of an MSc and if their project is just much bigger, than what is what can be expected within the timeframe, then you just have to say "well, look, you know, this will set you up for failure and I'm not happy to do that". So you know, some firm direction is required for some students obviously*
Mapping thoughts	*In a first supervision what I try and do with a student is to just, I just say 'I am going to write while you speak' and I usually do some sort of map on a piece of paper and try and, in the centre of the map, put what is at the heart of their passion. So I get them to talk about, 'What are you really?', 'Yeah, ok, so you are talking about child development, what about it? What age children?', you know, 'Is it gender related, is it, you know, cultural, is it…' and try and narrow, narrow, narrow it down to the heart of what they are talking about, put that in the centre of the paper and then do a kind of, depends on how it goes, but some sort of spider diagram, 'Well, in relation to that, what do you think about this?' and just get them through questioning to… And that helps them narrow down their title often as well*
Starting with firm foundations	*I think a lot of the students seem to actually start from the method and work backwards... you'll have conversations like;* *'I quite like the idea of doing a focus group'* *'Ok, why?'* *'Well, it's a good way of getting data'* *'Yes, why?'* *And it's those sort of conversations, and it's not really the fact that, they haven't actually got, they have got an inkling of what focus groups are designed to do, but they haven't necessarily actually sort of, … are you talking about…hermeneutics or, what is it you are actually looking at within that? To… sort of join up the narrative, to join up the foundations of where you are coming from.*
Thinking about the relevance and the impact	*I am much more focussed on 'well what's the impact going to be', because what's the point in doing something that we already have a massive evidence base about… another angle you could come at it from…I think an interesting intellectual debate really, so I think*

	it's that, getting that ideas, but making, I suppose challenging them a little bit about the relevance and the usefulness of their research idea
Exploring different avenues	*It is very evident when you're the supervisor, but much more difficult for the student to see and you can see they're stuck in that, and so you've got to reflect back to them... that might be because they're very keen …, or they have a bias towards that, so actually exploring those avenues with them as well*
Helping them to manage distractions	*I have seen it with other people and I have probably done it myself, you know, justify 'I haven't done this because I have all these things on' and being able to actually say 'Yeah, but if you are actually going to achieve this, you need to commit the time to it'*
Keeping them moving	*I suppose even just in time factor, it's getting the balance right between, yes, they have got to describe in a way in order for you to understand, but quickly make that shift into analysis and synthesis and stuff you know… and the next one is gaining a publication out of it and dissemination of it, because it's like that's the end point – 'Oh well, I have done the study and it's finished', but actually you have got to use it*
Watching out for signs of stalling	*I've had situations where I've worried that someone is telling me... some very interesting conversations and discussions, but because I've not seen any written evidence of that, I got quite worried…* *I think until you have a focus, things swim away because you have got nothing to hook the resources on*

Explanations of strategies used in reviewing the literature

Reviewing literature	**Explanation from supervisors**
Giving direction	*Suggestions about 'you might want to read this body of literature' because they don't know what they don't know*
Signposting to relevant literature	*I have actually had to really signpost students to specific literature because the literature that they have come with,… is actually not contemporary, or it isn't robust enough…I mean if I am doing searches for my own work and I come across something that would be valuable for that particular student that I am supervising, I will either signpost them to or provide the link; just give them a quick email or something like that. Or I will print it and take it to the tutorial, say have you thought about this, do you remember when we talked about that, well it's in this article here. So it's ways of doing it without trying to dent their confidence, if you like*
Introducing them to reference management systems	*I will point them to Endnote, which they may or may not use in the end*
Ensuring they know about search strategies	*I remind them that the importance of having a look at the resources on the library page because there is fab resources on, … Boolean searching and all of that stuff*
Using a structured strategy	*I think I am much more focussed now on saying 'right, well, if you are saying that there's a gap in the literature, do the analysis of the literature now, and prove that', because it's no good getting down the line and realising it was there in the literature anyway, you just hadn't searched thoroughly... So by enforcing them in a way to embed themselves in the literature, you can help them to, you know, to not waste time and not make mistakes*
Exploring the resources	*Too many of our students do not know the fantastic resources that we have here… But things like… they can have twenty minute 'one and one' with the information specialist, … Inter library loans…the importance of using web of science, web of knowledge because it takes us into resources that are not just ones that we own. I remind them that the importance of having a look at the resources on the library page because there is fab resources on, you know, however you say, Boolean searching and all of that stuff*
Setting mini tasks in critiquing	*I have set little projects, little tasks, which you could call that teaching.., maybe just to go away and look at some literature and look at how they might critique that*
Identifying flaws in other studies	*it exposes them to, you know, the different studies that are out there, which methodologies they have used, what have been the flaws identified around them*

Looking for gaps in the literature	*Then they look at the literature and see what everybody else has said and maybe where the gaps are ….'People are saying this, this and this, but I think that …' so, you identify your question*

Explanations of strategies used to develop project management skills

Project management	**Explanation from supervisors**
Starting with a plan	*What I like personally is to say to the student 'The next thing I want to see is a plan – just a sheet of A4 or just some kind of outline of what you propose; what you think it's about and then we can talk through it'*
Working backwards from the end	*Alerting them to… it's not just about finishing the last chapter, it's then about pulling it together and what they have to do in order to make it a thesis and also submission date. So we work backwards from the submission date to where they are, kind of half way through, so that it doesn't come as a complete shock*
Drawing a timeline	*It was just a piece of paper with a long line, in fact, three bits of paper with, you know, there's the cap and gown at the end, right, to get there what do you need to do when. And actually asking the student with post-it notes just to track back and look at, you know, in order to submit then, then you need to have a full draft ready for then, and then you need to have this done for then, ethics approval has got to be, so they were actually drawing out their own time line.*
Clarifying tasks involved	*So that they see that if they are going to get to the end of it, there is lots of different activities that they need to be undertaking*
Breaking the project into stages	*Have they thought through what the stages are and how they're going to plan that work? And some people have already done all of that for themselves, they've done projects before and so they can articulate that quite well. Others can't see that far ahead and can't see the end product, so trying to make them think about the end product; where they're trying to get to and help what steps and how much time it's going to take them as well.*
Thinking about practicalities	*I said 'You know, this is not going to give you a huge amount of data and you've got access to hundreds, literally hundreds of students, you know. You have to think about improving your sample size'*
Identifying support	*I try to talk them through that, you know and talk about the support that they're going to get at the*

	beginning and if they're not going to get any and they say they're going to do it all in their own time, then we'll talk about how they're going to manage that
Building in downtime	*Ask if they have built in any downtime, you know, family time, stuff like that? Because it's really hard to sustain it all*
Checking progress throughout	*I now have a checklist which is a structuring... each chapter… for each bit … have a traffic light, red, amber, green …In terms of supervision, instead of them sitting in tutorials in the front of the dissertation like frightened rabbits, they scan through and they suddenly see, 'Oh, chapter three, I have actually done that bit. Or I have developed that, I can go amber there. I haven't touched'…and right from word go they've got... they can see that they have achieved and they feel that they are on their way and they take control*

Explanations of strategies used to develop critical thinking

Critical thinking	**Explanation from supervisors**
Clarifying their understanding	*Well what she was saying was: "My project is going to be emancipatory" and she was hanging on to this word for ages and ages and it became apparent that she had absolutely no real idea what it was. I think that's part of the role of the supervisor; is to help the student unpick what they've heard and whether what they've heard is... not 'right', but... relevant and useful, and what's their interpretation of that?*
Developing diagrams	*I'm quite a visual person when I'm working with people and I can remember sitting and drawing like a picture of her describing the team to me and I was sitting kind of drawing a diagram and I was asking her how close she felt different members of the team were to her way of working and how far away they were. It certainly helped her to see that she actually needed to go and talk to some of those people that she actually saw as being very much on the fringes and not being that important to the team, as well as talking to the people that were closer to her*
Looking for links with the literature	*And then the question for all … 'How does that reflect the literature? … You know, you have to think can you back that up within the literature*
Challenging their assumptions	*It is about challenging them to think critically about their assumptions*

Using specific prompting	*Saying 'Hmmm, not sure it's right' is just so unhelpful. It's 'Why is it not? What needs to change? What needs to be better?' … Why are you are doing that, you know, make an argument for why that approach is the appropriate approach …and I have found, that just being positive - somebody just saying 'It's a really good idea, you're not articulating it very well yet'*
Focusing on philosophy	*I usually get them to sort of almost defend their philosophical stance ...and what we'll do is we'll actually sort of say 'OK, well lets write down some bullet points which you think actually fits with your philosophical stance' and get the student to then take those bullet points away and actually get them to reflect on does it fit with what they think the chosen approach actually is*
Getting them to take a step back	*I think again from a supervisory point of view, it then comes back to actually sort of saying 'Well actually no, take a step back'… 'Think about this, why do you think they have said that'?'*
Encouraging them to question	*I would encourage them to ask me questions about those paragraphs, rather than give a blanket comment because I don't tend to do that, but I say 'ask me a particular question about this, for example, "is this discursive enough?"'*
Keeping a research diary	*I would encourage all of them to keep a research diary. Because it's research, whether they are doing systematic, it's all research. The international students, I think maybe culturally, especially Chinese students, they are uncomfortable with it, so I am not going to force it, but I would say that our home students, particularly ones with full time jobs, they don't believe me, then they do it, and they are like 'hey, you are right'. Instead of holding it in my head all day while I am at work, I will write it down, or I will get up in the morning and I suddenly realise that I have been dreaming about something, get it in the diary. And it works, that works great as well*

Explanations of strategies used to help develop academic writing

Academic writing	**Explanation from supervisors**
Developing skills from the beginning	*They need to do some writing really early in the process, you know, so even if they are just writing what they think their rationale is, that ultimately might fit into an introductory section, but they do it at the beginning and then they edit things and change things as they go along*

Writing in smaller chunks and learning to edit	*When it's a big piece of writing it's about being able to see it in smaller pieces and feeling that it's okay to get perhaps more feedback than you've done in the past and having another go at writing it and having a bit more feedback and, what do they call that, like, the iterative process for the student, so that they're looking at it again and again.*
Keeping feedback positive	*Positive feedback is so important and I think we need to really build that in as it brings back the confidence and it knocks people's confidence if there are areas that they are, you know, a little bit new to*
Giving specific constructive feedback	*Be constructive, it gives you something solid to focus on when you are doing that*
Using supporting evidence	*Maybe it's just the realisation that you know, they have something important to say and that they can say it with authority, but that authority has got to be evidenced*
Encouraging them to being their own critical friend	*I've also tried getting students to be their… own critical friend. So, doing a piece of work, leaving it for a while, going back to it and writing questions to themselves on the work. Not correcting it, but asking themselves questions in the margins, like we would do when we were annotating a piece of work*
Keeping focused	*So I get them to actually do the shortest possible abstract, type it out and stick it across the top of their computer screen. I say "keep looking at that, 'cos that's what you really are trying to put across; not all these other little tangents which is going to distract from the main point you're trying to make…Keeping them on track in the nicest way possible, without destroying the ego*
Alerting them to possible pitfalls	*I talk to them about the pitfalls and the mistakes that I've seen. You know, stupid things like you know, word limits, anonymity, forgetting to write, or running out of steam and therefore they don't write a conclusion; they don't write any recommendations, or the recommendations they've made don't match what they've found in their study*

Supervisory Dilemmas

From time to time you may experience issues about which you are not sure how to proceed. Discussing the issue with the Programme Director or Module Leader might help you to identify different possible actions to help resolve the situation, but the following dilemmas (identified both from the literature or from supervisors' experiences) may provide further food for thought. The possible actions were suggested following discussion among experienced supervisors.

Dilemma 1

I supervised a student who worked within a research team, out in the Trust, so she was confident in terms of the research philosophies, the processes, the data collection for the more medical research she had been involved with, but really struggled with the more qualitative approach of the project we decided she would be doing.

Possible actions

Re-visit the research question – is a qualitative approach best? If yes, then:

- Suggest further reading to help
- Explore the struggle – is it knowledge base?
- Discuss that struggling may be about learning – reframing to accommodate
- Discuss/explore the uncertainties of qualitative compared to quantitative to acknowledge differences and values
- Explain enhancement of project and personal development rather than staying in 'comfort zone'

Dilemma 2

I think he come in with a clear idea on what he wanted to do, but the more he understands he realised the limitations of what he was wanting to do, so half way along he lost his clarity because he was starting to question his own approach, which threw him because he then went through the work of trying to put the ethical approval together and then 'oh, I have to change my methodology'

Possible actions

Discuss and explore the issues and expectations of visioning a linear process, helping student to recognise that research is about adapting and changing plan, trying to foresee problems but when problems do arise, dealing with them rather than thinking everything is correct

Dilemma 3

I know this person through a work connection as I used to be their manager, so I have known a bit about them before they came and I have always assumed that they will deliver and they will do that work but I didn't necessarily know how they do the academic work or their academic level of writing so I have always felt a bit on a back foot with that in terms of I am not sure of what, what their capabilities are. She is well able to articulate her arguments verbally but I have yet to see anything in writing.

Possible Actions

Ask to see draft work to allow you to comment on it

If the student produces an appropriate amount and quality of work then you will feel reassured. If not, then you can discuss barriers to writing or production of work.

Look at ways that may support the process and what would help the student progress.

There is a tension between supervising and supporting the student and ownership of the research, however it is a two-way communication/relationship so some honest discussion about the relationship may be helpful.

Dilemma 4

A student had experience of mental health problems and wanted to do research into this area. I thought it was highly inappropriate that the student was considering this area, because she was being affected by the reading she was doing on this topic. It was making her revisit her experience which was not helping her. I was concerned that she lacked perspective and would lose any sense of boundaries in research in this area, but she was adamant that since this was her professional background she wanted to keep this focus to her work.

Possible Actions

Depends on whether the approach is qualitative or quantitative

In whose opinion is it 'highly inappropriate'?

Role of supervisor – is it to question their judgement as to whether the choice of topic is inappropriate?

Flag up potential hazards and ethical issues

Discuss parameters, role boundaries, empathy vs sympathy

Is it the supervisor's issue?

Student would need to decide if it was inappropriate – Unless harm was occurring, or putting themselves or others at risk

What is supervisor role if all ethics etc adhered to?

Potential of 'Mollycoddling' of student (or being over supportive)

The fact that the student was already a professional in this area seemed to influence decisions, as presumably she had an awareness of professional boundaries in relation to her personal experience. Question of where to draw the line as to what is appropriate and the fact that personal experience can give insight into particular issues which others may not have considered

Dilemma 5

When I took on supervision for this student she was quite confident that she knew what she was doing, because she had received a good mark for her research module. But when I looked at this I had to explain that while it had been a good piece of work for that assignment, it wasn't anywhere near ready to have as a basis for her project.

Possible Actions

Need to explain differences between practice project, research, reflection etc.

Difficulty in getting student to see differences and also need to consider pressures and expectations from (seconding) trust

Some students don't always know what they want to do – part of the supervisor's role is about helping them understand and to move on.

You can only advise – students will do what they want to do

You could say clearly 'you are going to fail if you hand this in' but don't want to 'set students up to fail' – trying to pre-empt 'car crash'

We can see the pitfalls and don't want them to fail

Stopping student from handing it in?

At later stages submitting poorer work could be a 'coping mechanism' student may feel 'I have got to hand it in' – may want break from it and knows she/he can re-sit if it is a fail but will have time before result is decided (and it might just pass?)

Dilemma 6

One of my students had come from his home country just to do the masters' programme. He had left his wife and three children and did not know anyone here. He had really struggled in the taught part of the programme and had not socialised much with other students – partly because his spoken English wasn't that great and he had to spend a lot of time working on his assignments, getting to grips with the language. He was doing really well academically, but was thinking of giving up because he was so lonely and home-sick.

Possible Actions

As a supervisor sometimes they tell you their problems, and at times it can be difficult to know how they cope.

Cannot mend this but have a duty of care

Listen to them and point in the direction of University services or locally available groups to support

Enquire about skype or local community support

You can help them to look at options, and be positive about the progress they have already made.

One strategy is to give them a set time to tell you about problems but then to then focus on work.

Are there other mechanisms to support students in this situation?

There are lots of activities/events for international students, but is this the same for all students?

Discussion about professional boundaries within the relationship and parameters

Discussion about handing students your mobile phone number – many supervisors don't

Most supervisors wouldn't invite students to their homes- although this might not be the case in different institutions

Dilemma 7

A student presents with an assigned piece of work from their employers and wants to turn it in to a dissertation, but the piece of work is badly constructed and requires ethical approval and great deal of work. The student however, is being strongly encouraged to produce the piece of work as dissertation by their employer and sponsor

Possible actions

Do you need to advise employers?

Set up tripartite meeting to discuss

Need to manage expectations – student, employer, University

May need to guide re study skills and time management

Don't want to set student up to do a bad job

Consider learning styles – discussion about how people like to learn

Could be an international student, feeling pressured to look at specific project or to achieve certain grade

This could be compounded if the student is doing a small project which is part of a bigger project. The work needs to be suitable for a stand-alone dissertation.

Discussion about possibility of joint projects, but there need to be clear boundaries. Can be the case in work based learning projects – needs someone in the organisation who is coordinating the process.

Some people have seen situations where there are 2 stages – the dissertation and then a separate presentation for the employing trust

Key messages for supervisors

The key messages which are presented below were developed through an iterative research process involving over 20 supervisors in a series of interviews and workshops. Following these, discussions of the issues which emerged with the supervisors who had been involved, and reconsideration of the themes in comparison with previous published work on the topic of supervision took place. The literature was re-visited in order to explore whether the findings of the research echoed those of other authors who have explored the pedagogy of supervision. Although the literature covered a range of disciplines, and included both masters and doctoral supervision, there was an apparent resonance between the work of other authors and the findings from the study, which involved supervisors from the fields of health care and education.

Through this process, five key messages for supervisors regarding the development and use of the strategies they use in supervision were constructed, and a number of strategies used within supervision were identified. These key messages are:

- When going through the dissertation process with a student, a successful outcome will often involve becoming aware of their goals, expectations, and external influences which can impact on their ability to study.
- You cannot fully predict when they will need advice, guidance, support, challenge, reassurance or encouragement.
- Although they have responsibility for their progress and the quality of their work, you may be involved in assessing and anticipating their needs and creating strategies to help them to achieve the skills and understanding required to reach the required outcomes.
- Your assessment of their progress and feedback on their work can help them to undergo what may be a transformative educational experience.
- Your personal experiences of being supervised can affect your approach to supervision but you may also find the way in which others have conceptualised the supervisory role or discussion with other supervisors helpful.

The aim of this 'Guidelines, hints and tips' booklet is to share the thoughts and experiences of supervisors with others who are undertaking the role. Those who developed this resource found the experience of meeting with colleagues to discuss their experiences and to consider some of the literature on supervision

very useful, and would recommend such activities to others.

Appendix 8

Support materials for new supervisors' workshop

Assessment of students

By the end of this exercise you will have:

- Made explicit the assumptions you hold and how you go about the assessment of students' needs.
- Developed a set of principles to guide your supervisory practices and support your assessment of students.

Activity: Understanding our own practices and assumptions
Form into a group of three and assign roles as interviewer, interviewee, and note-taker. You will each have a turn in each role. The interviewer manages the 'interview' asking the following key questions:

How did your supervisor assess your needs and wants?
Describe this for the following areas of your supervision:

- Critical thinking
- Emancipation
- Enculturation
- Relationship

You have **15 minutes** to complete each interview. We will then discuss in the large group.

It is important that the note-taker provides a detailed record to the interviewee and does not engage in the conversation.

Pedagogical conversation: can we identify the principles for assessing our students' needs on which to base our supervisory practices?

Three levels of reflective questioning turn experience into learning

The aim of this structured exercise is to identify new perspectives on an experience which could then lead to changes in behaviour. The questioning process may help you to uncover your own assumptions and constructs (myths) about what you do as postgraduate supervisors (McCormack and Pamphilon, 2007 p 29).

Describe the experience
What in your words, is the story being told here?
What is the point of the story?
To what extent is this also your story?
In what ways is it different from your story?

Attend to feelings
What feelings did the story trigger?
What do those feelings reveal about the experience of the storyteller?
What do those feelings reveal about your experience?
What positive responses are in the story?
How do you feel about these responses?
Are some responses not present? Which ones?
Why might they be absent?
How do you feel about their absence?

Interrogate the story
Are there words or concepts that suggest a particular world-view?
Which cultural values are elevated in this story?
What ways of being have been elevated in this story?
What might be the history of these ways of thinking?
What other ways of being and thinking are made invisible by this way of thinking?

Goal: To record any insights or 'a-ha' moments which might occur while you are considering these questions. Record these briefly on the cards provided. Each insight card should contain enough detail to make it understandable to someone who is not part of the group and should open to the reader possibilities for action rather than generalizations that do not move beyond description. Insight cards should be practice-orientated.

The following example illustrates this principle:
Non-effective example: need to set better guidelines.
Effective example: need to analyse and acknowledge the different types of expectations involved in supervision.

Appendix 9

Supervisors involved in each phase

Name	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
1	**Lucy**	Gillian	Gillian	Karen
2	**Bethany**	Lucy	Lucy	Kay
3	**Daisy**	Winnie	Winnie	Eddie
4	Kate	Rosie	Rosie	Craig
5	Peter	Bethany	Bethany	Tamsin
6	Simon	Neil	Neil	Tilly
7	Sarah	Ken	Nicola	Beth
8	**Nicola**	Nicola	Thea	Fay
9	Frances	Thea	Emma	Ed
10	Terry	Emma	Tara	
11	Jim	Tara	Daisy	
12	**Thea**	Daisy		
13	Karen	Natalie		
14	**Natalie**			
15	Toni			
16	**Gillian**			
17	**Neil**			
18	Ursula			
19	**Rosie**			
20	Liam			

The names in bold text in phase 1 also participated in phase 2

Appendix 10

Initial data analysis groupings

Where the supervisor is coming from	What the student brings	What they actually do	Outside influences
Supervisor motivation	Student background and readiness	Create developmental space/ environment	National
Supervisor flexibility	Expectations and goals	Establish boundaries	Numbers of postgraduate students
Supervisor Investment	Student growth	Maintain ownership	Organisational
Influence of their personal supervision experiences		Develop a relationship	Ethical review processes
Feelings about supervision		Build confidence	Supervisor preparation and allocation
Questioning their practice		Give reassurance	Supervisor support
		Be aware of student's experience	External
		Go through the process with them	Employer influence
		Promoting skills	Personal and family life
		Finding and using literature	
		Project management	

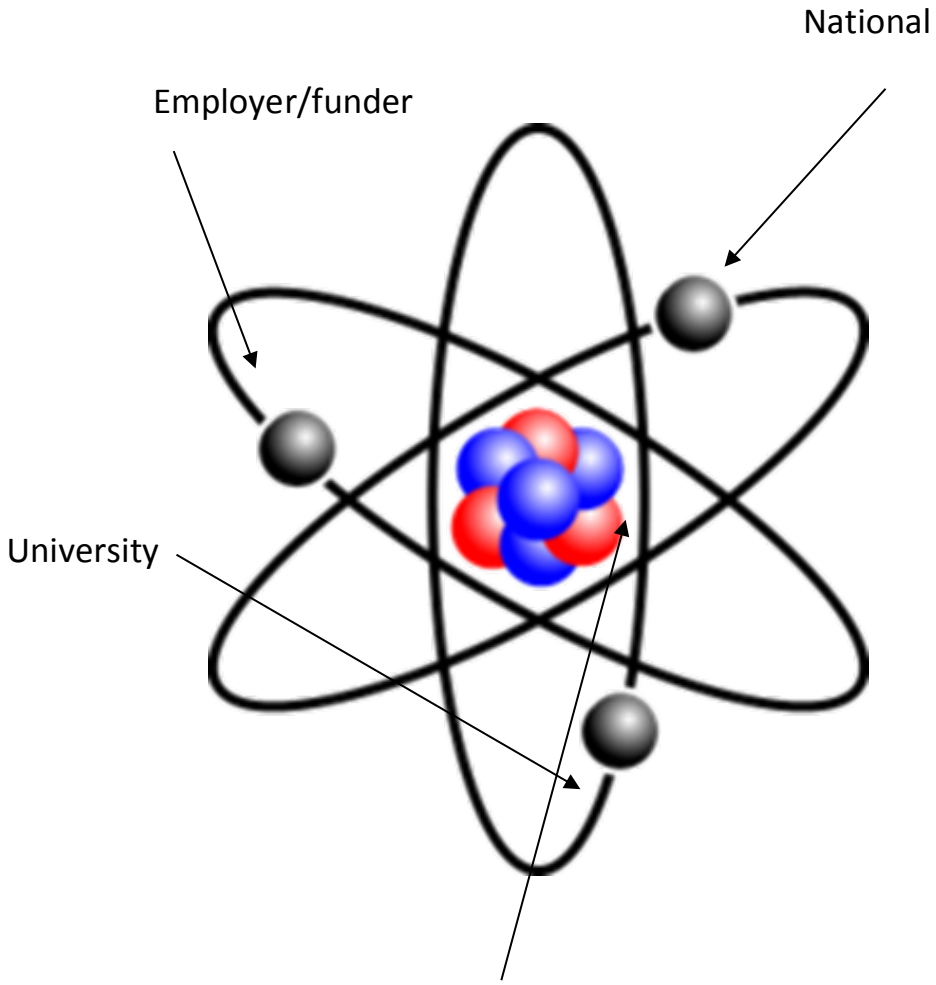
Where the supervisor is coming from	What the student brings	What they actually do	Outside influences
		Critical thinking	
		Academic writing	
		Giving direction	
		Assessment of student need/want	
		Development of focus	
		Anticipating needs or developments	
		Contextualise	
		Relevant to practice	
		Almost giving clinical supervision	
		Recognise masterliness	

Appendix 11

Extract of A5 booklet to summarise participant statements

Supervision at master's level

Findings so far



Student and supervisor

What the student brings

Where the supervisor is coming from

What they actually do

Pressures

But then there are the other things, you know, you hear people saying, well, oh she got seventy percent, you must have been a good supervisor, so the pressure is on you really which is wrong because if you allocate the student fifty eight percent or fifty percent, does that mean you are not a very good supervisor. It's a bit of an academic myth isn't it, not like an urban myth, but it's a myth, i.e., well, you mustn't be very good as a supervisor if your student doesn't get very good marks. But not take into consideration the fact that the student actually might have always got those marks, depending on who was supervising them…

Because you wouldn't want your students to not get the best deal and not, you know, get the maximum mark, but at the same time you wouldn't allocate marks where they weren't due, you know. So, we've all got integrity, so I think it's a little bit of a pressure really. I don't know if it's a competitive thing between them, ha, ha, I have heard it was the doctorates and PhD as well; it depends who your supervisor is to how well you do. If you have got a good supervisor, you will do well.

Confidence

with no clear guidance, you are kind of left wondering what we do whether it's right, or good practice or bad practice

you don't really know whether you're giving the student good advice or bad advice really. You assume that it's good if they're happy to come back and see you and they pass at the end of the day

if you haven't been through the process yourself doing a systematic appraisal, which I actually haven't, then you begin to question yourself, and you think, well actually 'am I directing them in the right way?'

I kind of was just dropped in at the deep end, saying, well ok, get on with it. And I then asked, I remember, to be able to shadow a few people before I made a complete hash of things. But erm, yeah, so that's why I sort of think maybe I am not doing everything right,

and I don't know if this is good evidence-based practice, or not – because I'm very new to this

Feelings

so saw it more as a development opportunity but the other side of that was that I was extremely anxious about the responsibility of it

I think if I had gone and asked the support would have been there, but I did feel a little bit vulnerable about I should be able to

I had a debate with (ethic's reviewer) about that and how it looks to the student. So I was frightened about, I couldn't advise them. I felt de-skilled

because the reality isn't a pleasant reality, so I don't know if I would encourage anyone to do it

I felt very supported and safe

that was probably the most exciting supervision I have done because it was cutting edge stuff

I think one of the things I found hardest sometimes about this sort of level of supervision is a sense of loneliness sometimes

Suggested Supervisor Development Strategies

Guidance booklet for what's expected of you as a master's supervisor? From an in-house peer support type

the sort of three sixty-degree feedback process would be really useful to ask students

a forum in which our, not necessarily our individual supervision, but opportunities to bring people together to discuss some of the... some of the things that you are learning as you, as you supervise other students

if I had a wish list, my wish list would be my list of names of people that I could refer to for different areas

I think the buddying up with people would be... I would find that really helpful

Appendix 12

Photograph of room used for workshops

Appendix 13

Supervisor's story from workshop 2

A supervisor's story

I think it's quite a powerful experience for students going through a master's programme, for whatever reason they do it. I think it can affect them in a very positive way because it can build confidence, but I think it can also have some negative effects in that it can be really stressful. I think it can make them doubt whether they are going in the right direction career wise sometimes and want to change. It has that power to unsettle people a little bit. I think it can affect people quite profoundly and I think they do need support as they make those kinds of transitions.

I think the relationship with the supervisor is quite key. I think students are in a very vulnerable position as they don't really know the systems and processes here, so I think you have to try and enable that. And I think it can be potentially quite a powerful role in that you can direct a student down a path that they might not want to go purely because that's your strength and not the student's strength.

I wonder actually, in hindsight now, how well the research module prepares them. I just wonder if it is a useful time to go through a whole load of theory which doesn't appear to go in. You know I wonder if we should actually get them to think about what it is they want to research and then try and situate it in the appropriate philosophies and paradigm, because it doesn't make any sense to them at the time. And the process of ethical review I think is a huge barrier, you know that they have got to work their way through. I think that's the biggest thing that frightens them and then after that, I think the next stage is the analysis of the data. They can describe what they have done but that deeper analysis I think is the next thing I have experienced where they struggle.

One difficulty is about confidence in terms of people's expectations because they are in senior positions and are used to being in charge and knowing what they are doing. And, it is quite difficult to acknowledge that 'I don't know this' or 'I don't understand this'. I think it's just when they start dipping their toe in the water and start realising how much they don't know, it's quite daunting really because they have so much to read and they don't know which of the literature to actually focus on because they haven't really understood what would be the best way to research what they want to research.

It is more than just the academic support and the writing, and it's about how people are thinking, it's about what else is going on in their lives. Sometimes there is a fine line about how far do you sort of push them, because actually sometimes I think you can recognise people are, you know, teetering on the edge of breaking point. I think part of it is them realising that this is not, like a quick fix, easily solution, its hard challenging stuff that is going to make them think differently and challenge…. I just wonder, sometimes I have questioned whether we feel more … whether we can understand those problems more because of who we are, because of the age we are, because of the commitments we have got. Because I think some supervisors often

just see at master's level that you are not really part of their pastoral care, but you know, I still think that sometimes you are and you might be the person they open up to.

It's hard to know what, well I mean… what is a good outcome, you know, a good outcome for supervision though? Is it that the student has passed and done really well or, or is it that they have had a learning experience during that, so even if they have really struggled, they feel as though they have achieved something, even if it's not a brilliant mark. With a lot of students, you get an email thanking them after they have got their mark and everything is great. But if the students who are referred, still acknowledge your support and commitment, that's the most rewarding thing in a way, so you do feel as though you have done them a service.

I think one of the problems is, we don't have sufficient numbers of people who can actually do the supervision. We don't have in my view, training to enable new people, particularly, to find out what's required. It's all very well saying you have got this qualification; you can now supervise. I think it's quite interesting that everybody has to have a teaching qualification to teach but to supervise research, what do you have to have?

I think I mentioned to a manager during an appraisal about, she raised the subject, would I like to do that, and I thought that would be something good to do. Although I was quite happy to do it, I didn't know what it entailed really. I saw it more as a development opportunity but the other side of that was that I was extremely anxious about the responsibility of it.

We had a session with (Person's name) at which I naively said 'is there some kind of programme to enable us to know the sorts of things we should be doing' and he said 'this is it'. I was sitting there thinking 'Gosh', because it was quite intimidating because you know I had supervised a lot at level six, but not at level 7 and I just really felt quite vulnerable in it all and I didn't really want to say 'actually, I don't know whether I can do that…'. I think if I had gone and asked the support would have been there, but I did feel a little bit vulnerable about I should be able to. I think there was a little bit of vulnerability on my part and not wanting to say anything in front of everyone else who seemed very confident in what they were doing. So I have learned a little bit by trial and error I suppose along the way. I think I am less confident with systemic review because I have never, you know, done one myself. So I always feel a little bit uncertain, but never mind, try and work through the guidelines. And, and it's been fine, I just find it a little bit more challenging personally about whether they are on the right track and I am more comfortable with the empirical stuff or practice projects. You learn by finding your way through it, and probably, unfortunately, by making some mistakes along the way.

Once or twice I have said to somebody who runs the programme, 'what instructions do they get about what level of supervision?' because I didn't know what I was supposed to be offering, and you know I would offer everything if I could. How many hours I could reasonably, or unreasonably, offer people, and in what time frame? And I feel as though there is a lot of pressure on students in their day job and sometimes, you know, careers are riding on it or, promotions are riding on it and they have got all of this stress, and they are there because their employer was kind of encouraging them to be there, and I think sometimes they don't really want to. I think that they expect we know everything and will be able to sort it out for them. Nobody

has ever said that, but I have had students expecting me to offer supervision, get in touch with them on Christmas Eve. And I am sorry, but I don't do that. I actually have a life as well, and I am very clear with students that I do have a life and I do have holidays, and I actually take my weekends. I try to take them reasonably seriously, so I think there does have to be rules and there does have to be guidelines to protect, for both the student and us.

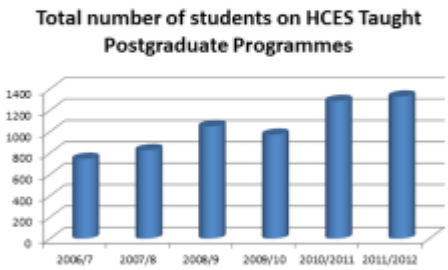
I am now paranoid about keeping a tutorial record about who said what when and you know, and any emails, which is sad, I mean I know it's necessary because sometimes you need it but it kind of takes some of the good stuff away, and you're spending time doing that which feels like administrative stuff, instead of having some blue sky thinking and a bit of inspiration and excitement and enthusiasm and joint thoughts about something. You are learning with them as well I think. That's the other thing I feel that in a really good supervisory relationship, you learn alongside them about the processes and you learn a little bit about what you might do differently next time with another student. I think you benefit in your own work, well I personally feel I have, because I have learned things from the students. I think there's a two way relationship, a critical friend type role on both parts sort in a way. So sometimes the students question me on what I am saying as well as I am questioning what they are saying and I think that works really well and I know I have used things that I have learned in my practice when I have been doing research myself or other types of things and I think 'oh yeah I will remember that', or even just references and stuff like that. They do give you a lot; I think it's a really beneficial role.

Appendix 14

Conference presentation for international conference

Supervision – 'secret garden'

Context of supervision



2014 – 15

- 50 + supervisors
- 145 dissertation students
- 6 different dissertation module options

Action research cycles

Evaluation – 20 staff:
5 focus groups
5 individual interviews

13 individual interviews
8 workshops
3 focus groups

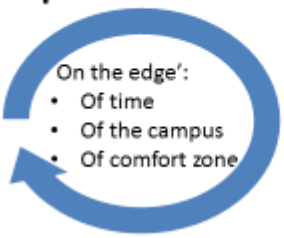
2 workshops (8 people)
Discussions/shared resources (10 people)

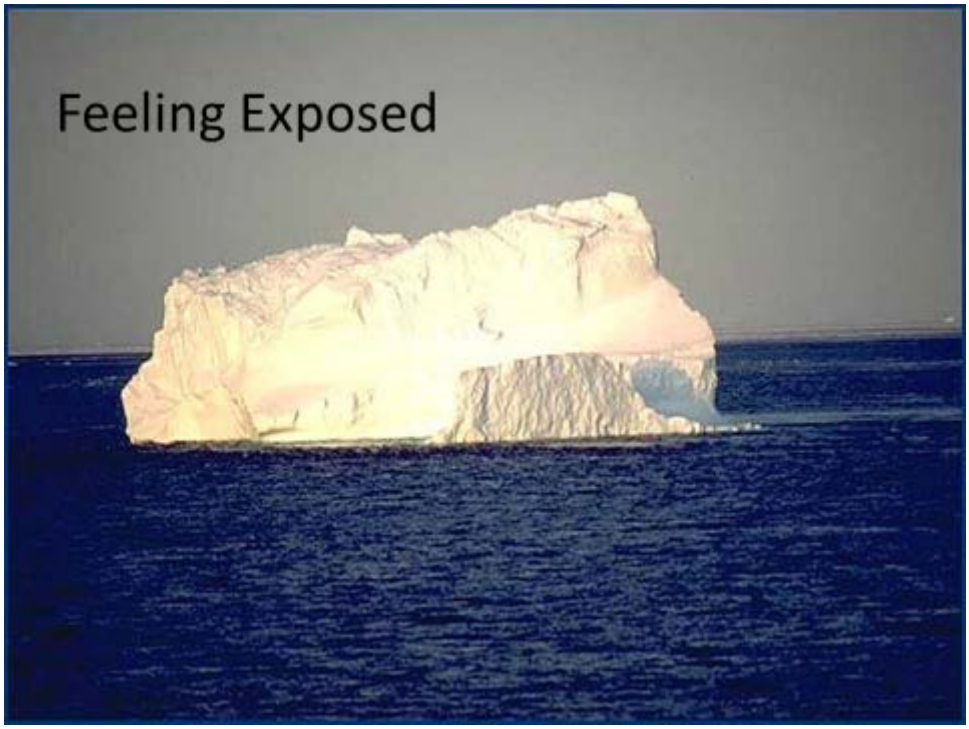
Challenges

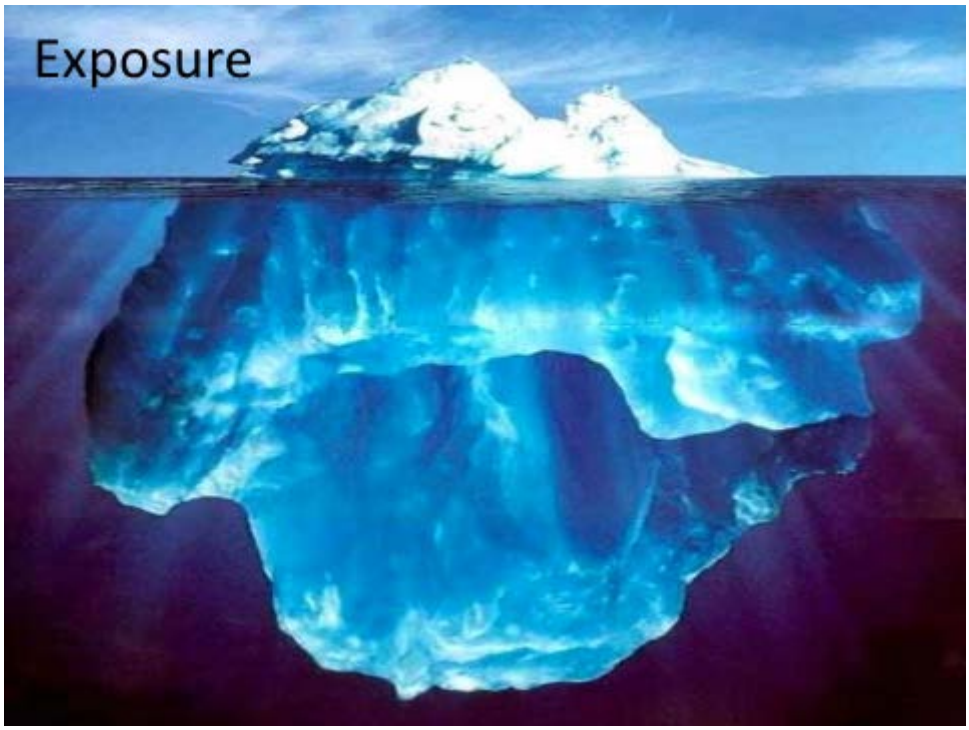
- Finding time and space
- Ensuring safe and welcoming atmosphere
- Agreeing on engaging activities
- Keeping people included and up to date with findings
- Adapting to ever-changing environment

Workshops

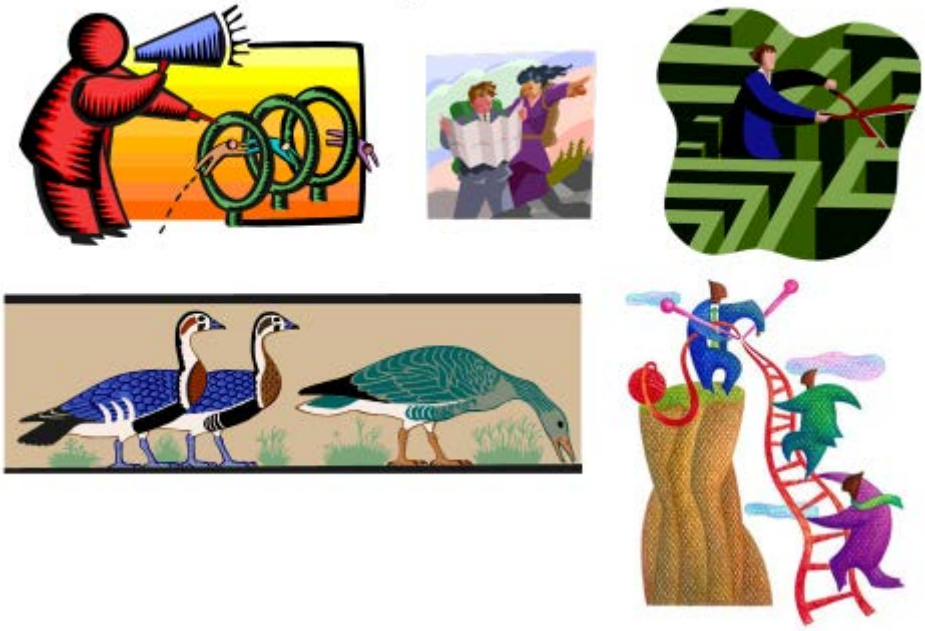
Workshop Date	
January 2013	Consideration of Lee's model of supervision Exercise on assessment of students' needs
February 2013	Reflections on 'supervisor's story
March 2013	Consideration of Supervisory Dilemmas
April 2013	Sharing of different supervisory practices
June 2013	Sharing of different supervisory practices
September 2013	Exploration of investment by supervisors
October, 2013	Exploration on confidence in supervision
November, 2013	Review of Supervisor guidelines, hints and tips




Feeling Exposed

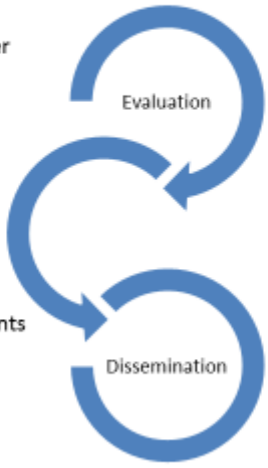

Exposure

Feeling included…



Developments for supervisors

Supervisors sometimes felt a sense of ill-preparedness, under confidence, and being slightly unsure about their supervisory role



"I feel a little apprehensive about asking now for help because I feel I probably should know better or they might think I should know by now"

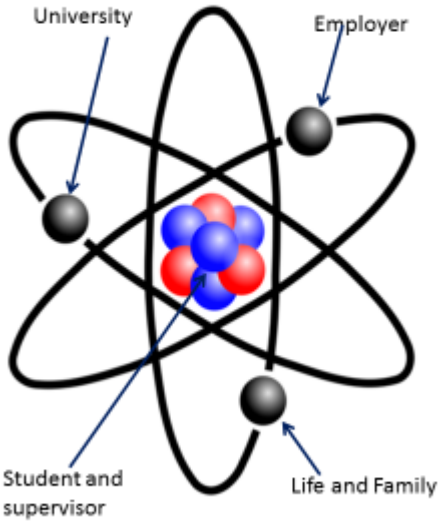
Restructure, move to departments
Potential for greater isolation
Increasing numbers of students
More new supervisors

"When the students are coming to seem me I just think 'what is on the next page of that booklet you sent me'? "

Developments for those involved

- *It's allowed me to sort of re-frame some of the things I had previously done in my own thought processes, but it's also given me a bit more confidence in trying something that I had sort of heard about or thought about, and seeing the success that other supervisors who have been involved in the project have had with that.*

- *I thought 'well, hey, you know, you've got needs as a supervisor. It's okay to go and look that up; it's okay to go and find it out', so maybe it did make me think… that's okay. It's okay to not know… and 'cos I wasn't quite sure what this thing was at master's… what it was.*



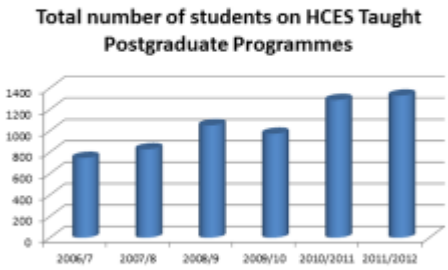
periodictablesofelements.wikia.com

Appendix 15

Conference presentation for regional conference

Context of project

2014 – 15



- 50 + supervisors
- 145 dissertation students
- 6 different dissertation module options

Action research cycles

20 supervisors in health or education
- 5 focus groups
- 5 individual interviews

13 individual interviews

8 workshops
3 focus groups

2 workshops (8 people)
Shared resources (10 people)

Challenges

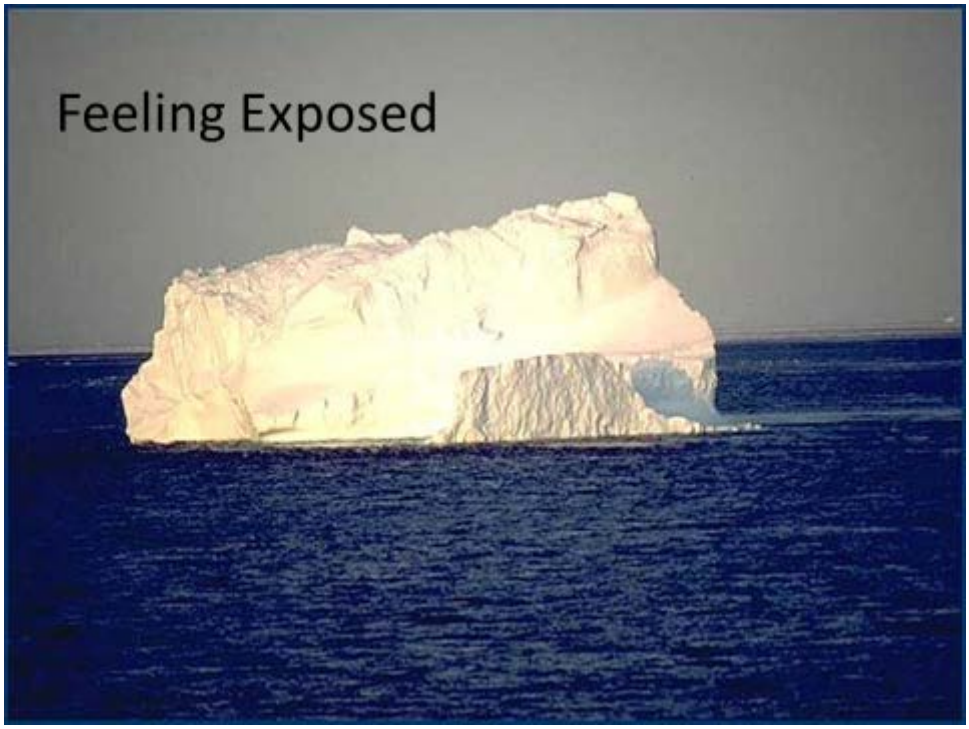
- Finding time and space
- Ensuring safe and welcoming atmosphere
- Agreeing on engaging activities
- Keeping people included and up to date with findings
- Adapting to ever-changing environment

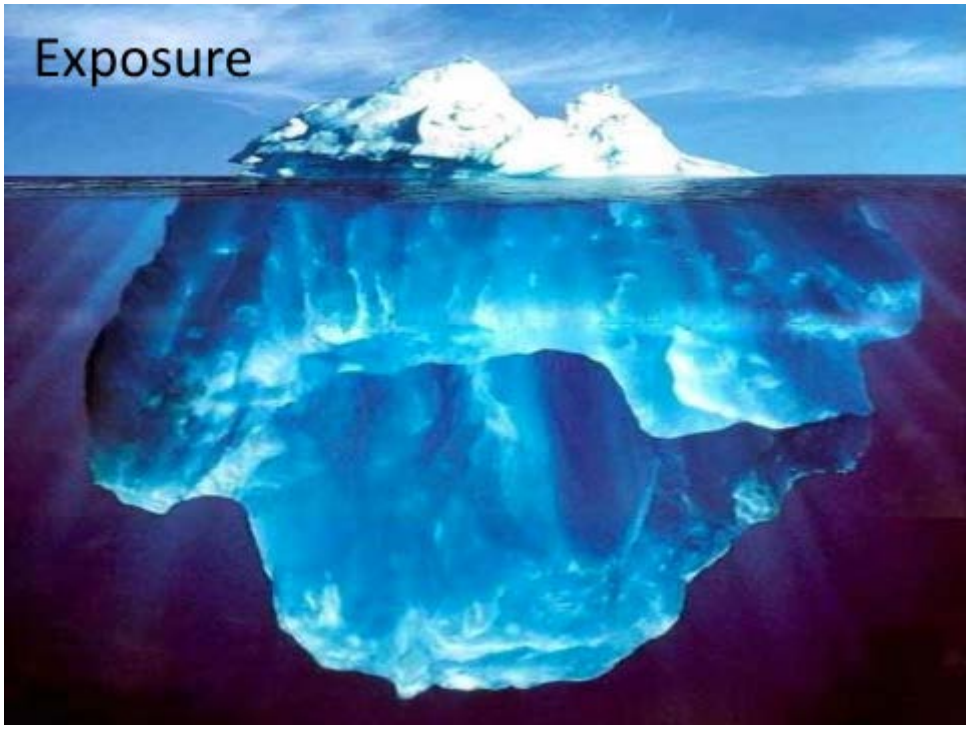
Workshops

Workshop	Activity	Strategy
Jan	Reflection on own experiences Consideration of Lee's model	Agreeing expectations Tripartite interviewing Group discussion
Feb	Supervisor's story dialogue	Postmodern group work (McCormack and Pamphilon, 2004)
March	Supervisory dilemmas	Exploring strategies
April	Sharing of practices	Show and tell
June	Sharing of practices	Show and tell
September	Exploration of investment	Discussion Proposals for guidelines document
October	Exploration of confidence	Discussion
November	Review of supervisor guidelines, hints and tips	Review of materials developed

Workshops


'On the edge':
• Of time
• Of the campus
• Of comfort zone


Feeling Exposed



Key messages

Going through the dissertation process with a student will involve becoming aware of their goals, expectations, and external influences which can impact on their ability to study.

You cannot fully predict when they will need advice, guidance, support, challenge, reassurance or encouragement.

Although they have responsibility for their progress and the quality of their work, you may be involved in assessing and anticipating their needs and creating strategies to help them to achieve the skills and understanding required to reach the required outcomes.

Your assessment of their progress and feedback on their work may help them to undergo what can be a challenging but transformative educational experience.

Your personal experiences of supervision can affect your approach to supervision but you may also find the way in which others have conceptualised the supervisory role or discussion with other supervisors helpful.

Final thoughts of those involved

It's allowed me to sort of re-frame some of the things I had previously done in my own thought processes, but it's also given me a bit more confidence in trying something that I had sort of heard about or thought about, and seeing the success that other supervisors who have been involved in the project have had with that.

I thought 'well, hey, you know, you've got needs as a supervisor. It's okay to go and look that up; it's okay to go and find it out', so maybe it did make me think... 'that's okay. It's okay to not know'