

A conversational case study which interrogates the quality of graduate supervision in the professional doctorate at QUT: A series of four roundtable papers*

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***Abstract:** This series of papers is designed to engender “quality conversation” and debate about the place of the professional doctorate in higher education and professional practice. Such conversation and debate will address the notions of validity and value in educational research within the professional doctorate (and doctorates more generally, particularly those which are challenging traditional conceptions of, approaches to, and formats of the doctoral award); and hopefully, there will be an emergence of guidelines and criteria to evaluate the professional doctorate (and other forms of doctorates which challenge the traditional conceptions) which are a valid and valued example of educational research. It uses the professional doctorate at Queensland University of Technology as a case study. The case study will raise issues and questions from a range of perspectives. It will be these issues and questions that will initiate the interactive part of the symposium where presenters, discussants and participants will have the opportunity to extend the conversation.*

Keywords:

professional doctorate; graduate supervision; action research

* Each paper stands in its own right as well as being part of the series of four roundtable papers

Background to the four Roundtable Papers

The case study of the professional doctorate at QUT must be set within the Australian context. The professional doctorate in Australia is a recent phenomenon in higher education, and at QUT, it was introduced in the 1990's. Its introduction provided the opportunity for people to research their professional work and practice. As such, it has also given the research community in higher education the opportunity to be experimental and pioneering in defining what is valued as doctoral research and how it might be viewed as valid in its own right.

The purpose of this series of roundtable papers, then, is not so much about comparing the rigour of a professional doctorate with that of a PhD. Rather, it is about advocating for the validity and value of pursuing doctoral research in ways that challenge traditional conceptions and approaches. The advocacy, therefore, is not about making comparative judgments; rather, it is about mounting a case for validity and value of alternative ways of doing doctoral-level educational research.

The significance of the papers in this session lies within the potential of the conversation and debate to deepen and strengthen the advocacy in which symposium participants must engage in their respective educational research contexts. A networking beyond the session may also emerge – and this level of ongoing interaction may provide a basis for advocacy in wider educational research.

The Four Roundtable Papers

The first two papers are the stories of two candidates who have completed the professional doctorate at QUT. Their stories comment particularly on the supervisory practices which they experienced during their candidature. The third paper is the story of the person who supervised the candidates. This story records reflections on his supervisory practices; and outlines what he calls a SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision. The fourth paper is the story of an academic whose research interests include graduate supervision. This paper provides a critical lens for interrogating the supervisory perceptions, perspectives and practices embedded in the first three papers. It identifies a set of criteria for quality graduate supervision; and it comments on these criteria with reference to research training implications for both candidates and supervisors. This paper, then, draws the first three papers together; and it creates a point of entry to a conversation about quality graduate supervision.

Paper #1

A tale of graduate supervision and examination in the professional doctorate: a graduate spins her yarn

Helen Chapman

(Helen is a graduate of the professional doctorate who maintains a strong interest in Action Research and higher education)

It is over five years since I completed my doctoral thesis and, while much of what happened has blurred or faded, certain experiences remain fixed in my memory. Through the deliberate and critical reflection required for the writing of this tale, my memories of those experiences have assumed a clarity and meaning not evident five years ago. My clearest memories concern my supervision and the challenges associated with “doing a doctorate” in a non-traditional paradigm.

Some background

My doctoral work evolved from my reflections on a work-related experience. The study was driven by the premise that mental health service provision should be less paternalistic and more empowering. I used a conceptual framework and an action research methodology to investigate the research question. The conceptual framework became a critical lens that provided the criteria for interpreting what happened during the inquiry. Action research, with its emphasis on reflecting and diffracting through collaborative processes, is not just a technical endeavour, but a means of investigating and acting in ways that are critical, participatory, and transformative and provided the methodological framework that allowed me to proceed with my interpretation.

The Action Plan was developed within a curriculum framework and carried out within the context of a mental health self-help group. The practical significance of the study lay in its utility to that group and the political significance lay in the individual and institutional development that the frameworks of the study advocated and facilitated. The study added to the body of knowledge in such a way that it formed the basis for better informed professional practice.

My supervisory ‘wants’

In the beginning, I was not very confident of my scholarly ability. However, I had years of life experience and was an established, mature professional used to taking control of my actions. I was accustomed to discussing and negotiating agendas and concerns, and to evaluating and prioritising choices. I did not want a supervisor who directed, inspected or controlled my doctoral process. Rather than tell me what to do, I wanted my supervisor to be what Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) defined as a *critical friend* - someone who helps others find the limits to the ways they are thinking. I deliberately chose my supervisor for this capacity, and found this type of leadership both an effective and appropriate form of supervision.

As a critical friend, my supervisor was more likely to ask questions than to answer them. Rather than supply answers, he stimulated reflection and discussion by using questions that provoked me to explore the situation further; to recognise and challenge underlying assumptions; and to prepare for future action and change. This form of supervision was very empowering at a personal level. By encouraging me to solve my own problems, my supervisor helped me to trust my intellect and my ability; I learned to have faith in myself. I also learned that maintaining intellectual integrity could entail taking a risk in response to various challenges.

Some challenges

My doctoral journey was challenging not only because of usual demands but also because of various transformations materialising within academia. Specifically, understandings of what it means to “do a doctorate” were, and indeed still are, being called into question and reframed. New methodologies, genres and styles were, and still are, emerging for both implementing and reporting postgraduate research. My doctoral work was intended to challenge the status quo within my professional world. It was some time before I realised it also challenged traditional, long entrenched understandings, especially in terms of the form and content of a doctoral thesis; not to mention methodological issues.

For example, my study was reported in the first person, active voice. The use of first person was an appropriate way of communicating within the action research methodology used, and the use of the active voice proclaimed my emotional involvement and allowed me to articulate in narrative form. According to Carter (1993, p. 9), “A story . . . is a theory of something. What we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe”. In a sense, my thesis was my story, narrated by me according to my determinations. I did not wish to hide behind what Emihovich (1995, p. 42) refers to as “the sterile prose of academe” in which my “disembodied voice as author was no longer connected to [my] research”. Rather, I wished to use my own voice and take responsibility for my statements, beliefs and opinions.

I believe that the need to take responsibility was in keeping not only with the written genre considered appropriate for reporting the study, but also with the essence of a professional doctorate - professional practice. However, there was a risk attached to communicating in such a way because it challenged traditional understandings of what constituted academic writing. Indeed, I was cautioned very early in the process by a senior academic, who tersely informed me that the use of the first person for academic work was totally unacceptable.

Another challenge to traditional, long entrenched understandings arose from the arrangement and style of my thesis document and from the circularity and fluidity of the chosen research methodology. Mostly my story was uninterrupted by headings; those used signified the importance of a new section within a chapter. Italicised sections were located throughout the thesis and signified either my response to my critical reflection, or an account of my reflections at a given point in time. The arrangement and style of my thesis document was not traditional. Nor was my research methodology.

Within the umbrella of action research methodology, I conceived a plan of action that was not only appropriate to the context but also feasible and had the potential to bring about both practical and political change. Action research not only emphasises collaboration and reflection, but also allows for the subjective realities of those involved; a necessary precondition for engaging in any successful change effort, according to Fullan (1982). Unfortunately, the meandering and fluid nature of the overall methodology together with the arrangement and style of my thesis document combined to create a difference of opinion regarding the value of my research.

As customary before an oral defence, copies of my thesis document were distributed to key faculty members. Following my presentation, one key person publicly confronted me with allegations concerning the lack of data, the ineffective methodology, and the general worthlessness of my inquiry. This was followed with private discussion in which I was advised to change my methodology and essentially 're-do' the whole inquiry. It is probable that the barrage of inappropriate assertions would have caused me to withdraw from the program had it not been for the trust I had in my supervisor, and the trust in my own abilities that he, and the study itself, had engendered.

The study's conceptual and methodological frameworks stimulated me to change and develop beyond that expected from research endeavours. Promotion of empowerment and transformative action in the study required conditions, beliefs, and language that supported notions such as negotiation, consultation, and mutuality of concern. I was not exempt from these influences. I did not stand back and attempt to remain objective. Rather, I deliberately immersed myself in the culture and participated as an equal partner. The study brought me to a more clearly articulated position and increased my capacity to be an advocate for change not just in theoretical terms, but also in political terms such as facilitating change and development: change in attitudes, knowledge and beliefs that lead to transformative action, and development of feelings and capacities that lead to empowerment. In the process, I also changed and developed.

Thus, it seems somewhat appropriate that my doctoral journey should end with the type of challenge that I could not have met at the beginning of the journey. Without the influences inherent in the study's conceptual and methodological frameworks, and without the influence of the empowering form of supervision I experienced, I am certain that I would have been unable to cope with inappropriate allegations stemming from inflexible and entrenched perspectives that view the world from a different paradigm.

I believe it is appropriate to complete my tale the way my thesis document concluded, with the following quotation:

Do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through criticism of the old; . . . even though the construction of the future and its completion for all time is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: **relentless criticism of all existing conditions**, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be (emphasis in original) (Karl Marx 1967 p. 212)

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Paper #2

Different rhythms, different songs: A case for supervisor as 'critical friend'

Geof Hill

(Geof Hill is a doctoral student who has completed his Oral defence and who has submitted his thesis for external examination.)

The professional doctorates

The professional doctorates are relative newcomers to higher education, and are still being informed by defining debates. One such debate associated with practitioner investigation (Groundwater –Smith, 1991; McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996; Anderson & Herr, 1999) raises several issues associated with epistemology. It presents practitioner knowledge as a viable knowledge base to both draw from and contribute to in doctoral study. Green and Lee (1999) have raised the question of supervision of practice, both as an epistemological issue of knowledge as practice, as well as ontological issue of inquirers adopting a subject approach to the field of inquiry.

Supervising the professional doctorates

The practices of 'Supervision' are the predominant teaching practices in higher education. Several higher education theorists depict supervision as a master-apprentice relationship (Madsen, 1983; Connell, 1985; O'Brien, 1995) with the thesis as a 'masterpiece'. This model accentuates the power relationship between student and supervisor (Laske & Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Grant, 2000). This set of beliefs is reminiscent of the 'Apprenticeship tradition' (Schrag, 1999, p. 269) of knowledge, which describes acquisition of knowledge through watching, assisting and imitating an older 'master'. This tradition is considered the oldest of the knowledge traditions. In this tradition the 'older master' is often a parent and apprenticeship describes the process by which their child learns from them. The 'masterpiece' is the outcome of the apprenticeship process, and is a piece of work that by its appearance demonstrates that the student has both acquired the knowledge and has assimilated that knowledge into their practice.

My own experience of undertaking a professional doctorate, adopting an investigative methodology of practitioner research, invited a different approach to supervision than the traditional master-apprentice model of supervision. Part of the focus of my study (Hill, 2002) was to examine the practices of supervision against a framework of congruence. My definition for congruence was drawn from Covey's (1989) proposition that one's practice is aligned with one's belief system. I extended this notion to suggest that, the supervision I received should be congruent with the particular ontological and epistemological positioning I had argued within my methodology. In this context I suggested that my supervisor had adopted an approach to supervision which I labelled 'critical friendship' in line with the notion of the term expressed in some action research literature (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996, p.30) and extended to include the notion of 'critical' contextualised in the theories articulated by the "Frankfurt school" (Carr and

Kemmis, 1986; Zuber-Skerritt, 1993), and their critical evaluation of the principles of positivism and interpretivism.

Supervision as critical friendship

In the context of my study I reflected on the supervision practices I observed and endeavoured to name these in the interests of extending supervisor reflection. The names I selected were

- Reflective responding
- Scholarly reframing
- Investigative reframing
- Facilitated silence
- Encouraging documentation
- Encouraging collection of data
- Scholarly reading
- Articulating an inquiry paradigm
- Big picture facilitation
- Encouraging publication

Reflective responding

The primary skill of a critical friend is listening to their colleagues as they talk about their practice. The critical friend encourages their colleague to talk about their work practice. In the literature on counselling, the term 'reflective responding' (Nelson-Jones, 1986) is used to describe a specific form of listening that feeds back to the colleague what it is the critical friend has heard.

Scholarly reframing

Sometimes reflective responding also involves making connections to other issues that, in the view of the critical friend as listener, relate to what the speaker is talking about. As this type of responding is introducing an agenda different to the one the speaker is introducing, it is technically not listening. It is often called reframing, suggesting that the critical friend is proposing a new framework by which to view the situation. Scholarly reframing involves making connections to literature that the critical friend believes are relevant to their student's understanding of their situation. The literature referred to may be literature that affirms their understanding of the issue, or it may be literature that challenges their understanding.

Investigative reframing

Sometimes the feedback to a colleague can be in the form of an investigative agenda, to help them to recognise the qualities and flaws in their own investigative practice. This feedback might involve naming the processes being used within an investigation, or naming the specific elements within an investigation, such as data or artefacts.

Facilitated silence

A skill associated with listening is choosing to be silent in order that the speaker may have space to explore the particular issue they are exploring. In my own investigations (Hill, 1995) I called this skill “facilitated silence”. I distinguished between silence which was created when neither the speaker or the listener knew what to say, and “facilitated silence”, which was a choice by the listener to leave a silent space, and not introduce either a listening response or a new agenda, so that the speaker had time to hear their own responses and potentially build on them.

Encouraging documentation

Part of assisting a colleague to investigate their practice is encouraging them to write about their practice. Having a person write about their practice is itself a form of practitioner investigation.

(Writing is) a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of the research project. **Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis.** (my emphasis)

(Richardson, 1994, p. 516)

Such encouragement can lead the critical friend to new aspects of their role, such as scholarly reading. Once a practitioner begins to write about an issue or their practice, this can also lead them towards a step of publishing their view of the situation and inviting critical reflection from people other than the critical friend.

Encouraging collection of data

Data plays an important part in any investigation. Data is the evidence by which an investigator investigates an issue. To encourage collection of data while a student is in the infant stages of their investigation, may well provide a bequest of worthwhile data, to which they can return at the appropriate time in their investigative process. In undertaking this encouragement I believe it is important to distinguish between encouraging a colleague to document and telling the colleague how they must document. The former appears to me to be more in keeping with the mentoring nature of critical friendship. It also leaves the investigator room to determine the best way for them to undertake this documentation.

Scholarly reading

Scholarly reading comes into play as soon as there is documentation of a person’s practice. When the supervisor reads their student’s description of a particular situation they learn about their (the student’s) perception of the situation. The critical friend also reads to discern the rigour evident in the writing as the agenda of rigour will later be used to assess the worth of the student’s thesis.

Articulating an inquiry paradigm

If a person is investigating a particular issue, then their set of beliefs about the process of investigation is important. The set of beliefs is called the investigative paradigm. A writer may not always articulate their investigative paradigm, often because they are not conscious of their paradigm. Reading descriptions of the particular situation that a person is investigating may reveal an unarticulated investigative paradigm, and the supervisor

can provide feedback about this to both clarify the paradigm and ensure that the paradigm is made explicit.

Big picture facilitation

While the investigator might at any time be focussed on a specific aspect of their investigation, one of the elements that I would expect in critical friendship is a grasp of the big picture. This is particularly the case when the supervisor needs to monitor the student's progress against the completion of the end product.

Publishing emergent meaning making

When a practitioner chooses to document their practice, they may also choose to take this documentation a step further and publish their writing. This can invite review from people considered to be stakeholders of the particular situation. This reviewing may well authenticate the writer's description of a situation, not as truth, but as a meaningful interpretation for other similar practitioners; it might invite challenging questions that help the practitioner reconsider their perception of the issue. There are many opportunities for an investigator to publish her work, and I see the role of critical friend as encouraging and supporting the investigator in this endeavour. Sometimes the critical friend is the first audience for these emergent meanings.

Conclusion

My particular study invited reflection not only on my own practice, but on the practices of my supervisor. While the topics chosen for post graduate research may not always lend themselves to such reflective engagement, I would advocate that regularly reviewing what one receives as supervision, in the light of what one has argued as truth and knowledge, provides a benchmark to continually assess whether the supervision being experienced is the sort of supervision that is helpful and progressing the research toward degree completion.

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Paper #3

Helen's and Geof's journeys from the supervisor's perspective; A SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision

Ian Macpherson

(Ian was Helen's and Geof's Principal Supervisor. He works within an Action Research/Practitioner Research approach to his research in curriculum leadership.)

This paper is situated within the graduate supervision experience of the presenter and within the ideas proposed by Eisner and Pare (Chaired by Dunlop, 2001) at the AERA Annual Meeting in Seattle (2001) and by Willcoxson (1994), Johnston (1995), Edwards et al (1995), Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) and Thomson (2001).

The paper is based on the graduate supervision of two professional doctorate candidates. It is backgrounded by the presenter's belief that graduate supervision can be one of those things that grows like topsy! (It tends to have developed in an almost ad hoc fashion and the collective knowledge about it can look more like a folklore than a body of rigorous professional knowledge.)

As the story of each candidate unfolds in their respective papers, a SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision emerges. With both Helen and Geof, there was an element of *serendipity* in the early stages. As time wore on and as each case settled into a progression of its own, serendipity was overtaken by a sense of *mission*. While this mission was quite clear and decisive in some ways, there was considerable angst about the underlying history and anxiety about a way forward. *Action Research* became a fertile territory for explorations of frameworks for thinking and acting. Thus began a time of *troubling* ideas, approaches and strategies. Indeed, this was a very troubling time for all involved! The time of troubling was characterized by an *emergence* (and *elaboration*) of epistemological and methodological frameworks, which have become an open-ended narrative of never-finished business. The notion of never-finished business highlights the importance of *reflections* and *reconstructions*.

Hence the case of *SMARTERR graduate supervision!*

In terms of an emerging professional knowledge about graduate supervision, a number of areas cry out for our attention. One such area relates to the range of relationships that develop in any case of graduate supervision. An elaboration of the SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision in the paper focuses on relationships. Questions may be posed about graduate supervision in relation to relationships; and these questions are considered with respect to the criteria which Eisner and Pare (see Dunlop, 2001) identified for judging the quality and worth of doctoral work within alternative approaches, paradigms and genres and from the guidelines which Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) identify for autobiographical self-study.

The guidelines referred to above in relation to autobiographical self- study (Bullough and Pinnegar) and to the ideas (Eisner and Pare) are modified and applied to a SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision in all of its facets through asking questions like:

Will inquiry be facilitated in ways that ring true and enable connection in a variety of situations?

Will there be a promotion of insight and interpretation in ways that are contextually and conceptually incisive and fruitful?

Will the candidate take an honest stand and to be ethical in conducting and reporting the research?

Is there space for the candidate to focus on the problems and issues of genuine concern to educators and for the candidate's voice to be heard?

Will the candidate encourage the improvement of the learning situation for both the self and others; and will there be the generation of fresh perspectives on problems and issues of genuine concern?

Is there space for others to get an inside look at participants' thinking and feeling?

Is there coherence and structure in the reporting as well as argumentation and convincing evidence?

Is there clear documentation of evidence?

Is there room for both complication and tension in the documentation and discussion/debate of the evidence?

Questions like these, it is suggested, offer a framing for the conversations that occur within the graduate supervision relationship. Obviously, some questions will be asked more often than others; some may be posed at particular stages of the relationship and not in other stages; while new questions will constantly emerge.

A possible pattern of asking questions is presented on the next page. This table is presented as a basis for generating discussion about an elaboration of the SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision, with particular attention to relationships.

This paper, then, represents the very early stages of a personal theorising of graduate supervision; and a beginning interrogation of the SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision.

TABLE 1

A personal theorising of the SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision

SMARTTER Aspect	Possible Questions	Discussion	Some Emerging Principles
Serendipity	Is there space for the candidate to focus on the problems and issues of genuine concern to educators and for the candidate's voice to be heard?	Serendipity is defined as the faculty of making happy discoveries by accident or chance. This implies that the initial meetings with the candidate and the potential supervisor are to a degree chance meetings. It is the capitalising on that element of chance that may be significant in establishing a mutually beneficial relationship	Affirmation of potential
Mission	Will the candidate encourage the improvement of the learning situation for both the self and others; and will there be the generation of fresh perspectives on problems and issues of genuine concern?	In an era of research study where completion appears to be more important than the process, an attention to focus and a harnessing of passion into a sense of mission develops the potential above into a platform for progression.	Advocacy for the research focus in terms of appropriateness and applicability
Action Research	Is there coherence and structure in the reporting as well as argumentation and convincing evidence? Will the candidate take an honest stand and to be ethical in conducting and reporting the research?	The importance of exploring what ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives are appropriate needs to be emphasised	Clarity of world view, conceptual and methodological underpinnings as applied to the research focus
Troubling	Is there room for both complication and tension in the documentation and	It would be easy to view this table as a tidy linear	Confrontation and contestation as a basis for ongoing

	discussion/debate of the evidence?	progression. While there may be some linearity, the reality is that there is constant revisiting of all aspects of the SMARTERR approach at all stages of a graduate supervision relationship	reconstructions of conceptual and methodological underpinnings and of fresh perspectives on the research focus
Emergence (and Elaboration)	Is there clear documentation of evidence? Will inquiry be facilitated in ways that ring true and enable connection in a variety of situations?	The responsibility of the researcher to research the focus in a transparent, credible and ethical manner cannot be stressed enough. While there is room for creativity and bold experimentation, there are accountabilities at the end of the day (e.g. a rigorous means for documenting and communicating the research process and its outcomes)	Transparency, credibility and ethical sensitivity
Reflections and Reconstructions	Is there room for both complication and tension in the documentation and discussion/debate of the evidence? Will the candidate encourage the improvement of the learning situation for both the self and others; and will there be the generation of fresh perspectives on problems and issues of genuine concern?	These questions were addressed above and are inserted here to convey a sense of ongoing revisiting, reflecting and reconstructing. A willingness to expect the unexpected and to understand that a research process culminating in a thesis is really a beginning of an open-ended narrative of a never-ending journey of never-finished business!	Capacities for reflecting, accepting ambiguities, and understanding the messiness of a research process.

Conclusion

The discussion and emerging principles in the columns of the above table form the basis of ongoing theorising of the SMARTERR approach to graduate supervision, with particular emphasis on the relationships associated with higher degree research study.

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Paper #4

Framing graduate supervision and examination in the professional doctorate at QUT

Tania Aspland

(Tania has a broader interest in the area of graduate supervision in higher education and supervises students in the professional doctorate).

The broad range of issues that have permeated graduate supervision have been documented for some time. These include debates about supervisory relationships (Moses 1984,1987, Aspland, 1999, Parry & Hayden,1999) team supervision (Whittle, 1994, Love & Street 1998), supervisory contracts (Hall, 1998), and the various craftings of supervision (Zuber-Sherritt, 1986, 1990, 1991).

Many universities in Australia now have in place higher degree policy and statements of responsibility and guidelines on supervision...Unfortunately what is stated in these documents does not always reflect actual practice by supervisors and departments (Council for Australian Postgraduate Associations, [CAPA] 1995:4).

The Winfield Report examined a range of studies (Marsh,1972; Rudd,1975; Whalley,1982; Delamont and Eggleston,1983; Makrotest,1987) and offered testimony to similar forms of student dissatisfaction with supervision generally, although the specific nature of the problems as perceived by the students was not addressed. A number of British studies (Wason,1974; Halleck,1976; Welsh,1979; Rudd,1985; Young, Fogarty, and McRae, 1987) found the isolation experienced by local students as a major factor influencing the rate of completion, enthusiasm for research, disorientation and the degree of clarity in student work. While one can assume that this is also the case for overseas students, such links were not proposed in the works. Another group of studies focused on issues related to the technical aspects of higher degree work such as writing reports and thesis writing (Wason, 1974; Lowenthal and Wason,1977; Brown and Atkins,1988; Gottlieb, 1994), data collection and analysis (Delamont and Eggleston,1983), proposal writing (Lock, Spirduso and Silverman,1987; Krathwohl,1988), and program design (Brown and Atkins,1988). Ballard and Clanchy (1988) have documented that mastery of many of these skills poses a significant problem for overseas students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Postgraduate supervision has been scrutinised in Australia and in Britain by a number of government departments and educational authorities (DEETYA Report, 1989; NBEET Report, 1992; Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 1987, 1994, 1998; ESRC,1991; SERC, 1991, National Postgraduate Committee, 1995; Higher Education Quality Council, 1996; Cryer, 1997). The findings of these enquiries together with more current research (Moses,1984,1985; Phillips and Pugh, 1987; Powles, 1988, 1989; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992; Zuber-Skerritt and Ryan, 1994) indicate that a range of problems are also evident in Australian university contexts. In fact, there exists an accumulated weight of evidence about student dissatisfaction with supervision (Parry and Hayden, 1994), a national concern about low rates of progress, high incompleteness, and inadequacies

in the monitoring of higher degree student progress. While much of this literature focuses on policy matters and concerns related to administrative issues (Holdaway, 1994), the *personal* is increasingly recognised in this field as significantly *political*.

Wright (1992) acknowledged the complexity of postgraduate supervision in universities. She highlighted a range of problems experienced by students at the personal level and assumes such problems to be common to all contexts including Australia. Firstly, Wright claimed that the style of supervision adopted by academic staff can influence the final outcome of postgraduate research programs. She argued that affiliation between a supervisor style and student acceptance of that style is related to student satisfaction and that students and supervisors often have differing orientations towards supervision. This matter of supervisory style is problematic (Wright and Lodwick, 1989:53) particularly in the changing contexts of the professional doctorate. Wright acknowledged that such orientations continually undergo change particularly from the perspective of the student, who invariably moves back and forth across phases of dependence and independence as the nature of the task changes. The stage of writing up is cited as the period of greatest strain, further exacerbated by long term feelings of loneliness and conflicting demands placed on time, resources and energy.

In a critique of the British and Australian literature, Powles (1992) attempted to portray an image of the good supervisor from the perspective of the student. [Good supervisors] guide while encouraging independence, ... are positive, interested in the student's intellectual enterprise, provide stimulation through their own involvement in research in the student's and related fields and through regular critical feedback on work done; they encourage frequent contact and achievement of timelines throughout the enrolment period; they are aware of personal problems and know where to refer students in times of crises (Powles, 1992:39).

This position assumes that the craft of good supervision is attainable by all who are willing to learn, a proposition that requires further examination if the field is to be critically reviewed and the nature of supervision problematised.

Phillips and Pugh (1987) identify the uncertainty of the purpose of doctoral study and the diversity of perceptions about the value of supervision as challenges that face postgraduate students. Feelings of uncertainty it is argued (Phillips, 1994b; Johnston and Broda, 1995), stem from the many mismatches arising from the differing perceptions of students, supervisors, examiners, universities and research councils. This diversity, Elton and Pope (1992) assert, centres on two main clusters of concern: organisational and interpersonal. As a result, the concept of collegiality and the interplay of organisational and interpersonal factors and their relevance to postgraduate supervision have gained credibility.

More recently, a number of scholars (Phillips, 1992; Whittle, 1992; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992; van der Heide, 1994; Zuber-Skerritt and Ryan, 1994; Johnston, 1995; Johnston and Broda, 1995) have explored the significance of the interplay amongst supervisory practices, student performance and the sociocultural and sociohistorical constructs of

university culture. This body of research argues that particular supervisor qualities and behaviours must ensure an ideal association based on mutual respect between supervisor and candidate (Leder, 1995:6) as each person moves through differing stages of development (Hajzler, 1996). The work of Siddell (1996) indicates the high correlation between successful thesis submission and the importance of addressing personal circumstances throughout the candidature. This in turn has promoted a review of the single-supervisor model of postgraduate research supervision and the formulation of innovative team approaches specifically designed to address weaknesses inherent in the traditional model (Cullen et al., 1994). Such a reconceptualised model of supervision generates new frameworks within which to supervise (Zuber-Skerritt and Ryan, 1994; Johnston, 1995; Shore and Connole, 1996). Phillips (1992) argues that staff support, whether team or individual, is one of the essential components of quality supervision necessary to construct an environment that is conducive to high quality work at the doctoral level. She suggests that such support can also come from departmental research tutors, or other academics within a university department. Crotty (1996) advocates similarly for a broader network of supervisors, peers and coordinators to provide ongoing emotional and intellectual support for graduate students. This kind of support is just one resource identified by Phillips (1992:11) as the core at the heart of a context which is either enabling or debilitating. She highlights three further components that are essential in ultimately influencing the quality of the final work: peer group support through the establishment of a postgraduate research community, student access to and provision of general facilities, and financial resources that may be utilised by the student in conducting research. Yeatman (1995) offers a different view of support through a focus on adjustment. While much of the literature on supervision refers to the importance of adjustment, it alludes to an asymmetrical process that requires the student to adjust, while the teacher or supervisor continues with existing practices. The notion of change advocated by Yeatman (1995) is one of mutual adjustment, captured through the use of student logs, that fosters a professional conversation within the supervisory relationship. This strategy is designed to address the needs of students who may be marginalised due to their social, cultural or political positioning within supervision. This process offers to students a voice through written communication, that invites critique in a non-threatening manner and generates a prolonged engagement from all participants (Marck, 1996). It provides an entree into an ongoing dialogue as a basis for problematising the supervisory relationship. Placed in the contexts of the professional doctorate these issues can be differently reconstructed but remain of great significance to both student and supervisor. Of particular significance is the supervision of thesis writing and examination as an integral part of doctoral supervision, particularly in the contexts of rigorous practitioner research.

A number of issues are explored in this paper and, based on both my experiences and the literature, a set of criteria will be proposed for discussion as a means of critiquing and interrogating the first three papers and for drawing implications for research training for both candidates and supervisors.

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A Concluding Note to the Four Papers

The four papers and the ensuing conversation are contextualised within a professional doctorate at one Australian university. Insights and ideas which are elicited are not intended to be generalisable; rather they are generative. Hopefully, insights and ideas about graduate supervision will help us to see things afresh and to continue our ongoing quest for quality and excellence in this significant area of higher education practice

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