New Approaches to Postgraduate Supervision and Supervisor Development

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Background to this workshop

• Supervisors’ approach to supervising research has a profound influence on how they will supervise.
• Shared experience, there are often no right or wrong answers, but there are a range of approaches from which we can choose.
• Discussion, and using the Surrey and Harvard research results will help to create that range of approaches.
• Approach to supervision can be linked to core beliefs about what research is.
• This is only the beginning of a dialogue. If, as is likely, at the end there are still unresolved questions, we will bring them together and find the best way forward.
Some Influences on Supervision

- Disciplinary pedagogy
- Departmental practices
- Conceptual approach of supervisor
- Codes of practice
- Employers/funders’ requirements

- Full or part time students?
- Experienced or inexperienced students?
- International or home students?
- PhD, professional or practitioner doctorate?
- Supervisor/co-supervisor
Initial questions

• As a PhD supervisor: what are the problems that you have faced? Do they fall into any categories?
• As a PhD student: what were the problems that you faced? Do they fall into any categories?
Literature search

• Functional approach  (Wisker 2005, Eley and Jennings 2005, Taylor and Beasley 2005)
• Qualities approach  (Wisker 2003a, Zuber Skerrit & Roche 2004)
• Critical thinking  (Barnett 1997, Wisker 2005)
• Mentoring  (Pearson & Kayrooz 2004, Brew 2001)
• Feminist approach  (Leonard 2001)
Research questions

• What conceptions of supervision do supervisors hold?
• Is there any relationship between the conceptions of supervision and the jobs that PhD graduates subsequently undertake?
• What are the common problems faced?
• What training for supervisors, if any, is undertaken or might be helpful
Interview questions to supervisors

• What has been your experience of supervising PhD students? How many, how many different types of doctoral students?
• What have your students gone on to do?
• How would you define an excellent PhD student or thesis?
• What effective ways are there of working with your students? Where do you begin? Where do you go then? How often do you see them? What do you do? What do they do?
• What problems have arisen and how have you coped with them?
• How were you supervised when you did your PhD?
• What do you think of the conceptual models?
Interview/focus group questions to students

• Tell me about your PhD/research
• What do you want from your supervisor?
• What do you most value getting from your supervisor?
• What has happened when you have felt most energised?
• Examples of problems and how you have coped?
# A framework for concepts of research supervision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisors Activity</th>
<th>Functional</th>
<th>Enculturation</th>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Emancipation</th>
<th>Relationship Development</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rational progression through tasks</td>
<td>Gatekeeping Master to apprentice</td>
<td>Evaluation Challenge</td>
<td>Mentoring, supporting constructivism</td>
<td>Supervising by experience, developing a relationship</td>
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<td>Supervisor’s knowledge &amp; skills</td>
<td>Directing, project management</td>
<td>Diagnosis of deficiencies, coaching</td>
<td>Argument, analysis</td>
<td>Facilitation, Reflection</td>
<td>Managing conflict, Emotional intelligence</td>
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<td>Possible student reaction</td>
<td>Organised Obedience</td>
<td>Role modelling, Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Constant inquiry, fight or flight</td>
<td>Personal growth, reframing</td>
<td>A good team member, Emotional intelligence</td>
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Functional approach

• “I have a weekly timetabled formal slot for them and follow-up if they do not turn up”

• “3 months: literature search
6 months: focus fixed,
12 months transfer report completed…”

• “In the 2nd year we see them monthly and they produce 5000 words before each meeting”

• Regular pair or small group meetings with supervisor to present findings
Enculturalisation

- I would feel I had failed if they did not stay in the field
- My students all know their academic grandfather
- I give my book to all my students
- Students need to know what ‘good enough’ looks like
- You need frequent meetings for international students
- The international student especially can implement all your corrections and think that is good enough.
- Some cultures expect you to tell them what to do
Critical thinking

• “I avoid dependency by getting them to think about some problems and giving them resources”
• “I want them to stand on their own feet and challenge the thinking”
• “My tutor was not confrontational, she encouraged me to be critical of my own ideas”
• “They need to explain to me why, what and how”
• “I ask them to email me a question about their project every week”
• “I use ‘magic’ words to help them identify the thread in their argument eg arguably, conversely, unanimously, essentially, early on, inevitably etc”
Emancipation

• “Your job as a supervisor is to get them knowing more than you”
• “I try to get the students to take the initiative”
• “My supervisor encouraged me to read widely, thinking critically, find examples in newspapers”
• “I try to get them to admit and confront their problems”
• “You get a lot of satisfaction, you have facilitated that growth in them”
Developing a relationship

• Enthuse: You need to fire the imagination, it is different for different students
• Altruism: My supervisor helped me with my writing but never pressed me to publish.
• Encourage: Need to inspire and encourage them to be brave in what they are thinking
• Recognise achievement: I wanted to call my supervisor the moment I solved the tough maths
• Pastoral support: this was as important as intellectual support to get me through
## Advantages and Disadvantages

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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Clarity Consistency Progress can be monitored Records are available</td>
<td>Encourages standards, participation, identity, community formation</td>
<td>Rational inquiry, fallacy exposed</td>
<td>Personal growth, ability to cope with change</td>
<td>Lifelong working partnerships Enhanced self esteem</td>
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<td><strong>Consistency</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Rigidity</strong></td>
<td>Rigidity when confronted with the creation of original knowledge</td>
<td>Low tolerance of internal difference, sexist, ethnicised regulation (Cousin &amp; Deepwell 2005)</td>
<td>Denial of creativity, can belittle or depersonalise student</td>
<td>Toxic mentoring (Darling 1985) where tutor abuses power</td>
<td>Potential for harassment, abandonment or rejection</td>
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<td><strong>when confronted with the creation of original knowledge</strong></td>
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(Cousin & Deepwell 2005)
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<th>Dependence</th>
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<td>Dependence</td>
<td>Student needs explanation of stages to be followed and direction through them</td>
<td>Student needs to be shown what to do</td>
<td>Student learns the questions to ask, the frameworks to apply</td>
<td>Student seeks affirmation of self-worth</td>
<td>Student depends on supervisor’s approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Student can programme own work, follow own timetables competently</td>
<td>Student can follow discipline’s epistemological demands independently</td>
<td>Student can critique own work</td>
<td>Student autonomous. Can decide how to be, where to go, what to do, where to find information</td>
<td>Student demonstrates appropriate reciprocity and has power to withdraw</td>
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## Links to conceptions of research

(Brew 2001, Lee 2008)

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<td><strong>DOMINO</strong></td>
<td>Solving problems in a linear fashion</td>
<td>Publications, grants, social networks</td>
<td>Data is linked together with hidden meanings</td>
<td>Personal existential issues, linked to career</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRADING</strong></td>
<td>Process of problematising or solving problems</td>
<td>A market place for exchanging ideas</td>
<td>Discovering hidden meanings</td>
<td>A personal transformative journey</td>
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**IN THE FOREGROUND IS:**

**RESEARCH IS:**
In small groups

• Take a problem you described earlier, or one of the case studies.
• Explore how the supervisor could react using each approach to supervision in turn
• Be prepared to share the group’s findings
Problems that students face – the supervisors’ view

- Dependency
- Not admitting to problems
- Poor progress. Not understanding the required standard of work and showing insufficient initiative
- Supervisor not interested in topic
- Conceptual difficulties
- Differences between supervisors
Some Problems: the students views

• Loneliness
• Not enjoying the topic
• Not knowing what is expected
• Practical issues: money, lifestyle, getting hold of the supervisor
• Ethical issues: are we being used?
• Stress (especially at transfer and viva)
• Supervisor being too prescriptive ‘my way is the only way’
• Lack of confidence – is my work good enough?
Observations on training supervisors

• Supervisors have learned most from how they were supervised themselves
• Understanding a range of approaches is important
• Co-supervision can be helpful if the roles are clearly allocated
• Those who need training can be the most affronted when the suggestion is made that they need it
Occupational influences

METHODS OF SUPERVISION
department norms, co-supervision, team supervision, group supervision

SUPERVISOR’S CONCEPTIONS
contacts, own PhD experience

STUDENT
previous experience, contacts, knowledge aptitude, skills, financial aims

UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES
recruitment, upgrading, networking financial support

TOPIC
occupational fertility
References


Some further information

Quality Assurance Agency web site and code of good practice at:

www.qaa.ac.uk

UK Grad web site and handbook at:

www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/Supervising_a_Doctorate/p!eXepfkk