

0580

## **The Doctoral Supervisor: finished article or open to development? The tensions for supervision within a performative culture**

Hazel Bryan, Chris Carpenter

*Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, United Kingdom*

### **Background**

PhD and EdD supervision is undertaken by supervisors working in Higher Education Institutions. Academics working within the HEI inhabit a politically charged arena. The RAE/REF (exercises undertaken by HEFCE, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland) enables Higher Education Institutions to submit research profiles which are awarded funding. Arguably, this exercise has the potential to create tension within the supervisory domain; the possibility of a climate of performativity caused by pressure from the RAE/REF may influence 'supervisory style' (Deauchar, 2008). Deauchar also raises the notion of an emerging consumerist agenda at play in doctoral supervision, in tandem with a fairly well established consumerist undergraduate culture. These themes of performativity and commercialism are also signified as controlling influences in HE today by Holligan (2005). Holligan's research found that the array of ideological discourses exercising authority over the university sector have the potential to undermine the concept of scholarly originality. With a genesis in academic autonomy, doctoral supervisors are now practising in a climate where this autonomy could bring them into conflict with their institutions (Holligan, 2005).

This landscape of competing policy discourses is not confined to the United Kingdom. One of the new missions of Doctoral Schools in France is to embrace the concept of 'Professionalism', defined as the transmission of competences adapted to the job-market (Dahan, 2007). Supervisors, required to encourage PhD students to consider careers other than academia are struggling to promote career options, Dahan found. Interestingly, this policy change is not confined to Europe: in the Southern hemisphere, new Australian government policies have been initiated in terms of funding for HEIs including doctoral research. Neumann's (2007) research into the effect of policy on doctoral supervisory practice finds that it has had a "swift and very powerful effect on core processes of academic work and the student research experience, as well as the differential impact of government policy across disciplines and institutional contexts".

### **Research Questions**

Studies into doctoral supervision to date have taken a socio-cultural view of the supervisory role; inviting supervisors to discuss their role and identity in relation to practice. This study seeks to do something rather different in that we are interested in the concept of supervisor reflexivity: on the ways in which supervisors articulate their place and space in the supervisory process, in terms of their perceptions of the impact they themselves have upon the work produced and the learning experienced by the PhD student. We are interested in how supervisors experience their supervisory role and what the critical aspects are that make supervisors do what they do.

Research questions:

How do supervisors position themselves in relation to the policy context of doctoral work?

How do supervisors articulate their role in relation to the student?

How do supervisors perceive their impact on their student's work?

Do supervisors construct themselves as the finished article or are they open to development?

## **Methods**

Mapping of the literature:

As Park (2007) makes clear in *Redefining the Doctorate*, the HEI sector as a whole has been influenced by "a new emphasis on skills and training, submission rates and quality of supervision, changes in the examination of the thesis, and the introduction of national benchmarking". The political backdrop of the former RAE is explored by Deauchar (2008) and the neo-liberal and consumerist agendas are discussed, asking the question to what extent performativity may influence 'supervisory styles', including an exploration of barriers that may affect supervision.

Fanghanel (2007) argues that "in a context of increased massification, teaching has become an activity at the same time more complex (directed at an increasingly diverse body of students in increasingly 'flexible' learning environments), more problematized (through educational development and targeted funding initiatives), and more managed (through audits and managerialist understandings of practice)". Similarly, Holligan (2005) finds that there are an array of ideological discourses exercising authority over the university sector may undermine the concept of scholarly originality.

The ways in which supervision can be categorised has been researched by Murphy, Bain and Conrad (2007). They suggest four classifications: controlling beliefs (where the supervisor directs and takes control of the study), guiding beliefs (where the supervisor acts as guide to the process), task focussed beliefs and person focussed beliefs.

Malfoy (2005) explores the increasing practice of collective supervision and knowledge sharing environments, exploring the uncertainty faced by supervisors in changing times, when what the PhD is being contested, especially in relation to research within the workplace.

Mentoring, as an effective supervision strategy, is explored by Manathunga (2007), arguing that its portrayal as innocent, collegial activity is to overlook the power of normalization in mentoring, and that mentoring can act as a form of academic and disciplinary self-reproduction and can have paternalistic impulses running through it.

Research methods:

20 semi-structured interviews

## **Frame**

Following Moriarty, Dahaner and Dahaner (2008), Freire's dialogical pedagogy is used as a conceptual framework within which 20 doctoral supervisors are interviewed.

Supervisor's capacity for reflexivity is explored using an interpretive phenomenological approach.

## **Research findings**

This research explores the tension for the supervisor practising within the performative context of managerial and neo-liberal agendas, against a backdrop of the RAE/REF and asks to what extent this culture influences supervision, and if there is reflexive, transformational potential for the supervisor.

## **References**

Deuchar, Ross (2008). *Facilitator, Director or Critical Friend?: Contradiction and Congruence in Doctoral Supervision Styles*. *Teaching in Higher Education*, v13 n4 p489-500 Aug 2008

Hockey, John (1995). Getting too close: a problem and possible solution in social science PhD supervision. In *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. Volume 23 Number 2 June 1995 pp. 199-210

Malfroy, Janne (2005). Doctoral Supervision, workplace research and changing pedagogical practices. In *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol 24, Number 2, May 2005 pp.165-178 (14)

Manathunga, Catharine (2007). Supervision as Mentoring: The Role of Power and Boundary Crossing. *Studies in Continuing Education*, v29 n2 p207-221 Jul 2007

Moriarty, Beverley; Danaher, P. A.; Danaher, Geoff (2008). Freire and Dialogical Pedagogy: A Means for Interrogating Opportunities and Challenges in Australian Postgraduate Supervision. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, v27 n4 p431-442 Jul 2008.

Holligan, Chris. Fact and fiction: a case history of doctoral supervision. *Educational Research*, Volume 47, Issue 3 November 2005 , pages 267 - 278

Dahan, Aubapine (2007) Supervision and Schizophrenia: The Professional Identity of Ph.D Supervisors and the Mission of Students' Professionalisation. *European Journal of Education*, v42 n3 p335-349 Sep 2007.

Murphy, N., Bain, J., Conrad, L. (2007). Orientation to Research Degree Supervisions. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, v53 n2 p209-234 Feb 2007

Fanhangal, J. (2007) Investigating university lecturers' pedagogical

constructs in the working context . HEA

Park, C (2007) Redefining the Doctorate