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1 Introduction

Rewarding, essential, potentially taken for granted and relatively under-theorised, research supervision plays a key role in higher education in empowering students to become researchers. As both undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers grow in universities, we are increasingly being invited to supervise students' research projects, encouraging, supporting and enabling them to develop skills, values and practices essential to learning the roles and rules of research. Research is defined here as *the* crucial element of learning – a fascination with questioning the world, ways of enquiring, solving problems, creating and innovating and developing discourse, strategies and interpretations. In this dynamic context, there is a clear need for sound, supportive and empowering supervision practices for students' research study, whether for dissertation, project or thesis. This book builds on shared experiences of good practice in research supervision at all levels (see Delamont *et al.*, 1998; Wisker and Sutcliffe, 1999; Wisker, Robinson and Trafford, 2000, 2001, 2003), and on research (e.g. Pearson, 1999; Brew, 2001) into what makes for effective supervisory practices.

The Good Supervisor intends to engage supervisors and students in a learning dialogue. It provides supervisors with research-informed suggestions about the dimensions of supervisory practice, that is systems and practices of working with conceptual frameworks, methods, processes of students' research, issues and practices of personal effectiveness in this long-term, interpersonal interaction between supervisor and student. In its conception, and through my own extensive personal and workshop interactions with supervisors and those supporting the development of students and supervisors alike, it has been absolutely crucial that the book should provide opportunities to engage readers in dialogue between research and experience, supervisor and supervisor, supervisor and student. This intends to be a useful, non-patronising book. It could not succeed if it tried to talk down to or 'train' supervisors. Instead, this book encourages reflection, dialogue and an exchange of good practice. Development suggestions are built *upon* and out of these practices. You are invited to engage with research evidence-based practice and reflective and evaluative stories from supervisors,

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students and educational developers, in a dialogue with your own experience. In each chapter, discussions, suggestions and activities or tasks to encourage reflection and good practice are integrated with experience and research.

Focusing on the role and support demanded of supervisors working with students, the book follows the shape of students' work. It considers how supervisors can support and enable students in their research towards, writing up and defence of dissertations, projects and theses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Although primarily intended for supervisors, it provides insights and task-oriented developmental suggestions that students could use on their own or in groups, with or without supervision.

The book takes novice, intermediate and experienced supervisors alike through the working life of supervisory relationships with research students. It invites the reader to consider the academic and administrative elements of enrolment and the development of a proposal. It deals with the development of a clear conceptual framework; the choice of appropriate research methodologies; information searches and dialogues with authors and theorists in the field; and the acquisition, management and analysis of information and ideas. The book also considers organisation and how to maintain momentum; as well as ways to ensure successful supervision and support for students through to the later stages of writing up, submission and, where appropriate, taking part in a viva. The final chapter looks at what may lie beyond completion of the research.

Issues of equal opportunities, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, power and authority, class, origin, learning style, language and tertiary literacy inform the discussion throughout, in terms of choice of learning approaches, access, study methods and supervisor–student interactions. Also considered are the needs of international students, those studying at a distance or 'offshore', and candidates studying part-time and/or in professional contexts. The supervision of one's colleagues, students undertaking creative research and the PhD by publication are also covered. Research and supervision involve human interaction and, in this respect, the book invites you to work with your student, considering both research ethics and interpersonal skills.

While those who are relatively new to supervision might find more of use in Stages 1, 2 and 4 of the book, established supervisors might find stage 3 extends their thoughts and practices. There is something here for all of us, throughout our supervising careers.

The Good Supervisor is unusual in that it is designed to support supervisors of a variety of research students on a variety of research projects. However, what the students all have in common is the research project. The book intends to be:

- accessible for supervisors *and* for students; there are exercises and discussions of good practice;
- underpinned by research and by the scholarship of learning and teaching, much of my own work and work from the UK, USA and Australia;
- pitched at undergraduate as well as postgraduate supervision. The scope is different, the authority/equality relationships are different, the length and depth of both the work produced and the time it takes to produce it are different, but otherwise many of the interactions and good practices have much in common.

The primary focus is supervising research projects in the social sciences, humanities, performing arts, health and related areas, but there is also much of relevance to colleagues supervising scientific research.

The idea for this book came about originally through reflecting on my own practice as a student and as a supervisor, both at postgraduate and undergraduate level, and finding there was a dearth of literature and of guidance for me in the supervisory role. This is not unusual in educational development, especially when a role, somewhat taken for granted and assumed to be an everyday activity, suddenly takes centre stage. Postgraduate students have been proportionally the greatest growth area in higher education in the UK, USA, Europe and Australasia over the last ten years, and recent learning and teaching agendas increasingly focus on the student as researcher. Research into and support for the learning of undergraduate students in greater numbers is well established (see Gibbs, 1991). Now the growth in the numbers of postgraduates brings with it similar issues of student diversity. Suddenly, during the 1990s, there were noticeably more women, more international and more distance postgraduates. Additionally, while postgraduate full-time study was common among younger students in the sciences, where they were often joining a research group, an increase was taking place amongst more mature students, and in the social sciences, the arts and humanities. The rise of the Educational and Professional Doctorates (EdD, PrD) began to take account of differing needs, as did the gradual development of a Masters in Research (MRes) and research elements in masters and undergraduate programmes, albeit often only single sessions on dissertation planning prior to supervisions. After the publication of the Dearing Report (1997), ongoing debates about the importance of research as an essential learning activity have helped us to concentrate on developing research methods and skills in all our students. In the light of diversity, change and demand, supervisors and institutions need to focus on supervisory developmental needs and practices.

The role has become visible, and it needs to be clarified and developed, recognising differences from one subject to another, one institution to

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another, one supervisor to another. Initially, like other educational developers, I ran some supervisory development sessions in my own university to bring together supervisors, to consider and share our own experiences of good practice. I found that many who attended were already supervising undergraduate projects and dissertations, and were hoping to supervise postgraduates. Although many of us perform this role, there have been few opportunities to reflect on, develop, or share good practice with others. Supervisor development workshops 'took off'. I found that, nationally and internationally, I was being asked to run sessions on supervising generally, although specific topics were becoming more specialised: the supervision of international, offshore and distance students; supervision in the creative and performing arts; supervision in professional contexts and issues relating to gender and diversity. Supervision is a demanding and rewarding learning and teaching experience that takes place within an international community of academic practice. Reflecting on and sharing experience of evidence-based good practice strategies can benefit all of us – supervisors and students, both postgraduate and undergraduate, at home and abroad.

In Australia and New Zealand, postgraduates now only attract funding if they complete a directive. The supervisor has an important role to play here (see Chapter 2). As our students increasingly push the boundaries of research topics, practices and outcomes, we are invited to explore creative, supportive modes of developing supervision to guide and empower them. This book does not pretend to dictate how to carry out the diverse and demanding supervisory role, instead it builds on successful development sessions I have been part of or have facilitated. Latterly, in researching and studying the role further, particularly in relation to my work with colleagues on a successful APU Israeli PhD programme, I have been made aware of the differing stories we all have to tell of our supervisory experiences and journeys. Indeed, the journeying model is one Australian colleagues have used extensively in supervisor development programmes (see Chapter 2). Some have developed online support, and Geof Hill, Tania Aspland, Coralie McCormack and Barbara Pamphilon, among others, use storytelling and journeying. This for me accords with the feminist and action research paradigms from which much of my own work springs. I am grateful to them, and to others, particularly Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997), whose use of individual case studies were the first I read dealing with supervisory role exploration. All of these examples are at postgraduate level. A focus on postgraduate supervision, and the current emphasis on students as researchers (Alan Jenkins and colleagues), enables us to share and explore the role and build communities of good practice. This transfers into all our research supervision, whether it be with postgraduates or undergraduates.

In order to develop students as researchers, we need to help them focus on asking research questions and exploring fields of study in critical, problem-solving, creative ways, matching this with a dedication to organisation and planning and achieving coherence and clarity of expression. Apart from discipline differences, a number of generic issues impact on all students undertaking research and success in these areas leads to a variety of post-graduate and undergraduate skills including, among others:

- time management
- problem-solving
- conceptualisation
- critical thinking
- conceiving and actualising projects through to successful conclusions
- writing for different audiences

If we consider the development needs of undergraduates and postgraduates, we can begin to imagine some of the requirements of supervisors who work with them, and so begin to devise supportive, developmental activities and programmes. However, there are no fixed behaviours which need to be trained – instead the relationship between supervisor and student is more like a dance, matching the steps of one to the other, and working together to produce a research artwork of quality, creativity and substance.

► **Why are learning and research important?**

Learning is essential for human growth. Research is *the* fundamental human learning activity, involving enquiry, problem solving, diversity, flexibility and decision-making. It encourages and enables the development of creative thinking, problem-solving strategies and abilities which in turn help others to approach everyday life as well as professional, political, local, national and international questions and issues.

‘Lifelong learning’ (Reeve, Cartwright and Edwards, 2002), ‘learning organisations’, ‘learning societies’, ‘learning communities’, ‘communities of practice’, even ‘learning cities’ are all current buzz words which suggest that communities recognise and wish to promote continual learning, reflection, awareness, problem-solving and improvement, and intelligent, creative responses to the complexities of life and of knowledge generation.

Research as a form of learning is crucial in societies for energy, motivation, creativity, linking theory and practice, establishing informed habits and skills for continuing to ask questions and seek information and answers, in

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context. One anonymous reviewer shared a definition developed with other Australian colleagues:

Research describes any critical and creative activity undertaken on a systematic, disciplined basis and dedicated to increasing knowledge. The results of research therefore take many forms. Research can contribute to knowledge directly through discoveries, or otherwise through innovative ideas and techniques, conceptual refinements, or constructive critiques and syntheses which extend existing knowledge or its applications.

The defining characteristics of research include (i) a dependence on formal, disciplined modes of inquiry, (ii) technical, conceptual or epistemological innovation, (iii) an open, rigorous approach to the testing of results, and (iv) a commitment to publication in some form. Publication in a general sense is the goal of a research enterprise, but the results of research activity can be 'published' in many ways, from a printed book or article, an architectural design, a patent or a computer program, to a creative composition or artefact in the visual or performing arts which adds to the body or range of knowledge or creativity. (Reviewer's comments)

Carrying out an important research project can provide us with an intellectual quality of life and an opportunity for emotional growth and satisfaction.

► Learning steps

A first piece of research is a major personal and learning achievement and for many the dissertation is *the* key moment when they begin to appreciate the stages, problems and potentially successful practices of research: from interest, to enquiring, question-forming, design of a study project, activating a piece of research through the use of a conceptual framework, underpinning theories, methodologies and methods, handling and analysing data, identifying findings, managing and discussing their significance at factual and conceptual levels and finishing a sound piece of research. Alongside these, students learn, we hope, the human interaction skills of making the most of their supervisor, of other institutional support, and that of family and friends. An undergraduate dissertation is a relatively small and time-bounded process and product when compared with a PhD, but in essence it involves many of the same skills, cast of mind and hard work. When it is undertaken, usually the final year of a student's degree, it is also usually the longest and possibly, therefore, the most daunting piece of work so far. In

this it resembles a master's dissertation and a PhD, with changes in research complexity and depth. Each is a learning step, a challenge, a development moment. Completion will involve a student immersing themselves in and making progress with the discourse and concepts of the subject and with the discourse of research. It will enable them to begin to develop a dialogue in their academic community. In addition to subject-specific skills, generic, transferable research method skills should be developed at both undergraduate and postgraduate stages. Many undergraduates may already have begun to develop research for essays and projects, engaging with the academic community through having new (enough) ideas and arguments. Many will find they need supervisory guidance to identify subject-specific and research skills and then to develop them. Students must be encouraged to reflect on these skills, to recognise them, adapt and utilise them in the future.

As undergraduate dissertations are one of the first formal steps in research, supervisors will probably need to structure and guide undergraduates rather more than postgraduates. For many academics, supervising an undergraduate dissertation is the first experience of supervising student research. Some may develop their own supervisory skills purely through dissertation supervision, while others, may develop these skills in the capacity of management, mentoring or similar roles. For some, the guiding of research and the kind of interaction necessary could be a developmental issue.

In discussing and sharing developmental ideas and practices in this book, we will be drawing on supervisory expertise and research into supervisory good practices at *all* levels of the students' and our own careers. In the main, the focus is on postgraduate supervision because of the length of the supervisory relationship, the complex, conceptual level of the work involved and because it is a developmental opportunity. Those undertaking undergraduate supervision might well be thinking ahead to postgraduate supervision. Differences which relate to the undergraduate and postgraduate levels – in scope, time, autonomy, structure and guidance – will be indicated and debated throughout, and if there are special issues related to undergraduate supervision that arise in the focus of a particular chapter then they will be highlighted.

► The PhD as a learning step

The PhD is a major academic, professional and personal achievement. Upon undertaking and then completing a PhD, a student will have made an original and valuable contribution to knowledge. Their work will be read by, built

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on and used by others – to build theory, to fuel change and encourage good practice. The achievement of a PhD is also a beginning – the student has made a major entrance into the academic community. By carrying out research through the full cycle of planning, actioning, drawing conclusions and communicating, they will have developed a range of valuable skills.

Nor is the PhD an end in itself. The learning never stops. It is essential to share work with others in the academic community and beyond. Here I am talking about several kinds of sharing. First, we have shares in others' work – sharing and working with others as a learning community as they develop their research pre- and post-doctorate. Following the achievement of a doctorate, students are involved in sharing and communicating, supporting and enabling, building on each other's research and learning in learning communities (Barnett, 2002), and contributing towards enlightened learning societies (Eagleton, 2000; Gibbons, Limoges and Nowotny *et al.*, 1994; Halpin, 2003), which make enlightened, creative decisions about fundamental human issues and practices (Squires, 1994; Rudd, 1985). This is essential work. It is partly enabled through continuing to move forward in learning. It is also enabled by transferring learning into professional and practical work through disseminating and sharing with others in:

- conferences and symposia
- publications
- consultancies.

► **Continuing to research and continuing to develop research skills**

It is important for students to build on the research they have carried out, continuing to ask new questions, extending both old and new boundaries – looking at those earlier designated areas 'for future research . . .' or considering where in their own thesis they imagine others taking their work further, indicating 'other researchers might . ..'. For many, practical outcomes are a main research aim so, following the achievement of their PhD, they need to put research work and its outcomes into practice, researching the effects. Carrying out new research and developing further research skills are also important next moves.

Reflecting on and identifying the wealth of skills developed during research is an important activity both during and after the research. This identification contributes to performance development, personal self-esteem, confidence-

building and effectiveness. Encouraging and supporting our students in these developmental activities are also part of being a supervisor.

► **Content and sources of the book**

This introduction establishes the importance of research as a knowledge-building, creating and sharing activity, identifying the key role the supervisor plays in empowering and enabling students to engage successfully in research. It introduces readers to the similarities and differences between undergraduate and postgraduate research supervision, and to different educational and staff development paradigms underlying the book as a whole. *The Good Supervisor* utilises three kinds of sources and paradigms. It draws from solid research-based evidence, as appropriate for a book dealing with supervising research practices; and from a narrative paradigm, where stories and interviews enact theories in practice for sharing and consideration to fuel development. And it uses the logically oriented 'good practice' paradigm.

The book is structured to explore supervisory roles and practices in relation to the development of the student's research project, from identification of a possible research area and question through to completion, submission and, in the case of PhD students, the viva and beyond. Each chapter combines systematically identified explorations and suggestions of good practice arising from research and experience with the self-reflective 'community of practice' mode of sharing and developing your own, owned response to ideas and issues arising. Some researchers or supervisors might be more comfortable with one mode of expression, others with another. The idea is not to dictate but to engage in a dialogue, exploring suggestions that have arisen from sharing experience, undertaking research, and through face-to-face sessions with practitioners worldwide. From experiences of supervision related to me by students, participants in postgraduate supervisory workshops, colleagues working with undergraduates and postgraduates across a wide range of subject areas, and from my own experience as supervisor, educational developer and researcher, I have compiled extracts of narratives, interviews and case studies of supervision in action. These represent some 'typical' or exemplary cases of supervisor and student experience to illustrate issues and particular points. A number of issues are raised in each chapter concerning challenges faced by students and supervisors alike and how we as supervisors can enable and support students in making choices which suit their research, empowering them to be successful researchers.

As a reader, you are invited to consider ways that might inform supervisory practice. This active and reflective element is prompted throughout, but particularly in a number of boxed tasks and activities. Some tasks and activities are less reflective and are intended to be used or adapted in your interactions with students. Such involvement is designed to lead to owned self-development as a supervisor.

► **Structure of the book**

The book is divided into four parts. Its focus is on the work of the supervisor, and development suggestions for that work are mapped onto stages of students' research, completion and beyond.

Stage 1: First Stages of Research Supervision – Getting Started

This stage takes you, as supervisor, through the early stages of working with students, contexts and subjects and of establishing and maintaining effective working relationships. It considers programmes designed to support supervisors in their development of good practice.

Stage 2: Establishing Research Processes and Practices

The second stage concentrates on the construction of the research, helping students to develop workable research questions, conceptual frameworks, literature reviews or theoretical perspectives. It discusses methodology and methods and the design of the study and proposals as well as considering research ethics.

Stage 3: Working with Students – Issues for Supervisors

The next stage turns to issues of interpersonal relations; overtime; considering roles and supervisory dialogue interactions; helping students to set up support groups; dealing with differences, difficulties and practices related to gender, etc.; international students; and distance learning. It looks at the variety of research, including relatively new forms – using creativity, research degrees by publication, and professional practice-based research. It also looks at how, as supervisors, we can support students to get on with their work and overcome difficulties, so maintaining momentum.

Stage 4: Managing the Research Process to Completion and Beyond

The fourth stage looks at writing up; preparing for the examination and assumptions underlying examining; supporting your student's viva prepara-

tion; carrying out any necessary post-viva work, and supporting them as they head off into their academic lives – conference presentations; publications; research; and recognising the skills they have developed.

► **Structure of the chapters**

Each chapter begins with a summary of areas to be covered, raises issues and questions in task boxes, and pulls together good practice suggestions from research, scholarship and experience for your consideration. The initial focus in each chapter is on postgraduate research, although it is assumed that the necessary stages of developing research are very similar in kind if not in scope to those needed by undergraduates. Where they present as very different from postgraduate supervisions, specific sections will look at masters and at undergraduate supervision.

Several chapters contain practical or reflective activities/tasks for students to undertake as part of the process of being supervised and of carrying out effective research. Each chapter ends with a summary of the main points and, where appropriate, further reading.

The primary readership for this book is anyone who supervises undergraduate or postgraduate research projects and dissertations and theses, although students will also find its ideas useful to them in their research. Based both on research and experience, this book provides an essential, accessible, yet scholarly guide for both new and experienced supervisors.

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