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Modelling Best Practice in Supervision of Research Higher Degrees in Writing

Abstract

Those who teach in the discipline of creative and professional writing in Australia will be sensitive to the current emphasis on higher degree by research (HDR) enrolments and on timely completions, and to ongoing debates around the quality and impact of creative work in the national research environment. Against this background, competent supervision of research higher degree students, informed by knowledge of disciplinary best practice, becomes increasingly important.

Recent research for the Australian Postgraduate Writers' Network has revealed a body of literature on effective postgraduate supervision across many disciplines, including some that are cognate with writing. This literature ranges from practical 'how-to' guides to more theoretically informed explorations of supervisory techniques and practices. A small number of publications address supervision in non-traditional fields. Very few, however, relate directly to supervision in writing in an Australian context. This paper, therefore, works toward modelling ways forward towards achieving best practice in the supervision of research higher degrees in creative and professional writing in Australia. It draws on existing scholarship to identify aspects of best practice shared by writing and other disciplines, and it adapts and extends these to suit the discipline, taking into particular account supervision of the creative work and exegesis. In so doing, the paper represents a first step in formally developing a theoretical and methodological framework that will inform, support and enrich supervisory practice in the discipline.

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Introduction: Supervision: Why worry?

Those who teach in the discipline of creative and professional writing (hereafter ‘writing’) in Australia will be sensitive to the current emphasis on higher degree by research (HDR) enrolments and on timely completions, and to ongoing debates around the quality and impact of creative work as practice-led research in the national research environment (see, for example, Neumann 2003, Sinclair 2004). We may lament the way that higher degree completions (and, by association, the people attached to them) have become, to use a familiar phrase, key performance indicators in the contemporary academic system, but the fact remains that the number of research degree completions counts for supervisors, our schools/faculties or other organisational units and institutions, as it does for the discipline itself. Even if this were not the case, few would dispute the value of having an industrious and contented band of research postgraduate candidates who complete their degrees on time: they enliven and enrich our academic communities, and helping them to complete their degrees and embark on the next step in their careers can be a high point in our working lives.

Against this background, competent supervision of HDR students, informed by knowledge of disciplinary best practice, becomes increasingly important. This paper works toward modelling ways to achieve best practice in the supervision of HDRs in writing in Australia. It arises from research completed in developing the Australian Postgraduate Writers’ Network, which shows that while there is a body of literature on effective postgraduate supervision across many disciplines, some of which are cognate with writing, very little of that scholarship relates directly to supervision in writing in an Australian context. This paper, therefore, represents a first step in developing a disciplinary scholarly, theoretical and methodological framework that will inform and support supervisory practice in the discipline of writing, along with an invitation to writers in universities – both students and supervisors – to enter into a conversation about the ideas we discuss here.

The supervisor-student dyad

In an ideal world, a student and a small group of academics would meet, find a point of connection and shared interest, and work together in a democratic landscape of research to take the student to the point of successful completion, and to contribute knowledge to their shared field. It would be a relationship of equals, of mutual respect, the sharing of information, and the generation of innovative and groundbreaking work. Of course it doesn’t always work like this. There are good reasons for both the successes and failures of the supervisory relationship, and they circulate around institutional structures, resources, discourses and personal qualities.

The institutionally mandated pedagogic model for research higher degrees in Australia is the supervisory panel.¹ In practice, though, the pedagogical model actually followed is generally the supervisor-student dyad. This can allow the development of a rich and

focused relationship between supervisor and student – and supervisor and student’s thesis – and certainly there are many cases where it works well. But it is not ideal: it can result in a rather intense relationship, and can leave the student under-supported when the relationship does not work well. Even in the best cases, it necessarily restricts the perspectives brought to bear on the work, and limits guidance, directions and suggestions to just one person, the ‘expert’ supervisor.

The individual supervisor has responsibilities that are both deep and broad. Universities Australia, the peak body representing universities – formerly known as the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) – lists the following among those responsibilities: academic support; support with time management – which includes issues such as research design, methodology, sourcing of data; being available to the student; receiving, reading and critiquing drafts; evaluating, and reporting to the university, the student’s performance and progress; general problem solving; managing all administrative requirements; ensuring that the thesis is ready for examination; nominating examiners and ‘providing career advice and assistance as appropriate’ (AVCC 2005: 18-19). This substantial list of responsibilities caters to a range of intellectual, administrative, practical and personal needs. Few supervisors would be capable of working effectively across all these areas, especially when the workload allowance in most universities is only an hour per week per HDR student, and experience shows that diligent supervisors invest much more time than this in each student.

Even if the supervisors were sufficiently accomplished and time-rich to meet the list of duties above, it is unlikely that any one person would have expertise at a high level in the various fields their candidate is likely to explore. This is particularly the case in creative arts higher degrees, where candidates often range widely across disciplines to gather the (conceptual) materials they will use to make, interpret and frame their creative work (Brady 2000). Few (if any) are experts in several fields; and fewer are, in fact, experts in supervision, or trained in the skills and techniques it requires. Responses to a survey conducted in 2007 revealed the shared experience that as long as you have been supervised at some point, you are considered capable of supervising; and, at least in the beginning, most supervisors rely on a mixture of trial and error, and applying techniques that were applied to them – whether or not those techniques were effective (see Williamson & Brien 2007 for survey results).

Fortunately, many universities have established standards for supervisors, including such hurdles as writing a supervisory statement or philosophy, undertaking in-house training, or only progressing from associate to primary supervision upon achieving a HDR completion (Williamson & Brien 2007). In-house induction or training programs, which include short, non-award courses or components of such awards as graduate certificates in higher education, ideally will alert the beginning supervisor to research strategies, codes of practice, and policies, procedures and timelines that they need to know about, explain the responsibilities of the supervisor and give tips on how to manage the job. Yet such training is typically generic, designed to cover many disciplines, and may offer only a base from which supervisors must then hone their skills to suit their discipline. This is

particularly so in the creative and performing arts in Australian universities, and probably most due to the relative youth of these disciplines.

A further difficulty in the supervisor/student relationship is the ‘political’ problem of power. The dyad supervisory model is the basis for ‘traditional metaphors of master and apprentice, or even parent and maturing adolescent’ (Nightingale 2005: 1), and it is founded on an uneven power relationship: uneven in terms of knowledge, skills and experience, as well as access to resources and authorities. This is inevitable in the dyad model, though scholars in the field of HDR pedagogy have tended to reject the traditional metaphors, opting instead for ones based on fellowship and counsel. Nightingale (2005), for instance, calls supervisors ‘advisors’ who ‘guide’ their ‘candidates’, Dibble and van Loon (2004) and Manathunga (2007) talk about supervision as ‘mentoring’, and Bartlett and Mercer prefer descriptions around ‘collaboration, community and most importantly, companionship’ (qtd in Nightingale 2005:1). Certainly this does happen in practice; stories told by current and past research students often describe positive and companionate relationships. But they are relationships built on the uneven foundation of institutional and discursive power imbalances. The institution determines what can be researched and in what ways, what resources will be made available for that research, and what kinds of identities students and supervisors can construct within the parameters of the university. Both students and supervisors have steps they must take, paths they must follow, and conventions and bylaws with which they must comply.

The discursive power imbalance is more imprecise, and can be more agonistic. Supervisors necessarily have more power, partly by virtue of their formal position within the institution, and partly because of the knowledge they hold (or are assumed to hold). Knowledge is power, like it or not. Michel Foucault put this firmly on the record in a number of publications, arguing against the dream of equality and openness in educational institutions:

With Plato there began a great Western myth: that there is an antinomy between knowledge and power. If there is knowledge, it must renounce power. Where knowledge and science are found in their pure truth, there can no longer be any political power. This great myth needs to be dispelled. It is this myth which Nietzsche began to demolish by showing, in numerous texts already cited, that, behind all knowledge, behind all attainment of knowledge, what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it. (Foucault 2000: 32)

Certainly the academy – along with other educational sectors – is particularly committed to power, because it is here that ways of thinking and forms of knowledge are established, evaluated, authorised and legitimated. It is academics – or rather, individuals constituted as subjects within the academic field – who decide that something is worth knowing about, and who determine how it can be known. It is academics, and the academic system, that ensure only legitimated systems of knowledge generation are applied to any research question: and that refuse other systems. Researchers in writing (and other creative arts) have often been exposed to this – the demotion or denigration of creative

modes of knowledge production. Any Indigenous research student is, similarly, likely to have found the limits of ‘tolerance’, to have learned how far the university will accommodate traditional systems of knowledge, regardless of the lip service paid to the value of those traditions.

For HDR candidates in a supervisory relationship, this is likely to mean that not only are they learning how to generate knowledge; and are, in fact, producing knowledge; but they too are being formed by the ‘knowledge machine’ that is the university. Throughout their candidatures, research students are judged successful not only when they fulfil the institutional requirements and research frameworks, but also when they are produced as ‘good subjects’ of the academy – those who have internalised the logic of research, who know what constitutes a valid topic and a valid approach, who know where the limits lie, and who self-police to ensure such compliance. This is not to denigrate the process of training or the ‘production’ of academic subjects; knowledge is an ancient game in human society. But as is evident throughout the history of education – and despite the internal contradictions this initiates – standards of justice, ethics and human rights tend to take second place to standards of knowledge, logic and judgment.

Despite this, it is important that supervisors remain aware of the power-knowledge nexus in which they operate, and remember too that with the best will in the world, the relationship between supervisor and student is a tricky one – is one that continually oscillates between power and collegiality. The unevenness of the relationship, and its complexities, are recognised in the literature on supervision: some scholars portray the journey of candidature through vivid metaphors such as ‘walking on a rickety bridge’ (Grant 1999) or running ‘a three-legged race’ (Dibble & van Loon 2004) – metaphors that imply more dexterity and energy than some of us feel capable of. These examples, illustrate, moreover, both a general acceptance of the student-supervisor model as the norm for HDRs, and a continuing preoccupation in scholarship with *what* the role of the supervisor is, and *how* this role is negotiated within the framework of the dyad.

Scholarship on supervision

Supervisors in writing who are feeling bereft of knowledge at this point will probably head for the bookshelves. They will be pleased to find some recent, practical and reasonably comprehensive ‘how to’ guides to supervision. These include Delamont, Atkinson and Parry’s *Supervising the doctorate: a guide to success* (2004), which covers supervision from beginning to end of candidature and is complemented by brief, illustrative case studies (but not from a writing perspective). Another book from the UK, Wisker’s *The good supervisor: supervising postgraduate and undergraduate research for doctoral theses and dissertations* (2005), looks more promising for the discipline, including as it does a chapter entitled ‘New ways: supervising creative research work and the PhD by publication’, but offers little by way of practical advice on supervising the writing doctorate for those supervisors who have themselves gained the degree in Australia. It does, however, give advice on supervising the PhD by publication that might

be of interest to those unfamiliar with this type of award. The third and perhaps most useful book of this kind is Australian and published by HERDSA, Nightingale's *Advising PhD candidates* (2005). Inexpensive and widely held in university libraries, it efficiently tracks through the stages of candidature and comments on supervising in new and non-traditional disciplines, citing as an example a summary of James Cook University's approach to doctorates in the creative arts. Also useful is the FIRST website <<http://www.first.edu.au>> which, developed by a consortium of Australian and New Zealand universities, offers resources for research supervision and training that include online self-instruction for supervisors, case studies, tools (such as questionnaires for students), bibliographies and links to other websites. It is open to staff of member universities. Overall, such resources provide a comprehensive induction into supervision generally.

Beyond the guides is a body of recent scholarship on postgraduate supervision that might help supervisors in writing and that is now presented in an annotated bibliography on the online Australian Postgraduate Writers Network <<http://www.writingnetwork.edu.au>>. Those who trawl through the bibliography searching for a picture of best practice in writing supervision in Australia will find, however, that this emerges from many different sources, and then incompletely. Sources include books (Bartlett & Mercer 2001, Green 2005), an Australian government report (Neumann 2003), book chapters (Perry & Brophy 2001), conference papers (Brien 2006, Grant 1999) and articles in journals specialising in higher education pedagogy (Ahern & Manathunga 2004, Arnold 2005, Dibble & van Loon 2004, Grant 2005, Manathunga 2005, Manathunga 2007, Mort & Horsley 2007). Some of these (Neumann 2003, Green 2005) are of limited practical use in writing and serve mainly as background to the Australian situation. Some explore problems commonly encountered in postgraduate supervision, but across disciplines: Ahern and Manathunga (2004), for example, describe, and offer solutions to, the problem of research students whose work comes to a halt, and Manathunga (2005) identifies early warning signs that students will fail to complete. A small number deal with supervision in writing from different perspectives (for example, Mort & Horsley 2007, Perry & Brophy 2001), or address matters in which supervisors may be involved (for example, Brien 2006 discusses the development and review of curricula for research higher degrees in writing; Mort & Horsley 2007 share their experience of supervising HDRs online). An even smaller number are by Australian scholars, commenting on the Australian situation (for example, Dibble & van Loon 2004).

Toward a framework for best practice

From the above, we find that scholarship and research on supervision clusters around two approaches or views of supervision. Grant describes the first of these as being:

a liberal humanist view of social relations in which supervision is understood to be a fundamentally rational and transparent practice between autonomous individuals ... a form

of teaching ... a progressive activity aimed at developing the student to her/his fullest potential (1999: 2).

The other identifies supervision as 'murky rather than transparent' because it is 'irrational and intersubjective' (Grant 1999: 4). Grant, who gives a useful summary of literature in each of these camps, advocates a model of supervision that combines and negotiates these two views, but central to her approach is the alignment of the rational with institutional frameworks, and the alignment of the irrational with unpredictable or personal factors. In this view, supervision is like 'walking on a rickety bridge': it is a process grounded in materiality (institutional frameworks) but involving unequal power relations and instability:

On the one hand, supervision is like the bridge in that it has a kind of material reality: the institution offers a 'sound' pedagogical structure within which the interactions between supervisor and student are assumed to occur. This structure has been defined more explicitly . . . as a 'code' of mutual responsibilities. Yet, on the other, because of the workings of power, identity and desire, supervision is not static but rickety, a bridge disturbed by erratic movement. Once an agreement for supervision is reached, and student and supervisor begin to walk on the bridge together, to act in relation to one another, many unpredictable effects occur, threatening the stability of the bridge and those walking on it. (Grant 1999: 9)

While Grant's words may strike a chord with many in writing, HDR students and supervisors alike, they may also prompt many questions, including the degree and nature of the wobbliness of our bridge, and how and when the supervisor (or someone else) can, or should, lend a steadying hand. Perhaps it is a 'question of balance' (Leder qtd in Grant 1999: 9).

We take this distinction between the institutional and the personal as one of our starting points, although in doing so we acknowledge that is a crude distinction and that the two often merge. We also use 'personal' in a broad sense, to embrace not only student-supervisor dynamics, but also the roles supervisors take in response to their students' needs. We identify those aspects of HDR supervision in writing that are peculiar to or prominent in the discipline. From these we begin to articulate the frameworks within which best practice can occur.

Institutional frameworks

To begin with the obvious, supervisors, and particularly novices, must arm themselves with a thorough knowledge of the institutional frameworks within which supervision occurs. The overarching institutional framework for the HDR is the university-level research strategy or plan that aligns itself with institutional (and government) imperatives; derived from this are more local (organisational unit) plans. While these seem removed from the everyday realities of the job at hand, supervisors should understand how the directions and objectives set out in these strategies/plans and their

offshoots relate to postgraduates. This is particularly so in writing and the other disciplines in the creative and performing arts, which may appear marginalised in favour of those that fit more neatly into institutional paradigms.

Flowing on from these overarching institutional strategies/plans is a range of more detailed policies and procedures relating to HDRs. Although the extent will depend on the students' topics and methodologies, supervisors in writing will need at least a working knowledge of policies in such areas as research ethics, intellectual property, copyright and plagiarism, or even the legislative contexts in which they belong. Some of these may influence the creative work itself and its future publication and could, as a result, become exegetical subject matter. Ideally, the HDR students will investigate such issues, but should they not do so, or if they lack confidence in the area, the supervisor can be an advisor and guide, in a way that extends the role of the supervisor of the traditional HDR in a specialised, discipline-specific way. This is not to imply that the supervisor's knowledge boundaries are stretched so far that they are expected to be, for instance, a de facto legal expert (we will discuss expectations and boundaries below); rather, it is to illustrate the potential for the HDR supervisor in writing, working within policy frameworks, to nudge the student along paths that ensure the rigour of their work in both academic and industry contexts.

Supervisors and students need to be aware of individual institutional statements governing HDRs by creative work and exegesis; these are integral to the "sound" pedagogical structure' (Grant 1999: 9) of the HDR and reflect disciplinary norms within which the HDR will be examined. The problem is that, in writing, these may be brief and generic guides to the type and standard of work to be produced (Brien 2006: 3) that do not give clear answers to such questions as the equivalence of certain types of creative work to the traditional thesis, or the percentage weightings of the parts of the practice-led thesis in creative arts, which commonly comprises art work and exegesis/dissertation. Moreover, these statements may differ between universities (Nightingale 2005: 32). Even though the supervisor may draw on their own or others' disciplinary knowledge and experience in guiding their student, they cannot expect to rely on institutional statements on HDRs in writing in terms of their clarity and comprehensiveness. As Nightingale states, '[supervisors] need to be able to articulate to candidates what it means to "do a PhD" (or a professional doctorate or any other degree with a research component) within the context of [their] discipline and [their] institution' (2005: 32).

Personal frameworks

Within the discipline of writing, the exegesis is acknowledged as a source of anxiety, irritation and bafflement by those HDR students who challenge its relevance to a writing project that they see as an essentially creative exercise (see, for example, Bourke & Neilsen 2004). Exacerbating this problem may be institutional guidelines for the writing HDR that are frustratingly generic in terms of the exegetical component and what it should do. There are even suggestions that the dual form itself is a problematic

relationship, described a decade ago as one of ‘uneasy bedfellows’ (Kroll 1999). No doubt because of these factors (and due, also, to the relative youth of writing as a research discipline) one subject relevant to disciplinary norms in writing HDRs that has been relatively well researched in Australia is the exegesis, largely due to the efforts of the Australian Association of Writing Programs and its journal, *TEXT*. The *TEXT Special Issue Website Series No 3* (2004), for example, comprises eight articles on the nature and purpose of the exegesis in the HDR in creative arts (Fletcher & Mann; Kroll; Bourke & Nielsen; Barrett; Bolt; Brien; Milech & Schilo; Nelson) and gives links to other *TEXT* papers on the exegesis. This literature addresses such issues as dominant discourses in exegetical practice (Bourke & Neilsen 2004) and appropriate models for the exegesis (Milech & Schilo; Krauth 2002) and forms a valuable body of scholarship that the supervisor in writing may draw upon (and contribute to).

This scholarship implies that helping students to overcome resistance to, or apprehension about, the exegesis is a key and ongoing task for the supervisor. Milech and Schilo (2004), who recount their own university’s entrance into non-traditional HDRs, draw attention to institutional guidelines that quantify creative and exegetical components of the HDR and thereby fail to convey the connectedness of what are two parts of the same project, and they narrate their endeavours at different institutional levels to define and promote models based on an overarching research question that provides a conceptual framework within which creative work and exegesis are bound. Institutional guidelines may affirm the importance of coherence through phrases such as ‘they must be clearly related’, ‘coherent and integrated’, ‘mutually reinforcing parts of a single project’, ‘in a symbiotic relationship’ and ‘form two complementary outcomes of a singular research program’, but do not elaborate beyond that. Furthermore, Brien (2004) suggests that students pursuing careers as writers rather than academics often neither view the exegesis as part of their professional portfolios nor understand the potential for publication of exegetical material in forms other than scholarly articles. While the recent trade publication of such overtly exegetical writings as Kate Grenville’s discussion of writing her award winning novel, *The Secret River* (Text Publishing 2005), *Searching for the Secret River* (Text Publishing 2006); and Sue Woolfe’s *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Looks at Creativity and Neuroscience* (UWA Press 2007) on her novel *The Secret Cure* (Picador 2003) offers a framework for discussion on this issue, this is still to be conceptualised and absorbed more widely within the discipline. In terms of this discussion of supervision, it appears that, at the very least, from the start of candidature, the supervisor can actively work toward a view of the exegesis as an integral part of both the HDR and the student’s professional development – whether candidates perceive their futures in, or outside, the academy.

Industry frameworks

Differing ideas of what student and supervisor expect of each other can turn their relationship sour, regardless of discipline. Complicating matters in writing is, as

discussed above, the fact that many HDR students look beyond the conferral of their degree to the publication of their work and beyond, to careers as writers or related professionals (Brien 2006: 2).² Indeed, undergraduate and postgraduate programs in writing explicitly address industry contexts internally, in their composition, and externally, in the way they are marketed. If, however, the production of the creative work for the HDR is seen as a step in a wider, professional context, does the supervisor primarily play a pre-publication role as editor or agent (as both Dibble & van Loon (2004) and Edmonds (2004) suggest is possible) or does this role focus more closely on the scholarly aspects of postgraduate research training?

Although Universities Australia nominates the vague ‘providing career advice and assistance as appropriate’ in its long list of supervisory responsibilities (AVCC 2005: 18-19), there has been a paucity of systematic and qualitative surveys of employers in relation to their needs. Even if there were reliable information that could be used for this purpose, few supervisors are trained career advisors, so any support they offer would be little more than amateur and anecdotal;³ and besides, this would constitute an additional element in an already very full schedule of supervisory responsibilities. Brien (2006) suggests that supervisors have an ethical responsibility to help student writers improve their career prospects in an environment that is highly competitive and offers few chances of stable employment – but argues that this should be accomplished as part of the core business of thesis development and completion, rather than as an ‘add on’ task.

These issues relate to a more general and ongoing concern in supervision literature on handling candidates’ expectations, from which emerges ‘the importance of openly negotiating the roles and relationships of the members of the team’ (Nightingale 2005: 12). Setting these boundaries involves both intellectual and pastoral elements of the supervisory relationship, but the above suggests that a third type must be identified in the discipline of writing. We have described this here as an ‘industrial’, in terms of ‘professional’, framework, and believe this aspect of the supervisory relationship demands substantial sensitivity to, and possibly negotiation of, individual expectations and limitations.

Testing these frameworks: Recent Australian investigations into supervision in writing

A 2007 survey initiated through the Australian Postgraduate Writers Network project (Webb & Brien 2008) sought to gather input from HDR candidates, recent graduates and supervisors in writing across all Australian universities. Among a series of questions asked in order to inform the construction of the online network, this questionnaire sought information regarding supervision. The responses to this survey largely reinforce the findings above. Although only a twenty-two per cent response rate was received, this was reasonable in terms of the response rates typical for email questionnaires, which seem to be lower, generally, than other survey methods (Kaplowitz et al 2004: 94). Nearly thirty years ago Hartman and Hedblom (1979: 195) confirmed that it is possible to use results

from a low response rate, providing care is taken in interpreting and generalising the results. Contemporary writers on survey research consistently report declining response rates, to the point where twenty-two per cent is a very respectable figure (see, for instance, Clark, Khan & Gupta 2001; Huang, Hubbard & Mulvey 2003; Johnson & Owens 2003). Although we certainly treat the responses with caution, given that all major institutions in Australia delivering writing HDRs are represented in the responses, we have confidence in the findings.⁴

Current candidates identified supervision styles as differing from 'very hands-on' to what was identified as a more *laissez-faire* approach. In response to their own learning, present and completed HDR candidates indicated that their learning was assisted when supervisors provided: constructive criticism; feedback and editing; attentive reading and listening; meeting facilitation; time and space for student to work; pastoral care; and/or when supervisors shared resources, knowledge, and their own experience; as well as advice about university and degree guidelines and procedures. In terms of professional qualities, the availability and punctuality of supervisors were mentioned as particularly helpful. Conversely, candidates indicated their learning was hindered when supervisors: didn't acknowledge candidates' prior learning; lacked suggestions or were too critical; didn't listen attentively; referred to their own workload; had time management or availability problems; were 'on a pedestal'; and/or 'hijacked' students' ideas. No real surprises there.

Closely linked to this sense of what supportive supervisors provide (or should provide), candidates' reasons for choosing to produce their creative work as a research degree included the provision of expertise through supervision, and the opportunity to work in a supportive environment. The HDR experience, it was asserted, also provided the chance to experiment, lent legitimacy to the writing, and added economic value in terms of opportunities for scholarships and paid employment. When asked whether they believed their HDRs would assist them in their future professional goals, the majority of candidates responded that they felt their degree would be very useful in terms of future publications, increased job opportunities, and attaining academic credibility. In retrospect, the majority of graduates reported that the experience of being a creative writing HDR student had been positive, stimulating and useful.

Conclusion: Building a framework for best practice

For those in the discipline of writing, it is possible that these resources, literature and series of frameworks will form a starting point to enhance both general and discipline-specific knowledge of supervision, but we acknowledge that a clear and complete picture of the *what* and *how* of supervision in writing does not yet emerge from them. Indeed, it has not been our intention to attempt to present a picture of the perfect supervisor, or the perfect relationship between that supervisor and their research students. The abundance of metaphors to describe the supervisory process suggests the dynamism and fluidity of the process, and that the idea of a 'model' supervisor in writing is, to add our own

metaphor, a mirage. Rather, we seek in the above to develop an informed way to move towards conceptualising a framework of a range of possibilities of disciplinary best practice that draws on existing scholarship and research.

It seems clear to us, on the basis of theoretical and empirical investigation, as well as anecdote and our personal experiences, that power-knowledge is not 'owned' by the supervisor – or even by the institution – in any real way. It is a strategy that operates in a 'network of relations' rather than in formal statements or legislative procedures (Foucault 1977: 26). This means it is never static or stable, but always being re-formed in practice. This also means it is difficult to identify the power, to pin it down, to appropriate or to resist it: it is everywhere, but nowhere in particular. Given this, supervisors have a particular responsibility to be reflective in their practice, and alert to why they guide the candidate down particular paths. Candidates, too, need to be alert to this, and to how and why they opt for particular research and learning strategies. Identifying these structures and the frameworks under which they are organised will enable both supervisors and candidates to not only find a path through the maze that is the environment for HDR candidature, but also to emerge from that labyrinth with new knowledge, new confidence, and new works of writing.

Endnotes

1. This is implied in the AVCC publication, *Universities and their Students* (2005) where Section B (Guidelines for Maintaining and Monitoring Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees) sets out the conditions under which sole supervision can be approved (see page 18). Earlier that year, in March 2005, the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies put out their 'Framework for best practice in doctoral education in Australia' where the expectation was that all HDR students are supervised by a panel. A check of research pages on Australian university web pages indicates that the majority of institutions follow this practice.

2. While HDR students always have the opportunity to seek publication of their work, and for many such publication is the cherry on the cake of their PhD, for writing students this is usually conceived as a trade rather than an academic publication, and one that will lead on to further trade publications, whether fiction, nonfiction or script.

3. It seems likely that this item in the list of supervisory responsibilities comes out of an earlier academic economy, when most PhD graduates went on to hold academic positions; in such a case, a supervisor could certainly offer advice. Currently, however, a PhD does not necessarily fit a graduate for work in this field (Sharpe 2008: 24). Research shows that in the UK only 30% of arts and humanities PhD graduates are employed as university lecturers (UK Grad Programme 2008), and in Australia 37.4% work in education (Graduate Careers Australia 2008).

4. The following universities were represented in survey responses: Curtin University, Deakin University, Flinders University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Canberra, University of New England, University of NSW, University of Wollongong, University of Melbourne, University of South Australia, and University of Technology, Sydney.

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