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Holding space for reflective supervisory praxis

It is far from an original observation that the nature of doctoral supervision has changed in recent decades (e.g. Adkins 2009, Vitae 2020). Increasing numbers and diversity in the PhD population, pressures for timely completion, and a postgraduate wellbeing crisis, are only some of the variables that modulated a relatively free and easy informality into a more professionalised relationship. Concurrently, the growing recognition that effective supervision is both a pedagogy and a learned praxis has underpinned a rapidly growing field of supervisor professional development (e.g. Lee, 2018, Polkinhorne, 2023). Expanding outwards from Australia and the UK in the 1990s and endorsed by sector strategic drivers, many HEIs now offer mandatory training, and often a suite of professional development spaces for Supervisors.

As with all educational practice, training is important but propaedeutic to supervisor development. The interpersonal nature of the job means that there is no single right way to supervise, and once the basics are in place, reflective critical thinking – alone and in collaboration with peers – is one of the keys to doing it well (Guccione and Stefanatos, 2023). The UKCGE - a representative body for postgraduate education in the UK – hosts the Good Supervisory Practice Framework (Taylor, 2019) and connected Research Supervision Recognition Programme which offers pathways (associate and accredited) for supervisors to gain sector recognition for their praxis. This recognition is both an encouragement and a reward for reflective engagement with supervision scholarship.

Accreditation advances the discourse and acknowledgement of supervisory practice within research culture, but there is little scholarship on the pedagogical responsibilities and associated actors required to facilitate the reflective spaces that enable outputs towards accreditation. In this paper, two practitioners with responsibility for

developing supervisory practice in their institutions share findings from research with supervisors who are working towards this UKCGE recognition as part of a Scotland-wide peer writing group. They offer insight into the institutional and peer support required, and the pedagogical possibilities for supervisors to protect and value spaces for reflection within the complexities of daily academic practice.

The paper draws on data shared by supervisors about their experiences of engaging in a peer writing group as a scaffold for their reflective practice and their motivations for accrediting their supervisory roles, as well as the authors' autoethnographic reflections of the pedagogical framing of the writing group as a mechanism to support supervisory praxis in Scottish HEIs.

References:

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