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INTRODUCTION

Supervising Practice: Perspectives on the supervision of creative practice higher degrees by research

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PhD supervision is a particularly complex form of pedagogical practice, and nowhere is its complexity more apparent than in new and emergent fields, such as creative practice Higher Degrees by Research (HDRs) where supervisors face the challenges of a unique, uncharted area of research training. While there is an increasing body of literature on postgraduate supervision, and another emerging body of research into what creative practice/practice-led/practice-based research is, so far little attention has been paid to matters associated with research education leadership and pedagogical aspects of supervision in creative practice disciplines.[1] It is for this reason that this special issue brings together a range of perspectives on the supervision of creative practice PhDs in visual and performing arts, media production, creative writing, and design.

Undoubtedly, PhD supervision is challenging in all academic fields. As academia's highest qualification, a PhD requires a sustained focus on a research problem, the acquisition of specialist expertise and a contribution to new knowledge in a chosen field.[2] A PhD supervisor must guide and support all of these aspects of candidature and must also manage a close interpersonal relationship over several years, during what the 'Group of Eight' refers to as a 'research apprenticeship' (2013, p. 10).[3] Supervisors must continually adapt their approach during different stages of candidature and modify their relationship with each student as they gain research capacity and independence. This means that supervisors must not only possess deep discipline knowledge, but they must also master particular academic skills and attributes, and they must continually recalibrate their approach throughout what Hammond, Ryland, Tennant, and Boud describe as the 'reactive, pre-emptive and proactive dimensions' of PhD candidature (2010, p. 14).

While effective supervision has no doubt always been critical to postgraduate candidates, during the past decade it has come into sharp focus as universities face a number of new imperatives. Universities in Europe, Australasia, the UK and the USA have substantially increased HDR enrolments and have seen new pressures to ensure timely completions due to outcomes-driven funding models (Hammond et al., 2010). At the same time, they have been required to comply with new standards and regulations in higher education (such as the Bologna model in Europe, the Australian Qualification Framework in Australia, and the Quality Code for Higher Education in the UK).[4] While universities have attempted to alleviate the challenges that this combination of change factors presents—by, for example, coursework in HDR programmes, strategies for dealing with 'risk', and institutional milestones to shorten completion times, ultimately it is supervisors who assume primary responsibility for absorbing supervision load and for ensuring effective supervision (Hamilton, Thomas, Carson, & Ellison, 2014). Indeed, a recent Group of Eight paper noted, 'It is difficult to underestimate the importance of supervision and the quality of supervision in creating the PhD experience and in ensuring the completion of a PhD' (2013, p. 13).

As a result, supervisors have come under increasing scrutiny during the past decade. As Hammond et al. observe, 'Supervision no longer occurs just in the private space between supervisor

and student' (2010, p. 7). Systemic change has occurred in the form of quality assurance measures, policy guidelines, supervisor accreditation, credentialing, compliance, reporting on progression and centrally delivered supervisor training. Yet, Bruce and Stoodley noted in 2013 that there remained a lack of clear definition, analysis and process around HDR supervision, and few pragmatic guidelines and training packages are available to support supervisors compared with other areas of pedagogical practice. Similarly, in a 2010 ALTC project report, Hammond et al. argued that, 'There is a need in many universities for greater emphasis on professional leadership in research education'. Since then (during the past five years), there has been new emphasis on building research education leadership capacity. In Australia, for example, research has been funded into effective supervision and resources for supervisors. The Office for Learning and Teaching has supported 17 national research projects on HDRs in the past five years, seven of which have focused on supervision (Hamilton et al., 2014). Literature, websites and courses have been produced to help supervisors to assist candidates to navigate milestones, write the thesis and ensure smooth examination.[5]

The supervision of creative practice PhDs in disciplinary fields, such as visual arts, performing arts, music and sound, design, creative writing, film and new media, is even more complex. The inherent challenges of supervision pedagogy and the impact of recent change factors across the higher education sector are exacerbated further by the relative newness of the field. Creative practice PhDs have gained momentum in the UK and Australia only since the Strand Report in 1998, and they are continuing to gain traction in the USA.[6] It is important to note that there are essential differences between the norms of PhD supervision in long-standing disciplinary traditions (such as Law, Humanities and Science) and creative fields, because the latter involves the production, presentation and examination of creative works (art, performance, creative writing, products or techniques) in combination with an 'exegesis' (written explication). Research questions, aims and objectives, methodologies, and the ways new knowledge claims may be evidenced are all quite different (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2009; Scrivener, 2000). Therefore, established practices and conventions of HDR supervision, as well training, ethical clearance protocols, writing genres and examination processes do not transfer seamlessly to creative practice PhDs.

The first generation of supervisors of creative practice HDRs, by necessity, have had to guide PhD projects that are fundamentally different from their own, in terms of approach, form, process and outcomes. Not only have they been called upon to define and develop an emergent field, they have established new pedagogical practices, approaches, systems and models for an unprecedented programme of research. Furthermore, as creative practice HDRs have expanded in scope and scale over the past decade, with exponential growth occurring in enrolments (in Australia, for example, DEEWR figures cited in Baker and Buckley (2009) evidenced a 10-fold increase), extraordinary demands have been placed on the supervisory capacity of creative disciplines.[7] To alleviate the shortfall, individual supervisors have taken on a higher average number of supervisions than supervisors in other, more established fields; supervisors have generally assumed responsibility for principal supervisions much earlier in their academic careers; and experienced supervisors have frequently crossed disciplinary boundaries to support candidates in adjoining fields (Hamilton, Carson & Ellison, 2014). Often, they have worked in hybrid teams comprising a creative professional and an academic with a traditional PhD in a cognate field and, while this helps to solve an immediate need, such professional collaborations may also give rise to tensions relating to cross-discipline languages, methods and research cultures, as well as what a PhD entails.

Moreover, the expansion of creative practice HDRs across disciplines, as well as intakes from diverse backgrounds (recent graduates; professional artists; designers and writers; academics; and industry practitioners), means that creative practice research has come to encompass a wide range of practices—from 'traditional' art forms to temporal installations, digital media, industry and community collaborations, as well as interdisciplinary and multimodal projects. The multifarious nature of creative HDRs means that supervisors have had to be flexible and develop new approaches to supporting candidates on a case-by-case basis, according to their unique needs. In addition, due

to intense experimentation with what creative practice HDRs and examinable outcomes may be, marked variations have arisen between institutions, as well as between disciplines—in terms of naming conventions, forms of submission (for example, the proportional allocation of practice and writing), processes and examination requirements around what are variously called 'creative practice', 'practice-led' and 'practice-based' HDRs. Identifying this diversity, an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded scoping study, *Creative Arts PhD: Future-proofing the creative arts in higher education* by Baker and Buckley (2009) noted the need to develop sector-wide standards and clear guidelines for examination of creative practice PhDs, as well as consistent approaches to supervision.[8]

In short, because the traditional conventions of supervision are ill-suited to the diverse contexts, mediums and outputs of creative practice; because of the rapid growth in enrolments and pressures on supervision load; and because of a lack of sec- tor-wide consensus, postgraduate supervision in the creative arts and design is particularly complex. Thus, supervisors have to be flexible, innovative, and able to solve new and often unanticipated challenges in what remains an emergent, contested and highly differentiated field.

Yet, until now, few collections have brought together a range of perspectives on the supervision of creative practice HDR. To enable capacity building of leadership in research education for supervisors and schools, it is time to consider the subject from the perspective of a spectrum of stakeholders—supervisors, administrators, examiners and allied HDR support services, as well as researchers who have captured the experiences of supervisors. This special issue of ACCESS brings together such a range of insights into supervising creative practice PhDs.

Firstly, Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul discusses what it means to be an 'ignorant supervisor', explaining the challenges and opportunities that arise from supervising non-traditional candidates whose research concerns lie beyond the expertise and knowledge of the supervisor. It could be argued that all candidates must eventually exceed the knowledge of their supervisor as they forge a highly specialised contribution to new knowledge. However, in an emergent field, relinquishing the role of expert as all-knowing researcher-supervisor, and assuming a primarily enabling role is an experience to which many supervisors will relate, especially when candidates are differently situated—not only in terms of their practice, but also in terms of their cultural background. Engels-Schwarzpaul argues that traditional supervision models might effectively make way (to some extent at least) for the incorporation of the candidate's own, often deep, situated knowledges and extended cultural and intellectual networks, which can assist in relation to new questions and practices.

In 'Double Blind: Supervising women as creative practice-led researchers', Courtney Pedersen and Rachael Haynes also investigate the potential that creative practice research HDRs bring for the disruption of long-held assumptions and practices in academia, as well as for the art world more broadly. Taking a feminist approach, they consider the potential that the supervision of practice-led research might bring for challenging the normative practices of studio practice, art markets and collection practices, as well as academic contexts. They ask whether higher degree supervision in this new field can produce potentially emancipatory knowledge, or whether it will lead ultimately to the perpetuation of the status quo and the disproportionately small number of successful women artists.

Welby Ings also considers the disruption of traditional models, this time in relation to the form of the thesis itself. In 'The Authored Voice: Emerging approaches to exegesis design in creative practice PhDs', he reflects upon the emergence of new forms of writing, structure and presentation in the graphic design exegesis. He illustrates instances of practice in which the designer's voice, narration and visual communication techniques influence and shape the print and digital media forms that are submitted as examinable outcomes.

From a different perspective—that of providing central writing support services for candidates—Claire Aitchison takes up the theme of writing in creative practice PhDs. In 'Writing the

Practice/Practice the Writing', she refers to the '(in) visibility of practices of writing in doctoral degrees'. Drawing on interviews and discussions with and between supervisors from a national research project, she investigates the benefits of writing for thinking through and resolving ideas in a PhD candidature. For artists and supervisors who may see the writing as an impediment to the pursuit of creative practice as research, this is an important discussion.

Robert Vincs and Barbara Bolt prosecute an aligned argument about the value of ethical clearance processes for the artist-researcher. They argue that, while it is easy to see centrally imposed ethics processes as a weapon of 'Godzilla-like bureaucracy' and compliance, or a form of censorship of the artist as agent provocateur, instead ethics can be harnessed as a tool that may help to ensure the efficacy and robust formulation of research questions and project development. Through a case study approach of situated ethics scenarios, they illustrate how the process of research ethics is inextricable from art making and is invaluable to the artist-researcher.

In 'Examining the Creative Arts Doctorate in Australia: Implications for supervisors', Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien consider the process of examination for creative practice researchers and supervisors. Reporting on the findings of a multi-method, nationally funded research project they conducted, they discuss current variations in, and issues related to policy; processes; and expert and peer beliefs about examination of creative practice HDRs. Importantly, they argue that preparing candidates for examination is a fundamental aspect of research training (and hence a critical aspect of supervision) as it underpins the transition of research higher degree candidates from apprentice to peer.

Lyndall Adams, Renee Newman-Storen, Christopher Kueh and John Ryan present a case study that establishes an alternative to the model of independent and exclusive candidate-supervisor apprenticeships. Describing their 'This is Not a Seminar series', they explain how it establishes a cohort approach to providing research training. They examine how cross-disciplinary dialogues between candidates and researchers from across creative practice fields can assist postgraduate research students to connect their creative practice to a diverse range of methodological, theoretical and conceptual approaches.

And finally, Jillian Hamilton and Sue Carson draw on their findings from a national research project entitled, 'Effective Supervision of Creative Practice Higher Research Degrees' to discuss ways in which supervisors have developed and shared their newly acquired tacit knowledge on supervision in this emergent field. They explain why supervisors in creative fields are resistant to centralised academic development programmes and prescribed standards, due to strongly held beliefs that creative practice HRDs need to remain open to innovation, experimentation and possibility. They go on to suggest that, instead, a dialogic approach to reflecting upon, discussing and sharing supervision practices with peers is a highly effective form of research education and leadership capacity building.

In very different ways, the articles collected here all take up the subject of disruption of traditional models, practices and ways of conceiving of research, HDR pedagogies and supervision. While practice-led research is, in and of itself, a disruptor of established assumptions about what research is and can be, what these articles make clear is that bringing creative practice research into the academy in the form of higher research degree training has triggered a ripple effect of change. It has challenged our thinking about the nature of the research process and the benefits, as well as the form of writing, examination and ethics. But it has also challenged our assumptions about the role and 'expertise' of the supervisor, along with our assumptions about academic development and training for supervisors. This process has brought new opportunities for thinking about and doing research and research supervision.

Notes

1. Recent work in this area includes collections by Allpress, Barnacle, Duxbury, and Grierson (2012) and Hamilton, Carson, and Ellison (2013).

2. According to the Australian Qualification Framework, a PhD requires a 'systematic and critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the frontier of a discipline or area of professional practice' (Australian Qualification Framework Council, 2013, p. 63).

3. Evidenced in Australia and the UK at least.

4. The AQF was initiated in 1995 and has been invigilated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency since 2011. In Europe, the Bologna Process, established in 1999, similarly established standards and pathways for the various levels of university degrees.

5. See, for example, Supervising Doctorates Downunder, which offers practical tips on various aspects of candidature, and fIRST (for Improving Research Supervision and Training, first. edu.au/), which provides a comprehensive, moderated, online collection of generic supervision resources and guidelines.

6. See Krauth (2002) as well as Baker and Buckley (2009) for historical dating.

7. A recent OLT project on the field of practice-led research higher degrees concluded that a shortage of academic staff in creative fields with doctoral qualifications caused considerable pressures on intakes and some universities accepted a doctoral qualification or equivalence as the capacity to supervise (Baker & Buckley, 2009, pp. 89–90).

8. An ARC-funded project and subsequent book has since focused on the written component of 'practice-based thesis' (Ravelli, Paltridge, & Starfield, 2014) and two ALTC/OLT-funded projects have focused on examination (Petkovic, Lang, & Berkley, 2009; Webb, Brien, & Burr, 2010).

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