



**SPACES,
JOURNEYS AND
NEW HORIZONS**
**FOR POSTGRADUATE
SUPERVISION**

EDITORS

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Spaces, journeys and new horizons for postgraduate supervision

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THE EDITORS
JUNE 2018

● DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Professor Brenda Leibowitz, who sadly passed away during the first half of 2018. Brenda co-authored one of the chapters in this volume and was a long-standing contributor and dear colleague in the field of higher education teaching and learning. To quote from a tribute by one of her closest colleagues, Professor Chrissie Boughey: “Although Brenda’s capacity to conceptualise and lead teaching and learning projects was enormous, her real interest was in research. She read widely, wrote extensively and, best of all, loved leading groups of people on big projects. Her ability to bring on board novice researchers, particularly as writers, was unparalleled and is seen in the number of collections she edited. Although this tribute to Brenda pays homage to her enormous intellectual and leadership achievements, for many she will always be remembered first and foremost as a dear friend and colleague because her support for those she cared for (and there were many) was truly boundless” (<http://heltasa.org.za/a-tribute-to-brenda-leibowitz/>). We, as editors of this volume, salute Brenda for her sterling work and contributions over many decades.

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● OVERVIEW

Following four books on postgraduate studies and supervision in the '*Studies into Higher Education*' series, the title for this fifth volume is: 'Spaces, journeys and new horizons for postgraduate supervision'.

The idea of 'spaces' refers to the variety of spaces where supervision and postgraduate work take place: personal, individual, disciplinary, collective, institutional, material, physical, virtual, and other spaces. The 'journey' metaphor has been debated as useful but probably insufficient to capture all the complexities and intricacies of supervision and postgraduate work. The term 'journey' is thus used here to indicate beginnings, movements, challenges, obstacles, assistance, support and other dynamic features of the supervision–study interface. The notion of 'horizon' associates with concepts such as transitions, changes, ranges of experience, outlook, perspective, vista, among others. The chosen volume title was thus sufficiently comprehensive and open to theorise, report, discuss and debate particular aspects of research on postgraduate supervision in its current variety and complexity.

The Introductory chapter, which is of a more theoretical nature, was contributed by Nick Hopwood from Sydney University of Technology, who is also a research associate at Stellenbosch University. He pursues the argument that practice, theory and doctoral education research are entangled through embodied actions, empirical access to the world and subjective experiences of it, and the conceptual tools at our disposal. Nick argues that theory enables us to pose new questions, engage in debates through particular vocabulary, work differently with data, and re-imagine what is possible in doctoral education. This position becomes useful when embroiled in educational practices or in acts of generating and analysing appropriate data, and when reflecting on theory, Nick rightfully asks what it permits us to do within the sphere of research into and supervising doctoral education.

Section A contains six chapters under the rubric of '*supervisory spaces*'. In the first chapter of Section A, Cally Grant from Rhodes University, outlines her experiential investigation into teaching and supervising several cohorts of postgraduate students in Educational Leadership and Management over a number of years. She reports on evidence of how postgraduate research learning took place within community spaces and how such learning might be best supported.

In the second chapter, Nick Mansfield and Sally Purcell from Macquarie University, Australia, exhibit the tangle that some postgraduate candidates can get into during the course of their research. They claim that although it is possible to put in place specific remedies for specific issues, doctoral candidature is experienced as a uniquely complex whole where multiple issues intersect and cross-multiply to place the candidate in an unprecedented situation. In describing a number of real cases, they address questions such as how candidates navigate their way in such a unique space, and how possible it is to provide them with skills that will empower them for their own academic destiny – given the multi-faceted connections between candidates, supervisors and the university.

The third chapter in Section A, contributed by Nonnie Botha from Nelson Mandela University, outlines a framework for postgraduate research supervisor identity. She explains how this framework was developed by considering data that emanated from empirical research and applying a theoretical model for identity development to the data. The significance of her chapter lies in its potential to enhance insights into the supervisory space of identity development, capacity building and the quality of postgraduate supervision.

In the next chapter of Section A, Sanchen Henning from the University of South Africa, explores the constrained spaces for research that master's students experience. Students often interpret research requirements as working in spaces of solitary confinement, thereby contributing to their agony and isolation during their research. Student feedback reveals postgraduate students' anxieties about failure and in this chapter Sanchen advocates for a compelling reason to assist master's students to conduct research that creates a sense of meaning and to inspire them to complete a quality dissertation.

Christine Winberg (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) and Simon Winberg (University of Cape Town) use an activity systems approach in the following chapter of Section A to show how the supervision space at two research sites expanded to include project-based cohort supervision – a practice that involves more supervisors, more peer learning and a larger research community. They claim that while project-based cohort supervision is a model more common in engineering and the applied sciences than in the social sciences, it embodies a form of collaboration consistent with the view that research supervision is an inherently social practice extending beyond the relationship between candidate and supervisor, and having implications for individual and group transformation.

The last chapter of Section A belongs to Rebekah Smith McGloin from Coventry University. She suggests that the spaces that supervisors inhabit are increasingly prescribed and circumscribed by frameworks and regulations. Yet the borders, boundaries and hierarchies that frame the 'traditional' supervisory domain are increasingly tested and made more permeable and contingent by the complexities, challenges and opportunities of negotiating collaborative, cross-cultural and cross-sectoral work. The chapter considers a range of external forces – from the macro to the individual – that are reshaping supervisory spaces and re-examines the changing roles and developmental needs of supervisors set against the skills, competencies and training that currently predominate.

Section B comprises eight chapters under the subtitle: '*Supervisory journeys*'. With the first contribution, Amaleya Goneos-Malka from Pretoria University, highlights details of an independent study she conducted on PhD employability in corporate South Africa. The findings from a nationwide cross-industry study on the distribution of South Africa's PhD graduates in leading companies confirm the problem of low PhD employability across all industrial sectors. She holds that the resulting low penetration of PhDs across the private sector might be detrimental to the South African economy and she concludes by asking questions about the difficulty of contemplating whether the low representation of top talent is due to deliberate discrimination, as a result of inadequate understanding about the value contributing potential of PhDs, or a failure to market such qualifications and graduates effectively.

The second chapter in this section was co-authored by Brenda Leibowitz (University of Johannesburg), Gina Wisker (University of Brighton) and Pia Lamberti (University of Johannesburg). Their chapter focuses on academics teaching in higher education institutions who choose interdisciplinary projects for their own postgraduate studies, linking their basic discipline with that of education or with teaching and learning. These candidates that are on 'crossing over' journeys face opportunities and challenges that are similar to those of other part-time postgraduate students, but they also experience specific opportunities and achievements related to academic identity in their research journeys. Some difficult questions which remain to be untangled include whether colleagues who come from fields other than education are being done a disservice by uncritically promoting higher degree studies in teaching and learning and, also, what would work for this group of academics to support and recognise their work in researching teaching and learning?

In chapter three of Section B, co-authors Shosh Leshem (Oranim Academic College of Education and Kibbutzim Academic College, Israel), Eli Bitzer (emeritus Professor from Stellenbosch University, South Africa) and Vernon Trafford (emeritus Professor from Anglia Ruskin University, UK) propose that in doctoral journeys in general, and thesis writing in particular, the introductory chapter is often considered difficult. It is often also difficult to provide students with clear guidance on this issue. This is because candidates are forced to grapple with decisions ranging from selecting an organisational framework to making adequate word choices. In scrutinising a total of nine doctoral theses – three from each country – the chapter reports a versatility of styles and scope of chapters among theses and nationalities. They suggest possible explanations for these differences among contexts, which include cultural, regulatory, disciplinary, style, convention and relational factors.

The next chapter in Section B, written by Sumari O’Neil and Carla Dos Santos, both from the University of Pretoria, highlights the problem of completion time for students on their master’s coursework journeys. These students are mostly not interested in becoming researchers or proceeding to doctoral study which distinguishes them from other levels of study regarding student experiences, student expectations and supervision effort. The authors consider it important for the education of coursework master’s students to include clear requirements and expectations for the ‘mini-dissertation’, and for the roles of the supervisors and students to be clarified before any supervision takes place. They also suggest that the standards for coursework master’s research dissertations should be more uniform to ensure the alignment of student, supervisor and examiner expectations.

In the next chapter, from a North American perspective, Suzanne Ortega and Juli Kent, who are both from the US Council of Graduate Schools, address the question of why postgraduate mentoring (supervision) needs to change. Three stages of development during the doctoral journey seem crucial, namely when students enter graduate school, during their pathways through graduate school, and during the transition to early career scholar or scientist. They highlight three major Council of Graduate Schools’ projects that represent these three stages, addressing the implications of each stage for both mentors (supervisors) and mentees (candidates). They suggest, in the final analysis, that graduate students need mentors, but they also need a community of fellow students and academics who can provide different types of feedback and support which is also an excellent preparation for professional life.

Adding to the quest for a most productive doctoral journey, Kirsi Pyhäntö from the University of Helsinki, contributed a chapter to Section B on the function of supervisory

and researcher community support in PhD and post-PhD trajectories. With this chapter she adds to bridging the literature gap by proposing a theoretical model which explains an understanding of supervisory and researcher community support. The model specifies forms, sources, support dynamics and fit as complementary components of support. Kirsi provides empirical evidence for key components of the framework and emphasises the importance of social support for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. Finally, she proposes possible future directions for research in this area and points to implications for developing doctoral and post-doctoral trajectories.

The next chapter in Section B was co-authored by Peter Rule from Stellenbosch University and Jaqueline Naidoo from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. They report on tracking the journeys of master's students' understandings of research from the beginning to the end of an academic semester. The importance of students' 'mid-conceptions' of research, which are students' ideas about research that have developed from their initial conceptions, but are still evolving in their journeys as 'becoming-researchers', are emphasised and the authors highlight the problem of how master's students often battle with threshold concepts in educational research such as 'paradigm', 'method', 'approach', 'evidence' and 'truth'. Recognising and valuing students' mid-conceptions of research can help supervisors to contribute to students' learning identities in their research journeys.

The final chapter in Section B, contributed by Rachel Spronken-Smith, Kim Brown and Romain Miroso – all from the University of Otago – does not only address the lack of knowledge regarding the graduate attributes of PhD graduates, but also their employment pathways after graduation. The sparse research that has been conducted is mainly from Europe, North America and Australia; little has been conducted in New Zealand. In their chapter they report on a study that was aimed at ascertaining initial employment destinations for New Zealand PhD graduates as part of their study and career journeys and soon after completing their PhDs. They also indicate how doctoral studies helped prepared doctoral graduates for these jobs.

Section C, which links to the sub-topic *'Postgraduate supervisory horizons'*, contains five chapters. The first chapter, which is co-authored by Petro du Preez and Shan Simmonds from North-West University, reports on an analysis of examiners' critiques on doctoral theses in the discipline of education. Their findings reveal that candidates often fail to demonstrate their contribution to new knowledge and existing bodies of scholarship, mainly because they fail to develop sound conceptual frameworks. In contributing to new horizons for doctoral assessment, the authors

suggest a theoretical view of how supervisors and candidates could use critical questions to interrogate theses before submission for examination.

In the second chapter of Section C, Liezel Frick from Stellenbosch University, challenges views on how 'originality' is explicated and viewed in doctoral work. Her work is based on an analysis of 1 566 theses produced across nine faculties at one research-intensive university over period of nine years. This analysis shows that originality is more often an implicit rather than an explicit feature of doctoral written outputs, despite the prominence given to this aspect of doctoral work in national and international rhetoric on the doctorate. New horizons for doctoral assessment are opened up as claims to originality remain a nebulous aspect of doctoral theses, lacking 'golden rules' for making originality explicit in thesis construction and providing evidence of the multi-faceted nature of originality.

Wendy Bastalich, from the University of South Australia, wrote the third chapter of Section C on cohort-wide research education. She points towards new horizons for supervision practices and provides an outline of cognitive learning theory that broadly informs three salient foci, namely 'cognitive processing', 'situated learning' and 'research writing'. She emphasises that educational theory and academic literacies are notable contributors to research and practice about pedagogy and curriculum in cohort research education. This thinking opens up new horizons for learning beyond current supervision spaces, thus bringing insights that offer radical and progressive transformations in research education.

The fourth chapter in Section C was contributed by Gina Wisker (University of Brighton) and Gillian Robinson (emeritus Reader from Anglia Ruskin University). They point out that ill health (mental and physical) of candidates during PhD studies is becoming increasingly recognised but is still under-researched. Their illustrative cases indicate a close connection between success in doctoral learning and sensitive, informed management of and support for physical and mental health issues as experienced by doctoral students. Their study opens up new horizons for research in the area of doctoral health and supervisor sensitivity and support. The authors conclude that health issues need to be recognised as part of doctoral education and that the supervisor's role in relation to this issue needs much more clarification.

The multi-authored final chapter in Section C was contributed by Anisa Vahed (Durban University of Technology), Ashley Ross (Durban University of Technology), Suzanne Francis (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Bernie Millar (Cape Peninsula University of Technology), Oliver Mtapuri (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Ruth Searle, a private higher education consultant. The authors suggest that the processes

of research engagement are profoundly transformative and that through personal engagement in the research process student researchers are understood to be 'remodelled' in terms of their identity, thinking and agency. Supervisors are equally challenged to stretch their own experiences and identities according to the needs of those they supervise, as well as in relation to the emergent academic demands.

This volume closes with a summative coda written by Cally Guerin from the University of Adelaide.

**ELI BITZER, LIEZEL FRICK, MAGDA FOURIE-MALHERBE
AND KIRSI PYHÄLTÖ**
EDITORS



PRACTICE, THEORY AND DOCTORAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

Nick Hopwood

INTRODUCTION

Kurt Lewin's maxim 'There is nothing as practical as a good theory' disrupts notions of theory and practice being separated by a chasm that requires bridging. I argue practice, theory and doctoral education research are entangled through embodied actions, empirical access to the world and subjective experiences of it, and the conceptual tools at our disposal. Theory enables us to pose new questions, engage in debates through particular vocabulary, work differently with data, and re-imagine what is possible in doctoral education. It becomes useful to us when embroiled in educational practices or in acts of generating and analysing data. When reflecting on theory, I am asking what it permits us to *do*.

Humility is called for when embarking on a chapter such as this. It is not an account of the doctoral education field as a *whole*. Partialities of multiple sources – historical, geographical, linguistic, and theoretical – frame the analysis. Nonetheless, in the spirit of Evans's (2011) mapping of the terrain, I suggest we find ourselves in a particular historical moment where empirical work, international exchange, and educational practices have reached a point where taking stock seems worthwhile, however partial this may be.

The chapter proceeds with a rough and incomplete map of the field. This points to particular theoretical spaces and the horizons they bring into focus. I then consider practice theories and the new horizons appearing through them. I conclude with a reflection on promising glimpses of possible futures with roots in different traditions of thought, histories, geographies and cultures.